GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL PLAN

Regional Assessment – 2011
Amended - 2012

REGIONAL ASSESSMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The Georgia Planning Act of 1989 authorizes the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to establish specific rules and procedures for local and regional planning.

The rules require that the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC), with the involvement of stakeholders, prepare a comprehensive *Regional Plan* to identify and coordinate remediation measures for, issues and opportunities that impact multiple communities within the region. This plan must be consistent with other corresponding regional and local initiatives, including the Regional Resource Plan (for environmental and historic resource management), the various local comprehensive plans for communities within the region, and State efforts like the State Transportation Improvement Plan. The resulting document then provides a forward-thinking work program for the GMRC that will better coordinate support services for local governments and direct State activities for the region.

In accordance with the rules established by DCA, the Regional Plan consists of two primary parts: The Regional Assessment and Stakeholder Participation Program, and the Regional Agenda. The purpose of this document, the Regional Assessment, is to present a factual and conceptual foundation upon which the rest of the regional plan is built, and must be completed and approved by DCA before work can begin on the Regional Agenda. Preparation of the regional assessment is largely a staff or professional function of collecting and analyzing data and information about the region and presenting the results in a concise, easily understood format, such as an executive summary, for consideration by the public and decision-makers involved in subsequent development of the regional plan.

The goal for this process is to provide a framework for preparation of a regional plan that will:

- involve all segments of the region in developing a vision for the future of the region;
- generate pride and enthusiasm about the future of the region;
- engage the interest of regional policy makers and stakeholders in implementing the plan;
- provide a guide to everyday decision-making for use by government officials and other regional leaders.

The planning requirements also provide technical guidance to Regional Commissions for advancing the state's planning goals. To this end, the planning requirements emphasize involvement of stakeholders and the general public in preparation of plans that include an exciting, well-conceived, and achievable vision for the future of the region. When implemented, the resulting plan will help the region address critical issues and opportunities while moving toward realization of its unique vision for the region's future.

Requirements

The rules for regional planning indicate that Regional Assessment must include the four required components listed below

Identification of Potential Issues and Opportunities
This element presents an inventory of the critical trends and concerns that must be addressed in order to advance the well being of the region. Staff from the GMRC reviewed the list of typical issues and opportunities provided in the State Planning Recommendations and selected those that may be applicable for the region. Additional items were added to the list as necessary based upon the analysis of data and information developed for the Regional Assessment. This initial step is intended to yield an all-inclusive list of potential issues and opportunities for further study, which may be modified through additional analysis as part of the development of the Regional Agenda.

Analysis of Regional Development Patterns
This element addresses the land use and development within the area, focusing on the overall management of resources and sustainability for the region. This element must include an assessment of existing and projected land use, and an identification of any areas requiring special attention. Once completed, this element will provide a foundation for coordinating future development strategies and regional capital investment projects.

Analysis of consistency with DCA's Quality Community Objectives
This element presents an evaluation of current policies, activities, and development patterns in the region for consistency with the various Quality Community Objectives (QCOs). While regional commissions and local governments are not required to be compliant with the QCOs, this process does identify opportunities for cooperation and coordination of policies and projects involving communities with similar standing.

Analysis of Supporting Data and Information
This element is used to affirm the validity of the evaluations throughout the regional plan, and specifically the potential issues and opportunities. It presents a collection of statistics, facts and other data used to identify key trends and conditions within the region that must be considered in developing the Regional Agenda.

Stakeholder Involvement Program

Developed concurrently with the Regional Assessment, this element presents the methodology for identifying and soliciting input from key stakeholders in building the Regional Plan. The purpose of the Stakeholder Involvement Program is to ensure that the resulting vision and implementation strategy reflects the full range of regional values and desires by involving a diverse spectrum of stakeholders in development of the Regional Agenda. This broad-based participation in developing the Regional Agenda will also help ensure that it will be

implemented, because many in the region are involved in its development and thereby become committed to seeing it through.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

The GMRC is one of 12 regional government offices within Georgia working to foster economic development and to provide community planning and information services. The GMRC provides services and technical assistance directly to its 13 counties and 38 municipalities as well as developing regional initiatives and supporting the programs of various State Departments. Originally founded as the Georgia Mountains Area and Planning Development Center in 1962, the GMRC has evolved in the common services provided but continually works to assist its member governments in efforts that preserve local character, encourage sustainable resource management and progressive economies, and contribute to improving the overall well being of the region and its communities.

Currently the GMRC employs 13 staff in the realms of planning, economic development, information technology, human resources and general administration. The Council for the GMRC consists of two representatives from each county, one from the County Commission and one mayoral representative from all the cities within that county, as well as 5 appointees from the State legislature.

Georgia Mountains Region Counties and Cities

Banks County
Homer
Maysville

Dawson County
Dawsonville

Forsyth County
Cumming

Lumpkin County
Dahlonega

Union County
Blairsville

Towns County
Hiawassee
Young Harris

Stephens County
Toccoa
Avalon
Martin

Rabun County
Clayton
Dillard
Mountain City
Sky Valley
Tiger

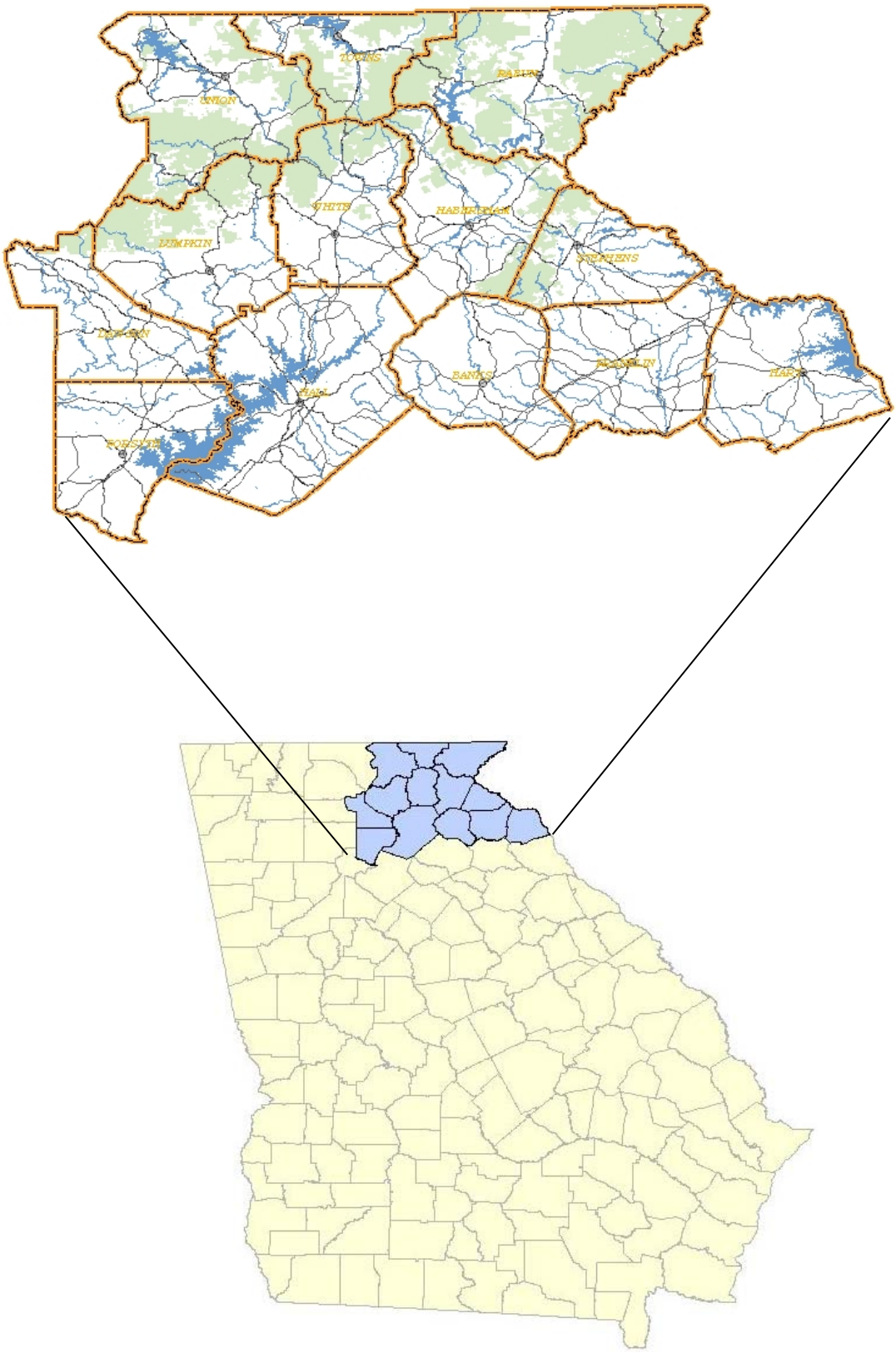
Franklin County
Carnesville
Canon
Franklin Springs
Lavonia
Royston

Habersham County
Clarkesville
Alto
Baldwin
Cornelia
Demorest
Mt. Airy
Tallulah Fall

Hall County
Gainesville
Clermont
Flowery Branch
Gillsville
Lula
Oakwood

White County
Cleveland
Helen

Hart County
Hartwell
Bowersville


UNION
WHITE
HABERSHAM
DUMPKIN
STEPHENS
BANKS
HALL
FORSYTH

REGION PROFILE

The Georgia Mountains Region

The Georgia Mountains region is comprised of 13 counties within the extreme northeast corner of Georgia, bordered by North Carolina to the north and South Carolina to the east. Eleven of the counties are classified as rural, while Forsyth County is included as part of metropolitan Atlanta and Gainesville/Hall County are their own urban unit for metropolitan transportation planning purposes. Taken all together, the Georgia Mountains region covers approximately 3,500 square miles and a current population just under 600,000 people.

The natural scenic beauty of the Georgia Mountains area is one of its most important resources. Approximately 463,013 acres of the Chattahoochee National Forest lies within nine of the thirteen Georgia Mountain counties. Nine state parks in the area provide for visitors who wish to hike, camp, canoe or enjoy wildlife, while the region also harbors access to the Appalachian Trail and the Bartram Trail within the Blue Ridge Mountains. Visitors may also glimpse life of the early settlers and their relationship with the Georgia mountains through attractions like the Northeast Georgia History center, Travelers' Rest in Toccoa or the Gold Museum in Dahlonega.

Topographically over half of the area is mountainous with the remainder being rolling land and hills. Seven of the thirteen counties (Dawson, Habersham, Lumpkin, Rabun, Towns, Union and White) are either totally or partially located in the Blue Ridge Mountains province, which includes the highest mountain in the State (Brasstown Bald, elevation 4,784 feet) and several other prominent peaks rising above 4,000 feet. This part of the region is defined by steep slopes and mostly narrow valleys with many streams. The southern half of the region is predominantly part of the upper Georgia Piedmont, where there are many broad, fertile, level bottom valleys such as the Nacoochee, the Sautee, the Chestatee, the Chattahoochee, the Soque, and the Etowah. Mount Yonah, with an elevation of 3,173 feet, is the highest peak on the Georgia Piedmont.

The prevailing topography means the region is also known for streams and rivers and, through human intervention, many reservoirs. The largest body of water in Georgia is Lake Lanier located on the southwestern corner of the region along the Hall-Forsyth County line. The 38,500 acre lake was created during 1954-57 by damming the Chattahoochee River at Buford and currently boasts over 20 million visitors each year, making it among the most visited lakes in the United States. Another sizable reservoir is 56,000 acre Lake Hartwell, created on the Savannah River near the city of the same name. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers operates both lakes to provide flood control, electrical power, recreation and water supply in the GMRC area. Additional reservoirs within the region include Lake Chatuge and Lake Nottely (operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority), and Lakes Burton, Rabun, Seed, Tallulah, Tugaloo and Yonah (all operated by the Georgia Power Company). Taken all together these lakes bring tourism, provide recreation and have bolstered housing for the region.

This natural beauty has contributed to the tremendous growth experienced by the Georgia Mountains region over the past three decades. Some of these counties are among the fastest growing in the United States, and all have experienced continued positive growth, with most at rates higher than the state average. Much of the growth can be attributed to migration resulting from economic factors, retirement populations and the spillover from metropolitan Atlanta.

A major economic factor in the Northeast Georgia area is tourism. Visitors are attracted by the history, outdoor activities, museums, mountain arts and crafts, antiques, natural scenic beauty and unique cuisine. Numerous festivals throughout the year, such as Octoberfest in Helen, White County or the Georgia Mountain Fair in Hiawassee, Towns County, draw hundreds of thousands of visitors from many places. Outlet trade centers located in Banks County and Dawson County attract a heterogenous mixture of shoppers/visitors year round. The tourism industry is nearly a billion dollar a year industry in the Georgia Mountains area.

Land use in the Georgia Mountains region is primarily rural in nature, the exceptions being Forsyth and Hall Counties. The majority of land is undeveloped or used for agriculture or forestry. Most residential land use is concentrated around the small towns located throughout the region, with some retirement communities located in the mountain areas of the region. Commercial and industrial development tends to be located where necessary infrastructure is in place (ie., along major transportation corridors and where water and sewer amenities are available). Because of its rural character, there are very few local land use regulations in the Georgia Mountains counties. Those regulations that do exist tend to be weak not because of the regulations themselves, but due to lack of enforcement. However, the recognition of the need for land use regulations or guides is being expressed by local governments and citizens as they observe the fast paced growth taking place within their communities.

Trends and Community Highlights

The following notes reflect the very general trends, issues and key talking points that were considered at the outset of this planning process. These have been recognized here for their overall value and/or impact on the character of the region and will be addressed throughout the process.

- The Georgia Mountains Region is known for its State Parks, water resources like Lake Lanier, national forests and wildlife management areas. The prevailing topography defined by the Appalachian Mountains has produced many scenic areas, picturesque valleys and ridgelines that have become the defining traits of the area. The rural character of the communities and the quality of life associated with each city and town has become directly related to the natural landscape and terrain of the region, giving high priority to the preservation of these areas. Some development has encroached upon the mountains in the form of hillside residential and telecommunications towers, which must be managed responsibly in the future if the integrity of the ridgelines is to

be retained. Greater attention should also be given to ecological concerns as more and more overall development comes to the region.

- The amenities that have attracted so many people to the area have also lead to a change in the predominant demographics of the population. In the metro areas of Forsyth and Hall Counties the mass influx of employment opportunities has brought with it a higher ratio of minority and Latino households. Conversely, the rural counties to the north and surrounding the reservoirs has attracted a high volume of retirees and seasonal residents. These trends are expected to hold for the near term of the planning time frame and as such the communities must be responsive to the needs of these special demographic groups.

- The recent economic trends of the region have been marked by a decline of the goods production sectors and an increase in the commercial and medical services sectors. While this means the employment rates have been generally steady overall, and the volume of amenities and retail options have increased with the number of residents, the loss of manufacturing jobs has hampered the growth of household revenues.

- The one sector that has prospered has been that of tourism. Overall population growth of the surrounding metropolitan areas has increased the number of prospective visitors to the region, and tourism to the Georgia Mountains has increased dramatically over the past two decades. This includes visitors to the parks and national forests as well as visitors to the many towns, festivals and regional attractions (like the two outlet malls). Going forward most of the regions counties and municipalities have ambitions of sustaining or growing their regional tourist appeal.

- Surface water is the predominant source for public water in the Georgia Mountains area, and this dependence is expected to increase due to population growth within and outside the region. It is anticipated more regional reservoirs will be developed within the 13 county area in the next 10-20 years. Not only will this require additional investments in infrastructure, but it will necessitate greater scrutiny with regards to environmental management.

Identification of Potential Issues and Opportunities

The planning process asks regions to assess the information outlined in an effort to identify issues and opportunities that should be considered when trying to plan for the future. In doing so the regions can more effectively define their objectives and actions to as to better achieve the desired vision.

The following represents a preliminary listing of Issues and Opportunities for the Georgia Mountains Region. These were collected or raised during the early discussions about the region and each community, or were identified based on the numeric and other data collection as part of the process. Local comprehensive plans and correlating documents such as the

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy or the *Regional Resource Plan* were also used to generate issues and opportunities for inclusion. These lists will eventually be refined, added to, prioritized and then used to establish long-term policies and work program items for the next 5 years. By working to resolve their issues and make the most of their opportunities, the GMRC and the region's communities will be in position to realize their respective Visions.

Per the *Regional Planning Standards* this process also involved a review of DCA's *State Planning Recommendations*. This list of typical issues and opportunities is intended to prompt thinking of what the region needs to address in the comprehensive plan. GMRC examined the list of typical issues and opportunities provided in the *State Planning Recommendations* and included those that may be applicable for the region. Categories within the *State Planning Recommendations* included:

- Development Patterns
- Resource Conservation
- Community Facilities and Infrastructure
- Social and Economic Development
- Government Relations

Population

- Impact of population growth for demand on facilities and services
- Impact of population growth for impact on rural character
- Impact of changing demographics, specifically the growing volume of retirement age residents and growing numbers of households with Hispanic/Latino ethnicity

Housing

- Shortage of specialty housing to accommodate retirement age population
- Need to ensure sustainable quality of workforce housing
- Slow/limited responsiveness to issues of the housing and development industry
- Need to monitor long-term impacts and sustainability of the second-home market

Economic Development

- Comparably limited support for agribusiness, especially agritourism
- Potential for continued growth within tourism sub-markets
- Need to assist with economic development in more remote, but pro-growth, communities
- Lack of diversity within economic base

- Demand for expansion of goods-production industries
- Strong potential within health service industries, particularly around existing and proposed hospitals
- Potential within existing cities to nurture small business and entrepreneurship

Natural & Cultural Resources

- Some local communities lack regulations that meet State minimum standards
- Lack of awareness about conservation design and best management practices
- Lack of education about all types of environmentally sensitive areas
- Out-of-date parcel data, NFIP maps or resource inventories at select communities
- Potential to develop land banks and pull support from stakeholder groups
- Lack of local greenspace plans
- Decreasing funds for State parks and wildlife management areas
- General habitat degradation caused by growth and development

Public Facilities and Services

- Growing demand for water supply sources, from both within and outside the region
- Growing demand and environmental need for public sewer services
- Strong need for, and great potential with, health care services and facilities
- Increasing demand for high quality education facilities and programs

Transportation

- Impact of growth and changing demographics on transportation needs
- Several State arterials struggle to sustain efficiency in serving both local and through traffic
- Growing need for bike trails and on-road bike lanes
- Lingering potential for 2nd commercial passenger service airport to support metro Atlanta
- Potential support for revenues through the Transportation Investment Act of 2010
- Demand for improvements to I-85 and intersection arterials

Intergovernmental Coordination

- Potential, and the need to coordinate implementation of, the three Water Planning District management plans developed for the region
- Lack of coordination among local governments, the State and other stakeholders in managing new water supply sources
- Confusion about new planning standards and the future of community development

Land Use

- The rapid transition of land use from farms and forest to residential and commercial
- The lack of adequate and innovative land use planning tools and lack of enforcement of existing land use regulations
- Insufficient infrastructure for the demands of changing land uses
- Lack of/limited capacity for identification and protection of sensitive areas (environmentally and historically) as the population grows
- Land use conflicts (i.e. Poultry and livestock operations vs. residential development, or high density development occurring in sensitive areas.)
- Insufficient land use regulations (do not consider impacts and consistency beyond jurisdictional boundaries)
- Volume of public land reducing the amount of land available for development
- The deterioration of downtown area, buildings and infrastructure, and loss of economic activity as suburbanization occurs in the region
- The eroding downtown tax base of the cities throughout the region resulting from suburbanization

Analysis of Regional Development Patterns

Land use management policies and programs represent guidelines for shaping development patterns that provide for efficient growth while also protecting sensitive social and environmental areas. This section presents an inventory of existing land use patterns and development trends for the region, allowing the local governments to produce the most effective policies needed to manage the demands from projected development.

Existing Land Use

The most prevalent land use within the region, Parks/Recreation/Conservation, presents a dilemma for local governments. While the region is blessed with large amounts of land designated for conservation of recreational use that contributes economically and to the local quality of life, the potential for additional economic development opportunities are limited. Thus, these areas are not contributing to the tax base as they potentially could, consolidating and multiplying the tax burden on the citizens in the impacted areas. On the other hand, many citizens have expressed that the quality of life these areas offer is well worth more than the additional economic development, which could take away from the rural, leisurely nature of the region.

Another of the largest land uses in the region is Agriculture/Forestry. It is understandable why such industries as poultry and timber are so important to the economies of the counties in the region. Approximately 26% of the region is dedicated to such use. Those areas that are in close proximity to growth will most likely be developed in the future.

The other dominate existing land use in the region is Residential, growing in proportion with the influx of residents seeking employment within the region and in metro Atlanta. Much of this area is concentrated in and around the municipalities and amenity areas that are linked by transportation corridors. But it is quickly to areas where land is simply affordable and away from the problems associated with growth and urban or suburban areas.

Commercial and industrial use make up humble shares but exist in notable concentrations around population centers and incorporated areas. This gives the region pockets of urbanity, even at smaller scales, throughout the metro Atlanta area and around select cities in the region. The prevailing topography has helped concentrate these more intense developments but some suburbanization is occurring as roadway accessibility improves in the Piedmont province. Those trends, combined with growing cultural shifts based around commuting to work and regional shopping centers has also marked the increase in land use dedicated to transportation infrastructure and utilities.

TYPE OF LAND USE	SHARE
RESIDENTIAL	15.60%
COMMERCIAL	1.70%
INDUSTRIAL	1.50%
PUBLIC/INSTITUTIONAL	0.60%
TRANSPORTATION/ COMMUNICATIONS/ UTILITIES	0.60%
PARKS/ RECREATION/ CONSERVATION	26.50%
AGRICULTURE/FORESTRY	26.00%
UNDEVELOPED	18.30%
LAKES	3.80%
INCORPORATED AREAS	5.40%
TOTAL	2,251,136 acres

Existing Land Use Pattern Problems

One of the biggest problems in the Georgia Mountains Region is that land available for development is a very limited commodity. Nine of the thirteen Georgia Mountain Counties has some type federal or state jurisdiction over a large percentage of the total land area in the counties. Because of this situation, and with the projected growth, it is more important than ever before that local governments incorporate good, sound planning and development practices into their every day administrative decisions.

Currently most of the local governments in the higher elevation mountainous areas of the region have little or no regulations addressing problems associated with mountainside or hillside development. Some have not adopted the mountain protection criteria or any other guidelines associated with steep slopes, resulting in the impairment of mountain views and damage to sensitive ecological habitats.

Another issue is the volume of development that is occurring on and close by Lake Lanier, the Chattahoochee River and the Etowah River. The Etowah River has been listed for the last three years as one of the most threatened in the United States. Suburbanization is encroaching the lake area and on these rivers as a high rate. Two recent studies on Lake Lanier identified that suburban residential and commercial development is the biggest threat to the lake through associated erosion and sediments from run-off.

The suburbanization of much of the region also threatens two particular segments of the region economy, The rapid residential development taking place in the southern portion of the region is doing so at the expense of agriculture. Farms are slowly disappearing as the value of land increases. Agriculture is one of the biggest contributors to the region's economy. The other negative impact with the suburbanization of the region can be found in the downtown areas of many cities. With consumers moving to and living in the suburbs and outlying areas most commercial activities will shortly follow. These downtown are left to deteriorate and decline. Thus eroding a once economically viable area not to mention the city's tax base and infrastructural investment.

Many areas and communities in the Georgia Mountains Region are seeing rapid changes taking place in regards to land use patterns. The transitional areas are seen as both good and bad. Good because growth is taking place, jobs are being created, opportunities for younger people are being identified, new services of convenience are being delivered and the tax base in our communities is being diversified. On the opposite end of the spectrum, urban sprawl is taking place and conditions are becoming crowded. Many of our vital natural resources are being threatened and, in some cases, destroyed. Few communities have regulations in place to efficiently manage growth. Finally, the delivery of services during periods of high growth and demand are subject to inefficiencies which may generate tax increases.

Market Forces Impacting Land Use Patterns And Policies

Several market forces have had a direct impact on the development of land use patterns in the Georgia Mountains Region. The nature of these forces can be positive or negative, and often these market forces even create both positive and negative impacts. These forces devise a very complex land use matrix in which portions are easily analyzed and results can be simply forecasted. On the other hand, this matrix is full of intangibles that can be inputted and interpreted subjectively which make predictions, projections and planning at best a difficult and unstable process. Whatever the case, these forces are at work all the time with every commercial transaction, rain storm and person who migrates in or out of the region.

Identified as some of the more significant market forces in the region are: the various industries established in the region, the age of the migrating population, the abundance of natural resources, the property values and tax structure, the infrastructure improvements, the proximity of the region to other areas, the quality of life amenities that exists in the region and the regulatory structure for developers in the region.

There are several types of industries in the Georgia Mountains Region which influence the land use market. However, there are three which stand out from all the rest. They are recreational tourism, poultry and timber.

Tourism and recreation generate more spending in the region than any other industry. The tourism and recreation areas not only identify themselves as a type of land use, they establish commercial corridors and nodes throughout the region. The poultry industry, based in Hall

County, relies on the rural character of the region to be profitable. Just as in the early days of settlement, agricultural areas require large tracts in communities with low population densities. It is known that certain types of industry are severely impacted as population growth occurs. The timber industry also relies upon undisturbed rural areas where large tracts of land are covered with mature timber. A huge percentage of the land use in the Georgia Mountains Region is categorized as either undeveloped or forested. Most of this type of land is found in the mountainous portions in the region. In the past, development practices were only accessible and limited to terrain of moderate slope and related favorable conditions, so timbering was about the only profitable land use available to property owners in the mountains. But with advances in building technology and design, as well as improvements in transportation, we now see other types of land uses (primarily recreation and residential) taking place.

As discussed in the population element in this plan, the overall population of the region is getting older basically because of the immigration of people that are retirement age. These retirees are attracted to the region for several reasons. Many grew up in small towns and rural areas that no longer exist, and while "searching for the roots" to their lives they find that the simple and quiet rural areas of the region are the quality of life answer they are seeking. Many retirees live on fixed incomes, so the low cost of living in the Georgia Mountains Region is attractive to these individuals. There is a large amount and variety of land that is available, housing is affordable and taxes are low, thus favoring this type of market.

The abundance of the existing natural resources and the suitability of infrastructure in the region directly influence the market forces of land use and development. As previously mentioned, there is a varied abundance of affordable land available in the region. Water resources available in many parts of the region are relatively untapped. Timber resources, for low cost construction, are plentiful. The transportation network has been improved to the point that link to neighboring communities and accesses to major markets are now possible. The natural resources also offer a variety of recreation opportunities and uses that attract millions of outdoor enthusiasts each year.

The quality of life amenities in the region are numerous. Identified as a few are the mountains, lakes, rivers, farms, the view and vistas, recreation sites, the small towns, clean air, and the simplicity and quietness that abide in the rural character of the region. All these add to the attractiveness of the region while contributing to such patterns of land use as recreation, residential and commercial.

Another major market force affecting land use patterns is the proximity of the region to other areas. Forsyth County is the only county in the Georgia Mountains Region that lies within the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Gainesville/Hall County became its own MSA in 2000, not only by surpassing the amount of persons, but also the density required to become a MSA on its own. The Georgia Mountains Region is within a two hour or less drive from the metropolitan statistical areas (MSA's) of Athens, GA; Atlanta, GA; Augusta, GA/Akien, SC; Anderson, SC; Greenville/Spartanburg, SC; Chattanooga, TN; Knoxville, TN; and Asheville, NC.

From this perspective is easy to recognize proximity as a major market force in the land use development patterns within the region.

One last significant influence upon the land use patterns in the Georgia Mountains Region is the effort to manage and plan growth as well as the lack of planning in the region. Most of the local governments in the region do not have regulations in place to manage development, nor do they provide sufficient staffing to track growth and enforce what regulations are in place. This is favorable to the development community as it offers them the freedom to proceed as quickly and as cheaply as their own budgets will permit. It also allows them to locate in areas that are favorable to them and with little or no restrictions. Therefore, the patterns of land use in many areas are a mixed bag and protection of neighboring land use investment is vulnerable to disorderly growth.

Less than half of the counties in the region maintain some type of land use regulations that provide for the designation and location of districts, which only allow certain types of development. Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Habersham, Hall, Lumpkin and Rabun Counties include land use ordinances in their regulations.

Land Use/Infrastructure Relationship

Development normally and usually takes place where the necessary resources are located in combination with inexpensive land and ideal locations. There is a direct relationship between location and intensity of land use with the resources and infrastructure available. In the Georgia Mountains Region the most intense land use patterns are concentrated around many of the municipalities. The cities in the region historically have taken the initiative to invest in the provision water, sewer and roads. These types of improvements enhance the carrying capacity of the land, thus creating policies that will permit a higher intensity of development.

The region is now experiencing a relatively high rate of development in areas outside municipal boundaries. In recent decades, development has been taking place around physical amenity areas of the region. More and more people are locating along lakes and rivers, and on mountain or ridge tops, the hinterlands of the region. The demand for access to these amenities has generated some improvements in the transportation network within the region. However, now more than ever, local governments are attempting to make provisions meeting the needs of rural residents in the outlying areas to shopping and other community services. But probably the greatest issue of concern to local governments is the ability to adequately address transportation improvements and infrastructure as their jurisdictions grow.

Areas Requiring Special Attention

This section provides a brief assessment of select issues and concerns around the county based on geographical reference. This will help each jurisdiction recognize those specific locations in need of special attention through physical investment or change of policy. A map is included to help reference each area.

Areas where significant RIRs are likely to be impacted by development

See GMRC Regional Resource Plan

Areas where rapid development or change of land uses may outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation

Portions of the lowlands and valleys between existing metropolitan areas and the mountains proper are all subject to development pressures as the region copes with general population growth. Those areas already in proximity of utilities, transportation infrastructure and/or economic activity centers will be the first to face development pressures, particularly in Hall, Forsyth, Dawson, Banks, Habersham and White Counties. Some outlying development may occur as a spin-off from the overall trend within any segment of the region except Union and Towns County, which lie north/west of the main Blue Ridge range.

The I-85 Corridor is one area projected to receive increased growth and demand for utilities, potentially beyond local capacity. As the arterial between large and growing metropolitan centers this roadway is drawing more through traffic and attracting more residents and businesses tying in to the metropolitan expansions. Lavonia has prospered as a commercial and industrial node as part of this growth, but the Interstate is now at risk of congestion beyond functional preferences. ***(Map ID – I-85 Corridor)***

Similarly, the region features several arterial roadways that serve multiple purposes and are at risk of over-congestion. Highways 129 and 17 in particular provide critical access for local and through traffic, particularly tourists traveling into the Georgia Mountains Region. As local communities grow and rely on these roads for commercial and industrial destinations, the congestion levels can increase dramatically at critical points when through traffic is added to the mix. Further, these corridors have historically been rural roads free from suburban development forms, signage and other elements detracting from the scenic beauty. Now the same communities relying on these roads to house auto-oriented uses are looking for ways to preserve the free-flow of traffic and the scenic appeal of these rural arteries. ***(Map ID – North-South Arterials)***

Areas in need of redevelopment and/or significant improvement

There are no areas with regional-scale concentrations of land in need of redevelopment, though there are several communities with industrial size properties that remain/will be vacant or underutilized. Royston will soon see some of its medical services and jobs relocated to Lavonia, and several cities have manufacturing or other industrial properties that remain empty.

Some older town centers and neighborhoods should be improved through redevelopment programs. Cities with higher volumes of vacant building within their downtown could use

support with economic development, while some older, established neighborhoods with higher shares of smaller housing have proven susceptible to economic poverty and should be addressed. ***(Map ID – Town Centers)***

Areas with significant infill development opportunities

The region features many historic town centers that would benefit through proper infill development that compliments community character and form while also injecting new economic activity. This is a predominant theme with many cities in the area as the region seeks to preserve its rural, mountain character and appeal for both residents and tourists alike.

The urban fringes within metropolitan Hall and Forsyth Counties contain some undeveloped and/or underdeveloped properties that might be better served as targets for more intensive land uses. Concentrating urbanized development within and around existing urban centers is an efficient way to maximize resources while preserving rural lands elsewhere.

While the counties along the I-85 corridor are managing transition from their historic agricultural base, there is land within their communities to absorb new growth. With appropriate management measures these counties could handle significant in-migration with minimal impact on natural resources, provided potential land use conflicts are mitigated. As a collective these communities have not only the land but access to water, utilities and sound infrastructure. ***(Map ID – Agricultural Transition)***

Areas of significant disinvestment, poverty, and/or unemployment

There are no regionally significant areas with concentrations of poverty or disinvestment. The largest are would be the volume of older neighborhoods and industrial areas on the east and south side of Gainesville reaching toward Oakwood, which features a concentration of Hispanic residents and low-income households that support the local poultry processing industry. This area is already the target for revitalization by the local communities.

Projected Development Patterns Map

Based on current trends and existing local regulations, this map illustrates projected land use patterns in the region for the next 10-20 years. This will be used during the Agenda development process as a rudimentary guide for assessing the impacts and opportunities of land use and development issues.

The projection is based on information culled from the Regionally Important Resource Map for the region and the Future Land Use Maps from local comprehensive plans. This was then briefly reviewed for minor amendments that might be needed based on changing conditions since some of the older Future Land Use Maps were produced.

Projected Development Categories

Conservation

Areas to be preserved in order to protect important resources or environmentally sensitive areas of the region. Areas shown as conservation must correspond to the Regionally Important Resource Map for the region.

Rural

Areas not expected to become urbanized or require provision of urban services during the planning period;

Developed

Areas exhibiting urban type development patterns and where urban services (i.e., water, sewer, etc.) are already being provided at the time of plan preparation;

Developing

Areas that will likely become urbanized and require provision of new urban services (i.e., water, sewer, etc.) during the planning period.

QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS

DCA has established statewide goals and a number of Quality Community Objectives that further elaborate the state goals, based on growth and development issues identified in local and regional plans, throughout the state. These goals and objectives are intended to provide guidance, or targets for Regional Commissions to achieve, in developing and implementing their regional plan. Pursuant to sections 110-12-6-.03(2)(c) and 110-12-6-.05(a)3, Regional Commissions must evaluate policies, activities, and development patterns in the region for consistency with these goals and objectives.

Comparison of State and Regional Goals

Georgia DCA - Statewide Planning Goals	***GMRC Planning Dept. Goals***
	It is the mission of the GMDRC Planning Department to promote the following objectives for the entire region and on behalf of all segments of the population:
Economic Development	
To achieve a growing and balanced economy, consistent with the prudent management of the state's resources, that equitably benefits all segments of the population.	• A growing and balanced economy;
Natural and Cultural Resources	
To conserve and protect the environmental, natural and cultural resources of communities, regions and the state.	• The conservation of environmental and cultural resources;
Community Facilities and Services	
To ensure the provision of community facilities and services throughout the state to support efficient growth and development patterns that will protect and enhance the quality of life of Georgia's residents.	• The provision of economically and environmentally sustainable community facilities and services that will enhance the local quality of life;
Housing	
To ensure that all residents of the state have access to adequate and affordable housing.	• The access to adequate and affordable housing;
Land Use and Transportation	
To ensure the coordination of land use planning and transportation planning throughout the state in support of efficient growth and development patterns that will promote sustainable economic development, protection of natural and cultural resources and provision of adequate and affordable housing.	• A transportation system that provides efficient, safe and sustainable access throughout the region; • The coordination of land use management and development patterns that support all other GMRC goals.
Intergovernmental Coordination	
To ensure the coordination of local planning efforts with other local service providers and authorities, with neighboring communities and with state and regional plans and programs.	**NA**

QCO Assessment

As part of the regional planning process, the RC is called upon to evaluate the current policies, activities, and development patterns in the region for consistency with DCA's Quality Community Objectives (QCOs). This analysis is used to identify additional issues and opportunities for adapting activities, development patterns and implementation practices to the QCOs, and adding them to the above list of potential issues and opportunities.

During 2011, DCA amended their list of QCOs in an effort to reflect modern concerns and interests and to allow for a more efficient assessment in these planning procedures. The following assessment is based on these updated QCOs as applied to the Georgia Mountains Region for 2011.

Economic Prosperity: Encourage development or expansion of businesses and industries that are suitable for the community. Factors to consider when determining suitability include job skills required; long-term sustainability; linkages to other economic activities in the region; impact on the resources of the area; or prospects for creating job opportunities that meet the needs of a diverse local workforce.

The Georgia Mountains Region is blessed with strong tourism and agribusiness industries, proactive economic development organizations and a variety of quality resources to support local efforts. There is the potential for improved targeted business recruitment to assist in small-business recruitment and expansion and to develop appropriate business sectors within the region's many historic town centers. There is also the need to continue efforts to diversify the economic base and to try to replace employment lost in the goods production sectors.

Resource Management: Promote the efficient use of natural resources and identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas of the community. This may be achieved by promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy generation; encouraging green building construction and renovation; utilizing appropriate waste management techniques; fostering water conservation and reuse; or setting environmentally sensitive areas aside as green space or conservation reserves.

The communities within the region are acutely aware of the value of local natural and cultural resources, which contribute greatly to area tourism, recreation and the appeal for luring new residents and businesses valuing the mountain character of the area. Many communities, however, have not yet adopted environmental policies or other regulations to ensure the highest standard of protection, due to either local resistance or prohibitive costs. There are, however, a large and growing variety of interest groups helping to educate and monitor resource management, which is helping protect many of these resources.

Efficient Land Use: Maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the costly conversion of undeveloped land at the periphery of the community. This may be achieved by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the traditional core of the

community; designing new development to minimize the amount of land consumed; carefully planning expansion of public infrastructure; or maintaining open space in agricultural, forestry, or conservation uses.

The prevailing topography has helped define and manage land use and development, but the region is just now experiencing greater pressures for suburban forms and more intense land uses within historically rural areas. The absence of land use regulations is being reconsidered at many communities and will factor in shaping how and where near-term development occurs.

Local Preparedness: Identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of future the community seeks to achieve. These prerequisites might include infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) to support or direct new growth; ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired; leadership and staff capable of responding to opportunities and managing new challenges; or undertaking an all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness and response.

Communities within the Georgia Mountains Region are growing more educated and capable in addressing growth and land use management. Through coordination with the GMRC, ACCG and GMA, local governments are regularly provided resources to improve their knowledge and be more proactive in shaping land use within their regions, but some work remains in this area.

Sense of Place: Protect and enhance the community's unique qualities. This may be achieved by maintaining the downtown as focal point of the community; fostering compact, walkable, mixed-use development; protecting and revitalizing historic areas of the community; encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community; or protecting scenic and natural features that are important to defining the community's character.

The Georgia Mountains Region is uniquely defined by the natural landscape and many reservoirs that have made the area a destination for people and businesses looking for a rural or outdoor lifestyle. Most communities are working to preserve and build off their historic town centers and retain the mountain character that has drawn and retained so many people.

Regional Cooperation: Cooperate with neighboring jurisdictions to address shared needs. This may be achieved by actively participating in regional organizations; identifying joint projects that will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer; or developing collaborative solutions for regional issues such as protection of shared natural resources, development of the transportation network, or creation of a tourism plan.

The communities within the Georgia Mountains region are seeking out more and more levels of intergovernmental cooperation, especially in terms of resource and utility management. Continued progress is desired, and there is ambition to better utilize technology to assist in this effort, such as with the recent regional aerial photography project that earned a NADO Innovation Award. Regional reservoirs will become a major factor in future discussions, as will the potential implementation of the Transportation Investment Act of 2010.

Housing Options: Promote an adequate range of safe, affordable, inclusive, and resource efficient housing in the community. This may be achieved by encouraging development of a variety of housing types, sizes, costs, and densities in each neighborhood; instituting programs to provide housing for residents of all socio-economic backgrounds; or coordinating with local programs to ensure availability of adequate workforce housing in the community.

The region is experiencing a rebound in housing development and sales, after a deep lull during the recent recession. The mountains and lakes spurred strong growth in the second/seasonal home market, which has slowed. However, early signs suggest workforce housing will be more affordable in the near term and that senior housing will continue to be a sharp need.

Transportation Options: Address the transportation needs, challenges and opportunities of all community residents. This may be achieved by fostering alternatives to transportation by automobile, including walking, cycling, and transit; employing traffic calming measures throughout the community; requiring adequate connectivity between adjoining developments; or coordinating transportation and land use decision-making within the community.

The potential within the Transportation Investment Act of 2010 has improved the opportunities for the regions infrastructure needs. Overall the various systems remain in good status, but as the population grows there will be more need for rural transit services and to sustain traffic flow on select State arteries serving high volumes of both local and through traffic.

Educational Opportunities: Make educational and training opportunities readily available to enable all community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or pursue life ambitions. This can be achieved by expanding and improving local educational institutions or programs; providing access to other institutions in the region; or coordinating with local economic development programs to ensure an adequately skilled workforce.

The Georgia Mountains Region does have a comparable abundance of educational facilities and resources for the resident population. Several technical colleges, private colleges and 2 State universities provide ample opportunities within the 13 counties, while the proximity to Athens and Atlanta means many other opportunities are within convenient access.

Community Health: Ensure that all residents, regardless of age, ability, or income, have access to critical goods and services, safe and clean neighborhoods, and good work opportunities. This may be achieved by providing services to support the basic needs of disadvantaged residents; instituting programs to foster better health and fitness; or providing all residents the opportunity to improve their circumstances in life and to fully participate in the community.

Thanks to Northside Hospital's Forsyth campus and the Northeast Georgia Medical Center there are premier health care facilities within the region, plus three other major medical centers available for area residents and visitors. Overall the level of health care is considered strong but plans must be made to coordinate with transportation and housing to ensure the accessibility to these services as the population grows within the more remote areas.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

Purpose

The purpose of the Stakeholder Involvement Program is to ensure that the regional plan reflects the full range of regional values and desires, by involving a diverse spectrum of stakeholders in development of the Regional Agenda. This broad-based participation in developing the Regional Agenda will also help ensure that it will be implemented, because many in the region are involved in its development and thereby become committed to seeing it through. The Stakeholder Involvement Program is intended to supplement, not replace, the regional hearing required in section 110-12-6-.08 (2)(a).

Requirements

The three elements required in developing the Stakeholder Involvement Program, as per the rules and standards for regional planning in Georgia, are listed below. These requirements are designed to ensure the process engages the public and key stakeholders, focusing on the input, interests and concerns of the region's residents, business owners and others with vested interests in the local communities. The result must be a concise schedule to guide development of the Regional Agenda, including planned participation events or meetings at key points during this process.

(a) Identification of Stakeholders. Compile a list of all stakeholders who need to have a voice in the development of the Regional Agenda. Refer to the list of suggested stakeholders provided in the State Planning Recommendations for suggestions.

(b) Identification of Participation Techniques. Review each of the recommended community participation techniques identified in the State Planning Recommendations to select those to be used for involving the selected stakeholders in the process of developing the Regional Agenda.

(c) Schedule for Completion of the Regional Agenda. Review the suggested schedules for completion of the Regional Agenda provided in the State Planning Recommendations and choose one that best fits regional needs. Adapt this schedule as necessary for unique regional circumstances, and substitute the specific participation techniques selected in the previous step at appropriate points in the schedule. This schedule must include events aimed at including the Regional Commission Council in development of the Regional Agenda, such as the Council serving as the steering committee for plan development or holding special participation events with the Council members.

IDENTIFICATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

An inventory of key stakeholders and interested parties is devised in advance of most planning exercises to ensure that a proper involvement program is pursued as part of the process. The Regional Plan is designed, after all, not only as a compliment to local and State community development efforts, but also as a means to engage people about topics and issues that might otherwise have been missed through either the smaller scale local plans or broader and more general State plans.

As part of the Georgia Mountain Planning process, the GMRC will engage various layers of stakeholder groups in different ways. This is intended not only to ensure a full and proper representation of regional interest throughout the planning process, but also allow GMRC staff to be more direct and effective in communicating with each group about specific issues and concerns.

The foremost group to be addressed will be the local governments themselves, which are the core of community development within the region and for whom the GMRC serves. The Regional Plan will be devised primarily as a vehicle to compliment the goals and interests of local plans, and as such special attention will be paid to securing the participation of local government staff and officials. Similarly, the GMRC will be reaching out to top-layer local organizations and stakeholder groups that are active in the development and implementation of local planning objectives. This includes development authorities, chambers of commerce, convention and visitors boards and other organizations working for the betterment of area cities and counties.

The next layer of stakeholders to be other organizations and people active in the local communities but not consistently addressing community development issues. This includes representation from prominent business and institutions, such as area colleges, Northeast Georgia Medical Center and area hospitals, major employers, media organizations and more. Special efforts will be made to engage the poultry and agricultural industry as well as the major health care providers due to their prominence in the region and critical role in future economic development efforts. GMRC staff will work with the local chambers of commerce to identify other select businesses for their targeted involvement in the process. This outreach will also concentrate on communication with local activist groups and larger social networks (churches, neighborhood organizations, etc).

An additional layer of stakeholders to be engaged will be the general public. The GMRC will promote their participation through web media and through local council and commission meetings, inviting area residents to provide their comments, concerns and questions to the GMRC during the planning process.

Finally, the GMRC will solicit input and comment from State Departments and other outside-based organizations that have an active role and key interest in the development of the Georgia Mountains Region. This will help those organizations better understand and support local and

regional objectives, and will also provide additional perspectives on the visions and issues facing the region.

Preliminary Stakeholders Identified for Participation

Local Organizations
Local Governments – Elected Officials
Local Governments – Planning Staff/ Officials
Development Authorities
Chambers of Commerce
Convention and Visitors Bureaus
Main Street/Better Hometown Managers
Historic Preservation Committees
School Boards
Local Hospital Boards/Authorities
Gainesville- Hall MPO

State and Regional Organizations
Georgia Department of Community Affairs
Georgia Department of Transportation
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Georgia Department of Economic Development
Georgia Emergency Management Authority
Georgia Forestry Commission
US Forest Service
Appalachian Regional Commission
Legacy Link (Transit & Senior Services)
Georgia Mountains WIB

Private Sector Interests
Charitable organizations (Goodwill, Red Cross)
Area churches
Real estate professionals (Norton, etc)
Family Connection Collaborative
Ethnic and minority groups
Local banks (UCB, HB&T…)
Georgia Farm Bureau
Cattlemen's Association
Insurance companies
Local Colleges and Universities
Poultry industry representatives
Retirement community managers
Local developers
Outdoor recreational interests
(SORBA, Ducks Unlimited…)
Major employers
Low-income group representatives

Natural and Cultural Resource Interests
(See: GMRC Regional Resource Plan)

The GMRC will make special efforts to engage representatives from the development industries, including such organizations as Norton Reality and major banks within the region. Additional Stakeholders will be identified throughout the process and be invited to participate. Where the GMRC does not have direct access to a particular targeted group of stakeholders (minorities, developers), the GMRC will provide Regional Plan materials and contact info to local organizations that work with those groups and invite participation. Where possible, representatives of select groups will be contacted directly for input.

IDENTIFICATION OF PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

Given the variety of stakeholders identified and the nature of the regional planning process, several different measures for soliciting and managing public input will be employed in developing the Regional Agenda. The following is an overview of the methods proposed.

Direct Outreach and Communication

Local government officials will receive regular notices of progress, invitations to review material and provide and questions directly with GMRC staff. This approach will ensure every GMRC member government is contacted regarding the development of the plan and given the most direct and efficient means for participating. Where possible this will be done through eblasts, but for those smaller communities without email fax service will be used. GMRC will also directly engage with local staff where possible throughout the process in visits to local governments or contacting select governments to solicit their comments.

GMRC Council Meetings

The GMRC Council will be notified of progress during their monthly meetings, invited to comment and instructed to share this news with local officials at their respective communities. There will also be opportunity to formally discuss the plan at select meetings during the planning process.

Surveys

A brief survey will be produced to solicit opinion on the validity and priority of the various issues and opportunities before the region. The survey will be provided online and be available for distribution to those who prefer/need conventional media. The survey will be promoted to all identified stakeholders and, as possible, to the general public.

Web Interaction

A page of the GMRC web site will be dedicated to the update of the Regional Plan, providing users with access to a calendar of events, a schedule for the planning process, the means to review draft material, participate in any online surveys and contact GMRC staff. This site will serve as the primary portal for casual interaction and select formal activities.

Public Workshops

GMRC staff will also coordinate and facilitate at least two public workshops dedicated exclusively to the planning process. These may coincide with existing regular forums featuring City and County managers and/or local planning staff and officials, but will include directed discussion of plan topics and review of plan-related issues. One will occur during the front of the Agenda development process as the GMRC moves to validate the issues, opportunities and prospective vision. The second will occur near the end of the process to review draft objectives and possible implementation strategies. Additional meetings will be established as needed/able, and the GMRC will be available to produce such workshops in conjunction with other events where able.

GMRC Planning Committee

The GMRC employs a standing Planning Committee comprised of several members of the GMRC Council. Their role is to assist the Planning Department in matters regarding DRIs and regional plan development. They will be called upon to serve as a steering committee for the Agenda development process and will meet at least three times. The Committee will also be advised throughout the process via email and teleconference as needed.

GMRC Planning Committee – FY12

Paul Kreager	*Forsyth County*	Jim Conley	*Mayor of Blairsville, Union County*
Bill Black	*White County*	Mitch Griggs	*Union County (Dev. Authority)*
Rex Farmer	*Hall County*	Trey Hicks	*Hart County*
David Stovall	*Habersham County*		

SCHEDULE FOR COMPLETION OF THE REGIONAL AGENDA

The following schedule represents a draft outline of the steps and milestones guiding the Agenda development process. The schedule is based on the use of participation techniques discussed above, and assumes the start of the process (initial outreach to stakeholders) will commence as the Regional Assessment is under DCA review.

	2012				2013				
	Aug/ Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Coordination & Logistics									
Notify stakeholders of process									
Identify dates and locations for meetings									
Develop web page									
Confirmation of Vision, Issues & Opportunities									
Promulgation of Assessment									
Develop & distribute/post first survey									
Outreach to local governments									
Public/ Plan Committee meeting									
Define Goals and Implementation Options									
Review and assessment of material									
Public/ Plan Committee meeting									
Distribute/post 2nd survey (optional)									
Confirmation of Future Development Strategy									
Development of draft Agenda									
Peer review of Agenda									
Public/ Plan Committee meeting									
Approval and Adoption Process									
Approval/ Transmittal to DCA									
State Review									
Adoption/ Promulgation								**May/June**	

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL PLAN

APPENDIX A
SUPPORTING DATA AND ANALYSIS

APPENDIX A - SUPPORTING DATA AND ANALYSIS

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Note: Where possible 2010 data has been included, however, all statistics and data in this document will be revisited and updated as needed in 2012, once all the US Bureau of the Census releases all of the data regarding the 2010 Census.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This document serves as one of the three main components of the Regional Plan for the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC). Known as the Supporting Data and Analysis, the purpose of this element is to present the collection of information and analyses used as the basis for the first element (the Regional Assessment) and as a resource for the development of the final element (the Regional Agenda).

The Supporting Data and Analysis element checks the validity of potential issues and opportunities and projected development patterns by evaluating the information required of the process. It is presented as an appendix and in an abbreviated format to improve accessibility of the information. Any and all questions about the data and information presented herein should be directed to the GMRC.

Requirements

The Supporting Data and Analysis element must, at a minimum, present and evaluate the data and information listed in section 110-12-6-.07(1) of the Rules and Standards for Regional Planning, as provided by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The Regional Commission must employ a 20-year planning time frame when evaluating these data and information items. The minimum general categories for information required in the element include:

Population
Economic Development
Housing
Community Facilities
Transportation

Information regarding Natural and Cultural Resources has been collected and assessed within the GMRC Regional Resource Plan, an affiliated document that was completed prior to the this planning process.

For this document, the GMRC Planning Department included and assessment regarding intergovernmental coordination issues, as well. This information is not required as part of regional plans in Georgia, however, as it is required of local comprehensive plans the GMRC felt a regional counterpart was necessary.

When evaluating all the required data and information, the element focuses on:

- Whether it verifies potential issues or opportunities identified above;
- Whether it uncovers new issues or opportunities not previously identified;
- Whether it indicates significant regional trends that need to be brought to the attention of decision-makers;
- Whether it suggests adjustment of the Projected Development Patterns Map (e.g., to avoid intrusion into environmentally sensitive areas, etc.).

POPULATION

The Population Element provides an inventory and analysis of demographic data, defining significant trends and attributes to help determine how human services, public facilities, and employment opportunities can adequately support existing and future populations. The information may also assist in establishing desired growth rates, population densities, and development patterns consistent with the goals and policies for the region. The inventory presents various statistics for the region over the past twenty years, and, where applicable, shows projections for the next twenty years. In some categories local performance is also compared with the state and other communities in Georgia.

Total Population

The total population defines the volume of citizens within a defined region. It explores the total size (volume) of the populace as well as the trends that produced that size. Tracking a region's total population will introduce comparisons to others as well as provide a basis for which other calculations and projections will be made. Population growth can identify numerous trends, ranging from economic expansion and a large volume of in-migration, to highlighting a comparably slow growth in relation to other areas. This information can then be used to address concerns over net migration, death and fertility rates, which in turn express greater issues to be addressed in other elements.

Table 1 - Total Population

	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	'80-'10
Georgia	5,457,566	6,478,216	8,186,453	9,090,479	9,908,357	81.6%
ARC	1,896,189	2,514,066	3,429,379	3,936,491	4,365,867	130.2%
NWGRC	478,163	548,220	697,410	783,507	845,372	76.8%
GMRDC	244,839	304,462	455,342	544,456	625,578	155.5%
NEGA RDC	275,449	328,223	438,300	517,768	585,627	112.6%
As % of Ga.						
ARC	34.7%	38.8%	41.9%	43.3%	44.1%	
NWGRC	8.8%	8.5%	8.5%	8.6%	8.5%	
GMRDC	4.5%	4.7%	5.6%	6.0%	6.3%	
NEGA RDC	5.0%	5.1%	5.4%	5.7%	5.9%	
GMRC Counties						
Banks	8,679	10,308	14,422	15,978	16,912	94.9%
Dawson	4,774	9,429	15,999	19,580	22,358	368.3%
Forsyth	27,959	44,083	98,407	138,454	179,003	540.2%
Franklin	15,153	16,650	20,285	21,435	21,556	42.3%
Habersham	25,345	27,261	35,902	39,384	43,652	72.2%
Hall	75,409	95,428	139,277	165,782	190,015	152.0%
Hart	19,383	19,712	22,997	23,871	24,207	24.9%
Lumpkin	10,762	14,573	21,016	24,857	27,748	157.8%
Rabun	10,466	11,648	15,050	16,140	16,638	59.0%
Stephens	21,764	23,257	25,435	25,087	25,779	18.4%
Towns	5,639	6,754	9,319	10,233	11,079	96.5%
Union	9,387	11,993	17,289	19,847	21,260	126.5%
White	10,119	13,006	19,944	23,808	25,371	150.7%

Source: U.S. Dept of Commerce, Bureau of Census

Age Distribution

As defined by Woods & Poole, "*the mix of age groups defines the region's character and indicates the types of jobs and services needed*." Each age group, from children to retirement age, requires special needs with respect to public services and facilities, making it important for the providing government to identify the prevailing age distribution. Moreover, by defining the present age make-up of the community a government is also producing a portrait of future age distribution and can more effectively plan for future needs and concerns.

Table 2 – Age Distribution, 2000

	0 - 4	5 - 14	15 -24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65+
United States	6.8	14.6	13.9	14.2	16.1	13.2	8.6	12.4
Georgia	7.3	14.9	14.5	15.8	16.5	13.2	8.1	9.6
GMRC	7.5	14	13.1	14.8	16	13.2	9.6	11.6
Banks	7.5	14.4	13.1	14.5	16.1	13.8	9.9	10.5
Dawson	7	14.5	11.3	14.8	17.7	14.5	11	9.3
Forsyth	9.5	14.6	9.6	16.8	20.3	13.5	8.3	7.1
Franklin	6.3	13.6	13.6	12.7	14.6	13	10.8	15.3
Habersham	6.3	13	15.3	13.3	15.1	13.1	10	13.8
Hall	8.2	14.5	15.1	16.7	15.5	12.4	8.1	9.4
Hart	6.3	13.5	11.4	12.6	14.8	13.8	11.2	16.5
Lumpkin	6.4	13.7	19.7	13.6	15.4	12.5	9.1	9.7
Rabun	5.7	12	11.1	11.7	13.6	14.6	13.1	18.1
Stephens	6.1	13.6	14.2	12.7	13.9	13.6	10.3	15.6
Towns	4.4	13.2	11.9	9.5	10.9	13	15.3	25.9
Union	4.8	11.7	10.1	10.3	13.3	13.8	14.4	21.6
White	6.2	13.3	12.9	12.7	15.2	13.7	11.4	14.6

Source: U.S. Dept of Commerce, Bureau of Census

Table 3 – Age Distribution Percentages, 2009

	GA		Banks	Dawson	Forsyth	Franklin	Habersham	Hall	Hart	Lumpkin	Rabun	Stephens	Towns	Union	White
% Persons under 18 yo	26.3		25.2	23.4	29.9	23.7	24.5	28.6	22.6	22.4	21.5	23.1	16.4	18.4	22.9
% persons above 65 yo	10.3		12.1	12.9	8.3	16.8	15.2	10.2	17.4	12.2	21.2	17.9	28.9	25.7	16.6

Source: U.S. Dept of Commerce, Bureau of Census

Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnic make-up of a population are other features of demography. Changes in the racial make-up of a community can signify greater social changes and/or needs, including language issues or shifts in cultural leanings. None of these factors present right or wrong values, but they can provide a measure of marketable influences and directions based upon strong shifts in racial compositions.

Table 4 – Race and Ethnicity of GMRC Population

	2000	2010
White	89.7	83.9
Black	5.3	4.9
Native American, Eskimo or Aleut	0.8	0.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.2	0.9
Other	4.2	9.9
Hispanic Origin	8.5	12.8

Source: U.S. Dept of Commerce, Bureau of Census

Income

Income levels provide an indication of the economic health of the population. Just as education levels offer insight into employment conditions and the quality of the labor pool, per-capita and household income levels measure the financial stability of the population, and how the local economy is responding to the educational climate. Higher income levels suggest a thriving economy, and offer a good indicator as to the success of a community.

Table 5 – Per Capita Income

	1980	1990	2000	2010
Banks	$ 11,252	$ 15,977	$ 16,558	$19,497
Dawson	$12,931	$17,410	$22,167	$25,557
Forsyth	$15,895	$21,858	$31,484	$35,385
Franklin	$11,858	$17,616	$19,071	$19,276
Habersham	$12,173	$17,560	$20,375	$19,286
Hall	$15,116	$19,504	$22,134	$23,675
Hart	$12,350	$16,722	$19,989	$19,124
Lumpkin	$12,103	$16,285	$19,993	$20,088
Rabun	$11,082	$15,650	$19,421	$22,471
Stephens	$12,568	$16,660	$20,704	$18,285
Towns	$9,190	$15,598	$20,779	$21,527
Union	$9,251	$14,913	$19,796	$24,182
White	$11,761	$18,310	$20,193	$23,680
GMRC	$12,118	$17,236	$20,975	$22,437
Georgia	$15,353	$20,715	$25,433	$25,134
United States	$18,444	$22,871	$26,988	$27,334

Source: Woods & Poole Economics, Inc.; US Census Bureau (2010)

Table 6a– Household Income Distribution, 2000

Income Levels	$5000-9,999	$10,000-14,999	$15,000-29,999	$30,000-34,999	$35,000-49,999	$50,000-74,999	$75,000-99,999	$100,000 +
Banks	11.4%	6.4%	18.9%	7.6%	22.8%	19.9%	6.5%	6.5%
Dawson	6.4%	4.3%	18.3%	4.8%	18.2%	23.4%	13.1%	11.6%
Forsyth	4.3%	2.9%	10.5%	3.9%	12.4%	21.3%	17.6%	27.2%
Franklin	13.7%	8.2%	24.5%	8.2%	19.6%	16.8%	4.7%	4.2%
Habersham	10.1%	7.7%	23.9%	6.5%	19.2%	19.0%	7.1%	6.5%
Hall	8.2%	4.9%	17.5%	7.1%	18.2%	21.8%	11.4%	11.0%
Hart	13.6%	8.6%	23.3%	7.6%	16.4%	17.7%	7.8%	4.9%
Lumpkin	10.9%	7.1%	21.0%	6.0%	16.6%	23.1%	7.4%	7.8%
Rabun	11.5%	7.1%	24.4%	8.5%	17.7%	17.4%	6.5%	7.0%
Stephens	13.8%	9.4%	27.7%	7.4%	15.4%	15.8%	5.5%	4.9%
Towns	12.4%	11.1%	23.3%	8.1%	18.8%	14.2%	5.1%	7.1%
Union	13.9%	6.7%	26.0%	7.1%	16.6%	18.1%	6.4%	5.2%
White	10.1%	5.3%	24.3%	8.6%	20.8%	19.7%	6.4%	4.8%
GMRC	9.2%	5.8%	19.1%	6.5%	17.0%	20.1%	10.4%	11.9%
GA	6.4%	4.5%	16.9%	5.9%	17.0%	22.1%	12.2%	15.0%

Source: U.S. Dept of Commerce, Bureau of Census

Table 6b– Household Income Distribution, 2010

Income Levels		$5,000-14,999	$15,000-24,999	$25,000-34,999	$35,000-49,999	$50,000-74,999	$75,000-99,999	$100,000 +
GMRC		14.1%	10.1%	9.8%	16.4%	22.7%	15.4%	11.5%

Source: U.S. Dept of Commerce, Bureau of Census

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Economic Development element attempts to define the assets and liabilities of industrial categories, geographical locations, and employment conditions. Economic development analyses inventory a community's functional conditions and achievements to identify the strengths, weaknesses and needs of native businesses. This portrait of a region's economic state is the foundation for assessing the performance of wages and job skills, employment and industry patterns, and efforts designed to improve local economies.

ECONOMIC BASE

Economic base analyses are used to identify the local significance of each industrial sector. Studied are the kinds of industry within a community, the total earnings those industries produce, and the wages distributed the resident population. Economic base studies can direct recruitment toward businesses that complement existing industry or require the skills of residents currently exporting labor to other regions. This information is basic, but vital, for more effective decisions concerning the health of the local economy.

Employment by Economic Sector

The primary measure of an industry's value to a local economy is the number of people it employs. An economy grows stronger as it increases any form of gainful employment in the local population, redistributing wealth and encouraging economic growth.

Table 7 - Total Employment by Industry

	Total Employment			Share of Regional Employment			Change
	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000	'80-'00
United States	100.9M	138.6M	166.2M				64.7%
Georgia	2,385,976	3,703,647	4,859,970				103.7%
GMRC	105,103	151,488	219,125	100%	100%	100%	108.5%
Manufacturing	32,884	39,821	46,905	31.3%	26.3%	21.4%	42.6%
Services	13,918	26,687	52,228	13.2%	17.6%	23.8%	275.3%
Local & State Government	13,284	16,314	20,051	12.6%	10.8%	9.2%	50.9%
Retail	14,619	25,348	28,569	13.9%	16.7%	13.0%	95.4%
Construction	5,820	11,312	23,351	5.5%	7.5%	10.7%	301.2%
Agriculture	8,828	9,702	10,844	8.4%	6.4%	4.9%	22.8%
Wholesale	3,566	5,413	8,658	3.4%	3.6%	4.0%	142.8%
Transportation/ Public Facilities	3,366	4,960	9,064	3.2%	3.3%	4.1%	169.3%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	5,804	8,734	13,181	5.5%	5.8%	6.0%	127.1%
Federal Government	986	1,248	1,907	0.9%	0.8%	0.9%	93.4%
Fisheries & Forestry	705	2,054	2,116	0.7%	1.4%	1.0%	200.1%
Military	1,102	1,537	1,723	1.0%	1.0%	0.8%	56.4%
Mining	222	358	401	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	80.6%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

Table 8 – Total Earnings by Industry

	1970	1980	1990	2000
United States	1,825 M	2,355 M	2,928 M	3,465 M
Georgia	35,556,751	49,794,520	73,638,399	91,571,279
ARC	16,336,517	24,620,428	39,903,089	51,526,014
NWGRC	2,476,218	3,174,821	4,425,281	5,592,054
GMRC	1,140,629	1,530,281	2,513,014	3,212,609
NEGRC	1,298,662	1,786,710	2,565,670	3,030,928
Manufacturing	460,322	570,393	754,774	947,692
Services	154,304	218,228	431,465	636,725
Local & State Government	113,767	192,882	292,532	355,736
Retail	139,655	186,154	283,529	333,377
Construction	70,660	94,416	178,221	227,226
Agriculture	55,395	120,587	176,987	190,518
Wholesale	32,584	69,354	119,215	157,161
Transportation/ Public Utilities	43,270	76,638	107,938	144,631
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	30,025	55,530	97,526	146,807
Federal Government	22,002	24,862	31,090	32,833
Fisheries & Forestry	10,188	7,752	19,292	21,731
Military	5,971	6,455	11,735	11,564
Mining	2,486	6430	8,710	9,558

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

Labor Force

Information concerning the skills and abilities of the labor force provides a strong indication of the economic potential of a region. Occupational characteristics highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the available labor pool, offering guidance as to the employment needs and limitations. An analysis of occupational employment, balanced by information concerning work location and commuting patterns, can be used to determine the assets of the existing labor force as well as to highlight which skills should be brought into the area. This analysis can then be used with economic base studies to direct activities for improving the local economic conditions.

Occupations

The occupational information reveals the kinds of skills & experience present in the local labor force, and provides an indication of how successfully that force can fill the labor needs of particular industrial sectors. Such information can also help explain commuting patterns, education needs, and possible changes in demands for consumer goods and services.

Table 9 – Total Employment by Occupation – 2000

	Sales Occupations	Administrative Support Occupations, Including Clerical	Service Occupations, Except Protective & Household	Profession Specialty Occupations	Executive, Administrative, & Managerial Occupations	Precision Production, Craft, & Repair Occupations	Machine Operators, Assemblers & Inspectors	Farming, Forestry, & Fishing Occupations	Transportation & Material Moving Occupations
GMRC	59,660	55,452	53,123	33,544	30,119	29,321	28,911	25,902	13,398
BANKS	786	829	918	766	731	1,215	1,185	119	592
DAWSON	958	1,241	821	1,273	1,175	945	1,095	52	561
FORSYTH	7,670	7,379	5,053	9,629	11,657	2,731	5,677	248	1,977
FRANKLIN	895	1,137	952	1,124	1,034	1,505	1,049	149	758
HABERSHAM	1,768	2,247	1,891	2,297	1,892	2,882	2,198	288	1,069
HALL	7,493	8,438	7,130	9,945	7,675	11,198	8,507	596	4,796
HART	1,064	1,356	1,151	1,447	1,115	1,795	1,457	111	690
LUMPKIN	1,104	1,469	1,235	1,582	980	1,297	1,542	112	629
RABUN	716	654	790	858	604	1,057	1,329	31	441
STEPHENS	1,050	1,843	1,173	1,784	1,005	2,546	1,466	106	720
TOWNS	407	556	480	601	423	256	666	20	150
UNION	941	802	963	934	677	827	1,222	160	512
WHITE	1,264	1,385	1,230	1,304	1,151	1,067	1,518	123	503

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

Occupations with no data available:

Technicians & Related Support Occupations
Protective Service Occupations
Private Household Occupations
Handlers, Equipment Cleaners, Helpers & Laborers

Table 10 – Comparison of Employment by Occupation – 2000

	GMRC	NEGRC	NWRC	ARC	GA	U S
Total Number Employed	*219,125*	*200,659*	*N/A*	*1,991,500*	*3,090,276*	*115,681,202*
Admin., Management, Professional, Technical	28.3%	28.4%	23.3%	39.2%	32.7%	33.7%
Sales and Office	25.3%	25.6%	24.9%	29.0%	26.8%	26.7%
Precision Production, Transport Equipment	19.5%	18.6%	25.7%	10.5%	15.7%	14.6%
Equipment Operators ASMS	13.2%	12.6%	13.4%	9.0%	10.8%	9.5%
Services	10.9%	13.7%	12.1%	12.1%	11.6%	12.0%
Farming, Forestry, Fishing	0.1%	1.3%	0.6%	0.1%	0.6%	0.7%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

Wages by Economic Sector

As the employment of each economic sector represents the value of each industry to the community's overall economic productivity, the wages provided by those sectors indicate the standard of living each industry will produce. Industries that can support higher wages yield more disposable income that can be reinvested elsewhere in the local economy. By contrast, industries with lower wages can become liabilities by leaving households dependent on additional sources of income.

Table 11 - Average Weekly Wages, as Compared to U.S. Average, 1990

(Figures for Ga. and counties shown as percentage of U.S. Average)

	Federal	Mining	Transportation, Public Utilities	Wholesale Trade	Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	Manufacturing	Construction	State	Local	Services	Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries	Retail Trade
U.S.	$651	$611	$609	$599	$512	$507	$493	$490	$449	$410	$291	$282
GA	89.2	91.8	94.7	96.5	101.6	85.0	83.0	97.3	91.8	94.4	91.8	81.6
BANKS	56.4		0.0	41.9	78.3	58.2	47.5	84.3	64.1	43.4	68.4	51.4
DAWSON	66.7		63.5	139.1	63.9	59.6	62.1	67.6	67.7	98.0		72.7
FORSYTH	70.5	74.6	67.3	89.6	74.6	75.5	82.2	84.5	80.2	74.4	93.1	82.3
FRANKLIN	64.1		72.4	61.3	75.0	62.5	65.5	80.4	69.9	67.6	91.4	74.8
HABERSHAM	65.3		87.5	64.9	75.2	65.5	60.9	86.9	71.5	63.9	174.2	77.7
HALL	86.2	78.9	83.4	75.8	84.4	81.1	76.9	82.4	89.1	90.0	114.1	81.6
HART	73.3		79.3	63.9	67.2	74.6	53.8	78.6	70.4	63.4	168.7	59.9
LUMPKIN	57.6		76.8	157.6	60.7	67.3	55.8	96.3	76.2	70.7	93.5	75.5
RABUN	61.3		74.9	63.4	59.6	62.3	54.4	80.4	66.1	67.6		67.0
STEPHENS	75.1		55.5	45.2	96.1	73.4	69.6	88.6	80.4	65.6	70.1	66.7
TOWNS	66.2		0.0	31.6	63.7	37.5	54.8	78.0	54.8	82.2	57.0	71.3
UNION	61.6		67.2	46.4	69.7	46.9	63.9	76.1	69.9	78.0		57.8
WHITE	63.1		63.7	59.3	59.8	73.8	62.9	77.6	73.5	52.4	91.4	76.2

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

Table 12 - Average Weekly Wages - 2000

(Figures for Ga. and counties shown as percentage of U.S. Average)

	Federal	Mining	Transportation, Public Utilities	Wholesale Trade	Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	Manufacturing	Construction	State	Local	Services	Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries	Retail Trade
BANKS	$639		$426	$487	$554	$457	$426	$517	$413	$228	$937	$261
DAWSON	$593		$623	$796	$672	$710	$560	$528	$434	$475	$420	$267
FORSYTH	$645	$968	$689	$949	$753	$739	$654	$516	$555	$661	$484	$345
FRANKLIN	$583		$649	$554	$599	$535	$596	$411	$429	$438	$487	$340
HABERSHAM	$603		$761	$498	$627	$527	$510	$576	$490	$418	$457	$299
HALL	$741	$1,112	$670	$675	$701	$620	$615	$522	$542	$526	$491	$356
HART	$701		$899	$473	$551	$613	$418	$473	$435	$417	$286	$229
LUMPKIN	$635		$742	$468	$608	$512	$503		$395	$471	$312	$302
RABUN	$652		$739	$652	$505	$493	$398	$452	$432	$361	$338	$310
STEPHENS	$703		$615	$449	$712	$590	$482	$547	$499	$422	$410	$304
TOWNS	$593		$655	$384	$458	$384	$411	$484	$394	$380	$422	$235
UNION	$568		$495	$677	$633	$409	$429	$467	$421	$357		$256
WHITE	$543		$514	$592	$985	$572	$485	$558	$496	$339	$407	$308

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

Sources of Personal Income

While wage rates represent one gauge of a population's wealth, wages constitute only a portion of each household's net income. Additional sources of revenue include earned interest, dividends, proprietor's income and financial assistance. These sources must be evaluated to levy a true measure of local economic health.

Table 13 – Sources of Personal Income by Type

	Wage or Salary	Other Income	Self Employment	Interest, Dividends, or Net Rental	Social Security	Public Assistance	Retirement
1990							
Banks	74.5%	1.2%	9.5%	5.1%	5.7%	0.9%	3.2%
Dawson	73.5%	1.7%	10.1%	5.8%	4.9%	1.0%	3.1%
Forsyth	79.2%	0.9%	7.7%	6.1%	3.2%	0.4%	2.6%
Franklin	70.4%	1.1%	6.6%	7.0%	8.7%	1.2%	4.9%
Habersham	74.4%	1.2%	7.5%	5.7%	6.6%	0.6%	4.0%
Hall	75.9%	1.2%	8.3%	6.3%	4.8%	0.5%	3.1%
Hart	69.4%	1.1%	8.5%	6.7%	7.9%	0.9%	5.4%
Lumpkin	73.5%	1.8%	10.1%	5.5%	5.2%	0.5%	3.3%
Rabun	63.3%	1.4%	9.0%	9.9%	9.9%	0.8%	5.7%
Stephens	73.5%	1.5%	7.4%	4.2%	8.7%	1.1%	3.5%
Towns	55.0%	2.4%	7.4%	12.7%	12.6%	1.4%	8.6%
Union	60.4%	2.4%	11.5%	8.6%	9.3%	0.9%	6.9%
White	71.5%	1.1%	8.6%	6.8%	6.9%	0.6%	4.6%
2000							
Banks	71.4%	1.9%	12.0%	3.7%	5.5%	0.7%	4.8%
Dawson	74.1%	0.9%	9.1%	7.0%	4.1%	0.3%	4.6%
Forsyth	82.8%	1.0%	6.0%	4.7%	2.3%	0.2%	3.0%
Franklin	69.6%	2.4%	7.4%	5.1%	9.0%	1.0%	5.4%
Habersham	71.1%	2.1%	5.5%	7.4%	7.0%	0.6%	6.3%
Hall	76.9%	1.7%	6.5%	6.0%	4.4%	0.5%	4.2%
Hart	66.7%	2.6%	6.8%	6.6%	8.1%	0.8%	8.4%
Lumpkin	73.6%	1.8%	7.3%	7.4%	4.8%	0.7%	4.5%
Rabun	60.4%	2.9%	10.1%	9.6%	8.4%	0.7%	7.8%
Stephens	74.3%	1.6%	4.8%	3.9%	8.3%	0.8%	6.3%
Towns	58.3%	1.8%	4.6%	8.9%	13.1%	0.9%	12.5%
Union	55.2%	2.7%	11.8%	8.5%	10.1%	1.0%	10.7%
White	68.8%	2.0%	9.3%	5.1%	7.4%	0.9%	6.4%

Source: US Bureau of the Census

Unemployment Levels

Another lead indicator of an economy's strength is the measure of its unemployment levels. Trends in this area reflect the stability and prosperity of local industries, as well as the results of past economic development strategies. Unemployment levels also represent a measure of the poverty level within the area and potential deficiencies in the redistribution of wealth.

Table 14 – Annual Unemployment Rates

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005
United States	-	7.0	7.2	5.5	6.1	4.0	5.1
Georgia	-	6.4	6.5	5.4	5.2	3.5	5.3
GMRC	10.0	7.4	6.3	4.9	4.2		
ARC	-	5.5	4.8	4.9	4.7		
NWGRC	-	8.5	8.3	6.7	5.1		
NEGRC	-	6.2	7.2	5.9	4.7		
Banks	6.3	6.5	5.0	5.5	4.5	3.0	4.0
Dawson	19.8	8.4	6.0	8.5	3.8	2.7	4.0
Forsyth	6.3	5.9	3.9	4.8	2.9	2.4	3.2
Franklin	9.2	8.2	7.2	6.4	5.3	3.8	5.7
Habersham	8.2	6.6	6.1	4.3	4.2	3.4	4.3
Hall	11.9	6.8	5.9	5.6	3.3	3.0	4.4
Hart	6.8	8.9	7.0	5.7	6.9	3.9	6.9
Lumpkin	9.5	7.4	5.2	3.9	3.2	2.9	4.5
Rabun	10.5	8.5	7.3	4.9	5.1	3.1	4.7
Stephens	11.9	9.8	9.5	6.9	4.8	3.5	6.0
Towns	7.0	5.5	6.7	3.7	3.6	4.0	3.5
Union	10.8	7.8	9.2	4.7	4.3	3.8	4.0
White	8.9	8.1	7.3	4.5	3.5	3.4	4.2

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

Economic Resources

Many communities employ a number of methods to encourage and strengthen local business and economic conditions. Economic development resources can take the form of development agencies, government programs, or special features within an education system that foster desired business environments. These resources are a means of supporting the local economy, and as such become strong factors in the analysis of regional economic development patterns.

Agencies

Local, State and Federal assistance is provided to the local government by the following:

- *Local Chambers of Commerce* – A Chamber of Commerce is the organizational force behind the local business community's efforts to support community development. Every County in the region has some form of Chamber to assist with business development and retention, and local governments are encouraged to maintain quality, regular communication and interaction with these organizations.

- *Local Development Authorities* – Development authorities are designed to support local business recruitment or retention through specific actions not available to the local governments directly. These authorities can pursue grants and loans and facilitate the actual development of land and interaction with private industry in ways that cities and counties are forbidden, making them a powerful resource for economic development. As of 2010 every county within the region has some form of development authority, and in some cases access to multiple such organizations. Sub-specialty authorities concentrate on downtown areas, others are joint authorities assisting more than one county.

- *Georgia Mountains Regional Commission* – This is the RC serving the 13 counties in the northeastern corner of Georgia, including Hall County and neighboring Forsyth, Dawson, Lumpkin, White, Habersham and Banks Counties. The GMRC has departments for Planning and Economic Development, each available to provide a full array of services to assist the City with plans, grant writing and other community development efforts.

- *Federal EDA Appalachian Regional Commission, USDA Rural Development* – All communities within the Georgia Mountains Region remain eligible for assistance from these Federal Agencies for projects that directly translate into new employment opportunities. This includes funding loans and matching grants for capital improvement and downtown development projects that attract new businesses or facilitate business expansion.

- *Georgia Departments of Labor, Community Affairs and Economic Development* – The State of Georgia assists local economic development through the provision of training programs, expert recruitment resources and financial assistance. Staff from all three Departments regularly communicate with the local governments regarding programs and resources for which they are eligible.

Programs and Tools

Local governments sometimes participate in several programs designed to assist business initiatives and improve the quality of the local labor force.

Local governments in Georgia are, depending on their classification and status, eligible for both the *OneGeorgia* and *BEST* programs that are designed specifically to support economic development in rural communities. Depending on the specific program, this support can include tax credits for new employment, assistance with job skills training and assistance with capital improvement projects.

Local governments are also eligible to apply for assistance through programs such as the *Transportation Enhancement* (TE) Grant, *Employment Incentive Program* (EIP) Grant and *Community Development Block Grant* (CDBG) programs. Funds awarded as part of these programs can assist with a select range of

projects such as small loans for infrastructure improvements and facility developments that support job growth. These programs can also provide loans directly to businesses for utility improvements and training programs that support economic development.

Georgia communities can also utilize the *QuickStart* program provided in conjunction with the Georgia Department of Economic Development and the Department of Adult and technical Education. This program provides resources for area technical colleges to develop and provide specific job training programs at the request of businesses seeking new/more employees. This service is provided at no or defrayed cost to the employees that enroll for the one-time training.

Education and Training Facilities

Post-secondary education is the foundation for developing a highly skilled work force. The accessibility and quality of colleges and universities enables a community to produce a labor pool with a wider variety of skill sets and with a deeper set of skills for the jobs in greater demand. Such facilities also support specific job-skills training for local industry expansion. Thus it is crucial for any community to include in their plans for economic development an understanding of the education resources available for building and sustaining the type of labor force needed to prosper.

Post Secondary Education Facilities in the Georgia Mountains Region

Public Institutions	*Private Institutions*
Gainesville State College	Brenau University
North Georgia College and State Univ.	Piedmont College
North Georgia Technical College (2 campuses)	Emmanuel College
Lanier Technical College (3 campuses)	Young Harris College
	Southern College
	Toccoa Falls College

Additional access to more than 20 prominent private and public universities and colleges, including the University of Georgia and the Georgia Institute of Technology, is available for more than 60% of regional residents through commuting approximately 1 hour to Atlanta pr Athens.

Economic Trends

Evaluate economic trends that are ongoing in the region, including which sectors, industries or employers are declining and which are growing. Also evaluate any unique economic situations, major employers and important new developments for their impact on the region.

The following has been reproduced from the 2011 update of the Georgia Mountains Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), the annual report provided to the federal Economic Development Administration highlighting the issues and trends of the region.

> *"The adjusted unemployment rate for the Georgia Mountains 13-county region was 9.9% in June. This compared with the Georgia rate of 9.9% and the latest U.S. rate of 9.2%. The individual counties ranged from a low of 8.1% in Forsyth County to a high of 12.3% in Hart County. There were seven counties (over half of the region) above the region, state, and U.S. unemployment rates with Banks at 10.5%, Franklin at 12.0%, Habersham at 10.5%, Hart at 12.3%, Lumpkin at 11.0%, Rabun at 12.2%, and Stephens at 10.9%.*
>
> *However, this unemployment rate does not reflect some of the major economic changes that took place in the region over the past year. Last year, four (4) counties were above the region, state, and*

US unemployment rates while this year seven (7) counties show higher unemployment. Due to the continuing recession, the tourism industry has been greatly affected with visitations to all lakes in the regions below normal again. This along with higher gas prices has caused many small business operations to have to close, including many locally owned food services and seasonal operations.

As indicated… in the Project Evaluation section, 418 new jobs will be created through grant projects provided through the GMRC. The Joint Development Authority Broadband project has the potential for another 680 job once completed. At the same time, 349 jobs were lost in 2 major plant closings and 2 workforce reductions according to the Georgia Department of Labor. This does not include the figures for fewer than 25 jobs lost per plant or small business closures. The Committee continues to work with the Georgia Mountains Workforce Investment Board as they plan strategies on how to retrain and assist the displaced workers."

Major Plant Closings/ Layoff 2010-2011

Company Name	County	Project Layoffs
Beaulieu of America	Franklin	192
Beaulieu of America	Hall	60

Workforce Reduction in bordering counties with potential impact to the region:

Clark Western	Jackson	62
Mitsubishi Digital Electronics	Jackson	35

Source: GA Department of Labor

"The State of Georgia's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate rose to 9.9% in June up 0.1% from 9.8% in May. The current June adjusted state rate, which is 0.7% higher than the U.S. seasonally adjusted rate of 92%, continued to top the national rate. These Major Plant Closing figures do not include the layoffs for 25 or fewer jobs lost due to closing nor does it include the individuals laid off by small businesses."

HOUSING

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

Housing Type and Mix

In reviewing the housing trends across a community, the number of units alone does not provide the most accurate picture. Instead, the number of housing units must also be divided into three categories that further define the type of housing involved. For the purposes of this plan, the assessment of housing units will utilize three primary housing types: Single family, multi-family, and manufactured housing. Because each type of housing provides different options for lifestyle choices and economic conditions for local households, they also require varying sets of needs and demands with respect to land conditions, public services, and facilities. Understanding the different housing types and how they are dispersed throughout a community can assist governments in more effective distribution of public services and facilities.
Single-family units are defined as free-standing houses, or as units that are attached but completely separated by a dividing wall. Associated with the "American Dream," single family housing is often the most desirable by all parties involved; To residents for the ownership rights and symbolism of achievement, to governments for the tax revenue and investment in the community, and to developers for the potential return value.

Multi-family housing consists of structures containing two or more units, including large multi-unit homes, apartment complexes, and condominiums. Compared to single family housing, multi-family units are more cost effective to produce and associated with a more temporary residency, factors which have spurned the growth of this market in a national society achieving new levels of mobility.

Manufactured housing is currently defined by the US Census as all forms of pre-fabricated housing, with a special HUD definition for units produced before June 10, 1976. This category is generally the least expensive means of housing production and ownership, but is also often associated with weaker economic conditions because of how local communities continue to evolve in their approach to taxing such structures, treating modern units the same as their mobile-home predecessors. However, the difference between modern manufactured housing and conventional housing is growing smaller and smaller, with much of the remaining difference being stylistic and less in terms of functionality or impacts on public services. The issue of how manufactured units fits into overall housing plans will remain prevalent until the real and taxable values of manufactured housing can be clearly defined in relation to conventional units.

Table 15 - Housing Units in the Georgia Mountains Region

	1990	2000		2000			
				Single Family - Detached	Single Family - Attached	Multi-Family	Mobile Home/ Trailer
GMRC	138,274	191,432		73.4%	1.2%	6.7%	18.7%
Banks	4,193	5,808		58.8%	0.3%	1.9%	39.0%
Dawson	4,321	7,163		77.7%	0.6%	5.0%	16.6%
Forsyth	17,869	36,505		86.6%	0.9%	2.2%	10.3%
Franklin	7,613	9,303		62.6%	0.7%	5.6%	31.1%
Habersham	11,731	14,634		68.4%	0.9%	6.9%	23.8%
Hall	42,456	51,046		70.3%	1.7%	12.4%	15.6%
Hart	8,942	11,111		68.9%	0.7%	4.5%	25.9%
Lumpkin	5,729	8,263		68.1%	1.2%	7.1%	23.7%
Rabun	7,883	10,210		75.6%	1.4%	7.2%	15.8%
Stephens	10,254	11,652		64.8%	1.2%	9.7%	24.3%
Towns	4,577	6,282		73.5%	1.6%	2.8%	22.1%
Union	6,624	10,001		80.9%	1.1%	3.8%	14.2%
White	6,082	9,454		73.7%	1.1%	1.4%	23.8%
				2010			
GMRC				70.4%	1.9%	15.0%	12.7%

Source: US Bureau of the Census

Condition

The US Census of Housing includes information on units without complete plumbing and water service, allowing governments to target concentrations of such housing for service upgrades or redevelopment. The number of housing units constructed prior to 1939 is one indicator of the overall age and productivity of the local housing market.

Table 16 – Housing Conditions in the Georgia Mountains Region - 2000

	Units built before 1939			Units with incomplete kitchens			Units with incomplete plumbing	
	#	%		#	%		#	%
GMRC	8,629	4.5%		582	0.3%		808	0.4%
Banks	496	8.5%		38	0.7%		43	0.7%
Dawson	211	2.9%		3	0.0%		--	
Forsyth	545	1.5%		103	0.3%		129	0.4%
Franklin	911	9.8%		31	0.3%		24	0.3%
Habersham	1,202	8.2%		41	0.3%		68	0.5%
Hall	2,201	4.3%		158	0.3%		255	0.5%
Hart	651	5.9%		56	0.5%		61	0.5%
Lumpkin	289	3.5%		31	0.4%		54	0.7%
Rabun	713	7.0%		26	0.3%		63	0.6%
Stephens	462	4.0%		17	0.1%		33	0.3%
Towns	203	3.2%		--			2	0.0%
Union	342	3.4%		49	0.5%		54	0.5%
White	403	4.3%		29	0.3%		22	0.2%

Source: US Bureau of the Census

Occupancy/Residency characteristics

Similar to the different economic and social needs defined by demographic statistics, occupancy and residency conditions can also indicate specific trends or needs of the region's population. Whether a housing unit is being leased or owned indicates the financial abilities of the household, as well as suggesting the health of the local economy. Vacancy rates, meanwhile, tell whether the market is ahead or behind the pace of population growth and demands. Typically, a strong market is defined by a relatively high percentage of homeowners and low occupancy rates.

Table 17 – Georgia Mountains Region Housing Occupancy Characteristics - 2000

	TOTAL UNITS	OCCUPIED UNITS	OWNER OCCUPIED	RENTER OCCUPIED	VACANT*	SEASONAL	OWNER VACANCY RATE (%)	RENTAL VACANCY RATE (%)
GMRC	191,432	166,287	130,200	36,807	25,145	13,047	--	--
Region %	100	86.9	68.0	18.9	13.1	6.8	--	--
State %	100	91.6	67.5	32.5	8.4	1.7	1.9	8.2
Banks	5,808	5,364	4,341	1,023	444	63	1.4	7.8
Dawson	7,163	6,069	4,943	1,126	1,094	785	2.1	5.1
Forsyth	36,505	34,565	30,426	4,139	1,940	715	1.6	4.1
Franklin	9,303	7,888	6,255	1,633	1,415	584	2.0	6.8
Habersham	14,634	13,259	10,107	3,152	1,375	349	2.2	8.9
Hall	51,046	47,381	33,676	13,705	3,665	811	2.5	5.6
Hart	11,111	9,106	7,359	1,747	2,005	1,148	1.9	7.0
Lumpkin	8,263	7,537	5,452	2,085	726	193	1.1	8.3
Rabun	10,210	6,279	4,992	1,287	3,931	3,073	2.7	11.7
Stephens	11,652	9,951	7,233	2,718	1,701	570	1.9	10.4
Towns	6,282	3,998	3,405	593	2,284	1,712	3.4	14.1
Union	10,001	7,159	5,889	1,270	2,842	2,040	2.5	12.0
White	9,454	7,731	6,122	1,609	1,723	1,004	2.2	15.1
			2010					
GMRC	246,279		61.4%	27.6%	11.0%			

Source: US Bureau of the Census

Cost of Housing

Understanding the physical conditions of housing options within a community is relatively useless without also understanding the market for housing affordability. An assessment of housing costs is critical to understanding the accessibility of the housing supply to the residents, and goes a long way toward explaining the strengths and weaknesses of the housing supply.

Table 18– Georgia Mountains Region Housing Ownership Costs - 2000

	Total Owner Occupied Units	Share of Units by Cost						Median Cost
		<$50,000	$50,000 - $99,999	$100,000 - $149,999	$150,000 - $199,999	$200,000 - $299,999	$300,000+	
GMRC	93,914	5.9%	27.9%	26.9%	16.4%	13.9%	9.0%	
Banks	1,782	12.9%	42.7%	30.6%	9.4%	3.5%	1.0%	$92,400
Dawson	3,376	3.6%	20.4%	31.1%	15.4%	15.8%	13.7%	$142,500
Forsyth	26,287	0.9%	8.4%	23.2%	24.8%	26.9%	15.8%	$184,600
Franklin	2,960	19.4%	47.5%	17.0%	8.6%	5.8%	1.7%	$84,600
Habersham	6,726	9.8%	40.5%	24.7%	14.6%	6.4%	4.0%	$99,700
Hall	26,315	3.2%	31.7%	33.8%	13.2%	9.8%	8.4%	$120,200
Hart	4,402	15.3%	40.6%	19.8%	11.7%	7.6%	5.1%	$89,900
Lumpkin	3,326	8.5%	32.7%	30.7%	14.0%	10.2%	3.9%	$111,800
Rabun	3,335	10.3%	33.2%	23.1%	12.7%	9.5%	11.2%	$112,400
Stephens	4,930	18.4%	51.7%	16.1%	8.9%	3.0%	1.7%	$80,900
Towns	2,369	8.3%	29.6%	23.4%	17.9%	13.4%	7.4%	$127,500
Union	4,043	7.1%	36.0%	28.6%	13.7%	10.9%	3.6%	$111,100
White	4,063	6.0%	34.4%	33.7%	15.9%	6.9%	3.1%	$114,000
	2009							
GMRC	135,980	7.2%	15.1%	27.0%	21.2%	15.4%	14.1%	

Source: US Bureau of the Census

Table 19 – Georgia Mountains Region Housing Rental Costs - 2000

	Total Renter Occupied Units	Share of Units by Rent					Median Rent
		<$200	$200-$499	$500-$749	$750-$999	$1000+	
GMRC	34,670	5.7%	32.0%	34.9%	12.3%	5.2%	
Banks	905	5.2%	53.4%	21.0%	3.4%		$424
Dawson	1,066	1.2%	13.4%	36.5%	25.0%	9.8%	$685
Forsyth	3,956	3.3%	17.5%	31.2%	21.6%	15.8%	$683
Franklin	1,498	13.2%	54.3%	13.6%	1.6%	1.2%	$377
Habersham	3,029	8.0%	45.7%	33.7%	3.5%	1.3%	$467
Hall	13,478	3.3%	20.9%	46.0%	17.6%	6.6%	$619
Hart	1,685	12.2%	59.1%	13.7%	2.0%		$381
Lumpkin	1,942	4.1%	33.1%	33.8%	13.5%	2.8%	$534
Rabun	1,233	7.9%	38.5%	22.1%	4.5%	1.0%	$439
Stephens	2,669	9.1%	54.8%	25.1%	2.4%	0.6%	$422
Towns	539	7.1%	36.2%	21.7%	8.0%	1.7%	$435
Union	1,182	13.5%	44.2%	23.4%	3.7%	0.8%	$389
White	1,488	5.8%	30.6%	42.1%	7.7%	1.3%	$525
						2009	
GMRC	61,861	5.9	29.5	33.3	14.2	17.1	

Source: US Bureau of the Census

Cost-Burdened Households

Evaluate the needs of households that are cost-burdened (paying 30% or more of net income on total housing costs) and severely cost-burdened (paying 50% or more of net income on total housing costs). Also evaluate the relationship of local housing costs and availability to the socioeconomic characteristics of these households, including income, income from social security or public assistance, employment status, occupation, household type, age of householder, household size, race, and unit type.

Table 20 – Housing Cost as Percentage of Household Income

	30-49%			50%+
	1990	2000		2000
Banks	340	333		210
Dawson	541	736		431
Forsyth	2,772	4,406		2,390
Franklin	880	571		436
Habersham	1,384	1,463		841
Hall	6,324	6,009		3,958
Hart	930	825		619
Lumpkin	617	832		626
Rabun	676	576		394
Stephens	1,580	1,281		707
Towns	347	356		261
Union	644	732		533
White	590	994		485

Source: US Bureau of the Census

Special Housing Needs

In addition to considerations for various income levels, housing assessments must also consider those persons and households with special needs such as the disabled, elderly, victims of domestic violence, those suffering with HIV or from substance abuse. This segment of the population not only requires basic housing, but also housing that matches affordability with functionality due to their limited abilities or need for access to medical care and human services.

The local comprehensive plans for the 13 counties and their county seats all reference the special housing needs for each local community. Most identified not specific need or issue for the near term, and there was no discernable trend or regional-scale issue that could be addressed by the GMRC.

There is a growing need for housing for the elderly, but much of that is being addressed through the private sector. Further, this will need to be revisited after the current recession to determine any changes in demand based upon the settlement of housing supplies across the region. Market strategists and realtors are suspecting more and more existing homes will be remodeled to sustain older residents for as long as possible, and that there will be a slight decrease in demands for retirement communities, but this will be assessed over the next few years.

Jobs-Housing Balance

Evaluate housing costs compared to wages and household incomes of the resident and nonresident workforce to determine whether sufficient affordable housing is available and appropriately distributed within the region to allow people to live near where they work. Data on the commuting patterns of the resident and nonresident workforce may assist in determining whether there is a jobs-housing balance issue in the region. Also evaluate any barriers that may prevent a significant proportion of the region's nonresident workforce from residing in the jurisdiction, such as a lack of suitable or affordable housing, suitably zoned land, etc.

A proper assessment of this issue will not be achievable until after the recession as both home values and income levels adjust to the new market conditions. Both vacant and occupied housing units are falling in price to fit within the conventional price ranges regarded as affordable for the work force, however more and more households are realizing shrinking incomes or lack the equity from their own home to make any upward investment. Many realtors are suggesting the near-term will see the region's existing supply mostly settled within 18 months in favor of the lower-income households, and that future supplies will feature more housing starting at lower price points so that developers and builders do not over-invest on supply that could go unsold. What remains to be seen is how the economy will respond and possibly support the new market model.

This suggests that in the macro scale the region will retain a favorable jobs-housing balance. Those communities within commuting range of metro Atlanta also have the largest housing supply to work with in this readjustment period, and are seeing the largest growth in employment, albeit mostly for retail and commercial work. By and large, however, the region has seen a stabilizing-to-shrinking ratio of jobs to houses, meaning area residents have a fair amount of employment opportunities compared to other regions.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

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

Water Supply and Treatment

Water is among the foremost utilities provided by local governments, and is generally considered the primary benchmark of progressive modern communities. A stable, healthy water supply is considered critical for attracting industrial growth, and the scope and quality of the distribution system will play a significant role in shaping how a community grows over time.

The region is home to 39 surface water intakes, serving communities within and outside the 13 counties. Most of these are managed by municipal or county governments, with two managed by independent authorities, and all are subject to the rules and permitting of the State of Georgia Environmental Protection Division. According to EPD, all of the systems within the region currently meet the requirements to retain their permits and/or are in the process of updating their permits. It is also understood that there are no major violations of water quality standards for public water systems and that each system is currently, or is planning to update, the projected levels of service for the next 20-40 years as part of the State's efforts to manage future water resources.

As a result of this information and other planning efforts, first priority of issues and opportunities has been pulled from four other completed documents. First is the GMRC Regional Resource Plan, which provides a regional overview of resource management for the drinking water supply sources within the region. This document identifies the reservoirs, rivers and recharge aquifers used to supply local utilities with their water supplies, and will be the primary guide for coordinating resource protection. The other three documents referenced will be the watershed management plans for the three Watershed Management Districts (WMDs) within the Georgia Mountains region:

WM District	***GM counties***
North Georgia Metropolitan	Forsyth, Hall
Coosa – North Georgia	Dawson, Lumpkin, Habersham, Towns, Union, White
Savannah – Upper Oconee	Banks, Franklin, Hart, Rabun, Stephens

Each of the WMDs has an organizing committee responsible for the development and oversight of a district management plan. This plan will be used to coordinate State support and planning for resource management and reservoir/intake permitting, and will be used by the local governments to coordinate their overall system management. The North Georgia Metro district has had their plans in place since 2003 and has since updated most of the elements and information. The other two districts recently adopted their management plans in 2011. As these documents address the key regional level issues and opportunities for water supply and treatment, the GMRC will defer to these documents for guidance and reference on these issues.

Sewerage System and Wastewater Treatment

Identify both collection and treatment systems, whether publicly or privately operated. Also evaluate the use of onsite septic systems within the region, especially where their widespread use may have adverse environmental impacts; and

As with water supply and treatment, these utilities are regulated and permitted through the State and critical issues are addressed within the Regional Resource Plan and the WMD management plans. As such, the GMRC will defer to these documents for guidance and reference on these issues.

Public Safety Facilities and Services

Among the most basic of services provided by local governments are those related to maintaining public health and safety. These include such things as fire protection, law enforcement, medical care and more. These are the elements of direct public service that not only protects lives and basic rights but also enhances a community's quality of life: Often communities with high quality services are deemed more attractive to residents and businesses, provided the right balance is struck between the benefits and costs for these services.

Fire and Hazard Protection

Fire protection services provide not only the direct benefit of safety against hazards, but the ability to provide such services traditionally ensure a higher quality of life for urbanized communities by permitting greater numbers of residents and activities at lower insurance costs. Half of this is dependent on the distribution of the public water system, the other half is the make-up of the personnel, facilities and equipment needed to perform the actual protection services.

All 13 counties have some measure of fire protection service and a Local Emergency Response Plan in accordance with State law. More populated areas have higher volumes of facilities and numbers of response units and vehicles, with urbanized areas like Hall and Forsyth County employing full-time fire fighting staff. According to local comprehensive plans all 13 counties have an acceptable level of fire protection within existing budget parameters. All 13 counties also have current Hazard Mitigation Plan in accordance with GEMA. Many are in the process of being updated and all should be updated by 2014.

The most pressing need among most communities is upgrading or maintaining the capacity and scope of public water systems to assist fighting fires. Several communities, like Hiawassee and Clayton, are striving to upgrade older water lines both to provide commercial service and improve the integrity of the lines in case of fire fighting emergencies. These projects are directly tied to utility improvement programs and will be pursued as funding is available.

The other major fire fighting issue within the region concerns wildfires within the abundance of forests and park land. Properties owned and managed by the US Forest Service or the State of Georgia feature their own wildfire management plans which are developed in coordination with the appropriate local authorities. As each Hazard Mitigation Plan is updated, any need for updated measures regarding wildfire protection will be noted and then a regional review will identify any common issues or opportunities that might suggest a multi-jurisdictional action.

Law Enforcement

Police protection, or law enforcement, is the public service designed to safeguard community residents and businesses from acts of theft, personal violence and other crimes. Such protection builds community character and support and can serve as a tool for attracting tourism and growth. Preventative protection also can lower costs of living and contribute to an overall higher standard of living within the community.

All 13 counties feature a sheriff's division for both general law enforcement and to assist with local courts and detention services. Smaller towns and cities also rely on contractual arrangements with the county to provide police protection through the sheriff. Larger cities like Gainesville, Cumming and others feature their own police department, as well, to provide more effective protection in urbanized areas. While not all law enforcement divisions are certified or affiliated with professional associations, each complies with the State requirements regarding staff training and qualifications, departmental management and recording. According to the local plans there is no significant need among any local police department other than aspirations for additional personnel and equipment pending available funding.

Health Care Facilities and Services

The remaining aspect addressed within the Public Safety element is the availability of hospitals and healthcare facilities to treat the ill and infirmed. Access to such facilities is required in order for a community to sustain its level of function and prosperity.

The primary medical facility within the region is the main campus for the Northeast Georgia Health System (NGHS), a regional not-for-profit community health system serving approximately 700,000 residents in northeast Georgia. NGHS offers a full range of healthcare services through its Joint Commission accredited hospital in Gainesville, Northeast Georgia Medical Center, which was named one of the country's 100 Top Hospitals for 2009 by Thomson Reuters. The system features a capacity for 557 inpatients, including 261-skilled nursing beds and a medical staff of more than 500 physicians. Additional facilities in Hall County include: three urgent care centers; a mental health and substance abuse treatment center; two outpatient imaging centers; two long-term care centers; and outpatient physical, occupational and speech therapy clinics.

The second primary care facility in the region is Northside Hospital – Forsyth, based in Cumming. This facility features over 160 in-patient beds and nine different specialty departments. The recently completed Women's Center is considered among the premier locations for births and newborn care in the region. The Forsyth campus is staffed by more than 450 doctors and 1,400 health care professionals overall as part of the acclaimed Northside system. Opened in 2002, this facility has permitted Forsyth County to provide residents local access to some of the best comprehensive care in the state.

The third primary hospital in the region is the Ty Cobb Healthcare Systems based in Royston, providing a total of 71 beds and employs 36 registered nurses with 2 pharmacists. The system also serves as a hub for human services in Franklin County with a Clinic and Urgent Care unit in Lavonia, the Women's Wellness Center, and Med Link. This facility is currently in the process of relocating the main hospital from Royston to Lavonia, right near the I-85 interchange with SR 17. This will not only increase the Ty Cobb Healthcare Systems' accessibility via the interstate, but it will also enable a larger, state of the art campus for future expansion to serve the eastern part of the region.

Additional medical facilities providing basic emergency care are located in Clarkesville, Toccoa and Dahlonega. While facilities do not have the trauma or specialty care provided through NGHS or Cobb Healthcare but can provide some advanced treatment for urgent care and better immediate response for those communities.

Each County also provides a Health Department to serve its citizens, addressing basic needs for immunizations and assistance with MediCare and MedicAid services. Each local plan addresses any particular needs of each facility and program.

As of this planning period, no regional trends or significant issues or opportunities have been identified in this element. The eventual relocation and expansion of the Ty Cobb will facilitate the provision of more and more advanced services to residents in the eastern half of the region, helping with the care and support of the growing population, especially the elderly. No additional need has been identified here that can be addressed through the RC.

General Government Services

Parks and Recreation

Recreational facilities provide communities with a quality that is difficult to measure but considered vital to its social well-being. By offering a variety of recreational activities a region can strengthen the residents' quality of life and stimulate facets of the local economy.

Local governments manage their own parks for both passive and active recreation. Several communities, such as Gainesville and Habersham County, have facilities and programs that have received recent acclaim throughout the state. Overall more communities have also looked to build upon the appeal of park space as both a quality of life amenity to spur economic development and resource conservation, but also to reinforce the rural, mountain character of the region that many communities wish to preserve. As the population and numbers of tourists to the area grows so has the demand for outdoor destinations for sport, public gatherings and to enjoy the beautiful scenery.

Many communities are doing what they can to provide a variety of parks and an overall volume to meet demand. This can be costly and at times difficult depending on the availability of land and growing financial pressures of local governments. Manpower to maintain or improve park space has been a premium for the past 2 years. State programs to support and enhance park space has been shrinking, and this is an area of public service often regarding more expendable than health and safety or education, causing a cut back in the parks available to area residents and visitors. Most communities intend to restore the amount of resources dedicated to parks as their means allow, but for now this is one aspect of local government that is operating at a minimal level.

As discussed in the Regional Resource Plan, the management of State parks and federal lands is both established and beyond the scope of the GMRC. Both the State and the involved federal agencies coordinate their own management plans with the affected local governments and there is a concerted effort to make sure these lands are both accessible to, and respected by, the various communities and their residents.

> *"Due to the State ownership and oversight by the DNR, vulnerability factors for the State Parks is considered low with regard to immediate loss or degradation of environment and habitat. Remaining concerns lie within the realm of management of surrounding properties, or the loss of funding to properly manage the Parks. As the region grows in population and in terms of tourist*

appeal, it is a near certainty the demand for these lands and facilities will remain high, which should permit DNR greater opportunity to secure funding but it may yet need to require continued outside support to sustain the level of service desired."

The general amount and status of park land within the region is considered very good for current demands, with only select issues at various locations being raised by various stakeholders (accessibility and parking at some parks, cleanliness and tourist management at others). Provided scheduled and planned improvements are implemented these facilities should meet the projected demand for the region during the planning timeframe. However, as State and local parks have received a large amount of cutbacks during the recession, not only are these improvements no longer guaranteed but existing levels of service and access to parks may be curtailed.

Solid Waste Management

As communities grow they also incur more garbage, necessitating proper management of the collection and disposal of various forms of solid waste. Some items can be recycled, some require special measures for disposal. All forms of waste management should be considered so as to ensure the continued health and safety of local residents.

As of 2011 local governments are no longer required to maintain a solid waste management in accordance with the standards of the past 20 years. Some level of annual reporting, maintenance of capacity assurance and the adoption of a plan of some sort is still required, but the format and rules otherwise are left open. Only 7 local governments in the region do not have up to date plans, and in all those cases but 1 the community is in the process of satisfying those obligations. Most suggest they intend to remain in compliance with the new statutes and hope to maintain a solid waste management plan for the purposes of ensuring the best use of resources on their end.

In the potential absence of these future plans, however, and given the growing pressure on land within the region, is has been suggested the GMRC pursue a regional scale solid waste plan. This would largely be done to accomplish two things:

1) Identify the total volume of waste to be generated by the region and ensure the overall capacity for disposal is being met, as a counter assessment to the many local plans that may not be evaluated concurrently, and;
2) To identify any and all potential sites for future waste disposal facilities.

The latter issue above is of critical importance to the region both as a means of preparing for all future disposal needs but also to ensure the protection of area resources. Natural resources and scenic beauty are vital to the region's culture and economy, so there is a vested interest in making sure any possible large-scale use that could adversely impact these resources is considered wisely. A regional-scale assessment might also review matters with a more neutral perspective, as most local plans often begin from the stand point that landfills are undesirable. This is an effort the GMRC could pursue as a follow up to the Regional Resource Plan and to ensure the future sustainability of the regions' waste management.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation concerns the accessibility to sites and land uses. The demands for transportation facilities and services vary by land use, demographics and other factors. The dynamic nature of accessibility and the various factors that combine to determine functional performance in infrastructure suggest transportation for larger or rapidly growing communities requires special attention outside of the traditional public facilities and services. Because transportation plays such a large part in shaping development patterns, and because transportation systems can be assessed as all together a utility, a set of facilities and a service, transportation must often be assessed as its own element.

Road Network

State roads are classified as interstates, arterials, collectors, or local roads based on average trip lengths, trip destinations, traffic density and speeds. Each classification represents the relative weight, or value, of a roadway, which helps govern the types of service and development conditions permitted. In this modern era characterized by the automobile, a community's accessibility is largely defined by the quality and quantity of its street network, particularly its access to major arterials. As a result, business and land development is often dictated by the conditions of the local roads and related capital improvements.

Road planning and management is handled at the local level for County and City roads and by GDOT for State and federal roads. Local planning and management typically involves funding from general government for basic road repair and some improvements, with major work funded through annual stipends from GDOT, grants or loans, or through Local Option Sales Tax referendums. To date all 13 counties and their cities have at least a basic level of road planning through their comprehensive plans and access to some local public works department or operation to handle the actual construction. Forsyth and Hall Counties, as metropolitan communities, have the added benefit of formal transportation planning provided through a Metropolitan Planning Organization

As an updated means for regionally assessing roadway needs and opportunities during the planning process, the GMRC will utilize its efforts with the recent Transportation Investment Act (TIA) of 2010. This measure allows the 12 RC regions within Georgia to develop and place for public vote a list of road projects to be identified for possible funding through a special purpose sales and use tax. The development of this list will be under the supervision of GDOT but directed through the nomination and selection of projects by local government officials and staff. By June of 2011 more than 300 projects were nominated within the GMRC's 13 counties, and the representatives of the local governments began evaluating which projects should be prioritized based on need and projected funding. The final list was approved by the Regional Roundtable in October of 2011 and will be submitted for public vote in 2012.

Based upon TIA discussions and analyses, the following issues were cited for regional significance:

- North – South corridors are of critical importance for both local and through traffic. Often these roads provide commuting access, commercial transport, tourism access and local service traffic. Particularly existing State arterials including Ga 400, SR 129 and SR 17, which serve deep into the region. Maintaining their functional levels was considered a top priority during TIA discussions.

- Relieving congestion on collectors was another priority, namely around the rapidly growing areas of Forsyth and Hall Counties as well as around select cities like Lavonia and Dahlonega.

Places where there is interest in new development on top of high existing population counts means there is a great need for roadway expansions along service routes connecting arterials in these areas.

- The Cleveland Truck Route (Bypass) warrants strong support even north of White County and should be considered an integral part of SR 129 improvements. Widening the corridor south of Cleveland does help traffic along this route, but the bottle neck created by the orientations around the town square are the biggest issue for travelers trying to reach the mountains or heading southward to Gainesville for medical services.

- Support for burgeoning industrial corridors was also key, including SR 17 and surrounding Ga 400. Even where some projects didn't make the final draft investment list proposed for the region, a number of projects cited by local officials and stakeholders touted the need for economic development and how such improvements are in demand from prospective employers.

At a rudimentary level the already-established needs include congestion relief throughout the metro counties of Hall and Forsyth, completion of the proposed Cleveland bypass, improvements to 129 between Gainesville and Cleveland, completion of the expansion of SR 17, and the preservation of arterials in the region that serve both through and local traffic. (This is further discussed under *Trucking and On-road Freight*.)

ID	Project	County
2	Intersection Improvements - SR 98 at SR 164/Old 441 in Homer.	Banks
3	Relocation of Tanger Drive	
4	SR 51 - 3 lane section with right turn lanes in front of primary school in Homer.	
7	Dawson Forest and Lumpkin Camp Rd Intersection-Add Roundabout and 10`Bike/Ped Facility	Dawson
8	Dawson Forest Road East By Pass-From SR 53 E to Harmony Church Rd	
9	Lumpkin Campground Road West By-Pass Widening	
10	Old SR 224/Shoal Creek Road Bridge Replacement	
13	Bethelview Road - Castleberry Road to State Route 20	Forsyth
14	Brookwood Road - SR 141 to McGinnis Ferry Road	
16	Freedom Parkway Sidewalk - SR 306 to Pilgrim Mill Road	
17	GRTA Regional Vanpool Service - Region	
18	Intersection Improvement - SR 20 at Kelly Mill Road	
19	Intersection Improvement - SR 20 at Veterans Memorial Blvd	
20	Intersection Improvement - SR 20 at West Maple St	
21	Majors Road Sidewalk - SR 141 to Ronald Reagan Boulevard	
22	(CST only) Old Atlanta Road, Phase 3 - James Burgess Road to McGinnis Ferry Road	
24	Pilgrim Mill Road - City Limits to Freedom Parkway	
26	Ronald Reagan Boulevard, Segment 2 - McFarland Parkway to Shiloh Road	
28	SR 369 at Mount Tabor Road	
29	SR 369 at Old Federal Road	
32	SR 400 at Jot-Em-Down Road	
33	SR 400- McFarland Parkway to SR 20	
34	SR 9 Widening - SR 20 to SR 306	
42	Widening McGinnis Ferry Road - Sargent Road to Union Hill Road	
53	Widening SR 369 - SR 9 to SR 306 (Includes New Interchange at SR 400)	
55	Widening SR 371 - SR 9 to Kelly Mill Road	
59	Widening SR 9, Segment 3 - SR 371 to SR 141	
62	Xpress Regional Commuter Service -	
63	Franklin-Hart Airport Improvements	Franklin
64	Highway 29 and Roach Street Intersection Improvements	
65	Hwy 17 - Hwy 281 Royston Intersection	
69	SR 145 -Turn Lane at Franklin County High School	
70	SR 17 Operational Improvements	
72	SR 328 - Gerrard Road Intersection Improvements	
75	SR 59 -Turn Lanes and Improvements at Franklin County Middle School	
79	New Interchange at the Junction of SR 365 and CR 387/Mt Airy Rd	Habersham
82	SR 365 and SR 384/Duncan Bridge Road-New Interchange	
83	SR 385/US 441 Bus. and SR 17/SR 197 Intersection Improvement	
88	I-985 New Interchange North of SR 13 Near Martin Road	Hall
91	Jesse Jewel Pkwy and John Morrow Pkwy Intersection Improvements	
95	McEver Road Intersection Improvements	
96	Sardis Road Connector - SR 60 to Sardis Road near Chestatee Road	
97	Spout Springs Road - Hog Mountain Road to Gwinnent Co. Line	
101	SR 211/Old Winder Hwy - SR 53 Winder Hwy to Gwinnett County Line	
106	US 129/SR 11/Athens Hwy Widening from SR 323 to SR 332	
107	US 129/SR 11/Cleveland Hwy - Nopone Rd to White County line	
108	US 129/SR 11/Cleveland Hwy Widening from Limestone Rd to Nopone Rd	
110	Highway 59 Improvements	Hart
111	Highway 77 Widening from I-85 to 1 mile south	
113	North Hart Elementary School Intersection Improvements	
109	Widening of SR 60 from SR 400 to the Hall County Line	Lumpkin
118	Improvements to Morrison Moore Pkwy/SR 52 from West of the Barlow Rd Intersection to Hwy 52 E	
123	US 441 Interchange Improvements-Southbound exit ramp at Rabun Co. High School	Rabun
125	GA 2/US Hwy 76 Relocation at Police Department to Correct Severe Switchback	
130	SR 15/US 441 Widening from North City Limits of Clayton to North Carolina Line	
135	S.R.17 Widening and Relocation	Stephens
136	SR 17 Bypass Extension to SR 123	
139	U.S. 76 Improvements from SR 515 to the North Georgia Fairgrounds	Towns
140	Widening SR 515 from SR 2 North of Hiawassee to SR 339	
141	Convert Glenn Gooch to Truck Bypass at SR 11-Add Turn Lane, Traffic Signal, Resurface	Union
142	Widening of SR 11/US129 from CR46 to NC State Line	
144	Cleveland Bypass -- Phase 2	White
150	SR 11/US 129 Widening and Reconstruction	

Alternative Modes

Pedestrian

A number of these short trips may be accomplished by pedestrian or bicycle rather than vehicular travel. The opening of additional roads and addition of sidewalks between the central part of town and redevelopment areas would increase the ability and safety of pedestrian travel. The pedestrian experience may be improved with the addition of streetscaping, lighting and crosswalks, particularly in the areas near existing and future public buildings and facilities.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan is a first step in the integration of bicycle and pedestrian facilities into the infrastructure and land development process in the region. Geographic, economic, land use and population characteristics of the region are identified along with possible funding sources, to increase project development. Connection of existing multiuse facilities to commercial centers and popular tourist destinations has been identified as a short term priority for the region. Integration of bicycles and pedestrian into land use planning and development is a long term priority for the region. These priorities were identified to address environmental, economic, transportation, and public health issues throughout the region. The top three areas in the region with the most potential for long term benefits from bicycle and pedestrian improvements were: Helen, GA; the Tallulah Falls Railroad Trail & Greenway Corridor (from Cornelia to the Georgia/North Carolina border); and Gainesville, GA. Local governments can use this document to assist and supplement efforts in their communities to develop bicycle and pedestrian projects. Having a project identified in this document can assist communities with funding and other implementation measures unavailable to them at the local level.

A complete update to the Georgia Mountains Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan will begin in Fiscal Year 2012. Regionally important issues to be included will updates on Rails to Trails planning and Safe Routes to Schools assistance.

Transit

Public transportation allows people otherwise unable to travel greater access to the community, and can support a community's health and vitality by providing a functional alternative to private automobile ownership. Public transportation is also a means of diffusing traffic pressures, alleviating the environmental concerns stemming from roadside development, and for stimulating residential and commercial activity.

Forsyth and Hall Counties are the only metropolitan communities with urbanized transit programs. Hall Area Transit provides both fixed route and on demand transit services throughout Hall County, primarily serving the Gainesville and Oakwood areas for access to medical facilities, education facilities, employment and commercial centers. Hall Area Transit also provides connecting service to park and ride lots for residents commuting into metropolitan Atlanta. Forsyth County provides access to Georgia Regional Transit Authority buses that commute into Atlanta, as well as an on demand service throughout the county.

Of the remaining 11 counties in the region, 6 provide a level of rural transit programs providing on demand service. Support through State and federal programs helps the services attend the needs of the elderly, handicapped and low-income households, particularly in accessing medical care, education or employment. Funding for these programs has been static, however, even as real costs and demands increase during the recession. Some programs have been harder hit and are dropping some service,

cutting vehicles or other costs. There have been early assessments about possibilities for regional cooperation with these services, and a recent report to be completed by the GMRC in 2011 should identify opportunities to help sustain and possibly expand these services within the planning timeframe. There is a level of need for these services at every county, though some remain small enough that such need is not as critical. Ideally, though, there remains ambition at every county to provide a degree of public transit services to ensure all residents have the mobility and accessibility needed to prosper.

Railroads, Trucking, Port Facilities and Airports

While personal automobiles are the most common form of transportation, rail and air travel remain critical to the efficient movement of people and goods. More importantly, these facilities require specialized planning and development to ensure efficient operation and not adversely impact surrounding land uses.

Railroads

Railroad service has declined in priority in the US since the 1950's but is still crucial to several industries. Heavy rail is an integral part of modern industrial freight movement as well as growing plans for increased passenger travel. Transportation planning must address available rail options and conditions not only for the benefit of the rail system but also for points where rail service interacts (or intersects) other transportation systems.

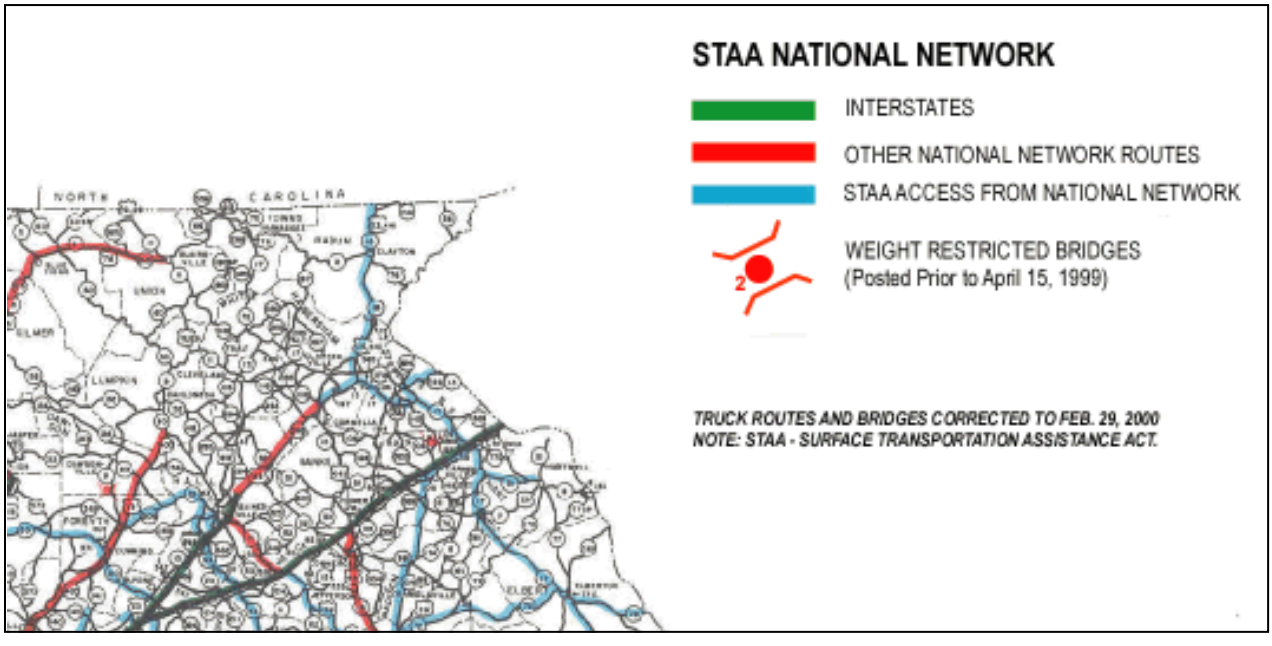
Two major active freight rail lines run in eastern half of the region. The CSX line runs south from Gainesville to Athens, while the Norfolk Southern Atlanta/Greenville line parallels US 23 and passes through Hall, Habersham and Stephens Counties. AMTRAK provides daily passenger service along this line with a Gainesville station stop in each direction. The Georgia Rail Passenger Program (GRPP) envisions future commuter rail service between Atlanta and Gainesville, as well as intercity service to Greenville, South Carolina. Commuter rail between Atlanta and Gainesville is a second phase development of the Commuter Rail Program. The line would have seven stations beginning at Lenox and going to Norcross, Duluth, Suwannee, Sugar Hill, Oakwood and Gainesville. The GDOT study projects that there would be more than 7,000 daily passenger trips and a substantial part of the operating costs could potentially be recovered from the farebox (estimated recovery about 60 percent).

The same line would serve as part of an intercity rail program also envisioned by GDOT. The Intercity Rail Passenger Plan explores the possibility of intercity rail passenger services between Atlanta and Greenville, South Carolina, going through Gainesville. The service is projected to attract 128,000 passengers annually by 2020. Implementation of the service is expected to cost approximately $104 million.

The freight lines remain very active and much of the local industry along this corridor is dependent on the access. Several other communities and industries have inquired about possible spurs to increase accessibility. As this demand for freight service increases the ability to also serve passenger trains will become more costly and difficult. For the immediate future sustaining the freight service is considered vital to local economies, especially as metro Gainesville features a high degree of goods distribution from these lines. To date local governments are doing what they can to maintain the integrity of the rail corridors, however there may need to be increased cooperation between the governments, GDOT and the railroad companies to explore future maintenance of the at-grade railroad crossings in the region. This would help the train traffic continue to flow at optimal levels without interfering with auto traffic or posing greater risks for accidents amidst increasing traffic on both sides.

Trucking and On-Road Freight

Georgia Oversize Truck Route



While the southern half of the region is ably served by freight-worthy arterials, this level of infrstructure does not push as deeply into the mountains. East/west connectivity is also limited based on terrain and Lake Lanier. For this reason, most tourist and freight traffic is restricted to the north/south flow into metro Atlanta or along the I-85 corridor, and industrial growth has mirrored this pattern of development. In the absence of major ports, this network works with the generalized distribution of economic activity centers across the region, particularly the GA 400 corridor, metro Gainesville, Banks Crossing and Lavonia. For now the network supports traffic patterns to move goods into and out of these business nodes and coordinate commuting traffic with adjoining metropolitan centers.

To date the existing corridors are considered satisfactory provided currently proposed improvements are fulfilled so as to maintain system efficiency and capacity. Part of this will require the passage of the Transportation Investment Act (TIA) sales and use tax to generate revenue for targeted projects along the 17, 441 and 129 corridors. This would support local plan objectives for most communities and be in line with major concerns from local business leaders. Once these corridors have been built up to their projected design, then the region and GDOT can examine new route improvements to enhance east/west traffic flow and localized distribution around select nodes.

Airports

All public use airports in Georgia are assigned one of three functional levels as the facility relates to the state's transportation and economic needs, as discussed in the current Georgia Aviation System Plan, a 20-year plan for the state's public use airports. These functional levels are generally described as:

- Level I-Minimum Standard General Aviation Airport
- Level II- Business Airports of Local Impact
- Level III- Business Airports of Regional Impact

Georgia Mountains Region Public Airport Facilities

County	City	ID	Runway Length (ft.)	Runway Width (ft.)	Functional Level
Hall	Gainesville	GVL	5,500	100	III
			4,001	100	
Union	Blairsville	DZJ	5,006	100	III
Habersham	Cornelia	AJR	5,506	100	III
Stephens	Toccoa	TOC	5,008	100	III
			2,951	50	
Lumpkin	Dahlonega	NA	3,090	50	NA

With the exception of the facility in Dahlonega, each of the region's public airports provides at least one commercial grade runway of 5,000 feet or longer as well as Level III hangars and support facilities. Lee Gilmer Airport in Gainesville and RG LeTourneau Field in Toccoa feature secondary runways and are the most advanced of the region's airports. Every facility has recorded some level of commercial flight traffic within the past year, provides a minimum level of maintenance and service bays and is expected to see increasing demands for use and airplane storage in the future.

In accordance with federal law every public airport maintains a Master Plan for coordinating safety compliance and improvement plans. These documents must be updated every 5 years and ensures that the airport is readily assessing future needs. As of 2011, all 5 airports will have a current plan updated within the past 3 years. No other regional need has been identified in this area to date, however the GMRC will continue to communicate with each airport and their respective communities in case new opportunities or issues arise.

OF additional consideration for the Georgia Mountains Region is the lingering proposal for a second national/international airport for metro Atlanta. Previous iterations of the idea included a possible site for this facility in Dawson County, on a 10,000 acre tract that has since been removed from consideration and is the subject of development deals with the County. Though this property is no longer the projected location for such a facility the possibility remains that such an airport may be located within the region.

Transportation and Land Use Connection

Identify areas of the region experiencing significant traffic congestion or having significantly underutilized transportation facilities. Evaluate the role of land use (e.g., scale of development, inefficient development patterns) in this mismatch of facility capacity and demand.

To date the transportation system has grown organically around the general topography and patterns for connecting cities with common roadways. Population centers have some traditional neighborhood street connectivity and some sidewalks, while most of the remainingroads are 2 lane arterials and collectors responding to the region's rural character. Only the southern part of the region is experiencing notable suburban forms and pressures, and introducing a new level of automotive dependency. Hall and Forsyth Counties have responded to this with efforts to foster more sustainable development and measures to introduce more alternative transportation, namely via transit and bike paths. Those counties also have the benefit of some devoted transportation planning through designated metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). Some efforts have been successful but more can be done, particularly in coordinating with adjoining communities in visions for multi-jurisdictional transit. Ultimately this assessment will be done from the ground level up by first pursuing the objectives

of the local plans and then using existing planning procedures (STIP process, TIA forums) to coordinate projects for maximum regional benefit.

Notable issues for regional consideration include the need to preserve the flow of major freight and tourist arterials, the truck route around Cleveland to relieve congestion moving to/from the mountains, and efforts to establish more land use management policies to preserve rural character and transportation efficiency.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

Modern communities are more intertwined than at any time in history, with neighboring jurisdictions sharing environmental features, coordinated transportation systems and other socio-economic ties. In order to provide the efficient and effective delivery of governance, such relationships require coordinated planning between counties, cities and across all public sector organizations.

The Intergovernmental Coordination chapter provides local governments an opportunity to inventory existing intergovernmental coordination mechanisms and processes with other local governments and governmental entities that can have profound impacts on the success of implementing the local government's comprehensive plan. The purpose of this element is to assess the adequacy and suitability of existing coordination mechanisms to serve the current and future needs of the community and articulate goals and formulate a strategy for effective implementation of community policies and objectives that, in many cases, involve multiple governmental entities.

The intergovernmental coordination element requires an inventory and assessment of the relationships between the local government and the various entities assisting in the provision of public sector services and facilities. This can include other units of local government providing services but not having regulatory authority over the use of land, such as constitutional officers. The inventory of each item must address the nature of the entity's relationship to the local government comprehensive plan, the structure of existing coordination mechanisms or agreements, and the parties responsible for coordination.

Local Governments

The GMRC relationship with local governments involves three layers. At the foremost level the GMRC exists to serve and assist the local governments directly as requested and able. This includes a variety of economic and community development services and is where the GMRC provides the local governments with a level of manpower, expertise or other resources not available to the community at that time. Often this assistance is cyclical and relates to an area of specialty not readily found at the local government offices, especially for smaller governments.

The second layer is via State directed assistance and review. In this capacity the GMRC is responsible for making sure the local governments are consistent with State policy or standards in the areas of economic and community development, and to perform regional reviews of select products such as comprehensive plans, solid waste plans and developments of regional impact (DRIs). The GMRC will help the local governments in the development of these products and strives to bring every community into State compliance and, more importantly, produce plans and products that benefit the local community.

Lastly the GMRC performs regional projects that compliment local objectives, often done in collaboration with the local governments. This includes a variety of multi-jurisdictional topics such as transportation corridor studies, natural resource assessments and tourism studies, all of which typically feature study areas larger than one county. These efforts allow an issue to be addressed at the appropriate scale, and the GMRC facilitates the coordination of planning and remediation between local governments where needed.

Progress with service and products at all three levels is communicated regularly to the local governments via monthly Staff Project Reports updated for every GMRC Council meeting. The Council itself is made up of local government elected and appointed officials (2 from each county) who shape

GMRC actions and policy. There are also regular reporting mechanisms provided through contractual requirements to DCA, DOT and other partners that allow local governments to track GMRC progress, as well as an annual report provided directly to every local government summarizing GMRC work throughout the year.

No particular needs have been identified at this time, and the GMRC will continue to try and improve communication and outreach to ensure all local governments are given proper attention and accessibility to GMRC services.

State and Federal Government

The GMRC maintains working relationships with several branches of the State of Georgia and federal departments or agencies. In most instances the GMRC has a defined, fixed role in working with these organizations on behalf of the region and its member governments or in an effort to assist with State or federal objectives in the region. The GMRC maintains required levels of communication, reporting and auditing to ensure these relationships are managed accordingly and as efficient as possible. Among the most common State and federal government offices with which the GMRC conducts business:

Georgia State Government
Department of Community Affairs
Department of Transportation
Department of Natural Resources
Department of Economic Development
Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority
Georgia Emergency Management Agency
OneGeorgia Authority

US Government
Economic Development Administration
US Bureau of the Census
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Independent Special Authorities and Districts

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)

Every county within the Georgia Mountains Region is included within the service area for the ARC, a regional economic development agency under the federal Economic Development Administration that represents a partnership of federal, state, and local government. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, ARC is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states and a federal co-chair, who is appointed by the president. Local participation is provided through multi-county local development districts. ARC funds projects that address the four goals identified in the Commission's strategic plan:

1. Increase job opportunities and per capita income in Appalachia to reach parity with the nation.
2. Strengthen the capacity of the people of Appalachia to compete in the global economy.
3. Develop and improve Appalachia's infrastructure to make the Region economically competitive.
4. Build the Appalachian Development Highway System to reduce Appalachia's isolation.

Each year ARC provides funding for several hundred projects in the Appalachian Region, in areas such as business development, education and job training, telecommunications, infrastructure, community development, housing, and transportation. These projects create thousands of new jobs; improve local water and sewer systems; increase school readiness; expand access to health care; assist local communities with strategic planning; and provide technical and managerial assistance to emerging businesses.

The GMRC maintains regular communication with the ARC by participating in ARC meetings and reports as well as maintaining the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which is provided to the ARC in accordance with federal requirements for regional economic development districts. This ensures the GMRC is in compliance with ARC requirements and that objectives for both organizations are in synch with each other.

Water Planning Districts

As discussed in the Natural Resources element, the Georgia Mountains region is served by three different State-designated Water Management Districts (WMD). Each of the WMDs has an organizing committee responsible for the development and oversight of a district management plan. This plan will be used to coordinate State support and planning for resource management and reservoir/intake permitting, and will be used by the local governments to coordinate their overall system management. The North Georgia Metro district has had their plans in place since 2003 and has since updated most of the elements and information. The other two districts recently adopted their management plans in 2011. As these documents address the key regional level issues and opportunities for water supply and treatment, the GMRC will defer to these documents for guidance and reference on these issues.

As of 2011, the GMRC will continue to provide assistance and information to the managing councils of all three districts, and will be working with the State in promulgating and implementing the management plan for the Coosa-North Georgia and Savannah-Upper Oconee WMDs. Through these efforts and eventual cross-pollination of planning efforts the GMRC will assist in developing consistency among all stakeholders.

Coordination with Other Programs

GMRC compliance or coordination with any State, federal or other comparable community development program for the region is implied in the discussion about relations with the applicable government, department or organization. Most programs in which the GMRC is participating are managed through the Georgia DCA or the Appalachian Regional Commission, and relations with these organizations are managed through contractual terms and mandated standards.

Not defined but implied as part of these measures is the need to foster consistency across the other regional planning measures performed by the GMRC. As each successive document or planning process is produced, it has been/will be cross-referenced with the Regional Plan to ensure consistency. As a rule the Regional Plan will defer to other documents as the planning assessment and guide for their respective specialty, and objectives and implementation measures will be brought over directly from those documents into the Regional Agenda.

Other GMRC Regional Planning Documents	Completed/ Last Update
Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan	2010
Regional Resource Plan	2010
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy	2011
Rural Transit Study	2011
Regional Solid Waste Management Plan	2012* (proposed)