ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners

Charles Bannister, Commission Chairman

Lorraine Green, District 1 Commissioner

Bert Nasuti, District 2 Commissioner

Mike Beaudreau, District 3 Commissioner

Kevin Kennerly, District 4 Commissioner

Jock Connell, County Administrator

Gwinnett County Planning Commission

District 1:
Peggy Boydston
Eric Johansen, Chairman

District 2:
Lynette Howard
Jose Perez

District 3:
Teresa Cantrell
Chuck Warbington

District 4:
Paula Hastings
Floy Jumper, Vice Chairman

At large:
Julianne Thompson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (CONTINUED)

Planning Advisory Committee for Unified Plan

Shiv Aggarwal
Appointed by Gwinnett Village CID

John Bell
Appointed by Board of Commissioners

Peggy Boydston
Appointed by Board of Commissioners

Barbara Bender
Appointed by Gwinnett Municipal Association

Mark S. Brock
Appointed by Council for Quality Growth

Renee Byrd-Lewis
Appointed by Homeowner's Association

Teresa Cantrell
Appointed by Planning Commission

Raymond Cobb
Appointed by Board of Commissioners

Chip Cofer
Appointed by Board of Commissioners

Casey Coffey
Appointed by Gwinnett Place CID

Adrian Cotasaenz
Appointed by Board of Commissioners

Gary Custar
Appointed by Evermore 78 CID

Lynette M. Howard
Appointed by Board of Commissioners

L.C. Johnson
Appointed by Gwinnett Clean and Beautiful

Mani Krishnaswamy
Appointed by Board of Commissioners

Wayne Lloyd
Appointed by SPLOST Citizen Committee

Michael Maston
Appointed by Housing Advocacy

Kevin McComber
Appointed by Water and Sewer Authority

Mark Mullin
Appointed by Hospital Authority/Board

Jose Perez
Appointed by Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce

Jon Richards
Appointed by Transit Advisory Board

Phillip Saxton
Appointed by Board of Commissioners

Julie Stuart
Appointed by Environmental Advocacy

Wayne Sutor
Appointed by Recreation Advisory Board

B.E. (Woody) Woodruff
Appointed by Board of Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 1: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

PART II: THE PLAN

PART III: IMPLEMENTATION

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Gwinnett's Unified Plan in a Nutshell

It is easy to take Gwinnett's good fortune for granted. Decades of growth, excellent schools, good services, new roads, community parks, and convenient shopping suggest that these good times will last forever. The Unified Plan is a chance to pause, look around carefully and then look ahead thoughtfully. How is the world around us changing? How are we changing? What do these changes mean for planning and preparing for the future?

Trends

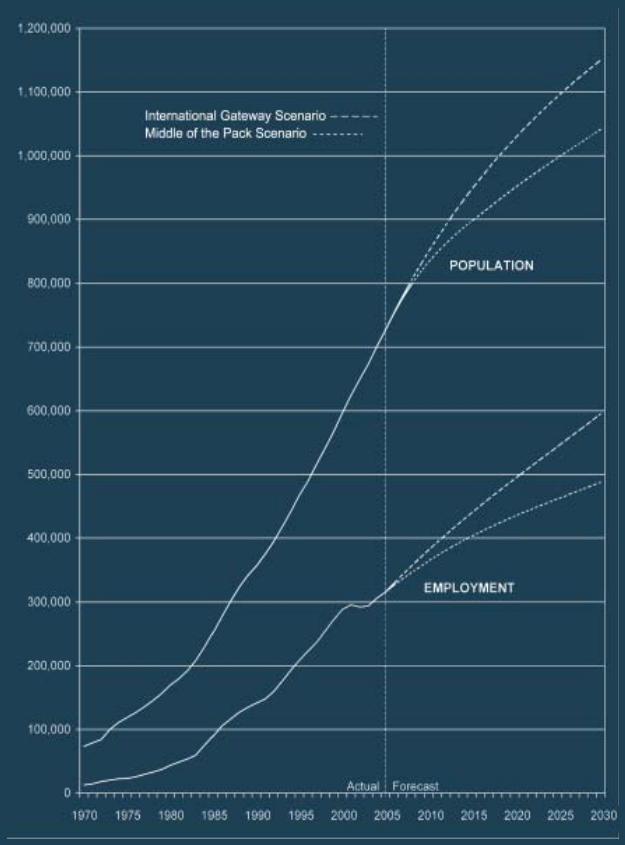
Gwinnett's growth in population is expected to slow somewhat over the next 25 years as its supply of land is developed. Job growth is expected to remain strong, but will increase more slowly as some sectors of the economy mature, relocate for better access (e.g., light industry, warehousing/distribution), correspond to slowing residential growth (e.g., construction, retailing). Gwinnett's population and employment figures expected to remain high, but the rate of growth will slow. The County's growing ethnic and racial makeup is projected to result in a mix with no majority group by 2013. Regional shifts in population over the past decades have resulted in a steady leveling of incomes within Gwinnett toward the regional average. Part I of the Plan describes current conditions and the issues they raise.

Future Scenarios

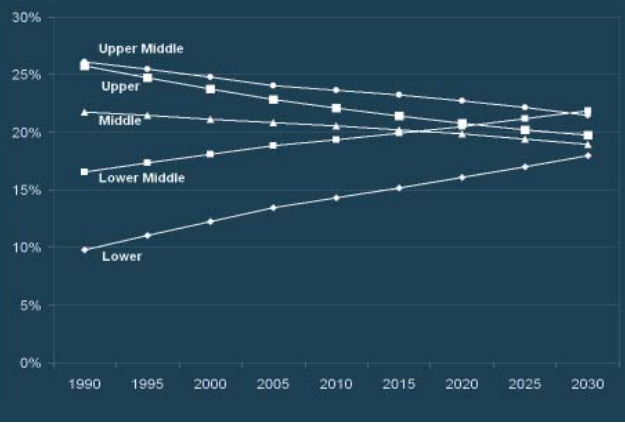
Taken together, the trends characterize a future scenario the Plan calls "Middle of the Pack" in which Gwinnett's phenomenal economic performance is not sustained, but remains respectable. The County's fiscal resources in this scenario are stretched thin and tough choices on the provision of services loom large if budget deficits are to be avoided.

The trends are powerful. They are not, however, inevitable. But to bend them to its advantage, Gwinnett will have to get involved and participate in ways it has not needed to before. An alternative future that maintains Gwinnett's dynamic momentum is also envisioned in the Plan. It is called the "International Gateway" scenario. The title recognizes the County's unique potential to capitalize on its diverse population near the international hub that Atlanta has become.

Historical and Forecasted Trends
in Gwinnett County Population and Employment



Percent of Gwinnett Households
in each Regional Income Quintile 1990-2005



Plan Themes

Much of the work on the Plan involved playing out these contrasting scenarios and comparing their performance. While the International Gateway scenario is the preferred outcome, the Plan also provides guidance on the realities of a Middle of the Pack outcome. A summary of the fiscal performance of the two scenarios is shown in the table below. It underlines the need for proactive intervention by the County.

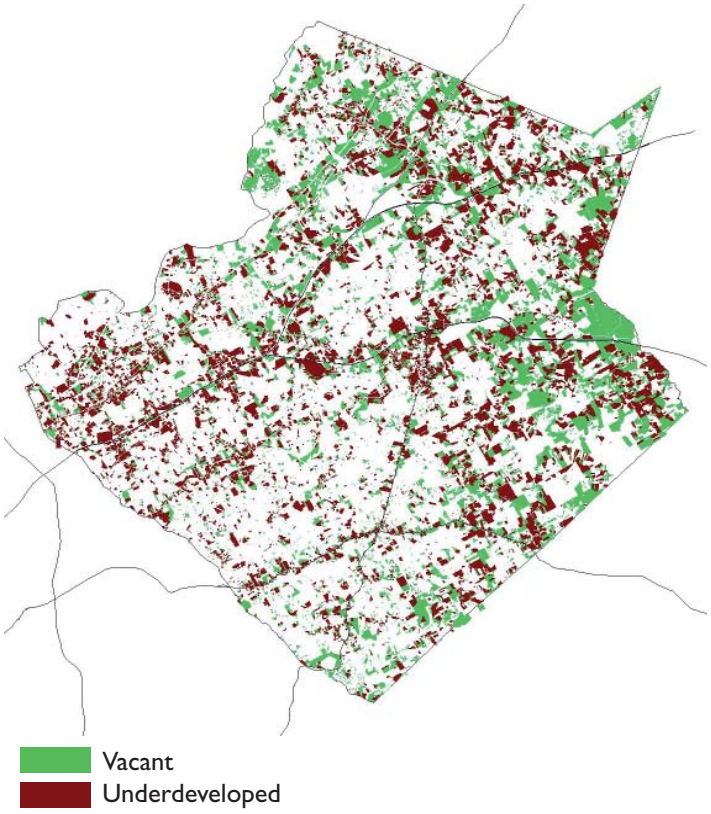
Population and Job Growth by Scenario

	2005	2030 Middle of the Pack	2030 International Gateway
Population	727,000	1.04 million	1.15 million
Jobs	316.000	483,000	595,000

Revenue and Expenditures by Scenario

	2005	2030 Middle of the Pack	2030 International Gateway
Revenue	$675 million	$1,025 million	$1,090 million
Expenditures	$675 million	$1,028 million to $1,109 million	$1,028 million to $1,045 million

Vacant and Underdeveloped Land



Intervention, however, must go beyond economic development and needs to confront the new and complicated challenges of guiding redevelopment efforts. This is especially important within the County's southwest quadrant, where Community Improvements Districts (CIDs) have already begun to organize for this challenge. Another 20 percent of Gwinnett's land area can be considered redevelopment candidates over the coming decades. One economic development and redevelopment challenge facing Gwinnett is that many of its vacant and potential redevelopment parcels are small and not contiguous. The limited availability of prime parcels is one reason behind the Plan's policy to protect large, well-located parcels for the development or redevelopment of regional office space, an emerging market for Gwinnett.

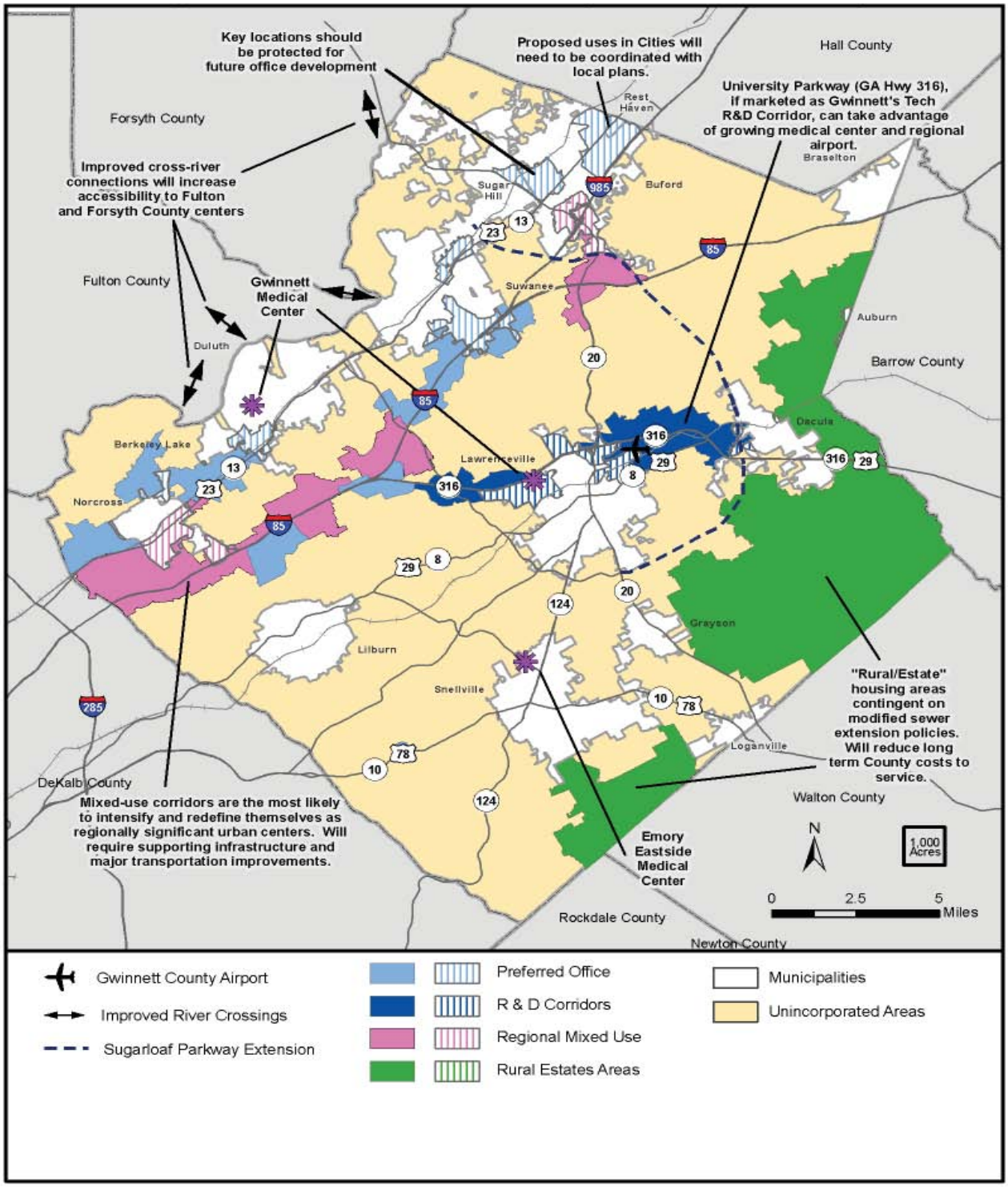
Confronting the mobility and accessibility challenges of increased growth under both future scenarios will require new funding sources and approaches for transportation; to simply build its way out of congestion will be cost-prohibitive for Gwinnett County. The scenarios tested also show the consequences of Gwinnett County continuing to approve development without making corresponding improvements in transportation capacity.

Rush hour traffic is heavily influenced by where people work and live. Providing more opportunities for people to live near where they work across the income spectrum, is therefore an appropriate focus of this Plan as well. As they are across the country, households in Gwinnett are shrinking and becoming less family-based. This means the County needs to take a fresh look at its emerging housing market.

The powerful demographic and employment shifts occurring in the region and the country require reframing Gwinnett's image. The County will have to go beyond the "bread and butter" of suburban living if it is to remain the preferred place for the emergent, footloose, information workers who crave more than the suburban lifestyle. Amenities – cultural choices, nightlife, pocket parks, transit options, and urban housing types – exist little outside of some of the County's cities. Government can help seed this evolution towards a more urban environment focused on the I-85 Corridor. Again, it is a new role for Gwinnett.

These important issues – maintaining economic development and fiscal health, fostering redevelopment, maintaining mobility and accessibility, providing more housing choice and keeping Gwinnett a preferred place – are the organizing themes of the Unified Plan. The next five pages treat each theme separately. The following theme maps highlight the key products of Part 2 of the Plan.

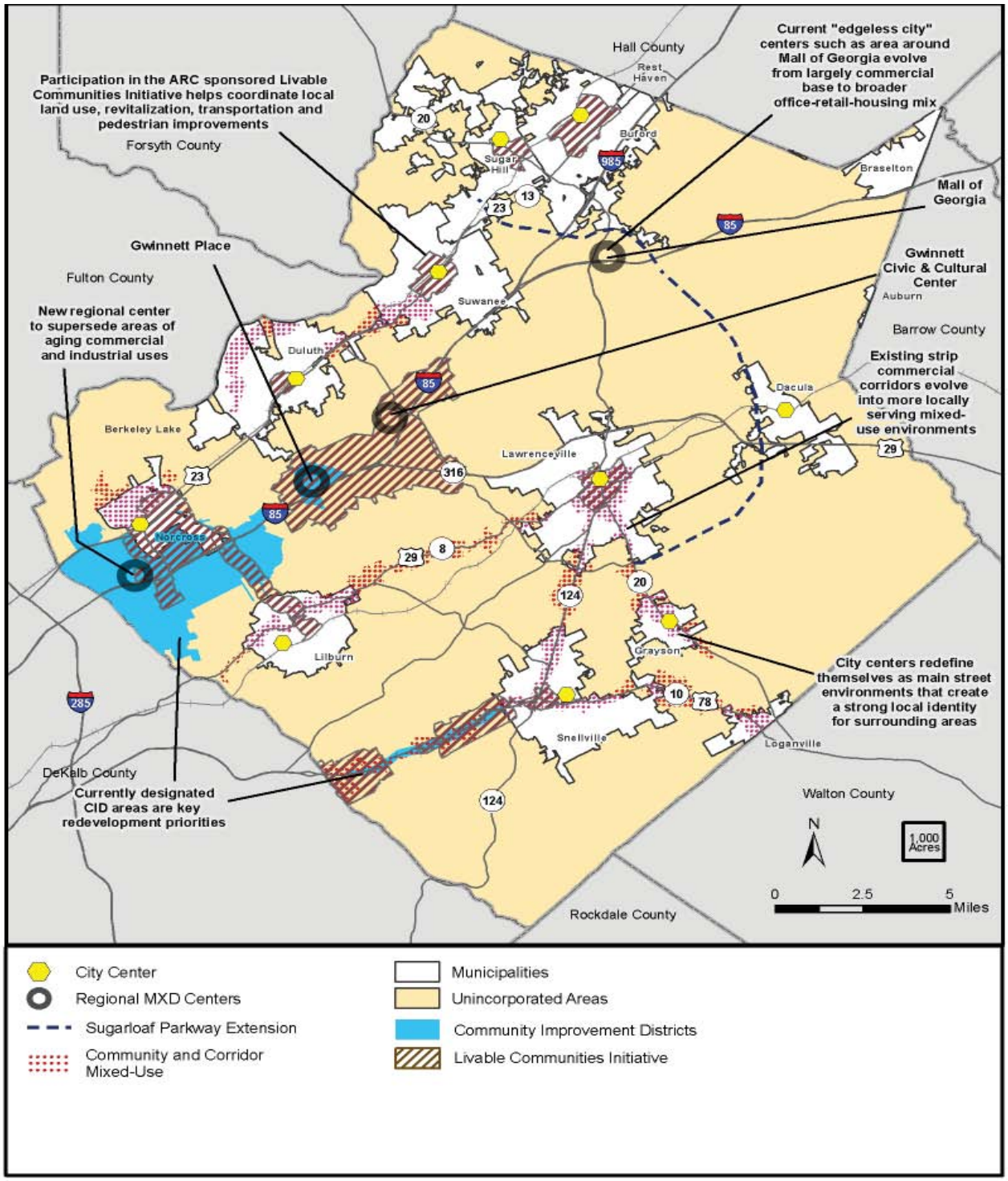
Maintain Economic Development and Fiscal Health



The major economic development and fiscal health policies are:

- Promote Major Mixed-Use Developments
- Protect Large, Well-Located Parcels/Areas for Office Use through Proactive Rezoning
- Strategic Placement of Sewer
- Use Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) for Rural Estate Housing in the East
- Revise Current Millage Rates
- Promote University Parkway (GA Hwy 316) Corridor as Gwinnett's Research and Development Belt
- Employ Debt Financing of Major Infrastructure
- Obtain Appropriate Balance of Retail

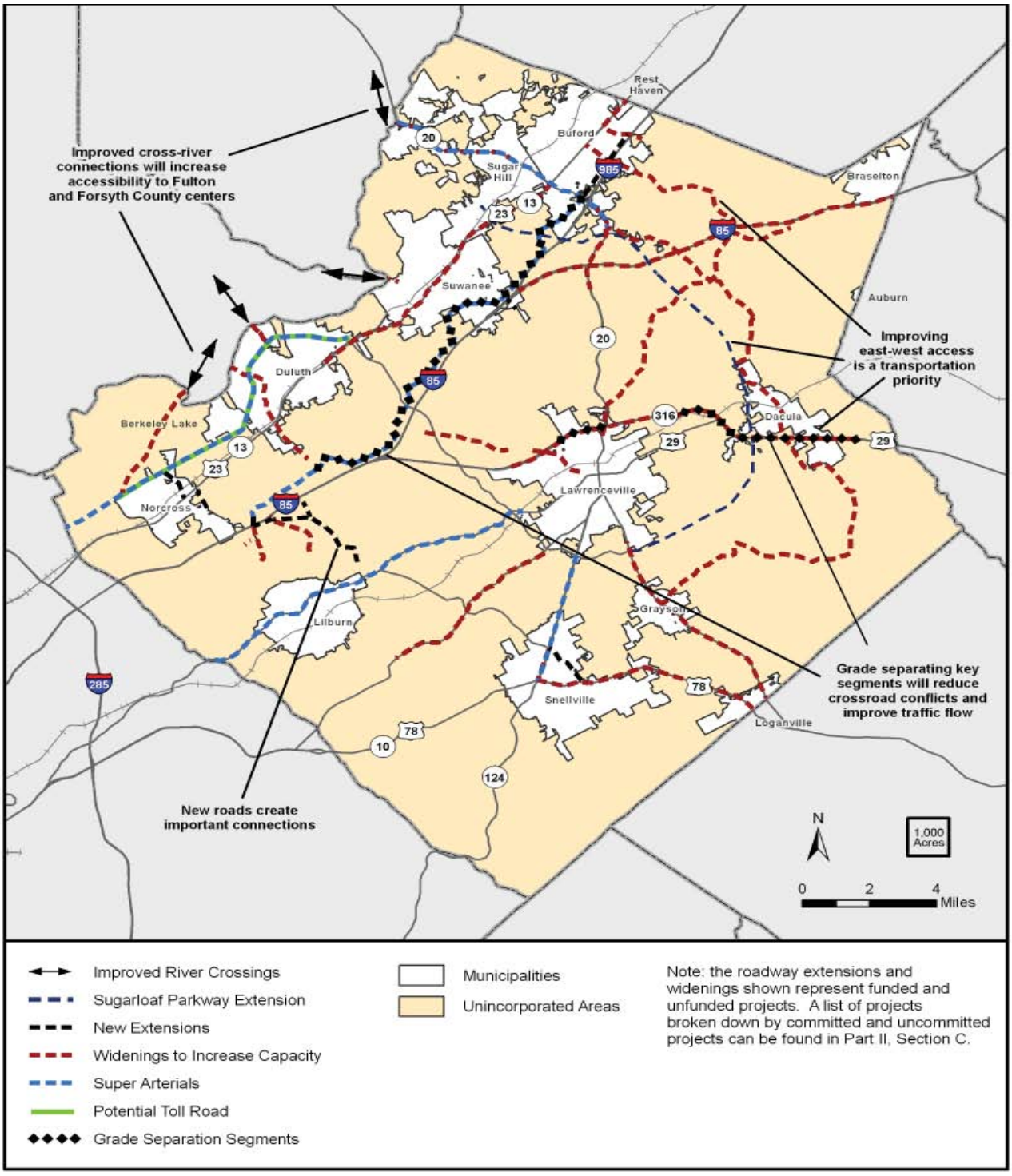
Foster Redevelopment



The major redevelopment policies are:

- Institute a Variety of Redevelopment Incentives and Bonuses
- Promote Densification in Specific Areas Designated for Mixed-Use Through TDRs, Rezoning, Increased Infrastructure Capacity
- Use Tax Allocation Districts (TADs)
- Promote Shared Infrastructure Facilities
- Allow "Corner Stores" within Specified Medium/Higher Density Areas as "Floating Zones"

Maintain Mobility and Accessibility

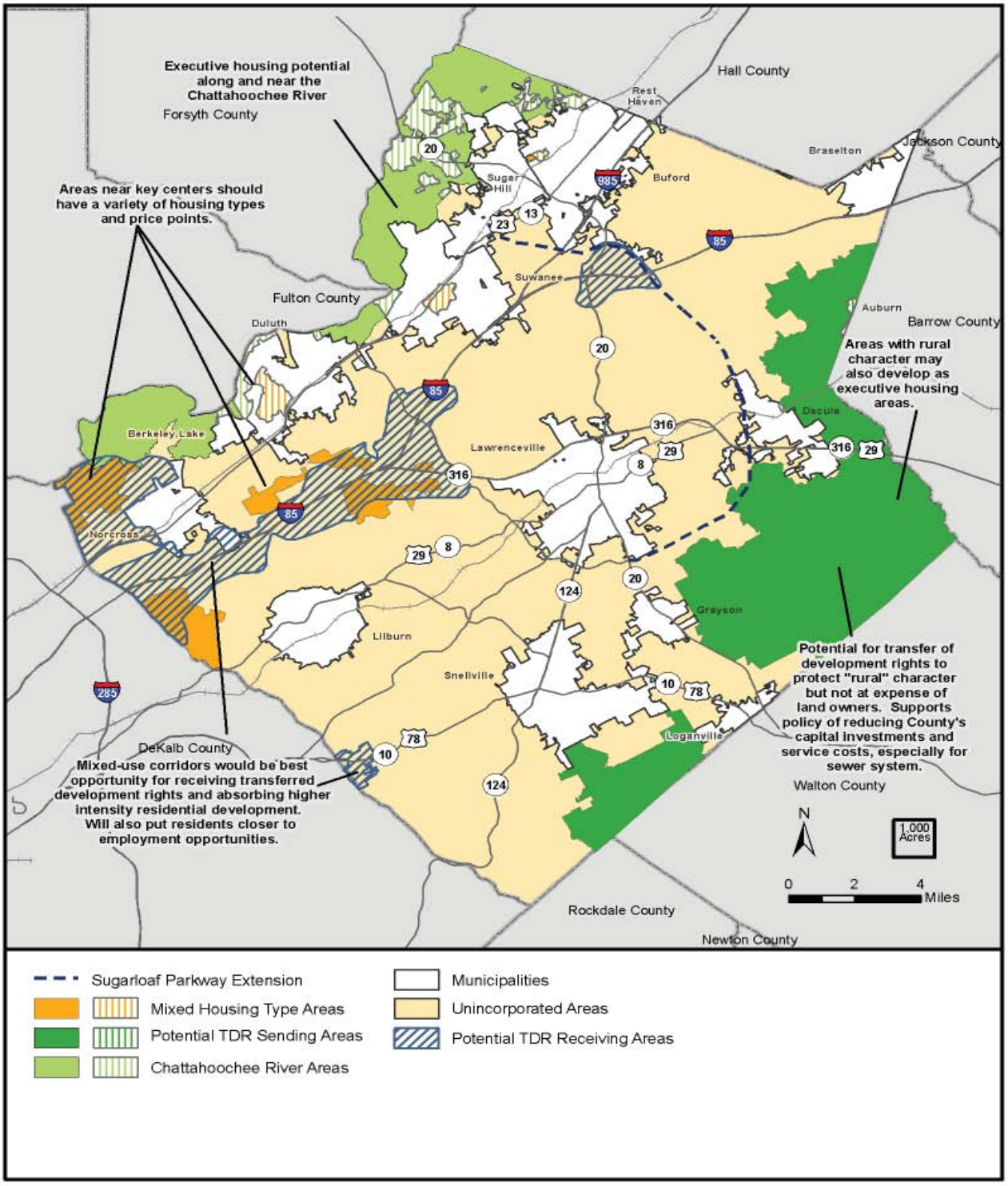


The major mobility and accessibility policies are:

- Enhance Signal Coordination and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)
- Manage Access on Arterials
- Enhance Incident Management (Traffic Control Center)
- Establish a Road Connectivity Requirement for New Development
- Create Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) at Appropriate Sites through Proactive Zoning
- Establish a More Extensive Transit System
- Pursue Strategic Road Widening and New Alignments

Transit is not shown on this map.

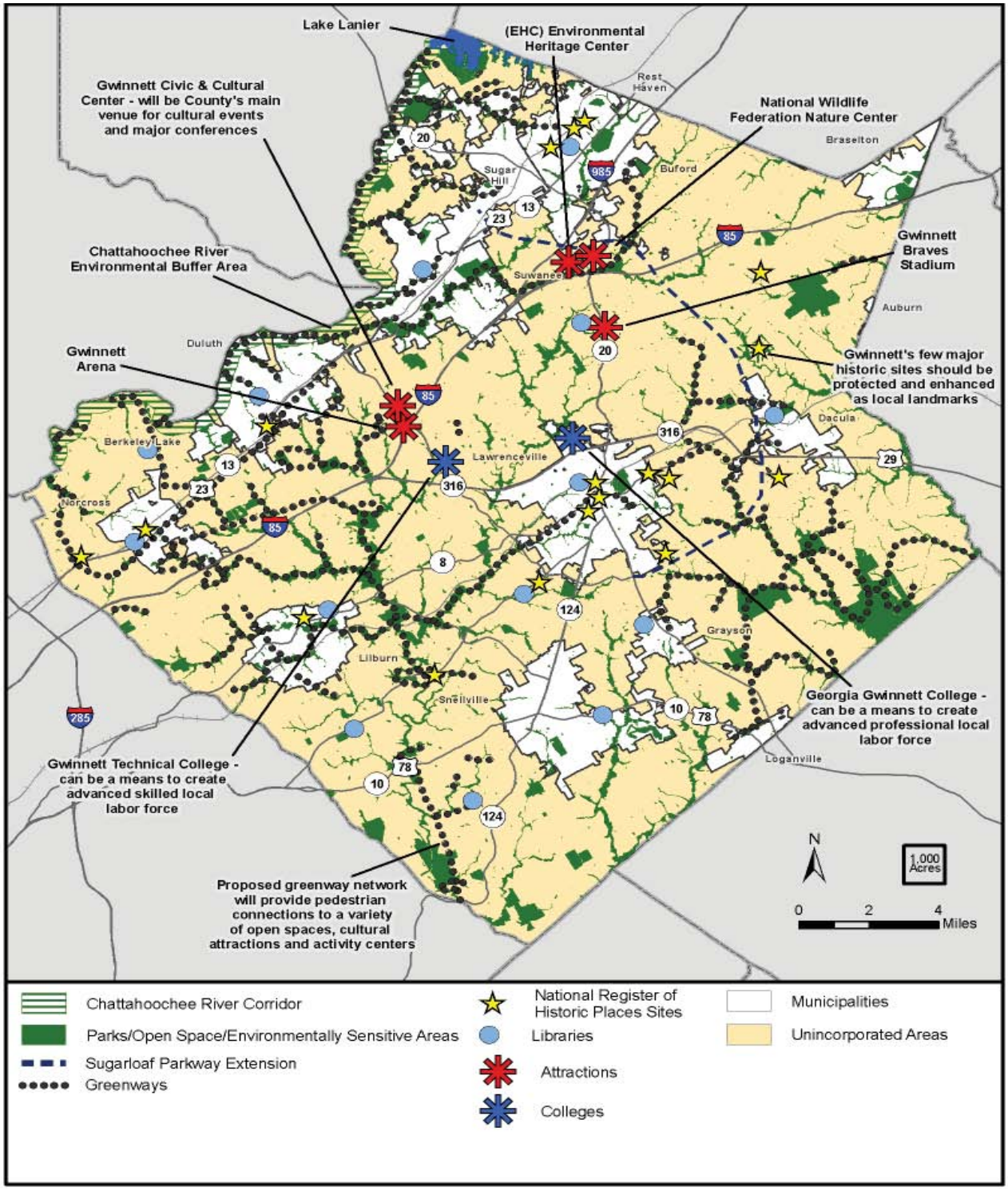
Provide More Housing Choices



The major housing policies are:

- Establish and Provide Access to More Executive Housing Areas
- Preserve Existing Workforce Housing
- Expand Maintenance and Rehabilitation Assistance to Homeowners and Small Businesses

Keep Gwinnett a Preferred Place

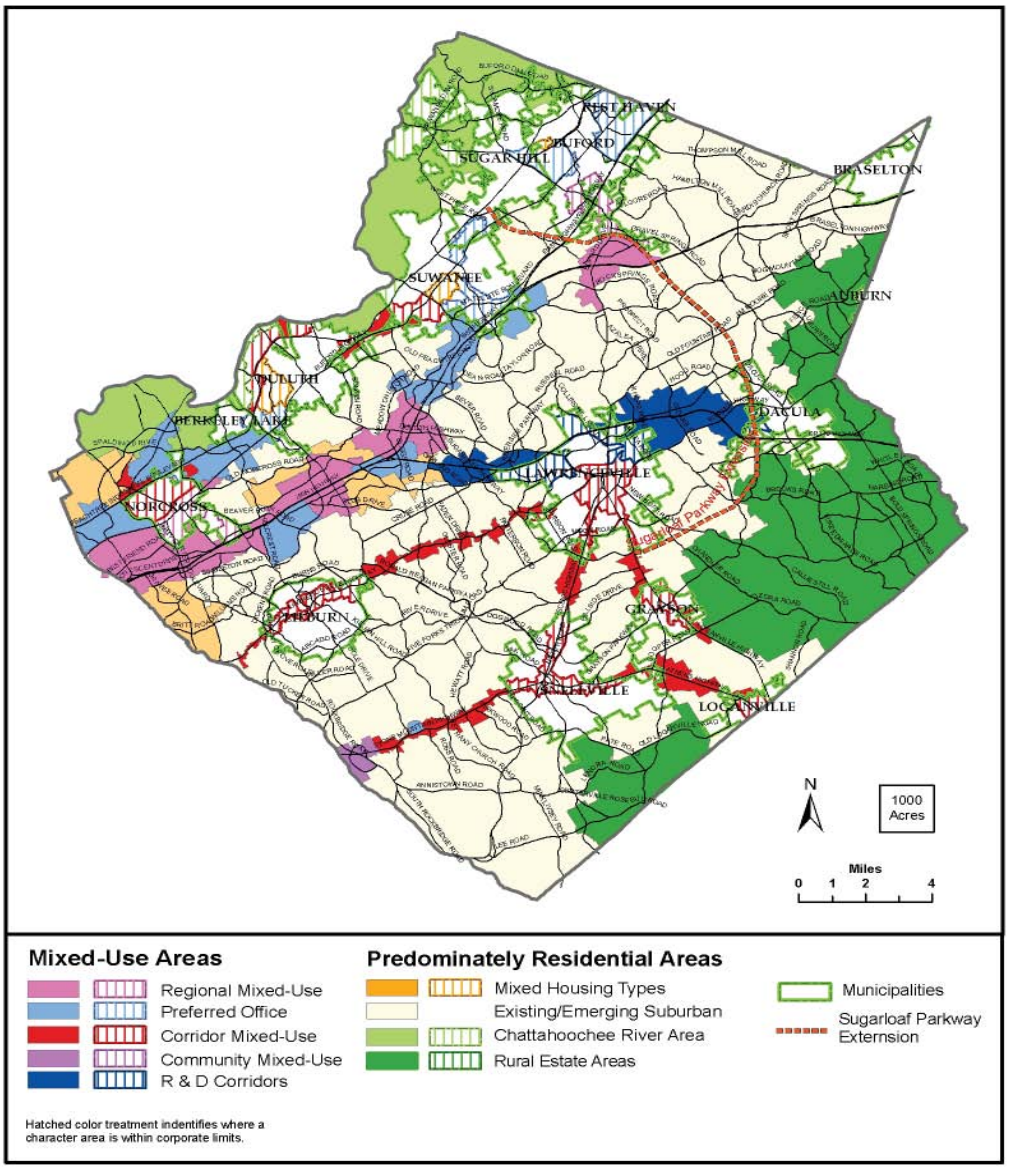


The major preferred place policies are:

- Improve the Walkability of Gwinnett's Activity Centers and Neighborhoods
- Support and Promote the Expanded Four Year College
- Invest in After School Programs
- Enhance Development Aesthetics
- Provide Venues to Celebrate Growing Cultural Diversity of County
- Expand Presence of "Arts Community"
- Provide Incentives for Enhanced Open Space/Trails
- Use Development Regulations to Create Local Parks
- Acquire Surplus Industrial or Commercial Sites for Open Space/Recreation

Future Land Development Map

The Future Land Development map shows where extensive rezonings and development will be required to carry out the intentions of the Plan and where suburban character will be maintained.



Implementing the Plan

Part 3 of the Plan focuses on its implementation. A section detailing the policies comprises the bulk of this part of the Plan. Each Policy is numbered and the policies are extensively detailed, noting implementation steps, entities responsible for them, assumed benefits, challenges, and costs and monitoring benchmarks. A section on policy prioritization presents those policies selected for inclusion in the Short Term Work Plan (2009 – 2014). The Plan divides the County in eight Character Areas. Land Uses to be encouraged and discouraged in each Character Area are described in a section on using the Plan and its maps. A section on recommended changes to the Zoning Resolution and development regulations addresses several items central to the Plan's implementation: the different scaleand purposes of Mixed-Use Districts; the protection of future Office Employment Sites; Rural Estate Land Uses and the Transfer of Development Rights option to achieve this goal; increasing access management on arterial roads to preserve their capacity; a needed Major Thoroughfare Plan that will classify existing and future roads and sets up access management; and finally, guidance on future roadway spacing. Ways to measure whether and how the Plan's targets are met are suggested, and periodic progress reports and the plan amendment process are discussed in a final section on monitoring and updating the Plan.

How (and Where) the Plan Meets DCA Requirements

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Chapter 110-12-1, describes the standards and procedures for local comprehensive planning and specifies the local planning requirements. The purpose of the requirements is to "provide a framework for preparation of local comprehensive plans that will involve all segments of the community in developing a vision for the community's future, generate local pride and enthusiasm about the future of the community, engage the interest of citizens in implementing the plan, and provide a guide to everyday decision-making for use by local government officials and other community leaders."

The framework consists of three components: a Community Assessment, a Community Participation Program, and a Community Agenda. The Department of Community Affairs reviews each of these documents for completeness and approval. Gwinnett County submitted its Community Assessment and Community Participation Program to DCA in February 2007. and received approval of them on July 9, 2007. The Community Assessment can be found in Appendix B and the Community Participation Program is included as a part of Appendix A. The Unified Plan document fulfills the requirements of the third component, the Community Agenda.

To make it easier for readers who may wish locate specific DCA-required Community Agenda items, the following table summarizes the requirements and lists the section(s) within the Unified Plan where the item can be found.

DCA Community Agenda Requirements	Where to Find the Item in the Unified Plan
(a) Community Vision: paints a picture of the future community, provides a description of development patterns to be encouraged, includes the following items:	Part 1: B. A New Type of Plan
(i) General Vision Statement (optional): a general statement of the overall goals and desired future the community seeks to achieve	Plan in a Nutshell
(ii) Future Development Map (required): shows the desired future development patterns by major character areas	Figure 73: Economic Development / Fiscal Balance Map Figure 74: Foster Redevelopment Map Figure 75: Maintain Mobility and Accessibility Map Figure 76: Housing Choices Map Figure 77: Preferred Place Map Figure 78: Composite Policy Map Figure 79: Future Land Use Needs Sidebar p126: Why No Parcel-Based Land Use Map? Part 3: C.1 Using the Plan for Future Land Use Changes by Planning Sector Part 3: C. 2 Using the Future Land Use Needs Map Table 53: Rezoning Targets - Approximate Recommended Acreage Changes
(iii) Defining Narrative (required): defines a specific vision for each character area	Part 3: C.1 Using the Plan for Future Land Use Changes by Planning Sector Part 3: C.1.1 Major Activity Center Part 3: C.1.2 I-85 Corridor Part 3: C.1.3 Highway 316 Corridor Part 3: C.1.4 River Corridor Part 3: C.1.5 Suburban I and Suburban II Part 3: C.1.6 Eastern Crescent Table 51: Future Land Use Actions Guidelines Table Table 52: Correspondence of Unified Plan Designations with Current Zoning Districts

DCA Community Agenda Requirements	Where to Find the Item in the Unified Plan
(b) Community Issues and Opportunities: lists the issues and opportunities the community intends to address	Part 1: A.2 Emerging Challenges and Unfinished Business Part 1: A.3 Keeping Gwinnett a 'Preferred Place' Part 1: C.1.3 Demographic and Socio-Economic Trends Issues to Address Part 1: C.2.3 Gwinnett's Evolving Landscape Issues to Address Part 1: C.4.3 Economic Well Being and Opportunity Issues to Address Part 1: C.5.3 Housing Issues to Address Part 1: C.6.3 Transportation Issues to Address Part 1: C.7.3 Water, Wastewater and Stormwater Management Issues to Address Part 1: C.8.3 Environmental & Cultural Resources Issues to Address Part 1: C.9.3 Gwinnett Government and Fiscal Capabilities Issues to Address Part 1: D. Summary of Issues Part 2: D.2.1 Theme 1: Maintain Economic Development and Fiscal Health Part 2: D.2.2 Theme 2: Foster Redevelopment Part 2: D.2.3 Theme 3: Enhance Mobility and Accessibility Part 2: D.2.4 Theme 4: Provide More Housing Choices Part 2: D.2.5 Theme 5: Keep Gwinnett a "Preferred Place"
(c) Implementation Program: Overall strategy for achieving the vision and addressing the issues and opportunities, includes the following components:	Part 3: Implementation
(i) Short Term Work Program (required): Identifies specific implementation actions that need to be taken during the first five years	Part 3: B. Short-Term Work Plan and Priority Policies Table 50: Priority Policies, 2009 - 2019
(ii) Long-Term and Ongoing Activities (optional): Identifies specific, long-term or ongoing implementation activities to be taken beyond the first five-year timeframe	Table 50: Priority Policies, 2009 - 2019
(iii) Policies (required): provide ongoing direction to local government officials for making decisions consistent with achieving the vision and addressing the issues and opportunities	Part 3: A. Policies and Their Implementation Part 3: D. Changes to the Zoning Resolution and Development Regulations Part 3: E. Monitoring and Updating the Plan
(iv) Supplemental Plans (optional): include or incorporate by reference any supplemental plans that focus on special areas, issues, or situations	Comprehensive Transportation Plan – Appendix I Consolidated Plan – Appendix J 2007 Update of the Gwinnett County Parks & Recreation Capital Improvement Plan – referenced

Overview of the Appendices

The 2008 Gwinnett Unified Plan, at around 200 pages, is the tip of an iceberg. These appendices, nearly 950 pages long are its base. A very substantial research effort underpins the policies and maps of the Plan. The Appendices are its record. They will provide a deeper understanding than the Plan itself of the trends, driving forces, scenario development and analysis conducted for Gwinnett and the region.

Volume 1 of the Appendices contains two plans executed concurrent and parallel with the Comprehensive plan. These are the:

- **Consolidated Transportation Plan (CTP).** This is a Plan whose format and content is specified by ARC. Significantly contributed to by Moreland –Altobelli Inc., it is one of the three plans that make up and cross-pollinate the Unified Plan. It uses the Middle of the Pack scenario to generate a list of needed transportation projects and adds additional projects that are desirable, resources allowing. The modeling done for the CTP was used in the Unified Plan, which also modeled the International Gateway scenario.

- **Consolidated Plan (CP).** This HUD-specified Plan, developed by Bay Area Economics, is the third leg of the Unified Plan, and the result of a pilot program by HUD to better integrate such plans into the ongoing agenda of community plans. This pilot, thus, seeks to raise the profile of Gwinnett's housing affordability gap and the social services needs that lower income residents have. While the data required by the plan, and its detailed reporting requirements, are contained in this appendix the findings and implications of the CP have influenced the policies in the Unified Plan. A "crosswalk" between these two documents, that makes these influences clear, prefaces the appendix.

Volume 2 of the appendices is organized in a sequence of: Public Outreach Process (A); basic analysis (B through E); modeling and evaluation (F through H). They reflect the substantive contributions of the team of experts assembled to help prepare the Unified Plan. Some highlights of each appendix in Volume 3 follow.

A – Public Outreach Process. Summarized in Part 2, Section B.2 of the Plan, this appendix describes in full the outreach process used to develop the Plan. It list interviewees, dates, agendas of the Plan Advisory Committee and so forth. It also contains summaries of the six focus group meetings, organized and conducted by Ventana Marketing Inc. These meetings were an effort to solicit the input of minority/ethnic groups, usually under-represented, into the planning work.

B – Community Assessment. This is the summary document produced at the end of the first phase of the Plan, a DCA requirement. It analyzes recent trends, discusses important features and issues for the county and sets up the meat of the Plan. Some of this material is incorporated in Part 1 of the Plan but the Assessment is obviously fuller and contains, in particular, more City-specific information.

C – Population and Employment Forecasts. Gwinnett has a 30–year history of outstripping its growth forecasts. It was deemed particularly important, therefore, to make sure that the forecasts for this Unified Plan were robust and defensible. Dr. Thomas Hammer undertook a comprehensive analysis of growth trends from a state, regional and county perspective, deploying a massive data base of counties nation-wide in which to ground his projections. Several meetings with ARC, which uses a different methodology, were held to review the Plan's assumptions. In the event, both approaches yielded very similar results, the projections generally showing a slowing of growth for Gwinnett.

D – Economic Development Overview. The Robert Charles Lesser Company, locally based, mined its hands-on familiarity with the region and Gwinnett to write this overview of economic development prospects for the County. Covering much ground and peppered with data nuggets and insights, much of this material found its way into different sections of the Plan and strongly influenced its direction. RCLCo's judgments also determined many of the parameters of the Land Use Allocation model.

E – Homeownership and Socio-Economic Trends. The sweeping changes in the racial and ethnic makeup of Gwinnett over the decade since the last plan necessitated a closer look. These reports, by Dr. Dan Immergluck of Georgia Tech, constitute important original research on this phenomenon and its implications. They portray some encouraging signs and patterns of relative integration rather than wholesale racial/ethnic segregation. These 2006/2007 reports were also a very early warning of the sub prime mortgage fiasco in which Gwinnett is now so heavily embroiled. This analysis also informed the Consolidated Housing Plan.

F – Land Use Allocation. This appendix explains the way in which land uses were allocated in the various scenarios and their relationship to other forecasting and modeling efforts for the Plan. This guidance on future land use actions, conducted by Facet Decision Systems, also provides a tool for future use by the County as conditions change.

G – Transit Testing. As part of the transportation modelling effort different transit routes and services were tested. This appendix provides information on the additional transit services tested in the International Gateway Scenario and provides a detailed table of mode splits for the eight County subareas.

H – Fiscal Analysis. No analysis in this Plan is more sobering than that conducted by Dr. Robert Eger (Georgia State University) of the County's fiscal future. By significantly expanding the reach of existing fiscal models used by the County this analysis reveals the coming fiscal crunch. It compares the various scenarios against each other and recommends significant changes in the way the county raises and spends monies to secure a positive fiscal future. Its recommendations have deeply shaped the Plan's policies and maps. The fiscal model, part of the land use allocation modeling described above, also furnishes the County with a useful, ongoing tool.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 1: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Gwinnett is changing rapidly and this Unified Plan must respond adequately to those changes if it is to be an effective guide for the future decisions that the County will need to make. This first part provides the background necessary to understand the many policy recommendations of the Unified Plan as well as the reasons this plan differs in approach and presentation from its predecessors.

A. TAKING STOCK

A.1 A New Approach

A comprehensive or 'general' plan is the key means to guide future decisions that will promote and support a community's economic capabilities, its physical well being, its overall quality as a place to live and its ability to deal with expected and unexpected challenges. Many of these decisions relate directly to the fiscal health of a jurisdiction and its abilities to provide a full range of high quality services to its citizens. Recognizing the direct correlation between development decisions and their economic and fiscal consequences is one of the things that makes this Unified Plan unique.

This Gwinnett 2030 Unified Plan is a new approach to coordinating key County government responsibilities for growth management, transportation, housing and related social services, public utilities, economic development, open space and recreation. The Unified Plan is not just about 'government' or 'development;' it has the ability to affect how all Gwinnett residents, employees and employers will carry out much of their everyday business.

Updating a comprehensive plan gives a community the opportunity to take a hard look at itself. While it should document all its achievements and assets, the update process also challenges a community to face its current and emerging challenges in a open and frank manner.

> Gwinnett is changing rapidly and this Unified Plan must respond adequately to these changes.

A.2 Emerging Challenges and Unfinished Business

Gwinnett County has changed rapidly during the past four decades. Most of this change has been the spread of suburban development throughout much of the County. Past comprehensive plans have directed their attention to the issues such suburban growth generates, along with growth still to manage.

Gwinnett is no longer merely part of an expanding band of new subdivisions and shopping centers. Once it was largely part of the rural exurban fringe; now Gwinnett is among one of the five counties that make up the core of metropolitan Atlanta. Almost 80 percent of the County's land base has been developed. Its 2005 population of 694,000 was the second largest in Georgia, after Fulton County. Its 316,000 jobs were exceeded only by Fulton, DeKalb and Cobb Counties.

As Gwinnett matures, parts of the County are changing to an unfamiliar status as "transitional" areas are now in need of reinvestment and revitalization. Though the change seemed to begin without warning, it was predictable. Many similar metropolitan counties in the United States have gone through a similar growth-slowdown-decline cycle over time. The typical steps of this cycle are:

- Rural edge
- Emerging bedroom suburbs
- Magnet for shopping centers and malls as well as typical suburban office or industrial parks
- Slower growth as build-out approaches
- Outflow of jobs and families to newer frontier jurisdictions
- Expansion of pockets of aging development; and finally,
- The beginning of concerted revitalization and renewal.

Such changes often occur over an extended time period of 50 to 70 years. In Gwinnett however, that process was exceedingly rapid. Trends that in other metropolitan counties have been more sequential and drawn out are occurring simultaneously in Gwinnett. Now the County must continue its suburban expansion while simultaneously taking on the issues and expenses of revitalization.

Gwinnett now confronts an array of new challenges that the Unified Plan must address:

- Continuing to expand its infrastructure to support suburban growth, while maintaining the level of fiscal health needed to support the high level of services its citizens expect—perhaps the most crucial issue the County faces
- Sustaining its economic well being as the regional economic context changes
- Maintaining the range and quality of housing choices needed to underpin its economic well being
- Revitalizing older areas and stabilizing today's healthy neighborhoods
- Adapting to significant demographic changes that are sweeping across the Atlanta region
- Coping with increasing traffic congestion and its impacts on economic development and the quality of life of its residents
- Increasing the operational and cost efficiencies of its utilities – especially its complex sewage collection and treatment system; and
- Maintaining and enhancing the overall quality of life experience of working and/or living in Gwinnett.
- Availability of sustainable drinking water sources to meet the needs of a growing community.

This plan meets the need for a useful document that provides effective guidance for the variety of decisions and actions needed to cope with such a range of challenges. Fully implementing the plan's priorities as well as its recommendations for tracking and monitoring the progress of such implementation will make Gwinnett a more active participant in charting its future.

Dealing with these emerging challenges as well as the more familiar growth-oriented ones of previous plans complicates the job of elected officials, agencies and others dealing directly with the requirements of plan implementation. These challenges represent uncharted territory. **Simply relying on the experiences of the past will not produce the expected results. Failure to recognize what is happening and why may cause decision makers to become advocates of what has worked before, rather than taking a lead in establishing a new vision for the future.**

A.3 Keeping Gwinnett a 'Preferred Place'

The Unified Plan is more than just a means to temper current problems and cope with a more complicated set of trends and circumstances. This Plan also charts a way to protect and add to those aspects of work, home, recreation, environment and culture that constitute a place's 'quality of life'. Put most simply, the Plan's aim is to create the belief and reality that Gwinnett is a **preferred place** among the competing places in the Atlanta region and, indeed, the greater southeastern United States.

The Plan's aim is to create the belief and reality that Gwinnett is a preferred place.

B. A NEW TYPE OF PLAN

B.1 Why is this Plan Different?

This Plan, in its analysis of issues and possibilities and in its recommendations, diverges from the approach of past Gwinnett County comprehensive plans.

Gwinnett has sufficient vacant land for continued suburban expansion to the north and east for the next twenty years. But, a plan focused on continued suburban growth with only one vision of its future is less and less useful as Gwinnett matures. Such an approach will not give Gwinnett the capabilities or the flexibility to cope with the economic and social change facing Gwinnett today.

While dealing with continued suburban expansion, Gwinnett must focus more energy into stabilizing and revitalizing many areas created during earlier waves of suburban growth. As Gwinnett matures, the County will face a number of important decisions about maintaining and upgrading county infrastructure and facilities such as its transportation network and sewer system, and these decisions will pose challenges to the County's fiscal capabilities. Gwinnett will also continue to transition from its earlier economic base dominated by light industry, warehousing and distribution, growth industries such as home building and real estate, and extensive commercial development. As these industries migrate out or age in place, Gwinnett will need to energetically recruit new economic sectors to employ its residents, support locally-based business development and sustain its tax base.

Perhaps the most important long-term consequence of failing to shift planning perspectives and approaches is the persistent erosion of the County's fiscal resources to a point that impairs its ability to provide the adequate pubic services and facilities needed to sustain a decent quality of life for its residents.

Gwinnett needs to redefine its vision of itself and account for changing realities and new opportunities.

The need for Gwinnett County to redefine its vision of itself and account for changing realities and new opportunities is a central message of the **Partnership Gwinnett** initiative of the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce. This Chamber-sponsored project is a parallel and complementary initiative that clearly calls for new approaches to planning for the future. Some of the key issues **Partnership Gwinnett** is addressing include:

- Attracting new economic development opportunities before, not after, older segments of the local economy decline or depart;
- Establishing and maintaining education and workforce excellence, especially in a world of constant economic innovation and change;
- Fostering greater locally based economic and entrepreneurial opportunities, including those tied to Gwinnett's increasingly diverse population groups;
- Tackling, in a determined way, Gwinnett's redevelopment and transportation needs;
- Bringing to Gwinnett, in part to attract new employers, those cultural and "quality of life" aspects that are now missing; and
- Marketing Gwinnett's assets and opportunities more aggressively.

This Gwinnett 2030 Unified Plan shares all of these concerns of the **Partnership Gwinnett** initiative, especially the need to recognize and deal adequately with the County's changing demography and economy. Both this Plan and the Chamber initiative call upon Gwinnett's leaders and citizens to recognize that changing times call for new bold initiatives. The County needs a new type of comprehensive plan that can be utilized as an effective guide to the flexible and pertinent strategic decision-making that this complex future demands. This Plan provides that guidance.

B.2 How this Plan is Different

The **first difference** is that the Gwinnett 2030 Unified Plan is made up of three major components that are usually separately conceived and only loosely coordinated – the Comprehensive Plan, the Comprehensive Transportation Plan and the Consolidated Plan (for housing and funding needs for other community based projects). While the latter two are stand-alone documents and included as Appendices, the Comprehensive Plan is the core of this Unified Plan document. The Comprehensive Plan is unusually rich in transportation and housing–related analysis and policies because of this coordination.

The Unified Plan has emerged through a process that developed each component simultaneously and required each plan to inform and respond to the needs of the others. Instead of individually developing and adopting each plan, their priorities, phasing and funding was coordinated. A pro-active and coordinated effort between the three components produced the 2030 Unified Plan. For example, the key land use priorities of the Unified Plan have been embedded in the Comprehensive Transportation Plan developed parallel to the overall Unified Plan process. The Consolidated Plan must include data and policies related to topics that the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires for a jurisdiction to be eligible for various federal programs. The key housing and community development policies of the Consolidated Plan are consequently also embedded in this Unified Plan. The need to accommodate all the HUD requirements also accounts for the Unified Plan's going beyond just the land use aspect of housing. Attention is given to the social and economic aspects of housing provision and related community needs and services tied to such issues as affordability, homelessness or needs of special groups within the overall population.

(A Unified Plan appendix presents the Consolidated Plan's background data and process overview.)

The **second difference** is the way this new plan is anchored in fiscal realities and is the result of rigorous testing and evaluation of growth impacts.

Deterioration of the County's fiscal health is ultimately the most serious threat facing Gwinnett. Without a fiscally sound and economically healthy public sector, it will be impossible to sustain current levels of services and maintain existing facilities. Consequently, the Unified Plan employed a rigorous fiscal and economic analysis to forecast the future fiscal impact of various development patterns and suggest the policies needed to improve the fiscal health of the county under each scenario.

> This new plan is anchored in fiscal realities.

The fiscal analysis demonstrated that without raising taxes, the continuation of current growth, demographic and economic trends may result in an annual eight percent (8%) deficit of revenues to expenditures. The slowing of current growth trends could result in much higher gaps. Awareness of these potential economic consequences for Gwinnett's fiscal future is one of the driving forces behind many of the recommendations of this new Plan.

Such conclusions stem in large part from the rigorous economic modeling, testing and evaluation of various growth patterns for the county. Analysis included the application of an employment driven growth forecasting model, a market analysis of Gwinnett's current role and economic development prospects within the entire Atlanta region, and the modeling by the County Department of Transportation of the impacts of various land use outcomes on the County's transportation networks. All of the potential futures or scenarios that these analyses examined had different fiscal implications.

A **third difference** is the organization of the plan's recommendations on the basis of five basic themes:

1. Maintain Economic Development and Fiscal Health
2. Foster Redevelopment
3. Maintain Mobility and Accessibility
4. Provide More Housing Choices
5. Keep Gwinnett a 'Preferred Place'

The traditional approach is to compile and present a number of separate topic driven 'elements,' such as land use, transportation, open space, parks and recreation. In the traditional 'elements' approach, policies and actions relating to a particular topic such as open space or transportation are usually isolated from other issues that they affect. In the traditional 'elements' style plan, understanding how all the various plan details interact requires back and forth

searching or elaborate cross referencing via tables or indexing. In contrast, using themes instead of elements enables the plan to discuss all the issues related to that theme.

The five themes this Unified Plan features are wide in scope in order to facilitate relating a variety of topics to the overall theme and its goals. The themes are in essence broad aspirations that the plan shows how to achieve e.g., how to foster redevelopment. These themes allow the presentation of plan priorities and recommendations to unfold as a coherent narrative. Each theme is a chapter in the overall story about what the plan aims to accomplish.

Cause and effect relationships that the traditional 'elements' approach can disguise are more overtly highlighted in the descriptions of the various themes (e.g., how economic development requires good transportation planning and a sound approach to housing choices). When all the details needed to tell a story are gathered, it is easier to understand the importance of less obvious details to achieving the overall aspirations of the Plan. Some users of the plan will have needs or interests focused on specific topics such as 'housing mix' or 'local streets' or 'industrial lands.' To assist readers in finding all of the plan's discussion and recommendations on a specific topic, several aids such as a cross referencing matrix are built into the Plan.

A **fourth difference** is not focusing on a single desired end state or static future for Gwinnett County. Between now and 2030 Gwinnett County must be prepared to deal with the possibility of more than one plausible future.

An effective plan cannot treat Gwinnett in isolation. Gwinnett's future is linked to that of the entire Atlanta region. If the region prospers, Gwinnett will prosper as well. If the region falters, Gwinnett may not escape the stresses and costs. Consequently, this plan presents more than one possible future for Gwinnett based on broad economic trends for the Atlanta Region and provides guidance for dealing with these different scenarios. These possibilities are illustrated in three defined scenarios:

- One future focuses on the County's opportunity to become one of the major growth centers within a very strong Atlanta area economy. This is the preferred alternative that the bulk of the plan addresses. Attaining this future requires a more proactive approach to planning and public sector initiatives than Gwinnett has traditionally employed. For example if Gwinnett is unable to proactively address transportation problems but continues to approve rapid development, the implications of this posture are explicitly presented in the testing of transportation alternatives.
- Another outcome that the Plan contemplates is a more moderate expansion of the regional economy and the need to cope with stresses regarding economic development. This outcome is not one the Plan recommends, but nevertheless is one the plan acknowledges can happen. In fact, such an outcome is more likely to happen if Gwinnett does not adapt to its new realities and seize on new opportunities. The Chamber of Commerce and Partnership Gwinnett studies ably addressed these eventualities.
- The third outcome contemplates a major downturn in the regional economy. This possible future greatly reduces the options available for Gwinnett to control its own future. Therefore, while the impact of a regional economic downturn was analyzed, the Plan does not develop strategies for this alternative.

> Gwinnett County must be prepared to deal with the possibility of more than one plausible future.

The **fifth difference** is the plan's flexibility and adaptability as it is implemented. This is one closely related to the presentation of different plausible futures.
This new Plan specifies a reasonable sequence of implementation steps and priorities, but does not establish a rigid set of actions that must be met at specified times to be considered successful. Instead, the Plan must be periodically reviewed and updated to adapt to changing circumstances, especially regarding major economic trends affecting the metro Atlanta region. The approach embodied in this Plan will require constant monitoring of economic trends and periodic determination of what scenario these trends and events most closely resemble. Adjustment of Plan expectations will also require complementary adjustments of supporting programs such as the Capital Improvement Program.

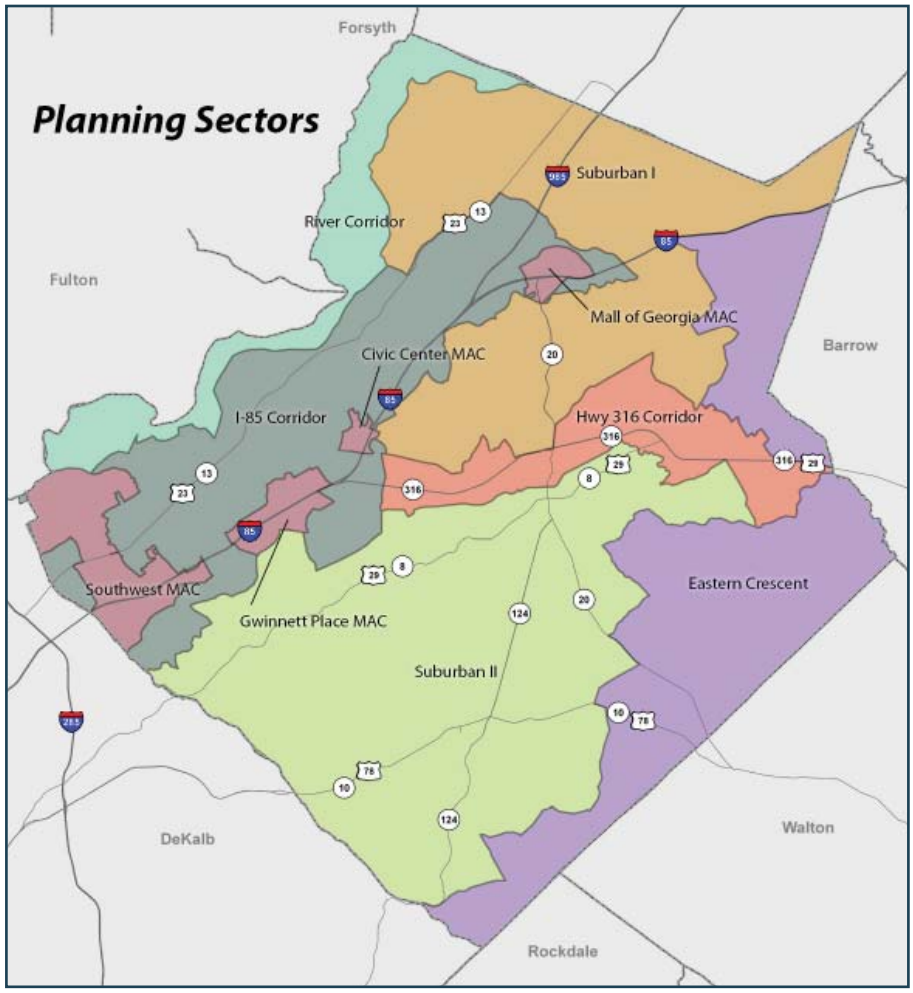
The ultimate test of this approach is how well the plan enables Gwinnett to maintain a proactive approach in determining its future fiscal health. Building into the Plan such follow-up monitoring and check points will enable Gwinnett to more quickly resolve the more pressing problems at any given time and better adjust to changing circumstances.

The **sixth difference** of this Plan from its predecessors is its introduction of the concept of **sector plans** as the vehicle for specifying many local details within the context of Gwinnett 2030 Unified Plan priorities. Sector plans are explained following the Planning Sector Map (Figure 1 below). This Plan provides guidance on major issues and recommends significant changes in land use allocation of public facilities and transportation improvements.

However, Gwinnett has grown too big and complex for one single plan to address in detail all its planning needs and opportunities. Therefore, the Gwinnett County 2030 Unified Plan does not provide a specific designated land use for every parcel in the county. The plan is explicit regarding the future designations of strategically located land, but many land use decisions could be better made within the context of understanding local circumstances.

Many large jurisdictions deal with this issue by implementing a two tier approach to land use decisions: 1) general policies and guidance are provided via an overall jurisdiction-wide plan, and 2) more specific localized guidance are provided via a series of sub-area or sector plans. By adopting this approach, the Unified Plan establishes the basic future development framework and priorities within Gwinnett, as well as key zoning framework recommendations while also specifying zoning changes required to fulfill the priorities outlined by the Plan. Subsequent to the Gwinnett 2030 Unified Plan adoption, development of sector plans will provide additional land use guidance, identify needed local

Figure 1: Division of County into Planning Sectors



Gwinnett has grown too big and complex for one single plan to address in detail all of its planning needs and opportunities.

road improvements and sites for redevelopment. The plans should also establish priorities for open space, infrastructure and urban design. To establish planning sectors based on common local traits and presumed future characteristics, the 2030 Unified Plan recommends the division of Gwinnett into the areas shown on Figure 1 on the previous page.

The Unified Plan contains a conceptual Composite Policy Map (Figure 77) and a Future Development Map (Figure 78) to provide flexibility for the unseen future. The Composite Policy Map shows how selected key policies (shown on the more detailed five basic theme maps of this Plan) will interact to create an overall geographic framework for future changes. The Future Development Map shows those areas of the County where implementation of the items highlighted on the Composite Policy Map will require significant (and often extensive) rezoning actions.

B.3 The Role of the Gwinnett 2030 Unified Plan

The Gwinnett 2030 Unified Plan is one of many plans that influence the County. The Gwinnett 2030 Unified Plan does not, and could not, cover every initiative that affects the County. Even if this plan is the keystone document, it is one of a number of plans and programs, including the Water and Sewer Master Plan, and the Parks, Open Space and Recreation Master Plan that must complement and support each other.

The implementation section of this new Plan (Part 3) includes specific recommendations for improving this coordination. Of special importance is having the Capital Improvement Plan and the Water and Sewer Master Plan be consistent with Gwinnett 2030 Unified Plan priorities. Both of these other plans directly influence the feasibility of many recommendations within the Gwinnett County 2030 Unified Plan regarding timing, intensity of land uses, and related efforts such as redevelopment.

B.4 Different Plan and Different Format

In order to make the 2030 Unified Plan more accessible and user friendly for the general public, this Plan uses a format that differs in key ways from its predecessor. This revised format and organization also enables different groups to use the Plan in different ways. The Plan users encompass a range of different people with different needs. These users include citizens who mainly wish to understand a particular issue, land owners and developers who are considering new projects or wish to request rezonings, business interests who are exploring whether Gwinnett is a good place to set up shop, Gwinnett officials and agency staff who need to oversee plan implementation, as well as other local, regional, and state officials and planners who want to compare Gwinnett's policies and results to their own.

The transparency of the plan's overarching message through using a theme based approach and its utility as a guide to future decision making is enhanced by:

- Providing the Plan in a Nutshell section to generally publicize the key priorities and features of the Plan.
- Providing a straightforward narrative about how Gwinnett can improve.
- Using sidebars ("boxes") to discuss background issues, technical approaches or relevant, but secondary issues, without impeding the smooth flow of the main narrative.
- Explaining clearly who does what – who leads, who supports and the respective roles and responsibilities of the public and private sectors in implementing plan recommendations.
- Including most of the technical data and analysis that guide the narrative in a separate appendix. This is done partly to streamline the narrative and partly to stress the Plan's role as a guide to decisions rather than as a data sourcebook.

How to Use This Plan

This plan does not tell you everything that planning encompasses (zoning district regulations, how to get a building permit, current capital projects, school policies, etc.). Instead it provides a variety of ways to enable readers to use the plan for different purposes.

- Those desiring only a concise overview of what the plan means should read the Plan in a Nutshell section.
- Those wishing to see more detail about a major topic such as roads, housing or redevelopment may find all they need by reading one of the theme based sections of Part 2 or consult the "Cross-Walk" table at the end of the Plan
- Traditional elements as separate chapters are not used, but there are numerous ways to follow a particular issue – mixed-use, urban design, environmental enhancements, etc. – by looking under the different themes.
- "Crosswalk tables" show how various sections of the Plan conform to state requirements for local plans and in which sections of the Plan various Plan topics or policies are discussed.
- Each policy and action identifies which agencies have a primary role in plan implementation – a feature that also helps citizens and other interests more effectively direct inquiries about specific areas of the plan.
- Staff, properly trained to use the plan and interpret its maps and recommendations, will be better able to answer such inquiries and, if they cannot, they will know who can.
- The Plan's implementation chapter lists criteria or describes how to use the plan for such key follow up actions as rezoning.

C. TRENDS AND DRIVING FORCES

This section presents background information on a variety of key plan topics. Where available, the following discussion provides data on recent trends affecting the topic presented. This discussion also describes some of today's and tomorrow's driving forces that will help define many of the key opportunities or challenges facing Gwinnett County that are addressed in the Unified Plan.

C.1 Demographic and Socio-Economic Trends

C.1.1 Regional Trends

In every decade since 1960, the Atlanta region has gained in population at a compound rate of at least 2.35% per year. This is at least twice as fast as the U.S. as a whole. Table 1 summarizes the region's population growth from 1940 onward.

The region's employment growth has been the driver of this population explosion. Between 1969 and 2000, the region gained employment at a compound annual rate of 3.67%, far higher than the U.S. rate of 2.02% per year. This remarkable 31-year period included only two individual years in which the region lost employment and four years in which it failed to exceed the national rate of job growth. There was no five-year interval in which the region's employment gain failed to exceed 100,000 jobs.

In every decade since 1960, the Atlanta region has grown at least twice as fast as the U.S.

But around the year 2000, the region's explosive job growth came to a halt. Its employment base expanded by only half a percentage point between 2000 and 2001, and then declined for two consecutive years. The ensuing gains during 2003 through 2005 just succeeded in bringing the 2005 annual average for metro Atlanta to 48,500 jobs or 2.1% above the 2000 figure. This unprecedented period of stagnation was linked to national economic conditions, but in contrast to prior experience, the Atlanta region did not fare appreciably better than the U.S. as a whole. In fact, the Atlanta region's losses from 2001 through 2003 were proportionally worse than the national declines during that period.

Table 1: Historical Population Trends in the Atlanta Region

	Fulton & 8 Contiguous Counties*		Other 20 Counties in Region		Totals: 29-County Region		
	Persons	Growth Rate	Persons	Growth Rate	Persons	Growth Rate	Ratio to U.S. Growth Rate
1940	608,513		334,849		943,362		
1950	778,895	2.50%	340,542	0.17%	1,119,437	1.73%	1.266
1960	1,077,299	3.30%	359,825	0.55%	1,437,124	2.53%	1.478
1970	1,479,108	3.22%	424,630	1.67%	1,903,737	2.85%	2.258
1980	1,851,693	2.27%	550,451	2.63%	2,402,144	2.35%	2.162
1990	2,445,317	2.82%	719,536	2.71%	3,164,853	2.80%	2.981
2000	3,338,334	3.16%	1,048,924	3.84%	4,387,258	3.32%	2.670
1950-2000		2.95%		2.28%		2.77%	2.218

** All counties touching Fulton except Carroll and Coweta.*

Source: US Census

Figure 2: Regional Map

Remarkably, the near-stand still in regional employment from 2000 through 2005 had only a modest impact on regional population growth. Table 2 describes the region's population growth and net migration for five-year intervals starting in 1990. (Both sets of figures include breakdowns by racial/ethnic status - with all Hispanic persons isolated from the three race-based groups).

Table 2 also highlights the huge population increases of the region's three major minority groups. This demographic transformation for Gwinnett has implications for a variety of issues that the Unified Plan must address including labor force characteristics, economic development, housing and human service needs. The expected increased diversification of Gwinnett in upcoming years is detailed later as part of the regional and local forecasting that was analyzed for the Unified Plan.

Table 2: Population and Net Migration in the Atlanta Region

	Population				Estimated Net Migration		
	1990	1995	2000	2005	1990-95	1995-00	2000-05
White	2,271,623	2,464,579	2,701,199	2,845,548	93,575	137,941	62,192
Black	778,212	984,446	1,237,349	1,490.731	141,611	172,660	167,505
Asian	51,660	96,309	151,061	209,681	38,558	44,135	45,555
Hispanic	63,358	168,596	297,649	459,867	90,003	96,813	114,354
Total	3,164,853	3,713,930	4,387,258	5,005,827	363,747	451,549	389,606
Annual % Change		3.25%	3.39%	2.67%			

Source: US Census

Table 3: Population Change, 1970-2005

	1970 Population	1980 Population	1990 Population	2000 Population	2005 Population (est.)	Population Change 1970-2005	Percent Change 1970-2005
Gwinnett County	72,349	166,903	352,910	588,448	693,900	621,551	859.10%
ARC**	1,500,823	1,896,182	2,557,800	3,429,379	3,813,700	2,312,877	154.11%
Georgia	4,589,575	5,457,566	6,478,216	8,186,453	8,821,142	4,231,567	92.20%

***The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency for the 10-county Atlanta area, including Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties, as well as the City of Atlanta.*

Table 4: White and Non-White Population

	White 1990	White 2000	Percent Change, 1990-2000	Non-White 1990	Non-White 2000	Percent Change, 1990-2000
Gwinnett County	320,971	427,883	33.3	31,939	160,565	402.7%
Atlanta ARC Region	1,773,404	2,017,854	13.8	784,396	1,411,525	80.0%

Source: 1990 and 2000 Census (SF1)

C.1.2 Gwinnett Recent Trends

[Note: A fuller description of recent socio-economic and other trends is found in the Technical Appendix of the Joint County-Cities Community Assessment that was produced as part of the Unified Plan development process. The following is a selection from that data.]

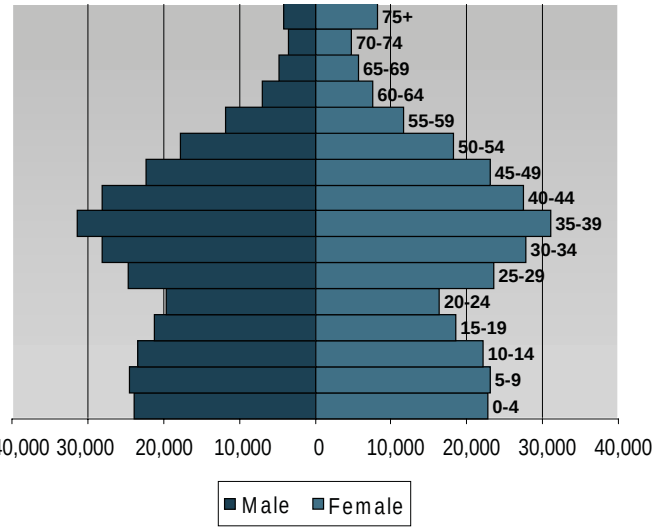
Population Trends and Growth Rate Comparison

Gwinnett County and its Cities have experienced tremendous growth over the past thirty years, with a nine fold increase in population between 1970 and 2005. (See Table 3)

Age Distribution and Household Size

Gwinnett County continues to be a predominately family-oriented area, composed predominately of adults of child-bearing age and children under 14. However, Gwinnett's share of the older populations has also grown significantly from several years ago. Between 1990 and 2000, the population age 55 and older doubled and now comprises more than 12% of the total population. According to the 2003 American Community Survey, Gwinnett's 229,000 households had an average size of 2.92 persons, significantly higher than the state average of 2.65.

Figure 3: Gwinnett County Population, 2000



Source: 2000 Census (SF3)

Race and Ethnicity

As shown in Table 4, between 1990 and 2000, the number of non-white residents in Gwinnett County increased at ten times the rate of the white population, making non-white residents 160,565 (approximately 27 percent of the total population) compared to 39,939 in 1990.

Table 5 depicts the dramatic growth in the Hispanic

population in the county and its cities. (The Hispanic population is not classified as a race in Census tabulations, so this category is presented separately.) In 2000, Gwinnett County's population was 10 percent Hispanic, and several cities such as Norcross had significantly higher shares of Hispanic residents.

Table 5: Percent Hispanic (County and Cities), 1980-1990

	1980 Total	1980 Percent	1990 Total	1990 Percent
Gwinnett County	1,426	0.80	8,470	2.40

Source: 1980 Census, 1990 Census, 2000 Census (SF3)

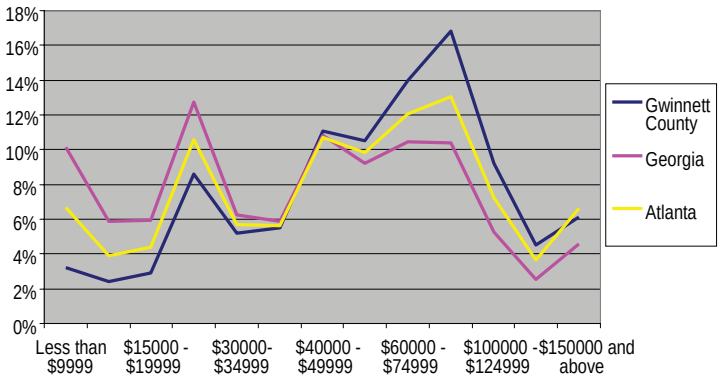
Income

Economically, Gwinnett County residents were in better shape in 2000 than in 1990. This economic growth has not been uniform across the county, as a handful of cities were relatively unchanged or experienced slight declines in such categories as per capita income in the past decade.

Median household income in Gwinnett County has grown moderately in the ten years between 1989 and 1999, and it remains greater than that of the Atlanta region or the state of Georgia (see Table 6). Nevertheless, between 1989 and 1999, Gwinnett County's income growth has slowed compared to the Atlanta region and state.

Figure 4 illustrates how Gwinnett County has a larger share of higher incomes than the rest of the Atlanta region or Georgia with only 2 percent of its households with incomes between $10,000 and $14,999 but nearly 17 percent of households with incomes between $75,000 and $99,999.

Figure 4: Income Distribution, 2000



Source: 2000 Census (SF3)

Gwinnett County's average per capita income grew slightly between 1990 and 2000 while per capita income in the Atlanta metropolitan region as a whole declined sharply between 1990 and 2000.

Table 6: Median Household Income, 1989-1999

	1989	1999 (adjusted)	Median Household Income Change, 1989-1999	% Change 1989-1999
Gwinnett County	$43,518	$45,976	$2,458	5.65%
Atlanta MSA**	$36,051	$39,453	$3,402	9.44%
Georgia	$29,021	$32,227	$3,206	11.05%

Source: 1990 Census (SF3) and 2000 Census (SF3). Incomes adjusted to use 1989 as a base year.
***Atlanta MSA includes the following 20 counties: Barrow County, Bartow County, Carroll County, Cherokee County, Clayton County, Cobb County, Coweta County, DeKalb County, Douglas County, Fayette County, Forsyth County, Fulton County, Gwinnett County, Henry County, Newton County, Paulding County, Pickens County, Rockdale County, Spalding County and Walton County.*

Table 7: Per Capita Income,1990-2000

	1990	2000 (adjusted)	Per Capita Income Change, 1990-2000	% Change 1990-2000
Gwinnett County	$17,881	$18,991	$1,110	6.21%
ARC	$23,918	$19,674	-$4,244	-17.74%
Georgia	$13,631	$16,066	$2,435	17.86%

Source: 1990 Census (SF3), 2000 Census (SF3), and ARC Envision6 Report. Incomes adjusted to use 1990 as a base year.

C.1.3 Issues to Address

The above regional and local data raise a number of key issues that will influence Gwinnett's future characteristics and that the Plan must therefore address.

- **Aging Population**
  The County will need to prepare for ever-increasing numbers of residents across all age ranges. Gwinnett County was once a family-dominated suburb. In the future, however, as residents age in place, the County will increasingly need to provide programs and services for older adults.

- **Continued Pressure on Schools**
  Despite this aging of the overall population, Gwinnett will still experience the pressure to provide additional school facilities to serve the influx of families with school-age children that move to Gwinnett.

- **Multi-Ethnic Community Needs**
  Gwinnett County, a homogenous community in the 1970s and 1980s, is now a diverse, multi-ethnic community. Programs and resources for non-native English speakers such as English as a Second Language will need to be provided in order to include this growing sector in the opportunities available in Gwinnett County.

- **Multiple impacts of less affluent overall income profile**
  The County's median income has been slowly declining since 1980. If this trend continues, the current, overall highly affluent, income profile, with its very high proportion of upper and upper middle income brackets, will become more like the regional norm. This income leveling will affect a variety of future trends and planning needs. These include accommodating housing needs of lower and middle income groups, areas with declining retail sales and property values (which are the two key sources of County revenues), demand for health, housing and other social services, and the nature of public safety needs. (The discussion of the County's fiscal condition and prospects in Part 1. Section C. 9 below directly addresses the significance of this trend.)

> Gwinnett County is now a diverse, multi-ethnic community.

- **Rising Proportion of Population Below Poverty Line**
  Although the residents of the County and most of its cities are prospering, special attention must be paid to the residents that are struggling economically. According to the Census, Gwinnett's share of residents in poverty grew from 4 percent in 1989 to 5.7 percent in 1999.

C.2 Gwinnett's Evolving Landscape

The physical changes to Gwinnett that stem from the growth trends documented above have been profound, and the last 30 years have witnessed rapid development and constant change. Each successive wave of newcomers has preferred that Gwinnett not change from what it was like when they arrived. From the early 19th century through the mid-20th century, Gwinnett was a rural landscape dotted by small locally oriented centers. Beginning in about 1970, however, the rise in property values and the associated increase in taxes spurred by the rapid growth have driven most agricultural pursuits from the County. Some pastoral views can still be found today, but Gwinnett is now a predominantly suburban landscape. And now, just as many of its residents long to settle into and live out a comfortable suburban lifestyle, significant portions of the county are transitioning from a suburban to an urban status.

C.2.1 Early History

Established in 1818, Gwinnett County was covered by a vast first-growth hardwood forest. In the early 19th century scattered small farms were cleared, first by the Cherokee Indians and later by the settlers who displaced them. Lawrenceville (the county seat), Duluth, and the hamlets of Hog Mountain and Pinckneyville were the only established towns. Following the forced relocation of the Cherokee Indians in 1837, a series of lotteries were held to distribute former Cherokee lands to settlers, and this led to a pattern of land clearance for new farms. Many of Gwinnett's oldest families came to Gwinnett at the time of those lotteries. By the time of the Civil War, cotton had become the major cash crop in Gwinnett County.

Railroads reached the county in the 1870's, and many of the towns that are familiar today, such as Buford, Sugar Hill, Suwanee, Norcross, and Lilburn sprang into being along the rails. The rail lines also spawned some industrial activity such as saddle manufacturing at The Tannery in Buford. Nevertheless, the County changed slowly and remained predominantly agricultural for many decades. A Gwinnett resident of 1860 would have found many aspects of the Gwinnett of 1960 quite recognizable.

C.2.2 Suburban Growth

In 1930, the population of Gwinnett was about 27,000 persons, and over the next 30 years it increased to only 43,000 residents. In the 1960's the pace of population growth began to pick up, and then it exploded. Gwinnett County experienced one of the most exceptional population booms of any U.S. county with a tenfold increase from 1970 - 2007. Several factors explain this rapid rate of growth. The first was Gwinnett's proximity to Atlanta, the booming metropolis of the southeast. Access to Atlanta's rapidly expanding economy is a prime reason for Gwinnett's population explosion of the past few decades.

But mere proximity to Atlanta does not fully account for such growth. Building Interstate 85 placed the County on one of the primary commercial arteries carrying goods and services between Atlanta and the industrial northeast. The middle class flight that characterized many urban areas in the country in the 1970's and 1980's was also influential and was responsible for a wave of affluent newcomers from

Atlanta and DeKalb County relocating to Gwinnett County. Additionally, Gwinnett's public school system maintains a reputation for quality which is a powerful attractor for families, whether out-of-state residents moving to the region or a young married couple residing in Atlanta faced with schooling their first child. Recently, SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) funded improvements for new roads, parks, schools, and other government facilities have also made Gwinnett that much more attractive for newcomers.

Extensive low-density subdivision development coupled with the general decline in farming acreage during the twentieth century led to the disappearance of much of the agricultural landscape. Between 1984 and 2004, about 50 percent of Gwinnett was developed, mostly in residential subdivisions. Intensive agriculture such as row crops, poultry and dairy farms became a thing of the past. Sizable areas of livestock pasturage and harvestable timber remained, but these came to be viewed as transitional uses awaiting development.

Clusters of multifamily dwellings, mostly apartments, appeared in western parts of the county, particularly in the 1970s and early 1980s. Due in part to market saturation and in part to resistance to increasing density, few apartment rezonings were approved from 1988 to the early 1990s. Most of the existing apartments are close to the border with DeKalb County, near Interstate 85, or near Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. The portion of multifamily dwelling units (counting apartments, condominiums, and townhouses) is now about 30 percent of the total County housing stock, with the remainder being single-family homes on individual lots.

During this period of rapid growth, Gwinnett became more than just a bedroom community. Employment in the county expanded as fast as the population, at least until about 2000. According to Georgia Department of Labor figures, Gwinnett went from 129,209 jobs in 1989 to 282,229 in 2000 to 325,070 in 2006. During that time, Gwinnett went from one major shopping mall to three, and major distribution warehouses lined the Interstate 85 and Highway 316 corridors. Warehousing and distribution remain one of Gwinnett's most distinctive land uses along the major highways. Gwinnett County serves as a distribution center for goods across the southeastern United States, mostly distributed by truck along the interstate highways.

As in many areas, the 2001 recession slowed employment growth in Gwinnett in the early part of this decade. Job growth resumed afterwards, but the new jobs were not as highly paid as those created in the 1990s. This trend spurred initiatives to encourage economic growth. The County government established an office for economic development in 2006. During that same period, the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce established its Partnership Gwinnett initiative, which promoted a specific goal of 65,000 new high-wage jobs over the next five years.

By 2000, the character of Gwinnett's population had changed. Ethnic minorities and immigrants poured into the County seeking a better quality of life; at the same time, the rate of increase of whites declined. The influx of newcomers remains multifaceted and complex, with large numbers of African-Americans, Hispanics, South Asians, Koreans, and others each forming their own communities to varying degrees. The school system has already become majority-minority (less than 50 percent white), and according to the US Census, the nonwhite population measures about a third of the county as a whole, compared with about 10 percent in 1990.

Existing Land Use

Gwinnett's recent history has resulted in the land use patterns shown on Figure 5. This map shows existing land use in 2006.

Table 8 on page 18 shows low-density residential as the dominant single land use in Gwinnett, more than one-third of the County's total acreage. Large-lot 'estate' residential properties (listed within the Low Intensity Land Uses category) are another 11 percent of the County. In contrast, medium and high density residential together total less than five (5) percent of Gwinnett's total acreage. Although it dominates the landscape along many of Gwinnett's arterial roads, commercial/retail and office land uses only occupy some 4.4 percent of the County and industrial uses only slightly more at 5.1 percent). Public parks and other forms of non public conservation and green spaces total almost 12 percent though such areas are often less visibly located and may not be perceived to be this extensive.

Figure 5: Current Land Use

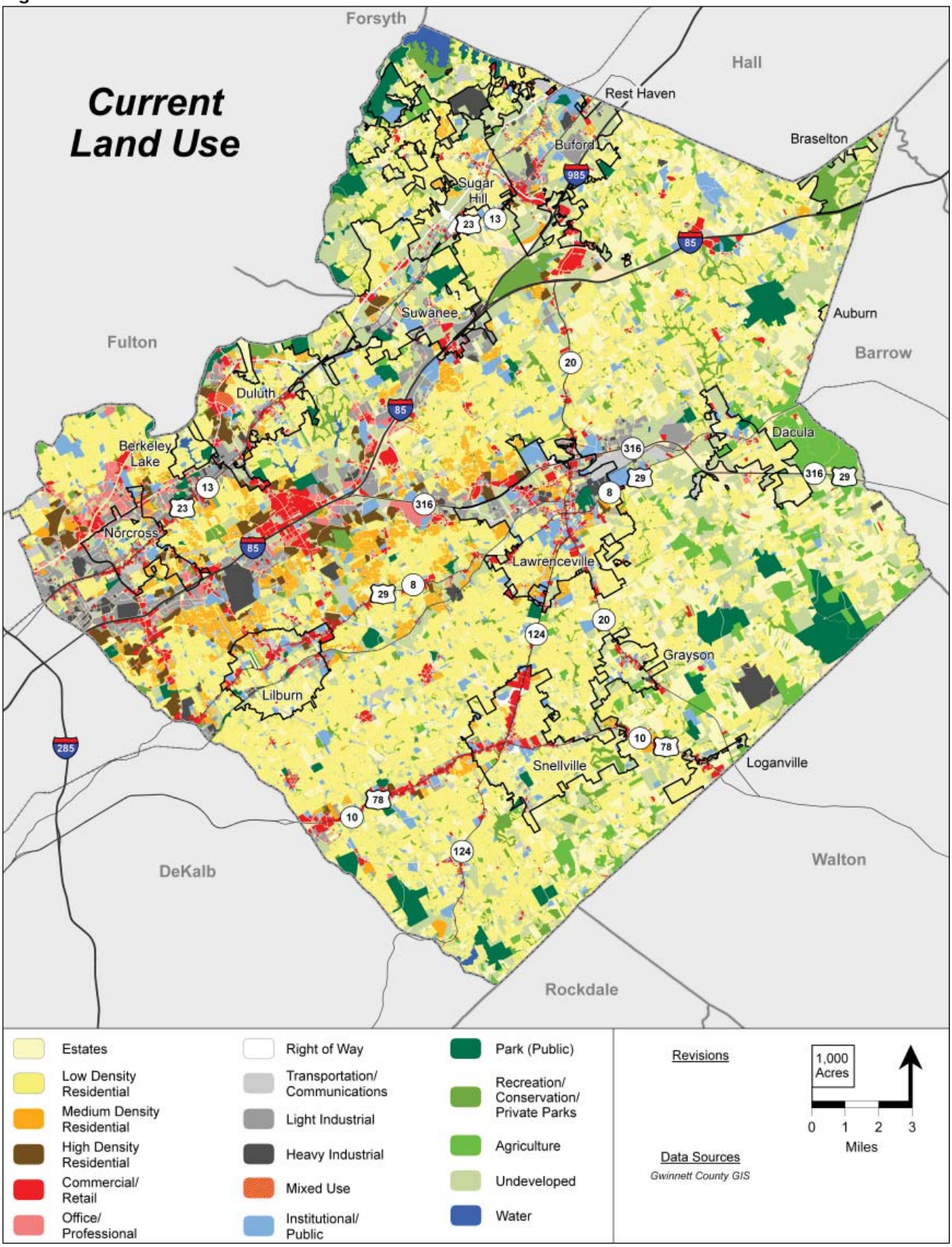


Table 8: Existing Land Uses by Acres and Percentage of Total

Land Use	Acres	Percentage
Residential		
Low Density Residential	91,286.1	35.0
Medium Density Residential	8,475.1	3.3
High Density Residential	4,211.3	1.6
Commercial/Office		
Commercial/Retail	8,650.6	3.3
Office/Professional	2,807.6	1.1
Industrial		
Light Industrial	9,279.4	3.6
Heavy Industrial	3,817.3	1.5
Mixed Use		
Mixed Use	1,196.5	0.5
Supportive Infrastructure		
Institutional/Public	10,387.0	4.0
Transportation/ Communications	3,730.0	1.4
Right of Way	21,488.7	7.6
Park (Public)	10,495.9	4.0
Recreation/Conservation		
Non-Public Parks	20,681.5	7.9
Water	376.6	0.1
Unlabeled	26.6	0.0
Low Intensity Land Uses		
Undeveloped	44,802.0	17.2
Agriculture	9,057.7	3.5
Estates	30,775.1	11.8
TOTAL	281,545	100.0

Source: Gwinnett County Department of Planning and Development

C.2.3 Issues to Address

- **Future of Remaining Undeveloped Lands**
  Gwinnett has become a much more urbanized County over the past three decades. Nevertheless, a large proportion of its land is still undeveloped or in active agriculture (20.7 percent together). These lands can be classified as greenfield opportunities for future development because they are largely without significant obstacles to new subdivision and construction. They are shown on Figure 6. A closer look at the size of the parcels that make up the greenfield lands reveals that the great majority of these parcels are small. Figures 7 through 9 show how few are the development opportunities on parcels 25 acres and larger. This is an important reality. It increases this Plan's sensitivity to conserving these scarce opportunities for optimal uses; it also highlights the dearth of larger parcels for economic development uses. The ultimate land use disposition of these areas of the County will be a major focus of the updated Unified Plan.

Definition of Low-Intensity Development

Residential parcels are considered to be low-intensity when:

- Their land value is greater than their building value; or
- Multi-family areas have less than 12 units / acre and more than one unit built prior to 1980.

Non-residential parcels are low-intensity when:

- Their land value is greater than their building value;
- They have an FAR* less than 0.2 and are located within 2 miles of a Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ) with housing valued at an average of more than $350,000 per parcel; or
- They have an FAR of less than 0.2 and are located within one mile of a highway interchange.

**FAR = Floor-Area Ratio, a measure of land use intensity (building gross square footage / lot area)*

Figure 6: Developable Greenfields

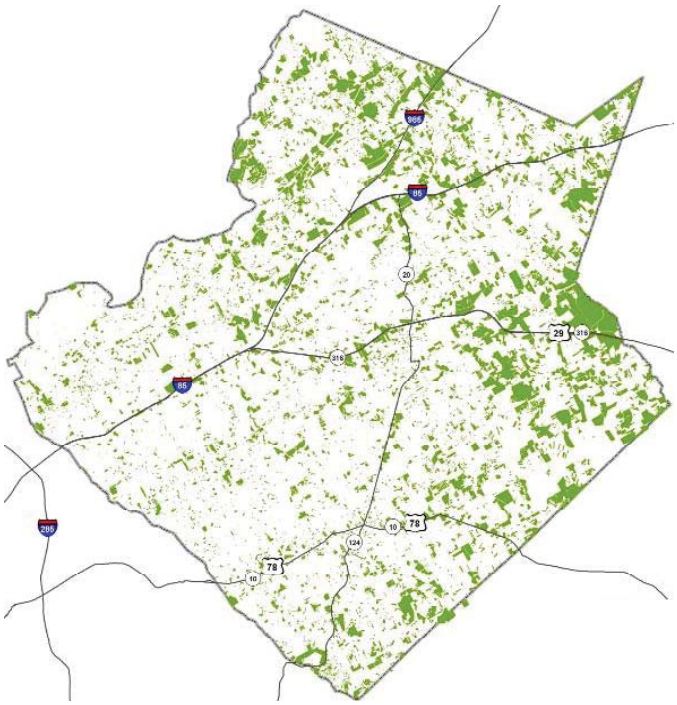


Figure 7: Developable Greenfields > 25 Acres

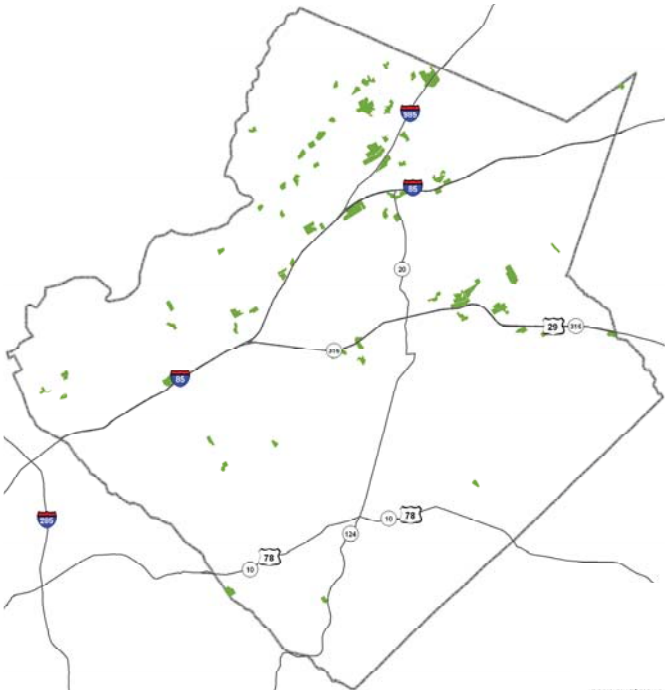


Figure 8: Developable Greenfields > 50 Acres

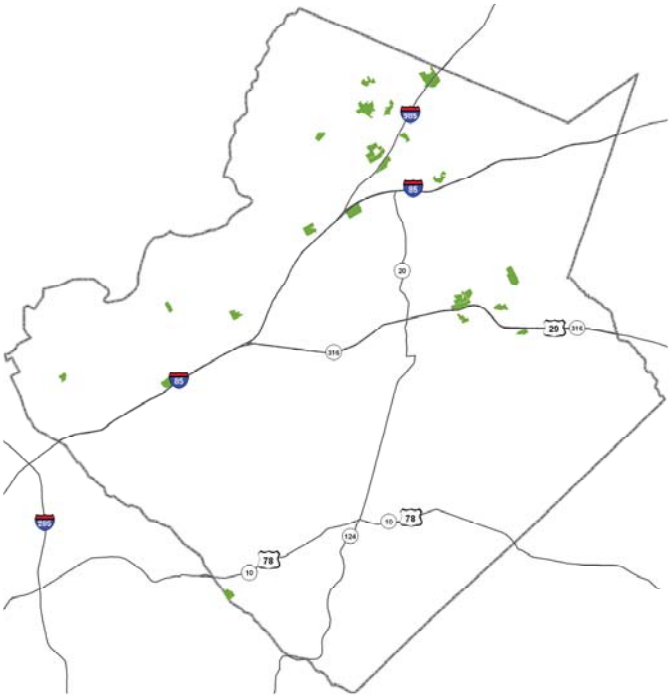
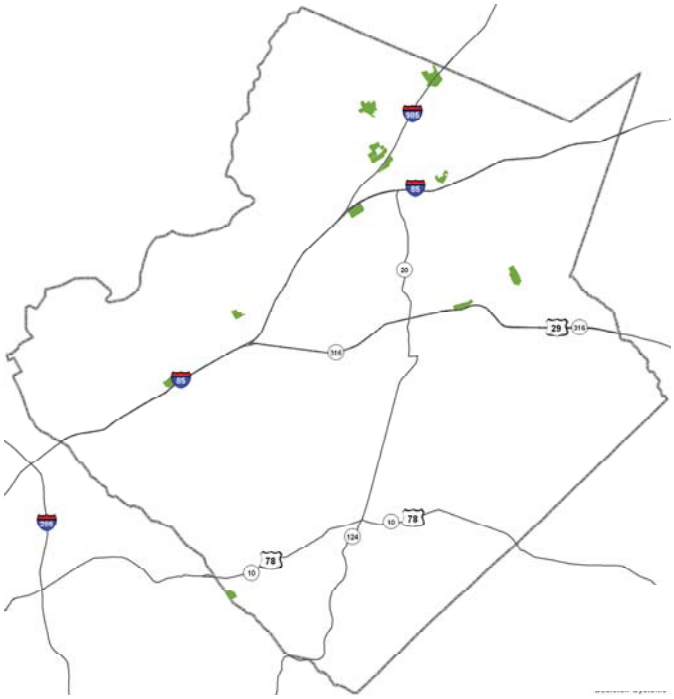


Figure 9: Developable Greenfields > 75 Acres



- Increasing Need to Redevelop Existing Uses
  Greenfield sites are not the only source of future land use change. Although 80 percent of the County is developed, many areas of Gwinnett are now or will be ripe for redevelopment in the coming years. One issue the updated Unified Plan addresses is how many of these areas may be redevelopable as new single uses or more mixed uses. This is especially true for many of the commercial and industrial areas that were built 20 to 50 years ago. Analysis done at the beginning of the planning process indicated that another 20 percent of Gwinnett is now, or is likely to be, ready for redevelopment over the life of the Unified Plan. Figures 10 and 11 show the remaining lands that a property data screening indicated were likely to be ready for residential or non-residential redevelopment, based on current zoning, within the planning horizon. In a planning effort like this, the current zoning on redevelopable parcels should not be viewed as an inflexible constraint on future usage, particularly given the small, scattered nature of the remaining Greenfield lands. This Unified Plan addresses the redevelopment needs of such areas and, in key respects, success of the Plan depends on such redevelopment, at specified locations, to achieve many of its priorities and absorb the levels of projected growth.

- Location of Potentially Developable Lands in Relation to Transportation Network
  Most of the greenfield sites are in the eastern and northeastern sections of the County, places that are generally away from the main regional transportation corridors. This makes them unlikely sites for significant employment development. On the other hand, most of the land near the more regionally accessible highways is already developed. To accommodate the level of economic development that the Plan outlines and accommodate the population growth such development will attract to Gwinnett, requires the County to plan for widespread redevelopment within many of its aging areas. Most of these are located in the southwest portions of the County.

Figure 10: Potential Commercial (Re)Development Land

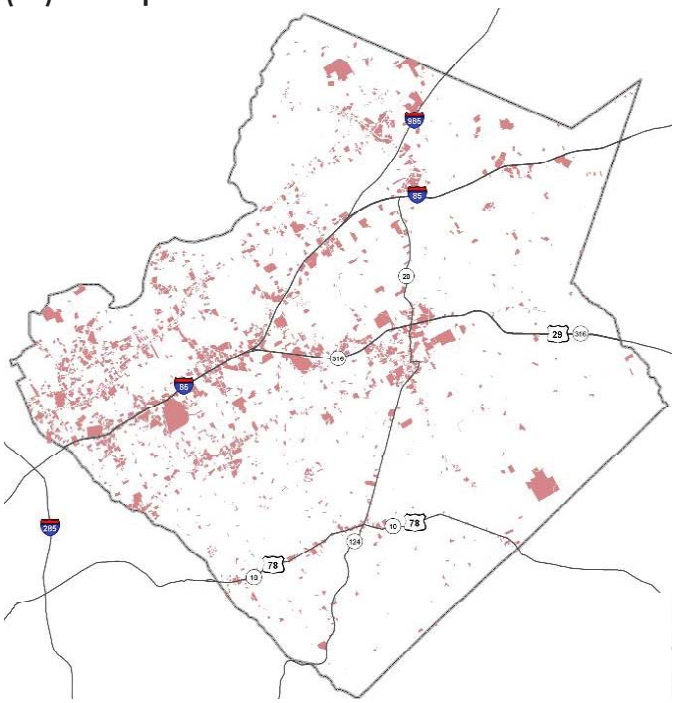
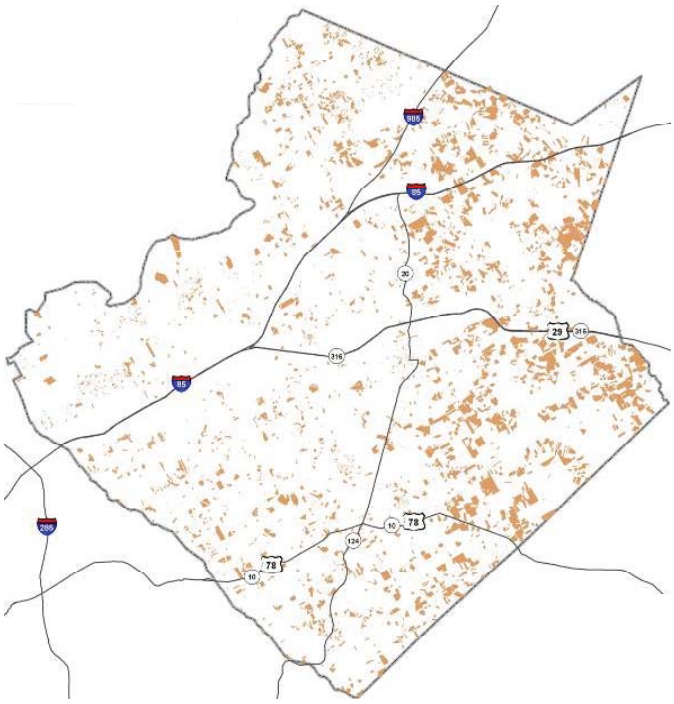


Figure 11: Potential Residential (Re)Development Land



C.3 Regional Setting and Implications

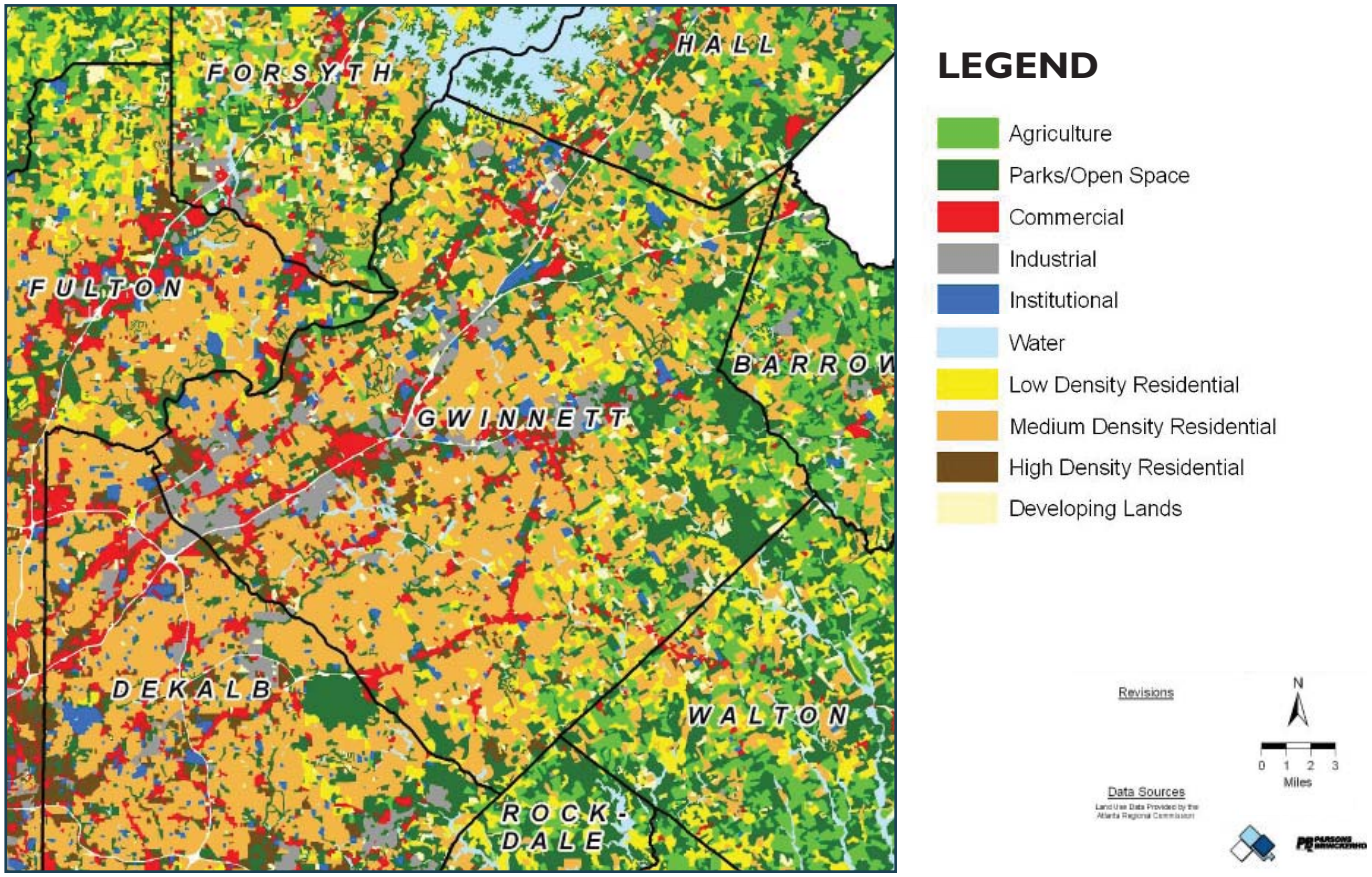
C.3.1 Overview

Gwinnett County is adjacent to seven different counties. Figure 12 shows the existing land uses in the jurisdictions surrounding Gwinnett and how they relate to uses within Gwinnett.

For the most part, uses along Gwinnett's borders are largely compatible with uses in Gwinnett. Indeed, the map clearly shows how many land use patterns in Gwinnett are, in essence, extensions of patterns established in the older jurisdictions to the west and south (e.g., along regional corridors such as I-85 or US 29). The map also shows how the still rural and relatively lightly developed areas of the east side of Gwinnett are a part of the region that is still part of the expanding suburban-rural edge. This edge is likely to push out much further during the life of this Unified Plan. Even if Gwinnett retains some of its rural character in this part of the County, the land use patterns in adjacent jurisdictions to the east are likely to change more drastically than along Gwinnett's other borders. Nevertheless, as the rest of this section describes, there will be changes all around Gwinnett.

The Unified Plan process included a staff analysis of the comprehensive plans (as available in early 2008) for the counties and cities surrounding Gwinnett. This review focused on the future land use maps of adjacent jurisdictions and identified planned development and redevelopment patterns within approximately three to four miles of Gwinnett County. The purpose of this review was to see where policies affecting land uses in these surrounding jurisdictions would be compatible or in conflict with what will occur nearby in Gwinnett.

Figure 12: Gwinnett's Land Use Context (2007)



General Overview

Gwinnett is adjacent to two of metropolitan Atlanta's urban core counties, Fulton and DeKalb to the west and south. The still exurban and rural counties (Hall, Barrow, Walton, and Jackson) are to the north and east. The growth centers and corridors of these counties are located away from Gwinnett's borders. Areas planned for the most intensive development are located in Forsyth County (Georgia 400) and in Rockdale County (I-20/Conyers) and are distant from Gwinnett's borders. Likewise, the growth centers of Hall, Barrow, Walton, and Jackson, are not close to Gwinnett County.

Mainly a product of Atlanta's earlier suburban expansion, the areas of Fulton and DeKalb near Gwinnett are generally projected to remain the less intensively developed portions of those two counties. They will remain predominately suburban in character, and the primary planning initiatives for these areas concern neighborhood preservation and redevelopment at appropriate locations.

The only locations where adjoining counties plan ambitious growth adjacent to Gwinnett are in Barrow County along University Parkway (SR 316) and in the cities and counties to the north along Interstates 85 and 985. Other than Loganville and the Athens Highway corridor, Walton County plans mainly lower intensity development near Gwinnett.

The following is a closer County-by-County look at current patterns or planned development for the areas within each jurisdiction that are closest to Gwinnett. (Land use plans for independent municipalities are included under the County in which they are located.)

C.3.2 Fulton County

Gwinnett County's westerly border with Fulton County extends for approximately 17 miles along the Chattahoochee River. Almost all this nearby land in Fulton County is located within the recently incorporated City of Johns Creek. Where Holcomb Bridge Road crosses the Chattahoochee River, the cities of Sandy Springs and Roswell in Fulton County also briefly share a common border with Gwinnett County.

City of Johns Creek[1]

The majority of development in Johns Creek near Gwinnett consists of upscale housing and is projected to continue as low to medium density single-family residential. Along the Chattahoochee River, the Johns Creek Plan shows a large amount of protected and environmentally sensitive land (parks/recreation/conservation) as well as some undeveloped areas near McGinness Ferry Road projected as low density residential. About five miles west of Gwinnett at the McGinness Ferry Road/Medlock Bridge Road (SR 141) intersection, the Johns Creek plan recognizes the growing office and medical district at the core of Johns Creek.

The Johns Creek plan also calls for mixed-use and higher density "live-work" communities up to four stories in height on Medlock Bridge Road close to Gwinnett (more specifically the City of Duluth). These live-work areas would be concentrated at the State Bridge Road (Pleasant Hill Road in Gwinnett) and Abbott's Bridge Road intersections and, to a lesser extent, the corridor connecting these nodes. Presently occupied primarily by shopping centers, scattered retail and office buildings, multifamily housing, and undeveloped tracts, the plan projects these areas will evolve into functional mixed-use communities through redevelopment, improved connectivity, and greater integration of land uses.

City of Roswell

The eastern tip of Roswell in Fulton County is the corner formed by Holcomb Bridge Road crossing the Chattahoochee River. At this point Gwinnett County and Roswell briefly share a border across the Chattahoochee River. The Future Land Use Map of the Roswell Comprehensive 2020 Plan indicates most of Roswell near Gwinnett County is built-out and anticipates no major changes in land use. Present uses in the area include a park bordering the river, large areas of single-family homes and some apartment and commercial development adjacent to Holcomb Bridge Road. Parcels in this area have

1 Shortly after its Dec. 1, 2006 incorporation, Johns Creek adopted the Interim Comprehensive Plan 2025 and Land Use Map. These documents are based on Fulton County's 2025 Comprehensive Plan (Focus Fulton) and the North Fulton County 2025 Land Use Plan. The city has just initiated creation of a new plan, The City of Johns Creek Comprehensive Plan 2030, which they expect to complete in November 2008. The status and nature of this plan will be monitored for issues significant to Gwinnett County. Documents from Johns Creek state that the community supports the main concepts of the recently completed North Fulton County 2025 Land Use Plan. Given this, and the well-established development patterns in the area, review of the present plan should give good guidance regarding the general location and intensity of land use anticipated near Gwinnett.

been acquired for green space and the city plans for a more extensive, multi-jurisdictional greenway along the Chattahoochee River.

City of Sandy Springs

The intersection of Holcomb Bridge Road and Spalding Drive forms a portion of the boundary between Gwinnett County and Fulton County. At this intersection the southwest quadrant is incorporated Sandy Springs in Fulton County. The City of Sandy Springs' Future Land Use Map shows the existing commercial and office development in this quadrant as suitable for a "community living working center." This designation supports redevelopment and/or adaptation of the existing development to form a mixed-use environment containing residences, businesses, public space, and supporting amenities. The plan shows the other nearby areas in Sandy Springs as remaining low-density residential communities.

C.3.3 DeKalb County

Gwinnett County's approximately 22 mile southeast border with DeKalb County is the longest shared with any adjoining county. The initial development surge in Gwinnett from the early 1970s to early 1980s was largely an outward expansion from DeKalb along Interstate 85 and other major thoroughfares including Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, Buford Highway, Lawrenceville Highway, and Stone Mountain Highway. Due to the historical and geographic relationships between the counties, the areas along this boundary share some common issues and opportunities.

The DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan Future Development Map designates the vast majority of DeKalb County near Gwinnett, either developed or planned, as suburban. This designation equates predominately to existing low to medium density residential and small-scale business development typical of metro-Atlanta's suburban areas. Only near extreme southern Gwinnett along Scenic Highway (SR 124) are there substantial undeveloped areas, however, these too are mainly planned for suburban development. Most of the land use policies for these areas emphasize maintaining stable residential areas and promoting mixed-use redevelopment within identified nodes and corridors. In this way, DeKalb's policies are consistent with what Gwinnett County has underway nearby in the Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District (CID) along Interstate 85 and in the Evermore CID along Stone Mountain Highway.

The major roads with redevelopment corridor designation on segments adjacent or near Gwinnett are Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, Buford Highway, Lawrenceville Highway and Stone Mountain Highway. At three intersections near Gwinnett, the plan calls for conversion of older, primarily commercial, districts into mixed-use "neighborhood centers" – "a neighborhood focal point with a concentration of activities such as retail, service commercial, professional office, higher-density housing, and appropriate public and open space." The DeKalb Plan recommends providing landmarks and signage at strategic locations to provide a sense of arrival and orientation. Toward this sense of place objective, gateway signage and other features are planned along the DeKalb/Gwinnett border at Interstate 85 and several arterial roads.

City of Doraville

Near Buford Highway, the City of Doraville borders Gwinnett County for a distance of approximately one mile. The Future Development Map of the City of Doraville 2006-2026 calls for Buford Highway in this vicinity to remain a commercial corridor. However, the Plan lays the groundwork for converting the highway's "strip commercial" character into that of a traditional shopping district by using a zoning overlay that requires such things as reorienting buildings closer to the street, pedestrian safety improvements, design/architectural guidelines, and creation of an attractive streetscape.

I-285 and the Doraville MARTA station are located approximately 1.5 miles down Buford Highway from Gwinnett County. Doraville plans to take advantage of the MARTA station by redeveloping the area between Buford Highway and the station as a transit-oriented town center. This mixed-use redevelopment will serve as the city's center of civic activity, include a town green, and provide opportunities for traditional main street retail with an international theme. Longer term, the city's plan forecasts two additional mixed-use centers, one on the site of the soon to be closed GM plant and another in the northeast quadrant of the I-285/Buford Highway interchange. To improve transportation and promote redevelopment in Doraville, the plan also accounts for bus rapid transit (BRT) on Buford Highway.

C.3.4 Rockdale County

Approximately two miles of Gwinnett's southeastern

county line borders Rockdale County. Although a number of new subdivisions have been built in this portion of Gwinnett County, it retains a rural, low-density residential character. This low-intensity development pattern continues into Rockdale County. The Rockdale County Future Land Use Map adopted January 9, 2007 seeks to preserve rural/low-density residential as the predominant land use near Gwinnett County. These areas are shown as low-density residential or watershed protection on the plan with recommended maximum housing densities ranging from 0.3 to one unit per acre. The watershed protection category calls for extremely low-density development and other measures to protect the surface water that flows to Randy Poynter Lake, formerly known as the Big Haynes Creek Reservoir, the main water source for Rockdale County.

C.3.5 Walton County

Most of the nearby areas in Walton County on the future land use map of the Joint City-County Comprehensive Plan 2006-2026 (Future Land Use Map) are suburban. The suburban designation calls for very low-density housing, rural/agricultural uses, and some neighborhood-scale business centers. Near Gwinnett, at the Bold Springs Road/Charles S. Floyd Road (SR 81) intersection, the plan shows a village center. This is envisioned as a low-intensity mixed-use area much like a small town or hamlet. Near southern Gwinnett, the plan indicates another village center at the Loganville Highway (SR 20)/Rosebud Road intersection. Adjacent segments of Loganville Highway have the highway corridor classification, where larger scale commercial development including major shopping centers and "big box" retailers are projected.

City of Loganville

Extending partially into Gwinnett, the City of Loganville represents the portion of Walton County with the most substantial development near Gwinnett. The city plan largely reflects the existing development pattern in and adjacent to Loganville. Community-scale commercial development is shown along U.S. Highway 78 on either side of the downtown area. The surrounding area is classified primarily as low density residential. (Note: The Community Agenda document (Comprehensive Plan) for Loganville was not yet available at the time this Gwinnett Unified Plan was drafted).

C.3.6 Barrow County

Most of the property near Gwinnett in Barrow County and the City of Auburn is designated as emerging suburban or suburban neighborhood on the County's Character Areas Map. These classifications equate mainly to low-density residential housing with some supporting community and neighborhood commercial development. The Character Areas Map designates three locations in Barrow for concentrations of business activity that are adjacent or near Gwinnett County. These are along University Parkway (SR 316), in the City of Auburn, and near Interstate 85 adjacent to the City of Braselton.

A large industrial district borders Gwinnett County along University Parkway. The plan shows commercial uses along the Interstate 85 corridor at Winder Highway (SR 211) and Hog Mountain-Braselton Road (SR 124).

City of Auburn

The City of Auburn extends slightly into Gwinnett County along approximately one mile of the eastern border. The Character Areas Map shows a commercial corridor near Gwinnett County along Winder Highway.

C.3.7 Jackson County

Most of the land in Jackson County in proximity to Gwinnett County is now part of the City of Braselton. The Jackson County 2017 Future Land Use Map recognizes Interstate 85 near Gwinnett as an industrial corridor. Other areas near Gwinnett are shown as low density residential.

City of Braselton

The City of Braselton lies along Interstate 85 and is primarily in Jackson County but also includes portions in Gwinnett, Barrow, and Hall Counties. In recent years, Braselton has annexed several thousand acres along Interstate 85 and Hog Mountain-Braselton Road such that the city now extends from Gwinnett County and the Chateau Elan development northward on I-85 beyond Exit 129 (SR 53). The Town of Braselton Future Land Use Map 2023 adopted in 2003 and updated in November 2007 shows a number of low-density residential areas existing or planned near Gwinnett. However the majority of the property is shown as light industrial It is most likely intended for office/warehouse uses. Braselton's Plan also shows major commercial districts surrounding Exit 126 (SR 211) and Exit 129 (SR 53).

C.3.8 Hall County

The Future Land Use Map of the Gainesville-Hall County Comprehensive plan was adopted on June 24, 2004 and most recently amended on May 12, 2005. Low-density residential remains the primary planned land use near Gwinnett. However, the plan designates some large areas in the Interstate 85 and 985 corridors for more intensive land uses. West of I-85, just above Braselton and the northeastern point of Gwinnett County is a large area designated for industrial and mixed-use development surrounding the Road Atlanta racing complex. Other locations where intensive land use is planned near Gwinnett include a commercial/retail district on Spout Springs Road and the River Place mixed-use medical complex on Thompson Mill Road. River Place will be anchored by a 100-bed hospital associated with the Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville. Along the Gainesville Connector (I-985) adjacent to the portion of Buford in Hall County large areas are shown in commercial/ retail, industrial, and mixed-use classifications around the Friendship Road exit.

C.3.9 Forsyth County

Gwinnett County's border with Forsyth County extends from Lake Lanier south along the Chattahoochee River to McGinnis Ferry Road. The Forsyth County 2025 Future Land Use Map designates most of the land near Gwinnett as low density residential. The plan projects the most intensive development in close proximity to Gwinnett on Cumming Highway (SR 20) near Buford and Lake Lanier. This development would be associated with the Windermere master planned community and is recommend as having commercial, retail, mixed-use, and multifamily residential components.

About five miles west of Gwinnett along McGinnis Ferry Road, the plan recommends a large area as commercial and industrial surrounding the Medlock Bridge Road (SR 141) intersection. This reflects the growing employment and retail center found in the Johns Creek master planned development that extends south ward into Fulton County.

C.4 Economic Well Being and Opportunity

C.4.1 Atlanta's Favored Quarter

Gwinnett is fortunate to lie within the Atlanta region's favored quarter – the radiating quarter of the region in which the bulk of white-collar jobs locate and which attracts the largest portion of both executive and affordable new housing growth. Atlanta's favored quarter largely equates to the area north of Downtown between I-75 and I-85 and is anchored by the Georgia 400 corridor and the Chattahoochee River. According to Census figures, between 1990 and 2000, nearly 80% of the region's job growth occurred within this favored quarter. Although an increasing amount of growth has located in areas outside of the favored quarter in the last few years, the large majority of growth will continue to move up I-75, I-85 and Georgia 400.

Much of the region's new office development is projected by economists to occur in the metro cores within the favored quarter. Metro cores are concentrations of office employment and regional activity and have evolved as the metro area continues to grow. Atlanta's largest metro cores include Downtown, Midtown, Buckhead, Central Perimeter and Cumberland-Galleria. These latter three cores are examples of 3rd generation cores. These 3rd generation cores were founded in the 1970s and dominated office growth in the 1980s. In the 1990s, they evolved into major employment and activity concentrations.

Although still experiencing positive growth in the years afterwards, the 3rd generation cores have experienced gradual declines in their capture of new office and retail demand, in part due to significant traffic congestion along major freeways feeding the cores. Demand for new office space has been increasingly met in newer 4th generation cores, (typically more amorphous and somewhat edgeless) located even further out from the center of the region. The strongest example of a 4th generation core in Atlanta is the Georgia 400 North corridor in North Fulton, which accounted for close to half of the region's office growth in the late 1990s and 2000s. The Gwinnett Place Mall and Sugarloaf areas in Gwinnett are among the emerging 4th generation cores.

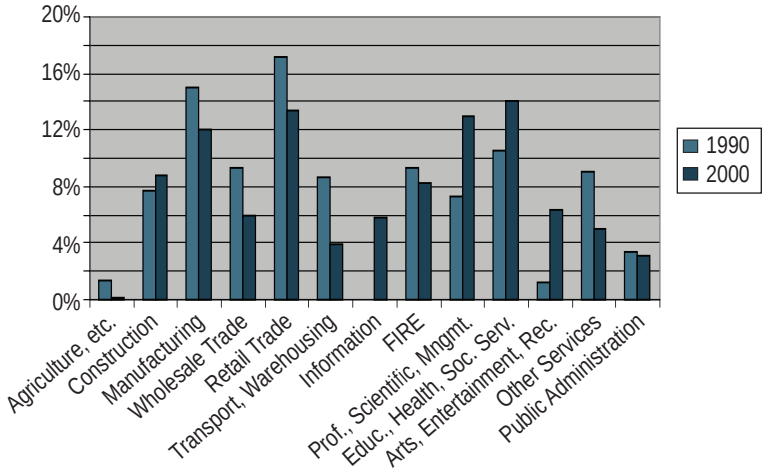
Employment growth in Gwinnett County has been relatively strong over the past few years, averaging more than 5,000 net new jobs per year from 2000 to 2006.[2]

Over the past three years, the Northeast/ I-85 corridor (which includes Gwinnett County) has captured slightly more than its fair share of office absorption (representing 10 percent of current space compared to 12 percent of absorption).[3] While there has been much discussion of shifting attitudes towards more inside-the-perimeter lifestyle, Gwinnett County and the rest of the suburbs still constitute a large capture of the metro area's employment growth. This is a trend that is likely to continue over the next few decades.

C.4.2 Current Employment Trends

Gwinnett County's residents are employed in a wide range of industries. Significant changes between 1990 and 2000 include job growth in the professional, education and health, and arts and entertainment industries.

Figure 13: Employment by Industry, 1990-2000



Source: 1990 and 2000 Census (SF3)

Table 9: Unemployment Rate, 1990-2000

	Labor Force 1990	Unemployed 1990	Percent Unemployed	Labor Force 2000	Unemployed 2000	Percent Unemployed
Gwinnett County	210,295	6,646	3.16%	325,379	10,596	3.26%

Table 10: Personal Income by Type

	1990 Constant Dollars	1990 Percentage	2000 Dollars	2000 Percentage	Difference
Wage or Salary	$7,161,124,061	86.20	12,422,379,700	85.40	-0.80
Other Types	$59,077,605	0.70	152,224,200	1.00	0.30
Self Employment	$472,778,197	5.70	801,120,400	5.50	-0.20
Interest, Dividends, Rental	$317,018,907	3.80	494,207,100	3.40	-0.40
Social Security	$146,010,769	1.80	287,405,300	2.00	0.20
Public Assistance	$12,794,760	0.15	29,618,600	0.20	0.00
Retirement	$134,919,270	1.60	357,304,100	2.50	0.90
Total Income	$8,303,723,578		$14,544,259,400		

Source: 1990 and 2000 Census (SF3); 1990 CPI was 130.7

2 Source: 2007 Atlanta Regional Commission estimates

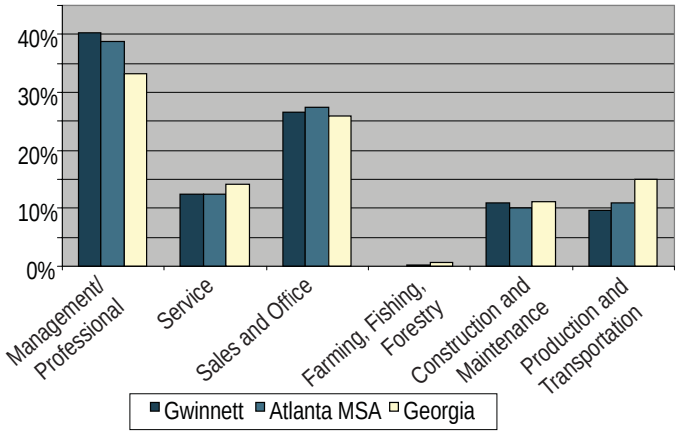
3 Source: CoStar 4th Quarter Office Guide 2007

Labor Force

Gwinnett County's unemployment rate of 3.26 percent in 2000 (Table 9) was lower than the state average of 3.5 percent and the national rate of 4.0 percent. However, five of Gwinnett's Cities had unemployment rates higher than the national average in 2000. Buford, Dacula, Grayson, Lawrenceville, and Norcross each had unemployment rates of more than 4.0%, with Norcross the highest at 6.3% according to Census figures.

One 2003 American Community Survey (ACS) indicates that a higher percentage of Gwinnett residents are employed in management and professional fields and construction and maintenance than the Atlanta region as a whole (See Figure 14). Compared with the state, Gwinnett has a higher percentage of management and professional jobs and a lower percentage of production and transportation employee residents. The 2003 ACS also indicates that 84 percent of Gwinnett residents employed were private wage and salary workers, 10 percent were federal, state, or local government workers, and 6 percent were self-employed.

Figure 14: Occupations in Gwinnett Compared to MSA and State, 2003



Source: 2003 American Community Survey, Selected Economic Characteristics

Table 10 shows that the trends in personal income have remained stable from 1990 to 2000. Somewhat more Gwinnett residents are earning income through retirement now than in 1990, an indicator of an aging population.

Table 11 shows the median wage earned in 1999 for males and females in Gwinnett County.

Table 11: Median Earnings in 1999 by Sex

1999 Median Earnings	Male	Female
Gwinnett County	$36,403	$24,903
Atlanta MSA	$32,654	$22,916
Georgia	$29,053	$19,649

Source: 2000 Census

Several significant trends will shape economic growth and investment in Gwinnett in the coming years.

- Gwinnett is transitioning from an industrial job center to a more office-oriented job center;
- Gwinnett will continue as a major regional shopping destination for the I-85 corridor;
- Several areas, particularly those in the southern end of the county are adjusting to revitalization; and
- Currently Gwinnett lacks a center or downtown area, although multiple centers are emerging as cities are reinvesting in their downtowns.

The following represents a more detailed discussion of these major trends.

From Industrial to Office Based Economy

Historically, Gwinnett's economy has been concentrated in warehouse, distribution, manufacturing, and retail services jobs tied to the role of Interstate 85 as the primary distribution corridor in the Southeast. Consistent with the evolution of metro cores discussed earlier, the Gwinnett/I-85 corridor now includes an emerging office core as jobs continue to follow executive housing growing between the Chattahoochee River and I-85. This emerging office core can be expected to grow. The scale and regional significance of such growth may depend on the degree that Gwinnett County pursues accommodating such economic development.

Although the industrial market in Gwinnett County remains strong, the supply of land for this market is decreasing significantly, resulting in shifting industrial growth to more exurban areas such as Jackson County, as well as to southern Atlanta region counties such as Henry and South Fulton where land is currently cheaper. In 2007, of the 6.3 million square feet of industrial space either delivered or under construction in the Northeast Atlanta submarket, only 1.7 million square feet, or 27 percent, was located in Gwinnett County. This share of new activity is significantly below Gwinnett County's 53 percent share of existing industrial space in the northeast Atlanta submarket.[4]

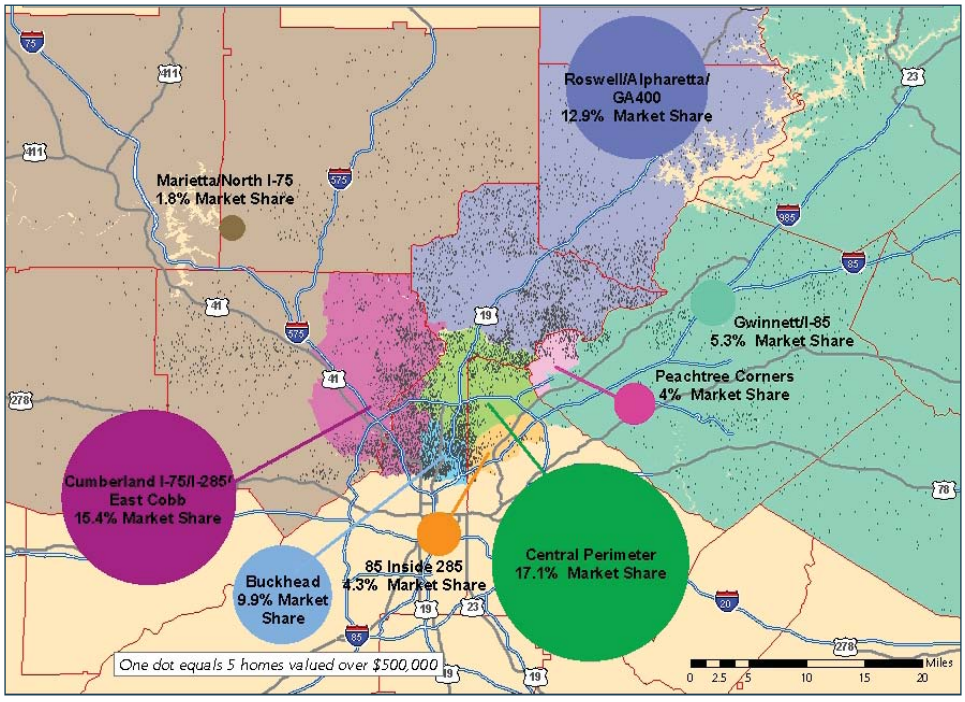
4 Source: CoStar 4th Quarter 2007 Industrial Guide

Figure 15 shows this close relationship between centers of office growth and upper income housing within Atlanta's favored quadrant.

As executive housing has continued to emerge along the Chattahoochee River in Gwinnett County (in particular the Sugarloaf/Civic Center area), office growth has continued to decentralize. Office growth has increased along I-85 in Gwinnett County, particularly around Gwinnett Place Mall outward to Sugarloaf Parkway. Outside of Peachtree Corners and some mid-rise office surrounding Gwinnett Place Mall, office flex space or service centers were the only viable options for prospective office tenants until the latter part of the 1990s. Since then, the supply of true office space has increased to accommodate an emerging demand.

Stimulated by the county's rapid residential growth, supporting developments such as the Mall of Georgia, the Gwinnett office market experienced more substantial growth in the early part of this decade. However, until recently Gwinnett has suffered from high vacancy rates, which has stalled new development. Currently there is nearly 500,000 square feet of office space under construction and an additional 300,000 square feet planned.[5] Although Gwinnett office vacancies are still high overall, they are approaching normal levels in areas furthest south on I-85, particularly in the Peachtree Corners area. It appears that despite existing high vacancies, developers are banking on continued job and population growth in Gwinnett to fill new office space.

Figure 15: Locations of Office Concentrations Relative to Executive Housing



Source: Housing data from Claritas, Inc; Office data from Dorey's 4th Quarter 2007 Office Guide

The most prominent submarket for office development in Gwinnett County has historically been Peachtree Corners, near Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and Jimmy Carter Boulevard. This area, characterized by single-story and mid-rise space surrounded by

5 Source: Dorey's 4th Quarter 2007 Office Guide

business parks and residential subdivisions, offered the only viable option for companies seeking to establish operations in the northeastern sector of the metro area. However, as more office space has emerged along I-85, the market in Peachtree Corners has tightened. There has been only 100,000 square feet of space built since 2001 and since early 2005 vacancies have steadily dropped in the Peachtree Corners area, dropping to 17.8 percent in the fourth quarter of 2007.[6]

Enabled by its solid labor base, close proximity to I-85 and GA Highway 316, and considerable supply of executive housing, the Sugarloaf / Civic Center area has emerged as the new corporate center of business in the county. The majority of recent development activity in the Gwinnett/I-85 submarket has occurred in this area and it serves as the primary supplier of new Class A office space. This area has further benefited by the near build-out conditions in the Peachtree Corners area.

One noteworthy, yet challenging trend to quantify is the strong growth in Gwinnett, and the Atlanta region of smaller office firms increasingly locating in suburban areas. Technology is allowing small firms to locate away from major employment cores, typically closer to where the firm owner or manager resides. This trend has led to a proliferation of office condominiums and small office buildings in many areas of Gwinnett, including in some town centers; a trend that will likely continue to gain momentum in the coming years.

Retail Sector Challenges

Gwinnett County is now a major retail destination serving not only northeast Atlanta, but much of northeast Georgia. The I-85 corridor is home to three major regional malls, including:[7]

1. **Gwinnett Place Mall**
   Built in 1984, this was the original regional mall in the county. With 1.2 million square feet plus significant retail in surrounding "big box" centers, Gwinnett Place is now experiencing significant competition from other regional retail cores and needs to reposition the itself in the regional market;
2. **Discover Mills**
   1.1 million square feet, built in 2001 to offer more value, outlet shopping; and

3. **Mall of Georgia**
   Built in 1999 with 1.7 million square feet of space, plus significant additional space in surrounding centers, the Mall of Georgia is among the largest retail nodes in the Southeast and serves much of northeast Georgia.

There is increasing concern that the market cannot support three regional malls within such close proximity and that at least one of these malls may potentially be affected by this oversupply.

Another significant question is whether Gwinnett is over retailed. Roughly 10% of Gwinnett's approximately 27 million square feet of retail space, (not including free-standing space) sits vacant today.[8] This means Gwinnett has roughly 35 square feet of multi-tenant space per person, well above the U.S. average of 21 square feet per person and above the Atlanta MSA average of approximately 28 square feet per person.[9] The ability of Gwinnett County to support this large amount of retail, and issues of retail abandonment in aging suburban areas (an issue nationally, not just in Gwinnett) will require an understanding of the future of these aging strip retail corridors and centers and the impact they have on surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Retail expenditures are being spread across too much space, resulting in high vacancies and, in many cases, centers that are suffering from disinvestment. This over-supply of retail is negatively impacting the retail market in the sales achieved per square foot (Table 12) which, in turn, negatively impacts the rents that properties can garner. Although the sales in Gwinnett County are performing better than Georgia as a whole, they are significantly below the U.S. average and are likely below the metro Atlanta average as well.

6 Source: CoStar 4th Quarter 2007 Office Guide
7 Mall data from Dorey's 4th Quarter 2007 Retail Guide
8 Source: Dorey's 4th Quarter 2007 Retail Guide
9 Source: RCLCO analysis of local, regional, and national retail figures

Table 12: Impacts of Over Supply of Retail Space

	U.S.	Georgia	Gwinnett County
Sales per Square Foot	$253	$222	$230*

**Please note that $230 per square foot is likely optimistic as the secondary retail data sources have eliminated small centers and chronically vacant centers from their statistics.*
Source: US and Georgia figures from National Research Bureau's 2006 Shopping Center Census. Gwinnett figures compiled from ESRI retail sales data and Dorey's 4th Quarter 2007 Retail Guide

According to CoStar, there are three retail submarkets in Gwinnett County: Peachtree Corners/Norcross, Snellville/ Stone Mountain, and Northeast Gwinnett. The tables below demonstrates that the aging retail submarkets (Snellville) are struggling to keep competitive rents and fill space while the newer submarkets are performing better and likely siphoning demand from the older properties.

Table 13: Average Rents ($/SF)

	2005	2006	2007
Peachtree Corners	$14.98	$16.91	$17.26
Snellville	$11.52	$10.91	$11.39
NE Gwinnett	$15.02	$16.59	$16.48
Metro Atlanta	$14.34	$15.63	$15.37

Source: Dorey's 4th Quarter Retail Market Report

Table 14: Vacancy Rates

	2005	2006	2007
Peachtree Corners	7.6%	8.2%	14.8%
Snellville	14.8%	17.3%	19.8%
NE Gwinnett	9.8%	9.7%	17.2%
Metro Atlanta	10.5%	11.8%	16.6%

Source: Dorey's 4th Quarter Retail Market Report

Adjusting to Revitalization

To date, the large majority of new development in Gwinnett County has been greenfield development. Redevelopment is difficult, logistically and financially, and until recently was nearly impossible due to a lack of mixed-use zoning regulations. The county is in the process of exploring means by which some of the areas that built out 10 to 25 years ago can experience reinvestment.

In part due to the market saturation of retail discussed previously, many areas within the county are adjusting to retail revitalization. Retail abandonment has created the perception, and in some cases the reality, of crime. Most of the concentration of disinvestment is in the southwestern portion of the county, areas in which most of the new development occurred 25 years ago and are now having to compete with the "shinier, newer" competition further north in the county.

Many of the older apartments have become the primary means to serve affordable housing needs in the county and have attracted significant population of recent immigrants. The upkeep and quality of these concentrations of earlier apartment developments is both an economic development issue as well as part of Gwinnett's challenges regarding housing affordability and housing choices.

Gwinnett County selected three areas of the county to study how revitalization may take place, each representing a different prototype of redevelopment. Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) have been formed in these areas to help spur revitalization.

1. **Gwinnett Place Mall**: A major retail core that has the opportunity to turn into a more integrated metro core with office, retail and residential.
2. **Gwinnett Village**: A large area that has older single-family homes, lower density apartment stock, and aging retail complexes.
3. **Evermore**: A corridor (Stone Mountain Highway) that is largely over-supplied with retail and lacks integration of uses.

Building Urban Centers

No single city currently serves as downtown Gwinnett. Most parts of Gwinnett County typify the sprawling, suburban development model with single-family subdivisions and garden-style apartments separate from strip retail and local-serving offices.

Gwinnett Place Mall once served as one of Gwinnett's major activity centers but was developed primarily for retail and is now adjusting to competition from other regional malls. As the mall area tries to reinvent itself, it has the opportunity to evolve into a central hub for the county. But to do so requires finding answers to the challenges posed by traffic congestion and the physical, financial and functional complexities of infill development and redevelopment.

Numerous Gwinnett cities are creating small, community-serving centers either through redevelopment of their historic downtowns or the creation of a new town center based on Main Street scale mixed-use developments.

The magnitude of growth projected for the county will require that the types of developments built in the future be different from today's typical low key suburban model.

- **Existing city centers:** Duluth, Suwanee, Norcross, Snellville, and Lawrenceville
- **Planned city centers:** Lilburn, Buford/Mall of Georgia, and Grayson

Although these efforts are relatively modest on a regional scale, they seek to integrate retail, higher-density housing, local-serving office, and public services (among other uses) to create a focal point for the community.

The magnitude of growth projected for the County (See Part 2.A), the shifting demographics and market factors such as land values, will require that the types of developments built in the future be different from today's typical low key suburban model. The most concentrated and ambitious changes in scale and character are likely to emerge from today's edgeless centers such as the area around the Mall of Georgia or the area around Gwinnett Place. Furthermore, although none of the town center efforts cited above represents a regionally significant concentration of activities, several cities are also exploring the potential of more urban-scale development nodes on land within their boundaries near major transportation facilities that include potential transit. Successful change of such locations to a more urban feel may give Gwinnett a greater variety of local centers and will add to Gwinnett's attractiveness for new employers and residents.

C.4.3 Issues to Address

- **Promote shift from industrial to an office dominated economic base.** Gwinnett's future well being will depend in large part on its ability to attract a larger share of regional office employment. This will require an appropriately trained labor force, suitable sites to develop, better regional access and a quality of life that attracts and retains the executives of such office based enterprises and their employees.

- **Prevent future "over-retailing" of Gwinnett and establish a retail base more in line with future demand.** Gwinnett County provides roughly 35 square feet of multi-tenant space per person, well above the U.S. average of 21 square feet per person and above the Atlanta MSA average of approximately 28 square feet per person.[10] In addition, approximately 10 percent of Gwinnett's 27 million square feet of retail space (not including free-standing space) is vacant.[11] Gwinnett's ability to support this large amount of retail and issues of retail abandonment need to be addressed.

- **Develop strategies to deal with redevelopment needs.** Gwinnett needs to have in place a variety of effective ways to redevelop extensive existing and expected future needs in commercial, industrial and residential areas.

- **Create new centers within Gwinnett.** Gwinnett currently lacks any regionally significant non-retail based centers. The most likely places for such centers to emerge may be through transforming such places as the areas around the Mall of Georgia or Gwinnett Place Mall into more urban mixed-use centers.

10 Source: RCLCO analysis of local, regional, and national retail
11 Source: Dorey's 4th Quarter 2007 Retail Guide

C.5 Housing and Community Services

Gwinnett County benefits from a high-quality housing environment, particularly for families seeking a safe and appealing place to raise their children. One challenge of the Unified Plan is to broaden such opportunities for a changing population. In keeping with this, the Unified Plan's housing policies and strategies respond to the vision statement, adopted by the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners in 1995:

"Gwinnett County will reflect a safe well-balanced, quality of life for people of all backgrounds and economic circumstances. The county should be a place where all people can feel good about where they live, have the opportunity for employment, have a sense of community spirit and are concerned for their future and the well being of their neighbors."

C.5.1 Trends

Development over the last 20 years has focused on single-family detached housing, the type most highly sought by area residents. Gwinnett offers good-quality housing in a variety of subdivisions, several of which offer attractive amenities and have homeowner associations to help to maintain them and the residents' quality of life. Several cities in the County offer quality housing often featuring historic street grids and walkable environments.

Housing Types and Distribution

The success of the single-family subdivision model has made it the dominant housing offered and thereby limited other housing choices available to Gwinnett County residents. As of 2000, 71.4 percent of the county's housing stock was detached single-family homes with townhouses making up an additional 3.7 percent. Multifamily housing represented 22.4 percent of all units in the county. Continuing the trend, since 2000 new construction consisted almost exclusively of single-family homes. This was 88 percent of new units according to building permit data from 2000 to 2006. Even though nationally, attached townhouses grew from five (5) percent of new home sales in 2000 to 22.6 percent in 2007, in Gwinnett, the private market and decisions were responding to only part of Gwinnett's housing needs. An increasing proportion of Gwinnett's population are groups whose needs and lifestyles do not require the typical single-family subdivision type of housing. In 2007, Claritas, Inc. estimated that 17.3 percent of all Gwinnett County households were single people and 29.7 percent were two person families. Many of these smaller households are empty nesters whose children have moved out. The county's population over the age of 65 is expected to nearly double in the next 20 years.

One interesting aspect of Gwinnett's housing patterns is the distribution of housing for different racial and ethnic groups. This is a distribution that makes apparent Gwinnett's increasing diversity, as well as the distribution of housing by income groups.

Figures 16 through 18, from a study for this Plan of ownership housing patterns by Daniel Immergluck of the City and Regional Planning Program of Georgia Tech, show the percentage within census tracts of home purchases in 2004 by three major minority groups – Asians, Hispanics and African-Americans. Although there are discernable concentrations of ethnic buyers

in some census tracts, the most interesting aspect of these maps is how such groups are establishing a widespread presence throughout the county. Gwinnett County was an overwhelmingly predominant white jurisdiction less than two decades ago.

A similar distribution also affects house purchases by various income groups. As Figures 19 and 20 show, in 2004 low income and moderate income families purchased homes all across Gwinnett. Although there remain clear patterns of where higher and lower income families predominate, the spatial divides between different income groups are not as absolute as may be commonly thought.

Figure 16: Percentage of Home Purchase Loans for Owner-Occupied Homes to Asians by Census Tract, 2004

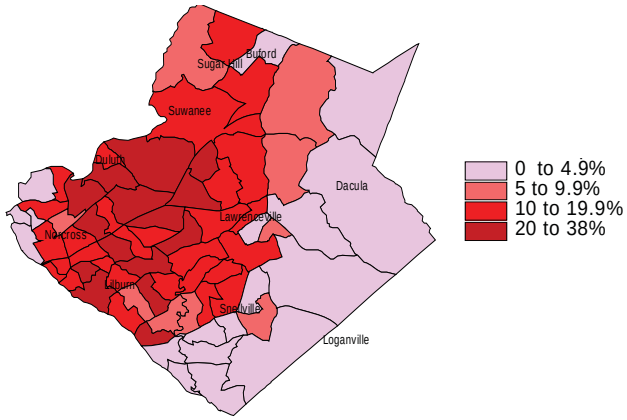


Figure 17: Percentage of Home Purchase Loans for Owner-Occupied Homes to African-Americans by Census Tract, 2004

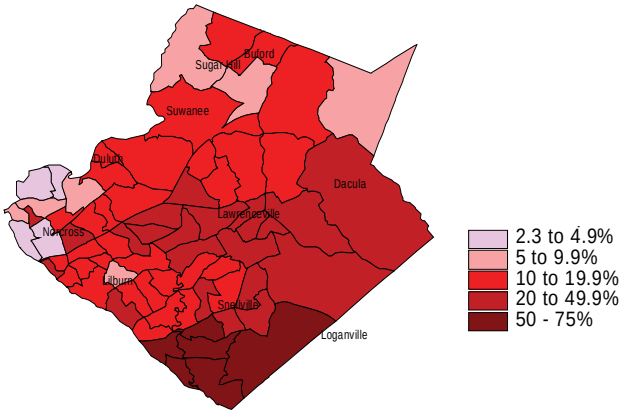


Figure 18: Percentage of Home Purchase Loans for Owner-Occupied Homes to Hispanics by Census Tract, 1997-2004

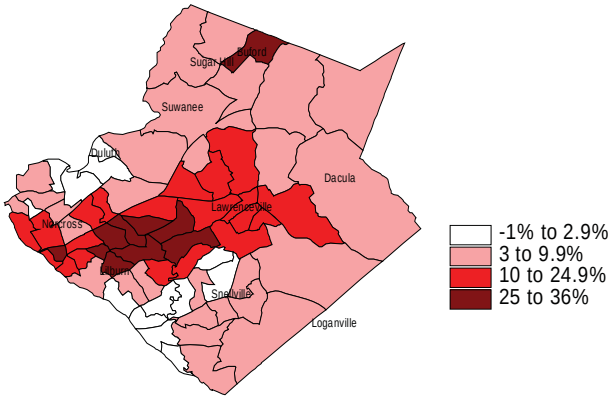


Figure 19: Percentage of Home Purchase Loans for Owner-Occupied Homes to Buyers with Low Incomes by Census Tract, 2004

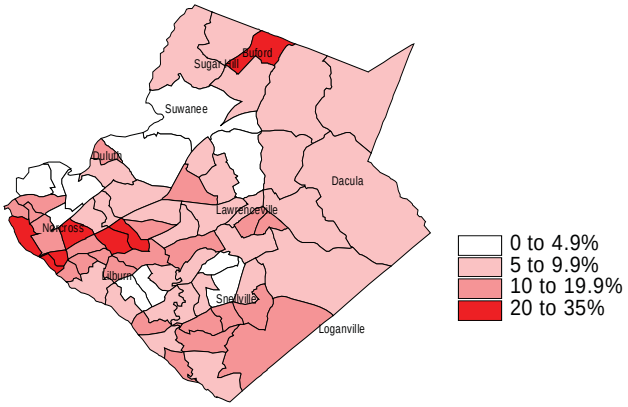
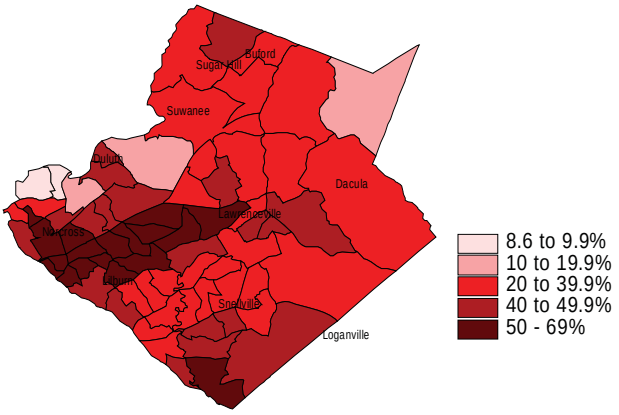


Figure 20: Percentage of Home Purchase Loans for Owner-Occupied Homes to Buyers with Moderate Incomes by Census Tract, 2004



Although Gwinnett is a relatively affluent county, housing affordability is still an issue of concern.

Housing Affordability

Although Gwinnett is a relatively affluent County, housing affordability is still an issue of concern. Almost eight percent of county households, roughly 16,000 households, spent more than one-half of their income for housing in 2000. This amount is above the standard established by HUD that recommends that households spend no more than 30 percent of their total income on gross housing costs. Another 31,000 households or 15 percent of the county total paid between 30 and 50 percent of their income for housing. Rising housing prices and rents since 2000 suggest that these proportions have likely increased significantly as the county has experienced significant price/rent increases.

Prevailing monthly rents in Gwinnett County for a two-bedroom apartment averaged $763 in 2006. Such rents were well beyond the financial capability of workers earning low wages. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) provides another way of understanding the affordability gap – the wage a single-earner household would need to earn to pay for the average unit (assumed at HUD's Fair Market Rent, which is based on prevailing monthly rents). NLIHC reports that a worker would need to earn $15.85 per hour to afford a two-bedroom unit while working 40 hours per week. A worker making minimum wage would need to work 108 hours per week to afford the two-bedroom Fair Market Rent (FMR) (see Table 15). Many low-income residents work more than one job and much more than 40 hours per week, but frequently the gap between market and affordable rents requires such households to spend more than 30 percent of their incomes on rent.

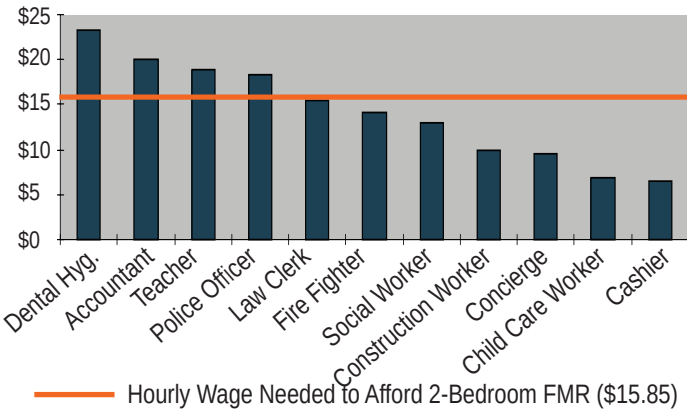
Table 15: Hourly Wage vs. Work Hours Required to Afford Rental Housing

Unit Type	Hourly Wage Required to Afford Unit*	No. of Work Hours Required for Minimum Wage Worker to Afford Unit**
Efficiency	$13.15	90
1 Bedroom	$14.25	97
2 Bedroom	$15.85	108
3 Bedroom	$19.29	132
4 Bedroom	$21.04	144

**Hourly wage required to afford each unit type of housing*
***Hours per week necessary at minimum wage to afford each size of housing unit*
Source: National Low-Income Housing Coalition

The Georgia Department of Labor lists various occupations paying wages that do not support the two-bedroom FMR. Figure 21 shows the incomes of selected professions that earn less or just above that required wage.

Figure 21: 2006 Gwinnett Area Median Hourly Occupational Wages



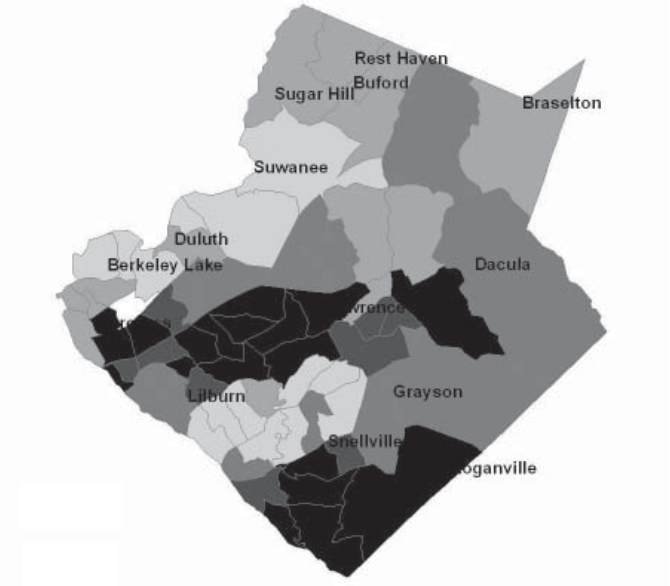
A healthy economy needs workers at all income levels to provide the full range of required and desired services. Failure to provide sufficient affordable housing limits the workforce that would be available to county businesses. County businesses have reported shortages of entry-level workers and workers to fill the County's many retail and service jobs. The limited supply of affordable housing within Gwinnett County forces workers for these jobs to live far away, yet the rising cost of gasoline is making that solution less and less tenable. Among those who cannot afford the median-priced apartment are single-wage earner households headed by

social workers, construction workers, child care workers and cashiers. Note that some low-income households can find affordable housing options within their reach by renting older or smaller units or by sharing housing.

Foreclosures and Their Impact

The Atlanta Metropolitan Area and Gwinnett County, in particular, were hard hit by the mortgage crisis that intensified at the same time as the Unified Plan was being prepared. Foreclosures in Gwinnett County in the first eight months of 2006 were 258 percent higher than in the same period in 2000 with foreclosures in 2007 at even higher levels. The first eight months of 2006 saw the start of 3,984 foreclosures in the county.[12] Foreclosures are hitting every part of Gwinnett. Figure 22 shows the distribution across the County in 2006 of foreclosure starts per 100 loans originating in 2002 through 2004. This analysis suggests that the rate of foreclosures in the county was increasing substantially, particularly in some parts of the County, even before the bursting of the housing bubble within the first half of the decade had peaked.

Figure 22: 2006 Foreclosure Index



** Estimated foreclosures based on annualizing January—July, 2006 data. Denominator is the number of home loans made from 2002 through 2004.*

The sources of this rise in foreclosures are in the housing bubble that arose in the years immediately precedong the development of the UP. From 2001 into 2007, there was a large growth in the use of exotic mortgages, including low or no-documentation loans, interest-only loans, payment-option loans, piggy-back 80/20s (where a 20 percent junior mortgage is made in conjunction with an 80 percent senior mortgage) and zero-down payment loans. These loans created risks for both lenders and borrowers.

Following a sustained period of lending to households with weak credit ratings and alternative or exotic mortgages for households with good credit, the foreclosure rate spiked. Increases in interest rates on adjustable-rate mortgages and the expiration of "teaser" introductory rates led to sharp increases in monthly mortgage payments for many households. This was often beyond the capacity of the borrower to pay. Through a combination of low down payments and inflated home appraisals, many homebuyers borrowed more than their homes were worth. When they could no longer afford to make the mortgage payments, they were unable to sell their homes to avoid foreclosure. The lenders underestimated their vulnerability to an economic downturn or a downturn in the housing market, exposing the lenders to massive losses from poorly performing subprime loans. The tightened standards subsequently used in underwriting mortgages prevented many homeowners who had fallen behind on their mortgage payments from qualifying for replacement mortgages at affordable rates.

In addition to the high cost to individual households of losing their home, the cycle of foreclosures also threatened to foster neighborhood decline. The foreclosure process can take some time before the lender takes possession of the house or condominium, and some homeowners facing foreclosure stripped their houses of appliances and other valuable fixtures. Some foreclosed units were not well maintained by lenders who were themselves ill-equipped to deal with the onslaught of foreclosed properties.

Foreclosures can entail significant costs and hardships for those most directly affected. They often involve losing not only accumulated home equity and the costs associated with acquiring the home, but also access to stable, decent housing. Moreover, foreclosures can damage credit ratings, hurting the owners' prospects not only in credit markets but also in labor and insurance markets, and in their ability to find quality rental housing.

12 Immergluck, Dan and Yun Sang Lee. Foreclosure Trends in Gwinnet County, Georgia, 2000 – 2006. May 2007.

The costs of foreclosures are also born by the communities in which they occur. Neighborhoods see values and confidence decline. Even after considering other neighborhood characteristics, higher foreclosure levels negatively affect the values of nearby properties. For every foreclosure within one-eighth of a mile of a single-family home, property values are expected to decline by approximately one percent. According to The Center for Responsible Lending,[13] the foreclosure spillover impact on neighboring homes in Gwinnett County has affected as many as 73,000 properties. Home devaluation was one impact that not only affected homeowners but the County itself. When such value declines translate into decreases, then the annual local property tax revenues available to County government and the school systems declines. When property is abandoned or vacated following foreclosure, these properties can become blighted and havens for crime, thus, begetting a spiral of neighborhood decline.

Foreclosures also entail out of pocket costs to local government. William Apgar and Mark Duda found that the direct costs of foreclosure processes and ancillary services (e.g., securing dangerous vacant property, etc.) to city government in Chicago, not counting those due to falling property values, involve more than a dozen agencies and two dozen specific municipal activities, generating governmental costs that in some cases exceeded $30,000 per property.[14]

(During the preparation of this Unified Plan, the federal government was exploring a range of policy options to respond to the mortgage crisis that had increased since the data cited above. It was thus too early to know whether these programs will provide significant relief for Gwinnett County homeowners.)

The Homeless

Though the homeless are relatively invisible in the County, the hardships they experience are very real for the 8,600 persons reported to be homeless in Gwinnett County in January 2006.[15] Fundamentally, homelessness in Gwinnett County relates to the limited stock of decent, safe and sanitary low-cost housing units combined with the limited financial capacity of homeless families and individuals (low wages, depleted savings and excessive debt).

As a participant in the State of Georgia's Balance of State Continuum of Care, the County cooperates with a diverse network of non-profit housing and homeless service providers to provide:

- Outreach and assessment to identify the needs of individuals and families and to connect them to facilities and services;
- Emergency shelter as a safe, decent alternative to life on the streets of the community;
- Transitional housing with various appropriate services; and.
- Permanent housing or permanent supportive housing.

The Gwinnett Coalition for Health and Human Services coordinates the efforts of the many non-profit service providers and operates a hotline to refer citizens to appropriate service providers.

Social services assist special needs populations experiencing problems with aging, dealing with physical or mental disabilities, or recovering from mental illness or addictions. In 2000, Gwinnett County had an estimated 2,236 low- and moderate-income households headed by an elderly person with physical or mental disabilities, known as the "frail elderly." Overall, the County had almost 24,000 individual residents with physical disabilities (four percent of the population), more than 16,000 residents with mental disabilities (three percent of the population) and an estimated 1,800 individuals who test positive for HIV/AIDS. Many of these individuals need supportive services and/or specialized housing in order to live independently and productively. Access to available services is often difficult and expensive for these residents due to the County's pattern of low-density development with limited transit service.

C.5.2 Driving Forces

High construction costs, the limited supply of affordable housing sites and the limited financial resources available have inhibited the non-profit sector's ability to provide new affordable housing. Other key barriers to affordable housing include:

- Local building requirements such as minimum square footage and minimum lot size requirements and certain infrastructure requirements that prevent development

13 Ernst, Keith, Wei Li & Ellen Schloemer. Center for Responsible Lending. Subprime Spillover. 18 January 2008. http://www.responsiblelending.org/pdfs/subprime-spillover.pdf
14 Apgar, W. and Duda, M. (2005). *Collateral damage: The municipal impact of today's mortgage foreclosure boom.* Washington, DC: Homeownership Preservation Foundation. May 11.
15 Gwinnett County Continuum of Care, 2006; Bay Area Economics, 2006

of smaller units on smaller lots;
- Zoning and community opposition that block group homes and other supportive housing with services for individuals with special needs;
- Burdensome federal and state regulations constraining use of Community Development Block Grant funds;
- Historically weak policies to preserve the existing housing stock through renovation;
- Lack of public/private partnerships with financial institutions to encourage greater investment in low- and moderate-income areas; and,
- Need for more awareness of affordable housing issues and solutions among the overall community and more education for prospective homebuyers.

Many prospective homebuyers are constrained by lower incomes, inadequate savings to fund the down payment and closing costs, and poor credit records resulting from bouts of unemployment or illness.

C.5.3 Housing Issues to Address

By including the Consolidated Plan, the Unified Plan addresses the following concerns:

- **Limited Housing Choices**
  A wider range of housing types and prices is needed to meet the needs of smaller households, young adults, the elderly and low-income households.

- **Limited Supply of Affordable Housing**
  A greater pool of available sites and resources to fund new affordable housing must be established.

- **Economic Development Impacts of Limited Housing Affordability**
  An inadequate supply of affordable housing impairs the ability of local businesses to fill and retain workers in entry-level and lower-wage jobs.

- **Quality of Housing Stock**
  Deterioration of some older neighborhoods, including those impacted by housing foreclosures, must be checked.

- **Impact of Foreclosures on Households Losing Their Homes**
  Foreclosures not only deprive families of shelter, they also creates serious impacts on the economic resources available to them. Preventing foreclosures can help families retain credit worthiness, build future equity and avert a number of social disruptions such as pulling children out of their schools.

- **Transportation-Housing Nexus**
  Dealing with how increasing costs of transportation without access to adequate transit affects the financial plight of low-income families and their ability to provide for their housing needs, among other competing demands on their resources.

- **Housing and other Services for Special Needs Populations**
  Social service needs of special populations experiencing problems with aging, dealing with physical or mental disabilities, or recovering from mental illness or addictions, need to be addressed.

- **Dealing with "Latch-Key" Child Issues**
  Opportunities and support for youth, particularly those with working parents who lack the financial means to afford quality child care.

C.6 Getting Around: Transportation Network and Needs[16]

C.6.1 Trends

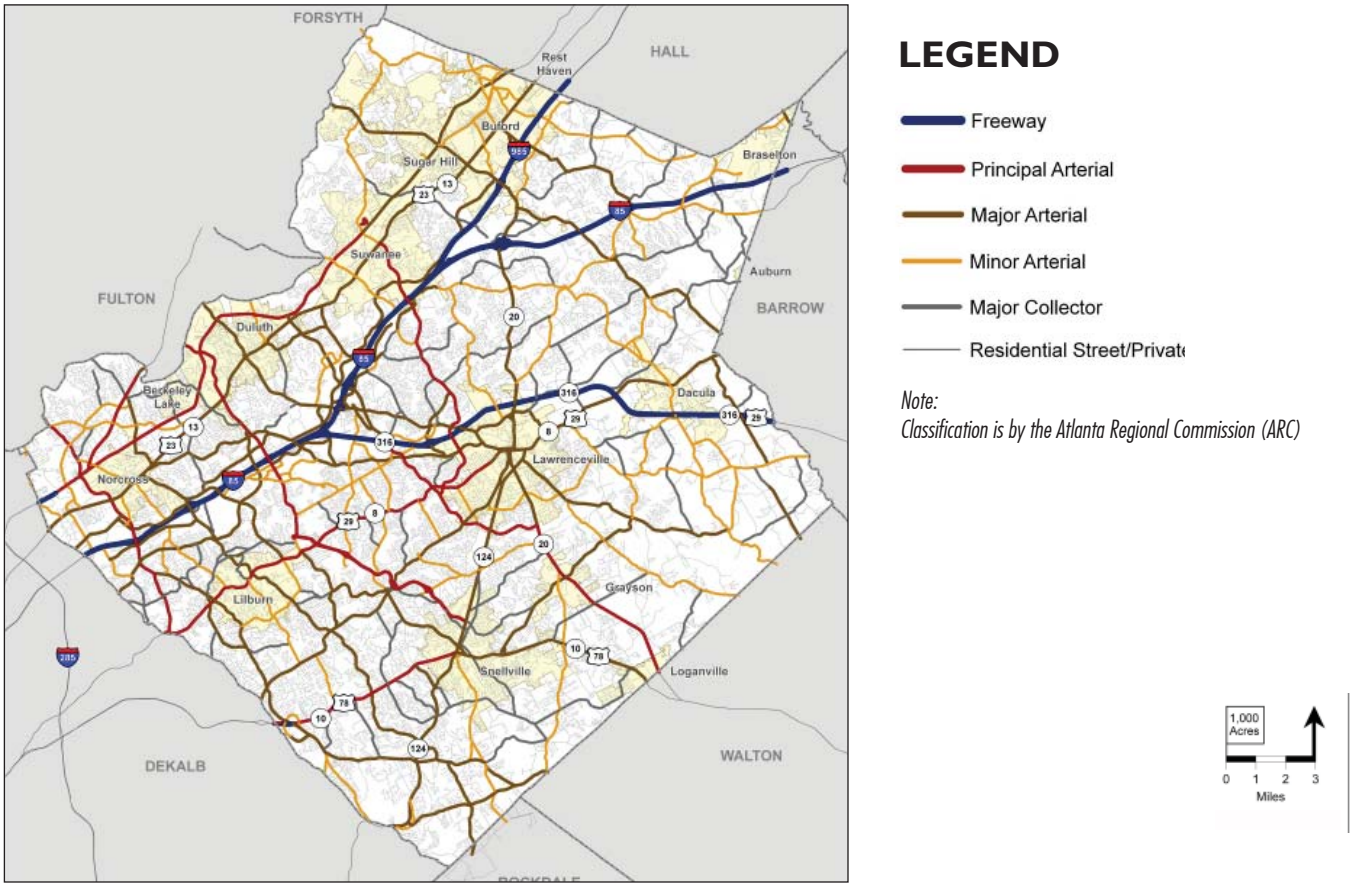
An evaluation of Gwinnett County's existing transportation system provided a baseline for planning the County's future mobility needs. Mobility is an increasing concern as population and employment grow. Fast paced growth has contributed to increasing levels of traffic congestion and, as in the rest of the metro Atlanta area, long commute times.

Figure 23 shows the major roads in Gwinnett as classified by the ARC. Scrutinizing the lower third of the county, one sees a reasonably dense network of arterial roads, whose spacing averages between 1.5 and 3.0 miles. The middle third of the County is more sparsely served at an arterial network spacing between 2.25 and 4.5 miles. The northern third is the least densely networked, and the least densely developed, at an average spacing of between 3.5 miles and greater. Because of the County's rapid growth from exurb to suburb, there was little time for the County and State to develop the incremental web of roads that could have served as the backbone for a continuous arterial network that could be improved over time. Consequently Gwinnett has come to rely on a small number of major and principal arterials to carry most of its traffic. These 6 or 8 lane facilities result in many left turn movements and concentrate shorter and longer trips on them in the absence of a more redundant continuous network. Future planning should try address and redress this imbalance.

Traffic volume in Gwinnett County has increased markedly over the past decade. Previously, the highest daily traffic volumes have been along I-85 from the DeKalb County

16 This section highlights the data and analysis of the Comprehensive Transportation Plan final draft that was submitted in April 2008. Those desiring more detail regarding current transportation issues should refer to that document, which is part of Volume 2 in the 2030 Unified Plan. A copy can be found at www.gwinnettcounty.com, under Transportation.

Figure 23: Major Roads in Gwinnett County



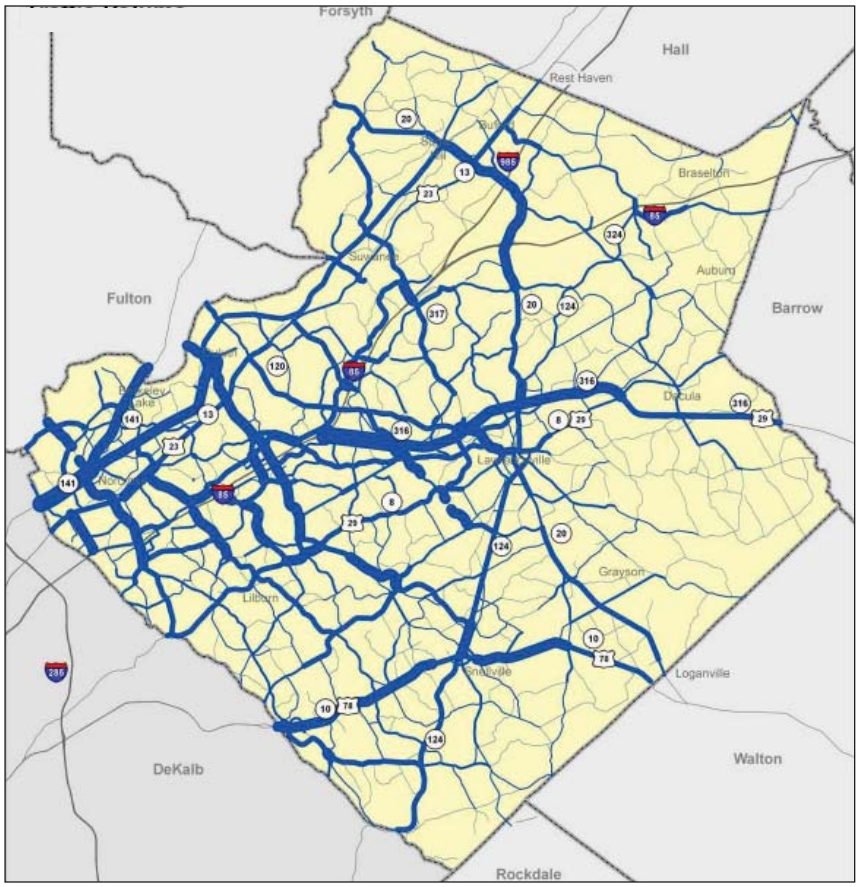
line to the I-85/SR 316 split. Today, however, heavy traffic stretches all the way to the I-85/I-985 split with more than 147,000 vehicles using the road per day. Additionally, more than 80,000 vehicles travel on I-85 from the I-85/I-985 split to SR 20 on a daily basis. Other significant arterials with more than 80,000 vehicles per day are Peachtree Industrial Boulevard from the DeKalb County line to Peachtree Parkway and SR 316 from I-85 to Sugarloaf Parkway.

Figure 24 shows Gwinnett County's traffic volumes according to GDOT and the Gwinnett County Department of Transportation (the traffic count data dates range from 2004 to 2007). The traffic volumes for the interstates are excluded from the map to prevent the very large volumes on I-85 and I-985 from obscuring other major roads in the figure. Key routes showing heavy volumes are Peachtree Parkway, Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, Buford Highway (US 23/SR 13), Lawrenceville Highway (US 29/SR 8), Five Forks Trickum Road, Stone Mountain Highway (US 78/SR 10), SR 316, Buford Drive (SR 20), Pleasant Hill Road, Jimmy Carter Boulevard, Ronald Reagan Parkway, Lawrenceville -Suwanee Road, Beaver Ruin Road, Indian Trail-Lilburn Road, Killian Hill Road, Satellite Boulevard, SR 124, and SR 120.

An additional trend affecting Gwinnett is that its arterials lack regulations for access management. This means that the capacity/mobility functions of many of its major roadways are deteriorating. Failure to manage access can have the following impacts:

- An increase in vehicular crashes;
- More collisions involving pedestrians and cyclists;
- Accelerated reduction in roadway efficiency;
- Unattractive commercial strip development;
- Degradation of scenic landscapes;
- More cut-through traffic in residential areas due to overburdened arterials;
- Homes and businesses adversely impacted by a continuous cycle of widening roads; and,
- Increased commute times, fuel consumption, and vehicular emissions as numerous driveways and traffic signals intensify congestion and delays along major roads.

Figure 24: Traffic Volumes



Note:
The traffic volumes for the interstates are excluded from the map to prevent the very large volumes on I-85 and I-985 from obscuring other roads.

ADT represents the latest daily traffic count available as of Spring 2007. Count dates range from 2004-2007. Some values may be estimated.

Data from Gwinnett County traffic counts, GDOT.

Not only are these impacts costly for Gwinnett County and the public, but they may also adversely affect corridor businesses. Closely spaced and poorly designed driveways can make it more difficult for customers to enter and exit businesses safely. Access to corner businesses may be blocked by traffic, which makes it difficult for customers to enter and exit the business.

Robert Charles Lesser and Company, part of the team for this Plan, suggests that the County's increasing congestion is starting to impact its economic development. Existing warehouse and shipping businesses, dependent on reliable interstate mobility and access, are becoming caught up in Gwinnett's traffic and as a result are moving away from Gwinnett and into Barrow and Hall Counties, which are further away from metro Atlanta's traffic congestion.

C.6.2 Driving Forces

Land Use Patterns

Gwinnett County has a typical, suburban development pattern of low density, disconnected developments spread across the County. Although most development is low-density, there are some more densely developed areas such as in downtown areas in the cities. Most of these were typically founded around the railroads, and subsequent development focused around the County's major roads. This is particularly the case in areas surrounding interstate exit ramps where regional attractions tend to be located.

Poor connectivity is also a factor in Gwinnett's traffic problems. Individual developments in Gwinnett County are not often connected to adjacent developments. Access to virtually all developments require an automobile trip. If walking, a relatively long and not particularly pedestrian-friendly walking trip must be made. Furthermore, the trip often requires one to exit one development onto a collector or arterial street and then enter another development. This occurs even if the developments are adjacent. This is almost always the case with adjacent residential developments and is usually the case with adjacent commercial uses. This pattern of development has increased the need for an automobile for most trips in the County.

The partially radial nature of Gwinnett's road network, a function of serving the County's cities, also contributes to the County's transportation problems. Traffic is concentrated on major roads that intersect in downtown areas rather than being distributed over a wider network. An additional challenge facing the County is that the road network is predominately north/south focused, and there are very few east/west roads. When travel demand centered on the cities or downtown Atlanta, this orientation may have worked well for most people. However, today, people and jobs are located across the County and the region. Having limited east/west travel options requires people to make longer trips on already crowded roads to get to their destinations.

Another land use factor that influences Gwinnett's transportation network is the Chattahoochee River. It divides Gwinnett County from Fulton County and Forsyth County and the many jobs located in those counties. The river's four crossings are congested so it is difficult for people to commute between the counties. This hurts Gwinnett in its ability to attract residents who work in Fulton or Forsyth County and to attract employers who want access to the highly educated, white-collar labor pool.

Transportation Alternatives to the Private Automobile

Travel in Gwinnett County is very reliant on the private automobile, especially for commuting. In 2005, there were 575,500 daily work trips. Of the total work trips, Gwinnett's travel demand model calculated that 0.9 percent, or 5,300 daily trips, were made by transit. The ARC travel demand model, as enhanced by the study team, was used to examine present and future year travel demand and congestion in Gwinnett County. The travel demand model forecasts roadway and transit demand based on information such as development density, income, household size, automobile ownership, employment type, travel time, and travel cost. The travel demand model numbers for 2005 are slightly different from those reported in Census 2000 for Gwinnett County. The travel demand model tends to understate transit, walking, bicycling, and work from home numbers and overstate vehicle trip numbers. Census data indicate that 79.7 percent of people drive alone and 14.1 percent carpooled. They also show that 0.8 percent of people used public transportation, 0.8 percent walked, 0.8 percent traveled some other way, and 3.8 percent worked from home.

In 2006/2007, there were approximately 2,030,000 annual transit trips (or approximately 5,600 daily transit trips) in Gwinnett County. This includes 1,320,000 annual boardings on Gwinnett Transit's five local, fixed bus routes, 470,000 boardings on Gwinnett Transit's three express bus routes into Downtown and Midtown Atlanta, and 240,000 boardings on the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority's (GRTA) four routes. Two of these provide service to Atlanta, one to the Lindbergh MARTA station, and one to the Doraville MARTA station.

Local fixed route transit service is focused in the I-85 corridor and includes service to Norcross, Duluth, Lawrenceville, Buford, the Gwinnett Place Mall area, the Discover Mills Mall area, and the Mall of Georgia Area. (Please see Figure 25 showing the transit service area.) Four of the five fixed routes have headways ranging from 15 minutes to 30 minutes in the peak period; 30 minute headways in the weekday, off peak period; and 30 to 60 minute headways on Saturday. Transit Route 50, which serves the Buford area, has a 90 minute headway at all times. There is no Sunday service. A transfer center, where four of the five routes connect, is located adjacent to Gwinnett Place Mall. Route 10 provides service to the Doraville MARTA station in DeKalb County.

In addition to local, fixed route service, Gwinnett County is served by seven express bus routes. Three are commuter bus routes. The routes originate at the I-985 Park and Ride lot, the I-85 Indian Trail Park and Ride lot, and the Discover Mills Park and Ride lot and serve Downtown and Midtown Atlanta. GRTA offers four additional routes. Two of the routes originate at Discover Mills. One terminates service at the Lindbergh MARTA station, and the other terminates in Midtown via the I-85 Indian Trail Park and Ride facility. The third route originates from the John's Creek area near the Fulton County and Forsyth County boundary and extends through Gwinnett County (with several stops) to terminate service at the Doraville MARTA station. The fourth route begins service in Snellville and terminates Downtown. (Please see Figure 26 for a map showing the express bus service area.)

Figure 25: Intra-County Bus Routes

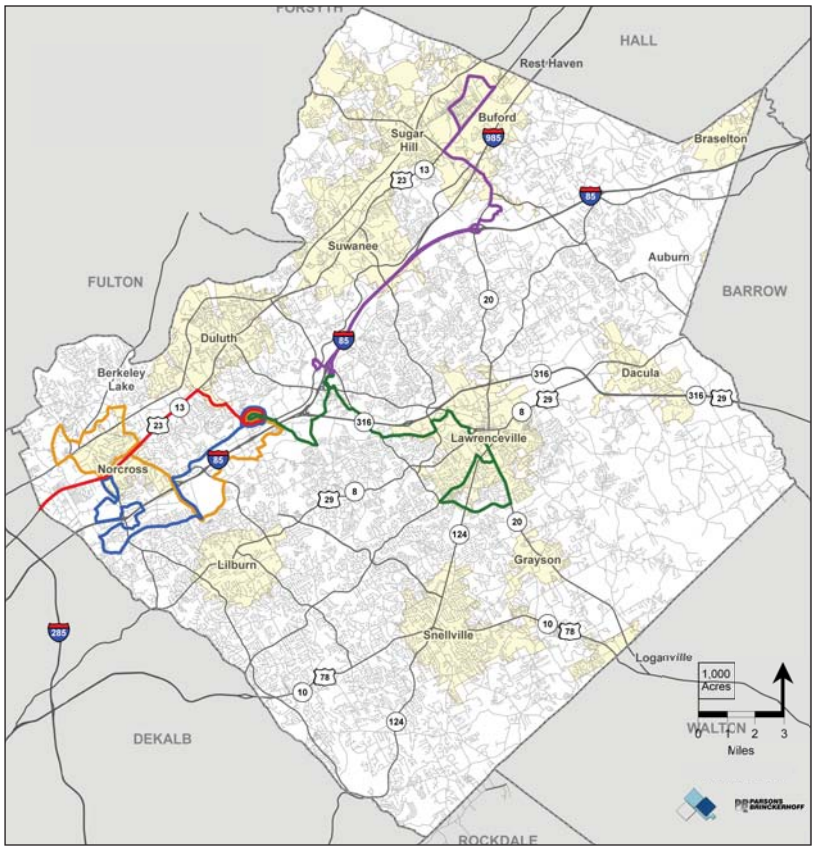
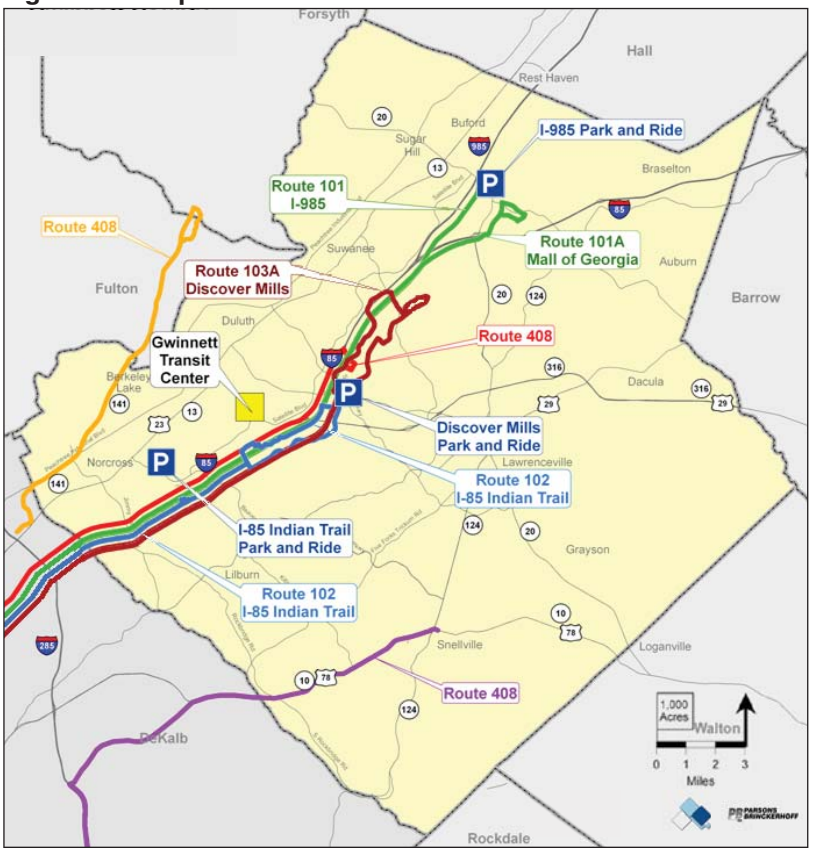


Figure 26: Express Bus Service



C.6.3 Transportation Issues to Address

- **Congestion Mitigation**
  The most obvious and pressing transportation issue facing Gwinnett County is congestion. It is important to recognize that it will not be possible for Gwinnett County to eliminate congestion. This is because it is, in part, a region-wide issue with many trips in Gwinnett originating elsewhere, for example, interstate travel on I-85. Even if the County spends billions of dollars, as in our scenarios, there would still be congestion. At best, the County may be able to slow the rate of growth in congestion. However, just because the congestion problem cannot be solved, the County must still take action to identify and fund transportation projects that ease congestion. Identifying projects will be the easy part; finding funding will be much more difficult. State and Federal funding sources are providing less funding than they have in the past so it will be necessary for Gwinnett County to contribute a greater percentage of a project's total cost. It will require political will to identify the revenue sources that will fund projects.

- **Increase Connectivity in New and Existing Developments**
  Developing a strategy to address Gwinnett's lack of connectivity will be an important issue affecting congestion and the County's future travel patterns. The lack of connectivity between different developments has forced people to use major arterials to travel for short, local trips. These short trips add to traffic volume and slow through traffic. Changing policies to require connections between new developments will be difficult; additionally, changing policies to create connections between existing developments will be even more difficult.

- **Lack of Access Management along Many Key Roads**
  Access management is one way to reduce some of the roadway congestion caused by vehicles directly entering and exiting major roads from commercial and residential driveways. The goal of access management is to allow access to private properties in a manner that does not disrupt traffic flow. Reconstructing arterial roadways is costly and disruptive, but in order to preserve access to businesses and improve traffic flow some selective reconstruction may be essential.

Gwinnett's lack of connectivity will be an important issue affecting congestion and the County's future travel patterns.

- **Increasing Transit Coverage and Ridership**
  Gwinnett County does not have a history of transit support or ridership. As congestion increases and the demographics of the County change, it will be necessary for the County to provide more effective and efficient transit services. However, the success of transit service is not simply dependant on reducing the time between buses. Developing and redeveloping Gwinnett in a way so that transit can work better will also be necessary if more intensive transit modes like light rail or bus rapid transit are to be realized.

- **Finding Adequate Sources of Transportation Funding**
  Transportation improvements can be expensive and are sometimes controversial. In many cases, the improvement does not provide a long-term or permanent solution to the transportation problem it is designed to solve. These factors can make funding transportation projects difficult. Gwinnett currently funds many of its capital improvements through SPLOST and "pay as you go" sources. To afford the kinds of large-scale transportation improvements that will be necessary, Gwinnett County residents and officials will need to consider alternative financing methods for how it approaches paying for large infrastructure improvements. The funding challenge is considered further in the fiscal analysis section where some new sources of revenue are discussed.

C.7 Water, Wastewater and Stormwater Management

C.7.1 Trends

Water and wastewater infrastructure in Gwinnett County is owned by the Gwinnett Water & Sewerage Authority. Stormwater infrastructure in the County is owned by the Gwinnett Stormwater Authority. The Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources operates and maintains this infrastructure for the respective Authorities.

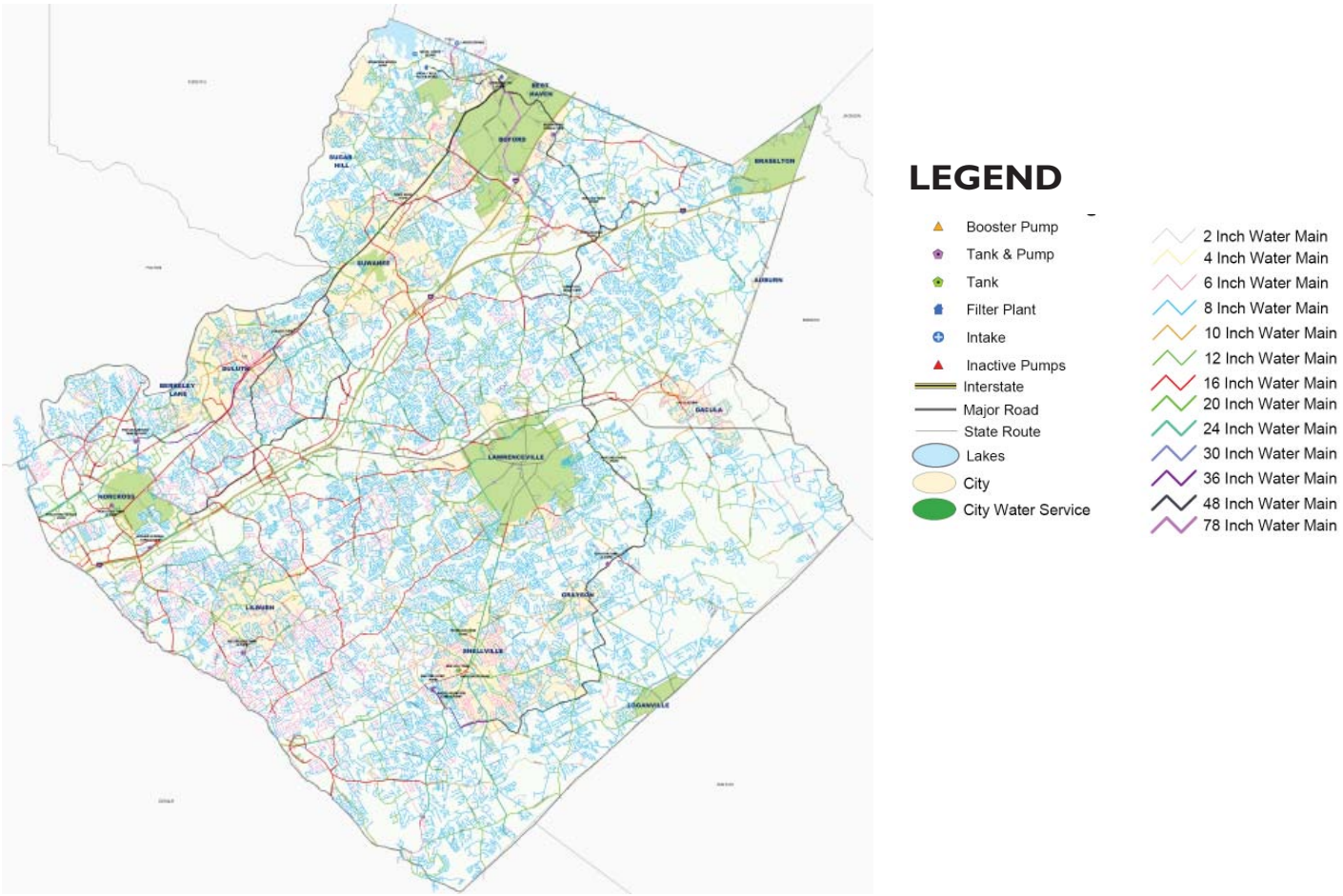
Water

Gwinnett County's water source is Lake Sidney Lanier, a manmade lake created by Buford Dam on the Chattahoochee River. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources controls water withdrawals from Lake Lanier, with Gwinnett's monthly average withdrawal permit set at 150 million gallons per day (MGD). This amount is also governed by a contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which operates Buford Dam and generates electricity there.

The County provides water from two separate raw water intakes located on the lake. Finished water is produced at two independent filter plants, Shoal Creek and Lanier. Pumps move finished water from the clear wells at the filter plants through transmission mains into the water distribution system. There are over 3,300 miles of pipes in the distribution system, ranging in size from two to 78 inches in diameter. Over 90 million gallons (MG) of water are stored in distribution storage tanks, located throughout the County to ensure the provision of consistent line pressure, fire protection, and water availability during periods of high usage.

In 2007, Gwinnett County's average daily consumption was 86.8 million gallons, with a peak day of 125 million gallons. The County serves nearly 235,000 water customers.

Figure 27: Existing Water



Wastewater

The total wastewater treatment capacity for Gwinnett County is currently 71.62 million gallons per day (MGD). An additional 40 MGD of treatment capacity has been constructed at the F. Wayne Hill Water Resources Center. A 40 MGD discharge permit to Lake Lanier has been issued and construction of an effluent pipeline is expected to be complete at the end of 2009.

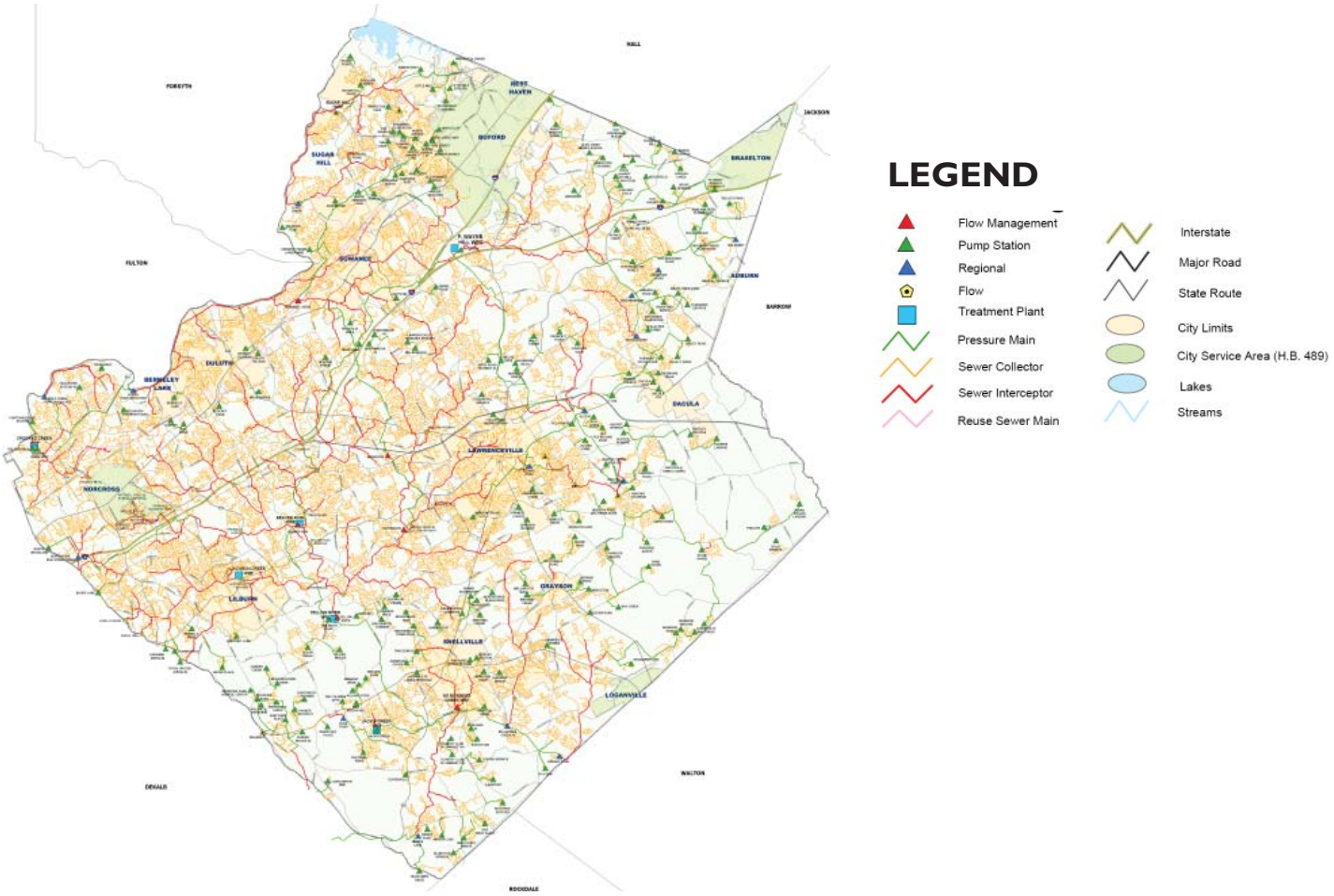
The County currently operates six water reclamation facilities and leases treatment capacity in a facility located in Dekalb County. Over 2,595 miles of sanitary sewers, ranging from six to 72 inches in diameter, collect wastewater that flows by gravity to large-diameter interceptor sewers and then to the water reclamation facilities. Pump stations and force mains are used as necessary whenever topography does not permit gravity flow. The County has 230 wastewater pump stations in service and over 249 miles of force mains, ranging from 2.5 to 48 inches in diameter.

Higher density development has brought significant challenges to ensure that adequate sewer capacity is in place to handle increased flows.

There are several new pump stations currently under construction or in design.

In 2007, Gwinnett County's maximum monthly daily average wastewater flow was 52.8 million gallons per day. The County serves nearly 142,000 sewer customers.

Figure 28: Existing Sewer



Stormwater
The Stormwater Management Division is responsible for providing programs and services to prevent flooding, provide adequate drainage, and protect and enhance water quality in the County's streams and lakes.

In 2005, a Stormwater Utility was created in Gwinnett County in order to more effectively improve drainage problems, fulfill regulatory requirements, and reduce pollution carried to waterways by stormwater. In 2008 the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners appointed seven members to the Stormwater Authority.

The following is a non-comprehensive list of some of the major ongoing programs within the Stormwater Management Division.

1. Public Education programs to encourage environmentally responsible behavior at home, school, and work. Activities include river cleanups, facility tours, Adopt-a-Stream workshops, storm-drain stenciling, and water quality monitoring.
2. Public Participation programs to encourage citizen input in processes that influence stormwater regulations. These include the Development Advisory Committee, Tree Advisory Committee, Growth Issues Steering Committee and Revitalization Task Force.
3. Water Quality Protection and Post Construction Stormwater Management programs to reduce non-point source pollution.
4. Construction Site Pollution Control to address erosion issues.
5. Watershed Improvement Program to protect and improve water quality and stream conditions. A full assessment and modeling project was completed in 2000, which documented the condition of the watersheds and developed a model to predict pollutant levels based on land use. Capital projects have been developed since that time aimed at watersheds and streams adversely impacted by stormwater runoff.
6. Operation and Maintenance program to ensure a functional, reliable storm sewer system.
7. Flood Study Program to identify existing and future floodplains in the County using modeling based on land use and topography.
8. Watershed Dam Upgrade Program which has brought 9 of the 14 U.S. Department of Agriculture built flood control dams in the County into compliance with state regulations. The remaining 5 are in various stages of design or construction.

9. Water Quality Monitoring Programs for streams.

C.7.2 Driving Forces

Land Use Challenges
Over the years, Gwinnett has developed in typical suburban fashion, with primarily low density, residential subdivisions. Early development was concentrated mainly in the southwestern parts of the County as well as within several small town communities. Much of the earliest development went on private septic systems, but as growth began to dramatically increase in the early 1970s, several small wastewater treatment facilities and large trunk sewers were constructed. This infrastructure was planned, designed and constructed to accommodate that very same pattern of low density residential and retail development.

The past several years have brought higher and higher density development to the southwestern part of the County. This has brought significant challenges to the Department of Water Resources, to ensure that adequate sewer capacity is in place to handle increased flows. Much work has been done to verify infrastructure as-built data and current wastewater flows in order to fully model existing sewers to assess needs. As the County continues to revitalize these areas with the Community Improvement Districts and Major Activity Center classifications, and the prospect of high rise development looms on the horizon, it is expected that significant upgrades will be needed to accommodate wastewater flows from these redeveloped areas. There are several challenges associated with this. Planning, budgeting, designing and constructing sewer upgrades take significant amounts of both time and money. It is also more complicated to reconstruct infrastructure in

highly developed areas where services must be maintained in busy corridors.

Over the years, development spread outward, moving northward and eastward. During much of the 1980s and 1990s, Gwinnett experienced a continuing phenomenal growth rate. This high rate of growth exceeded the fiscal ability of the Department of Water Resources to construct the large gravity sewers to serve the growing populations in the northern and eastern sectors of the County. Development continued with developer installed pump stations and force mains constructed to convey flows relatively long distances to existing sewer infrastructure. Developer-built infrastructure is donated to the County once developments are completed. The infrastructure then becomes the County's responsibility to maintain and operate. With the increased energy costs seen over the past several years, operating costs have increased tremendously.

The Department of Water Resources has limited resources to design and construct the gravity sewers that would be needed to continue development in the eastern part of the County without additional developer installed pump stations and long force mains. If development patterns were to continue as seen prior to this latest economic slowdown, the number of pump stations and long force mains would increase significantly, increasing the operating costs to the Department accordingly.

Fiscal Challenges

The Southeastern United States has been in a serious drought since 2007. The Georgia EPD has issued a Level 4 Drought Response Declaration for 55 north Georgia counties, including Gwinnett, which prohibits or limits most outdoor water use. Additionally, the Governor has mandated a 10 percent reduction in water use for all public water utilities in the state. While Gwinnett fully supports these water conservation measures, the fiscal impact to the utility is quite significant. Water demands are presently lagging 2007 nearly 20 percent. Decreased water sales obviously mean decreased revenues, although most costs to produce and deliver the water do not decrease proportionally. This, combined with the increased energy costs over the last few years, and the decrease in System Development Charge revenues due to slowed development activity, has led to serious fiscal concerns. The Department has taken several steps to operate as efficiently as possible and cut both operating and capital expenses.

The Gwinnett County water, sewer and stormwater infrastructure systems are relatively young when compared with utility systems in many regions of the United States. However, the Department of Water Resources recognizes the need to begin planning to rehabilitate and replace aging infrastructure. Current capital budgets do include some level of funding for such projects, but a thorough analysis should be performed of the system to determine the most cost effective ways to maintain and renew the system. The Department has undertaken an aggressive Advanced Asset Management approach over the past couple of years to address these issues. Early efforts are concentrating on completing full condition and criticality assessments of all infrastructure so that the systems can be managed in the most cost effective manner while maintaining the desired level of service for customers. Great progress has been made in this continuing program and projects will be prioritized and added to the Capital Improvement budgets annually.

Regulatory Challenges

In 2001 the Georgia General Assembly created the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (MNGWPD) which is made up of 16 counties and 99 cities within the metropolitan Atlanta area, including Gwinnett County. In the fall of 2003 the MNGWPD approved three comprehensive water resource plans to protect water quality and public water supplies in and downstream of the region, protect recreational values of the waters in and downstream of the region, and minimize potential adverse impacts of development on waters in and downstream of the region. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) is responsible for issuing all water withdrawal permits and wastewater discharge permits within the state.

Adherence to the MNGWPD Plans is mandatory in order for Gwinnett County to receive permits from EPD.

In 2008, the Georgia General Assembly approved the Georgia Comprehensive State-wide Water Management Plan. The purpose of the Plan (which is being managed by the Georgia EPD) is to guide Georgia in managing water resources in a sustainable manner to support the state's economy, to protect public health and natural systems, and to enhance the quality of life for all citizens. Four major water management objectives are being addressed. These include:

1. Minimizing withdrawals of water by increasing conservation, reuse and efficiency.
2. Maximizing returns to river basins by managing interbasin transfers and uses of on-site sewage disposal systems, and land application of treated wastewater where water quantity is limited.
3. Managing in stream/off stream needs for water through surface storage, aquifer management and reducing demands.
4. Protecting water quality by reducing discharges of pollutants to streams and runoff from land, so as not to exceed the assimilative capacity of receiving streams.

The Department of Water Resources actively participates in and monitors activities of the MNGWPD and EPD to ensure fair representation of County interests. Of particular interest is the issue of interbasin transfers and consumptive use. Gwinnett County currently withdraws all of its raw water from the Chattahoochee River Basin. Approximately 25% of the treated wastewater currently discharged is permitted to be discharged outside of the Chattahoochee River Basin, into the Ocmulgee River Basin. The MNGWPD Wastewater Plan indicates that this interbasin transfer will continue to be permitted in this way; however, the Department of Water Resources acknowledges that future additional interbasin transfers will not likely be permitted. Additionally, it is estimated that there are approximately 80,000 septic systems in Gwinnett County. The EPD currently considers septic systems to be 100% consumptive use, meaning that no water from them is returned to the waterways of the state. The Department of Water Resources believes this to be untrue and continues to comment to that effect.

Interstate water lawsuits involving Georgia, Florida and Alabama have been consolidated in the Jacksonville

Federal District Court. The Settlement Agreement between the Corps of Engineers, the power customers, and the water suppliers for storage contracts for the water in Lake Lanier was appealed in the Washington, DC, Circuit Court of Appeals. The Appeals Court ruled against the Corps of Engineers. The schedule for trying these consolidated cases is uncertain but expected to occur within the next two or three years. While Gwinnett County will continue to have ample water to supply its customers from Lake Lanier for the next couple of decades, the liability as to what that water will cost continues to be uncertain.

Over the past few years there have also been serious disagreements regarding the Corps of Engineers Water Control Plan for Buford Dam. They have been ordered to prepare a new plan and associated Environmental Impact Statement over the next several years. In the meantime, the Corps of Engineers has revised its Interim Operating Plan to accommodate the severe drought occurring in the Southeastern United States. The Department of Water Resources monitors and comments on these issues regularly to protect the interests of the citizens of Gwinnett.

The Department of Water Resources will complete an update of the Water & Wastewater Master Plan in 2010. The completion of this Master Plan has been timed to allow incorporation of policy recommendations from the Unified Plan to ensure a truly comprehensive planning effort by the County as a whole. During the Master Planning process, future water withdrawal needs and future wastewater discharge options beyond 2030 will be explored.

C.7.3 Issues to Address

- **Need to Replace or Upgrade Older Segments of Sewer Network**
  Aging and undersized sewer infrastructure in the southwestern areas of the County which are undergoing redevelopment must be upgraded. These projects will be very expensive and will take considerable time to plan, design and construct. Additionally, because this infrastructure is located in densely developed areas, there will be logistical challenges to keep infrastructure in service during construction and to minimize disruptions to busy corridors.

- **Expensive Extensions of System to Serve Low Density Development**
  If typical suburban development continues in the eastern areas of the County, major sewer interceptors must be extended to accommodate this growth and to allow for the decommissioning of several developer built wastewater pump stations with the construction of a few regional pump stations. If not, there will be a significant increase in the number of developer built pump stations and operating costs will continue to rise. These interceptors and regional pump stations will be very expensive and require significant time to plan, design and construct.

- **Loss of Revenue from Decreased Water Sales**
  The current drought situation in Georgia has led to increased water conservation and significantly decreased revenues. The expectation is that even once the drought is over, per capita water use may never return to the levels seen prior to the drought. Water conservation will continue to be at the forefront and will likely be further embraced by customers. While rates could be more closely aligned with the cost of service over time, the Department expects fiscal challenges due to decreased water sales in the future

- **Rising Operating Costs of Water Distribution and Wastewater Treatment**
  Producing and distributing water, and collecting, treating and discharging wastewater are all energy and chemical intensive operations. Operating costs have increased significantly over the past several years and are expected to continue to rise. The unpredictability of what that increase will be adds an additional challenge.

- **Lack of Funding for Water and Sewer System Sustainability**
  As Gwinnett's water, wastewater and stormwater systems age, there will be an increased need to repair and replace infrastructure. Current capital budgets may not include sufficient dollars to maintain sustainability over time.

- **Potential Barriers to Increasing Water Supply and Discharge Limits**
  It is expected that with increased demand for limited water supplies in the region, interbasin transfer issues and consumptive use of water are likely to become more significant over time. These issues could impact the ability of the County to obtain additional water withdrawal and wastewater discharge permits in the future.

- **State and Federal Differences Regarding Water Withdrawals and Costs**
  The ongoing interstate water disagreements and the dispute with the Corps of Engineers will most certainly impact future water withdrawals and the cost of that water in the future.

C.8 Environmental Quality and Cultural Resources

This section discusses those features and factors that impact the County residents' quality of life. These include environmental quality, cultural resources, and park and greenways systems.

C.8.1 Trends

Environmental Quality

Gwinnett County has several hydrological features that impact both its development potential and the County's quality of life. The Chattahoochee River and its tributaries fall under the protection of the Chattahoochee River Tributary Protection Ordinance, which restricts development along steams and ensures a 50-foot natural, vegetative buffer along water bodies. Gwinnett County has nine groundwater recharge areas that cover almost one-fifth of the County. These areas are especially sensitive to hazardous substances, as their pollution could contaminate local drinking water supplies. All of Gwinnett's groundwater recharge areas have low pollution susceptibility and are protected by various restrictions enforced by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Groundwater recharge areas and rivers are also protected through Gwinnett's Buffer, Landscape, and Tree Ordinance. This ordinance protects the County's natural features through development regulations and landscaping plan specifications.

There are several wetlands systems in Gwinnett County, but development patterns and land reclamation threaten their viability. In 2006, Gwinnett County began planning for a Stream and Wetlands Mitigation Bank that would offer developers credits and incentives for improving wetlands in the County. Restoration and mitigation projects can be used to offset the impact of development near wetlands. The Mitigation Bank proposal is under review with the Army Corps of Engineers.

Figure 29 shows the County's three main water supply watersheds and their subbasins or sub-watersheds. Gwinnett County and 14 cities both inside and outside Gwinnett County get their water from Gwinnett's water supply areas. A number of ordinances protect the County's watersheds and water quality by restricting development and requiring buffers.

Figure 30 shows the County's lakes and ponds, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, State protected river, and streams.

Figure 29: Water Supply Watersheds

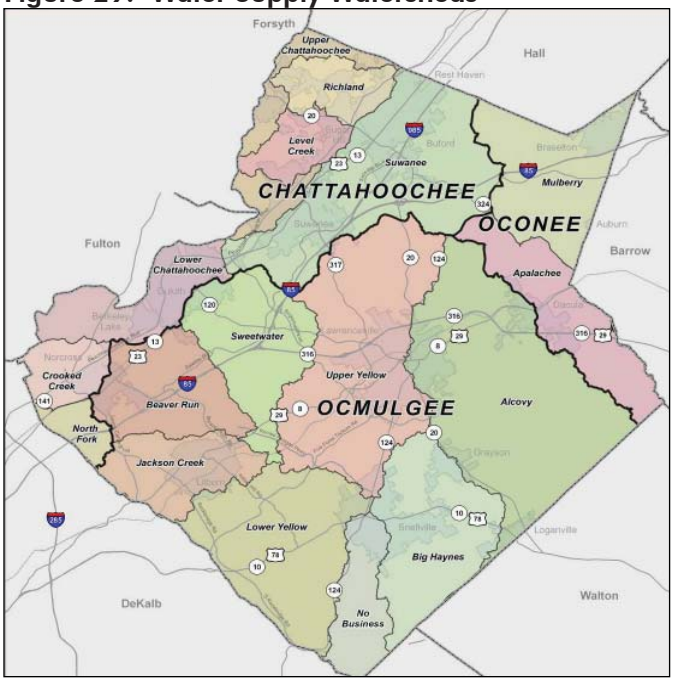
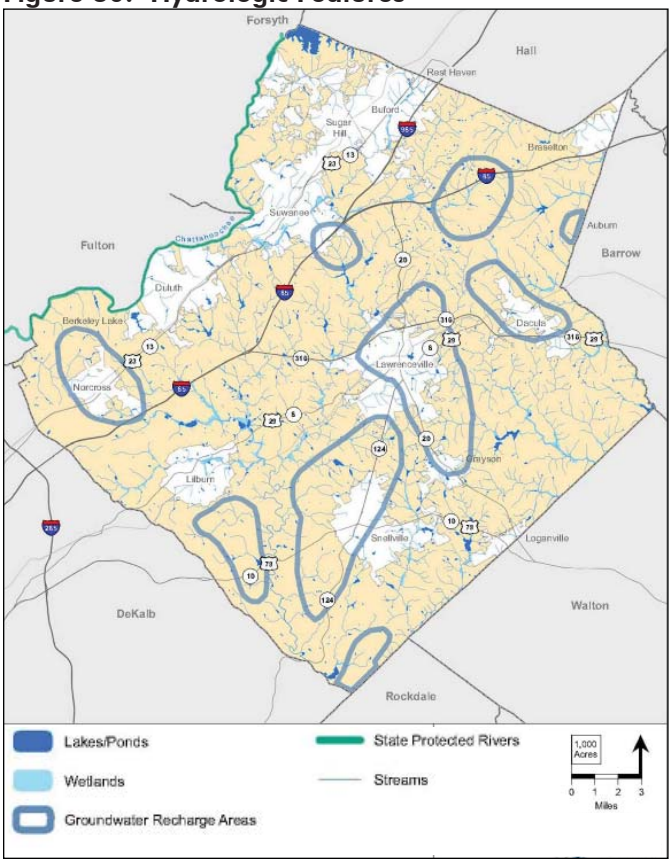


Figure 30: Hydrologic Features



One hundred year floodplains are any areas susceptible to flooding with at least a one percent probability of flooding in any given year. Approximately 23,000 acres or eight percent of Gwinnett County's lands are within one hundred year floodplains. Construction and development within floodplains is restricted by Ordinance to the following uses: public parks, agriculture, dams, bridges, parking areas, public utility facilities, and outdoor storage. Construction that would change the flood characteristics of the area or create hazardous velocities of water flow is not allowed. The cities of Suwanee, Lilburn, and Buford have significant amounts of floodplain within their borders.

Development on slopes greater than 12 percent is restricted by Gwinnett County. Steep slopes are found throughout the County but are especially prevalent west of I-85 due to the topography of this area. According to Gwinnett's Development Regulations, cut and fill grading has a maximum slope of 2:1, as most soils can be stabilized at that ratio.

Some of Gwinnett County's soil is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as being prime agricultural soil. However, identified prime agricultural soil does not necessarily correlate with farming. Some of the areas identified as prime agricultural soil are developed or are in areas of planned future development. In 2000, only 0.2 percent of Gwinnett County employment was associated with agriculture.

Cultural Resources

The historic and cultural landmarks in Gwinnett include historic homes, graveyards, schools, churches, and mines. Lawrenceville, the County seat, has a concentration of historic resources along East Crogan Street. Other notable features in the County include the Old Native American Quarry in the southernmost part of the County, historic Swann's Mill located between Dacula and Lawrenceville, and McDaniel's Bridge along Route 78 west of Snellville. Gwinnett County has conducted an historic sites inventory and identified 297 churches, schools, bridges, cemeteries, old towns and Native American trails.

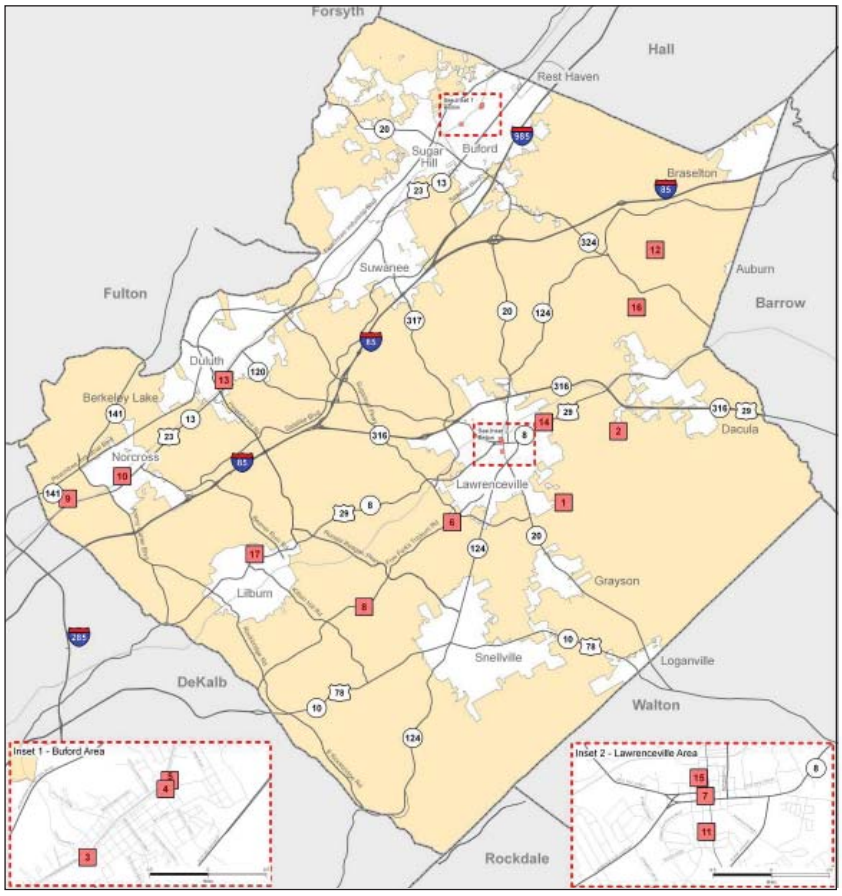
There are seventeen sites within Gwinnett County on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP): Isaac Adair House, Alcovy Road Grist Mill, Bona Allen Shoe and Horse Collar Factory, Bona Allen House, John Quincy Allen House, Robert Craig Plantation, Gwinnett County Courthouse, Hudson-Nash House and Cemetery, Mechanicsville School, Norcross Historic District, Old Seminary Building, Parks-Strickland Archaeological Complex, The Superb, William Terrell Homeplace, Clarence R. Ware House, Elisha Winn House, and Thomas Wynne House. These sites are shown on Figure 31.

Although the sites listed above represent those properties that have been nominated and accepted for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, many other sites, properties, and objects within the County and its communities may also be eligible for potential listing. Furthermore, NRHP properties and those not considered eligible for federal NRHP listing may warrant special local protections to ensure their preservation.

Besides those resources already listed on the National Register, there are many other sites and buildings in the County that have no official designation, yet their presence provides the community with an opportunity to build a larger and better historic legacy for future generations.

Parcels with archaeological significance are located throughout the County and are especially concentrated along the Chattahoochee River in the northwestern part of Gwinnett. There is also a trail of archaeologically significant tracts along Sugarloaf Parkway stretching between Lawrenceville, Suwanee, and Duluth and a grouping of tracts in the southwestern part of Gwinnett near the border with DeKalb. The largest concentration of sites is in the Hog Mountain-Dacula area where prehistoric mounds have been discovered, containing Gwinnett County's only archeological site on the National Register of Historic Places.

Figure 31: Cultural Resources - National Register of Historic Places



1	Isaac Adair House
2	Alcovy Rd. Grist Mill
3	Bona Allen Shoe and Horse Collar Factory
4	Bona Allen House
5	John Quincy Allen House
6	Robert Craig Plantation
7	Gwinnett County Courthouse
8	Hudson-Nash House and Cemetary
9	Mechanicsville School
10	Norcross Historic District
11	Old Seminary Building (Female Seminary)
12	Parks-Strickland Archaeological Complex
13	The Superb
14	William Terrell Homeplace
15	Clarence R. Warehouse
16	Elisha Winn House
17	Thomas Wynne House

Parks and Recreation

In November 2007, the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners received the 2007 Update of the Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Plan (2007 CIP). The Unified Plan does not provide specific or detailed park and recreation recommendations and recognizes the 2007 CIP as the principal document for information, goals, strategies, and priorities for Parks and Recreation.

The 2007 CIP is an update to the 2004 Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan. The 2007 CIP has three objectives: evaluate the County's ability to provide park and recreation services, identify service gaps and needs, and propose a prioritized list of capital projects for the period following the 2005 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). This last issue is particularly important because at the end of 2008, Gwinnett's residents will be asked to vote on whether to extend the SPLOST for another four years.

Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation was a Gold Medal Award winning finalist in the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration. The Gwinnett County park system currently includes:

- **27 Community Parks totaling 2,930 acres**
  The centerpiece of Gwinnett County's park system, Community Parks contain a diverse range of active, passive, team and individual recreation opportunities for all ages. Community Parks can accommodate a large number of users (and vehicles) and intense usage at peak times. New Community Park development should address both the active and passive recreation needs of the area. Larger parks (e.g., greater than 100 acres) should set aside at least one-third of the land area as passive recreation and preserved open space. The degree of development within smaller parks (e.g., less than 100 acres) should be determined on a case-by-case basis, but may exceed 67 percent for active recreation. Community Parks should be located on major roadways and be designed to connect to a County-wide greenway network.

- **8 Special Purpose Parks totaling 60 acres**
  Special Purpose Parks and facilities serve special interest recreation or leisure interests and are generally single purpose and located on small sites. They can provide a special emphasis to a nearby community park or be free standing. Consideration should be given to the ability of such facilities to be self-supporting, however, each should be judged on its own merits.

- **2 Special Purpose Neighborhood Parks totaling 50 acres**
  Special Purpose Neighborhood Parks are intended to serve densely populated areas that:
  - Are deficient in park and recreation opportunities; and
  - Do not contain tracts of land large enough for the development of a Passive Community Park; or
  - Wish to develop more active recreational uses than permitted by either the Passive Community Park (see below) or Special Purpose Park.

  Special Purpose Neighborhood Parks will generally be in the 5 to 20 acre range and may be developed on vacant commercial or industrial/brownfield sites in cases where more suitable options do not exist. Special Purpose Neighborhood Parks generally contain active and passive recreational activity areas. This park type would serve various age groups with emphasis on youth and should be tailored to fit the existing and anticipated characteristics of the surrounding population. Limited non-organized sport group activities are encouraged. A desirable location is within close proximity to multifamily complexes or higher density single-family detached areas. Park users will be encouraged to walk to Special Purpose Neighborhood Parks, thereby limiting the amount of on-site parking space to be provided.

- **7 Passive Community Parks totaling 500 acres**
  In areas that are underserved, densely populated, and land poor, passive Community Parks offer a smaller-scale alternative to Community Parks. They offer a similar complement of facilities as Community Parks, with a blend of active and passive recreation opportunities, however, sport field complexes, large community facilities, or other recreation areas requiring hundreds of parking spaces are not permitted. Approximately 25 percent to 33 percent of a Passive Community Park may be developed with impermeable surfaces. Passive Community Parks should provide both pedestrian access as well as vehicular access to the site. In this regard, they should be located on major roadways and be designed to connect to a County-wide greenway network.

- **12 Open Space Parks totaling 4,800 acres**
  Open Space parks are generally large parcels of mostly undeveloped land that embody natural, scenic and cultural values, resources and landscapes. These parks provide passive, non-programmed recreation opportunities in a managed environment. To fulfill their open space preservation and protection roles, Open Space parks typically provide only the minimal amenities needed to provide public access for low intensity and dispersed recreation. Open Space parks are designed for a maximum of 10 to 15 percent impervious surface coverage. Where possible, Open Space Parks should be located along and/or connected to the greenway system.

- **12 Green Space Parks totaling 220 acres and 4 "Other" facilities totaling 410 acres**
  Green Space parks and other facilities are informal and less defined categories. They are not part of the County's park classification system. Examples include Alcovy River Corridors, Yellow River

Table 16: National Recreational and Park Association Open Space Standards, 2002

	Component	Use	Service Area	Desirable Size	Acres /1,000 Persons	Desirable Site Characteristics
LOCAL OR CLOSE-TO-HOME SPACE	Mini Park	Specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specialized group such as tots or senior citizens	Less than ¼ mile radius	1 acre or less	.25 to .5	Within neighborhoods and close to apartment complexes, townhouse development, or housing for the elderly
	Neighborhood Park/Playground	Area for intense recreational activities such as field games, court games, crafts, skating, and picnicking; also for wading pool and playground apparatus areas	¼ to ½ mile radius to serve a population up to 5,000 (a neighborhood)	15+ acres	1.0 to 2.0	Suited for intense development; easily accessible to neighborhood populations; geographically centered with safe walking and bike access; may be developed as a school park facility
	Community Park	Area of diverse environmental quality; may include areas suited for intense recreational facilities such as athletic complexes, large swimming pools; may be an area of natural quality for outdoor recreation such as walking, viewing, sitting, picnicking; may be any combination of the above depending on the suitability and community need	Several neighborhoods, 1 to 2 mile radius	25+ acres	5.0 to 8.0	May include natural features such as water bodies and areas suited for intense development; easily accessible to neighborhoods served
	Total Local or Close-To-Home Space = 6.25 to 10.5 acres per 1,000 population					
REGIONAL SPACE	Regional/ Metropolitan Park	Areas of natural quality for outdoor recreation such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping, and trail uses; may include play areas	Several communities, 1 hour driving time	200+ acres	5.0 to 10.0	Contiguous to or encompassing natural resources
	Regional Park Reserve	Areas of natural quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as viewing and studying nature, wildlife habitats, conservation, swimming, picnicking, hiking, fishing, boating, camping, and trail uses; may include active play areas; generally 80% of the land is reserved for conservation and natural resource management with less than 20% used for recreation	Several communities, 1 hour driving time	1,000+ acres, sufficient area to encompass the resources to be preserved and managed	Variable	Diverse or unique natural resources such as lakes, streams, marshes, flora, fauna, and topography
	Total Regional Space = 15.20 acres per 1,000 population					
LOCAL OR REGIONAL SPACE UNIQUE TO EACH COMMUNITY	Linear Park	Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross country skiing, canoeing, and pleasure driving; may include active play areas (note: any activities included for the preceding components may occur in the linear park.)	No applicable standards	Sufficient width to protect the resources and provide maximum use	Variable	Built on natural corridors such as utility rights-of-way, bluff lines, vegetation patterns, and roads that link other components of the recreation system or community facilities such as schools, libraries, commercial areas, and other park areas
	Special Use	Areas for specialized or single-purpose recreational activities such as golf course, nature centers, marina, zoos, conservatories, arboreta, display gardens, arenas, outdoor theaters, gun ranges, downhill ski areas, or areas that preserve, maintain, and interpret buildings, sites, and objects of archeological significance; also plazas or squares in or near commercial centers, boulevards, and parkways	No applicable standards	Variable depending on desired size	Variable	Within communities
	Conservancy	Protection and management of the natural and cultural environment with recreational use a secondary objective	No applicable standards	Sufficient to protect the resource	Variable	Variable, depending on the resource being protected

Wetlands, Harbins to Palm Creek Connector Trail, Beaver Ruin Greenspace, Collins Hill Golf Club, Gwinnett Environmental and Heritage Center, and Vulcan Site.

The County also contains 1,310 acres of city-owned parks and 1,670 acres of Federally-owned parkland.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) provides guidelines for local or close-to-home recreational and open space and for regional recreational and open space. Table 16 describes NRPA's parkland designations; service areas; and desired size, acres per 1,000 population, and site characteristics. Table 17 compares the NRPA's park and open standards to the amount of park and open space provided within the County. If all parkland is added together, there are 15.4 acres of parkland per 1,000 population (based on 2007 US Census population estimate). An area where the County is deficient is local or close-to-home space. The NRPA standards recommend between 6.25 and 10.5 acres per 1,000 population. Gwinnett has 2.4 acres. This calculation includes the city-owned parks. If those parks are not included, the County has 0.7 acres per 1,000 population. Gwinnett's provision of close-to-home open space is well below the recommended standards. Gwinnett fares better with providing regional recreational open space. It has 12.2 acres per 1,000 population and the NRPA standards recommend 15.2 acres. If the Federal land is not included, the County has 10.0 acres per 1,000 population.

Table 17: Comparison between NRPA Standards and Gwinnett's Park Provisions

NRPA Park Designation	Gwinnett Park Designation	Total Acres in Gwinnett	Gwinnett's ac/1,000 population	NRPA's ac/1,000 population
LOCAL OR CLOSE-TO-HOME SPACE				
Mini Parks	n/a	0	0	0.25
Neighborhood Park/ Playground	n/a	0	0	1.0 – 2.0
Community Park	Passive Community Parks	500	0.64	5.0 – 8.0
n/a	Special Purpose Neighborhood Parks	50	0.06	n/a
n/a	City Parks	1,310	1.69	n/a
TOTAL LOCAL / CLOSE-TO-HOME SPACE		**1,860**	**2.40**	**6.25 – 10.5**
REGIONAL SPACE				
Regional/Metropolitan Park	Community Parks	2,930	3.77	5.0 – 10.0
Regional Park Reserve	Open Space Parks	4,800	6.18	variable
n/a	Special Purpose Parks	60	.08	n/a
n/a	Federal Parks	1,670	2.15	n/a
TOTAL REGIONAL SPACE		**9,460**	**15.20**	**12.18**
SPACE THAT MAY BE LOCAL OR REGIONAL AND IS UNIQUE TO EACH COMMUNITY				
Linear Park	Green Space and Other	630	Variable	0.81
Special Use	n/a			
Conservancy	n/a			
TOTAL LOCAL/REGIONAL/ UNIQUE SPACE	**630**	**Variable**	**0.81**	
TOTAL OPEN SPACE		11,950	15.4	

C.8.2 Driving Forces

The main driving force impacting each of these elements is population growth. As Gwinnett's population grows and its demand for housing, jobs, services, and land increases, increased pressures are placed on the County's natural environment, cultural resources, and park system.

An additional driving force impacting Gwinnett's park system is the County's increasingly diverse population. People from different cultural backgrounds have different preferred recreational activities. An example cited in the 2007 CIP is that the Hispanic community has requested more soccer fields.

As Gwinnett's population grows and its demand for housing, jobs, services, and land increases, increased pressures are placed on the County's natural environment, cultural resources, and park system.

C.8.3 Environmental & Cultural Resources Issues to Address

Issues – Environmental Quality

- Threats to Wetlands
  Wetland viability is threatened by land consumption patterns and land reclamation.

- Improving Impaired Streams
  Some of Gwinnett County's streams are on Georgia's 303(d) list of impaired streams. Twenty-three streams classified as "not supporting" do not meet the standards for their designated use (e.g., fishing, swimming, recreational use, etc.). A variety of measures to better protect such water bodies have been enacted since 2000, but the Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources needs to continue monitoring the health of its streams.

Issues – Cultural Resources

- Limited Concern for Historic and Cultural Resources
  Most Gwinnett residents have roots somewhere else and many have arrived here relatively recently. This means appreciation of Gwinnett's remaining historic resources and other cultural landmarks tends to be confined to a small segment of its population. Those who have been working for greater awareness and appreciation of historic and cultural resources have had only a small base of support.

- Need for Non-Regulatory Historic Preservation Incentives
  Traditional methods of historic preservation, use of national or locally designated historic districts and regulations, have no broad based constituency. A battery of other approaches backed by a variety of incentives rather than restrictions or requirements may be a more fruitful approach.

Issues – Parks and Recreation

- Lack of Sufficient Small Locally Accessible Park Space
  At present, most of the County's parks are large regional parks and most residents require an automobile to get to them. Developing parks and open space throughout the County and within a short distance from people's homes will be a major concern as the County moves forward. Additional smaller, neighborhood parks and single purpose facilities such as skate parks, swimming pools, or soccer fields could reduce dependency on the larger parks to meet demand for such activities. This would make many more recreation opportunities directly available to those without ready access to cars and for young people who do not drive.

- Piecing Together a Continuous System of Greenways
  There is need and interest for the County to provide a county-wide network of greenway trails. Such a network would provide for a more continuous interlinking of large and small green spaces and environmental resources, and improve access of residents to such features.

C.9 Gwinnett Government and Fiscal Capabilities

The discussion of fiscal matters is left to last because it affects and is affected by some of the topics discussed above and because it highlights some of the most serious future challenges the county faces. Despite much of the positive news on income and jobs presented in C.4, an examination of current trends and driving forces raises several important warning flags.

C.9.1 Current Budget Picture

Tables 18 and 19 summarize current (2005) Revenues and Expenditures by major category.

As Table 18 shows, property taxes comprise 39 percent of revenues and sales taxes provide 21 percent of overall revenue. This helps to explain the County's willingness from a fiscal perspective to readily rezone property for retail uses. Although currently, this is not looked at in rezoning staff analysis, most of the remaining categories pale against the revenues generated by property and sales taxes except for the grab-bag of 'Other Revenue' (24.5 percent). Property and sales taxes revenues relate directly to land use decisions made by the County. Income profiles also relate indirectly to these as well.

Table 18: 2005 Revenue by Category

Revenue Categories	2005	Percent of Total
Property Taxes	$260,282,545	38.6%
Sales Taxes	$140,971,729	20.9%
Excise and Special Use	$30,216,872	4.5%
Licenses and Permits	$25,265,571	3.7%
Charges for Services	$30,639,128	4.5%
Fines & Forfeitures	$21,725,217	3.2%
Other Revenue	$165,511,880	24.5%
Total Revenue	$674,612,942	100.0%

Source: Gwinnett County Finance Office

On the expenditures side, Public Safety constitutes about a third of the expenditures, as does the General Administrative function. Public Works, which includes local road building derived from SPLOST monies accounts for another 23% of expenditures. Health and Public Assistance currently only constitutes only about 1.5% of expenditures. Clearly crime and related incidents would affect expenditures as would publicly provided social service needs that might be driven by a less affluent and an aging population.

Table 19: 2005 Expenditures by Category

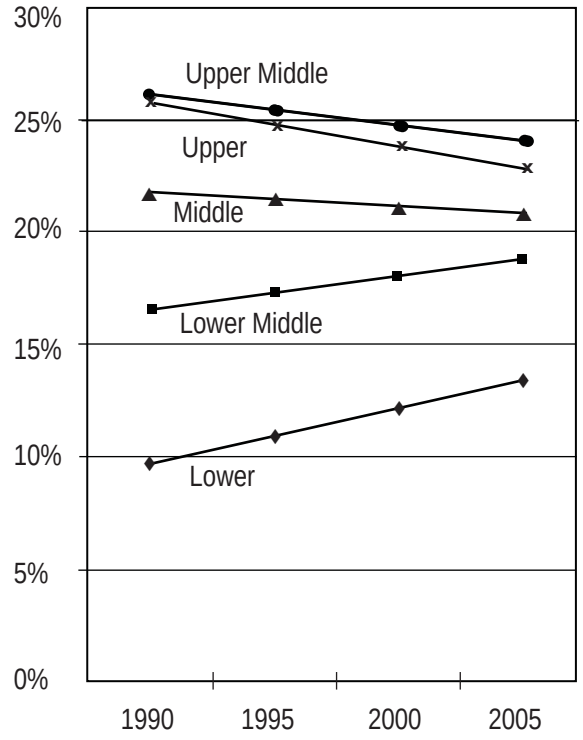
Expenditure Categories	2005	Percent of Total
General Administrative	$218,901,936	32.4
Public Works	$152,596,769	22.6
Courts	$34,190,804	5.1
Public Safety	$217,179,136	32.2
Health	$6,011,708	0.9
Public Assistance	$3,956,138	0.6
Recreation and Library	$41,144,932	6.1
Other Expenditure	$631,519	0.1
Debt Service	$0	0.0
Total Expenditures	$674,612,942	100.0%

Source: Gwinnett County Finance Office

C.9.2 Trends / Driving Forces

The proportionate size of each income group in Gwinnett has been slowly and steadily converging toward a more equal share of the total population for the past several years, as the graph in Figure 32 shows. Indeed, Gwinnett's median income is approaching the regional median [or average] income, and, as it continues, this trend has very significant implications for Gwinnett.

Figure 32: Gwinnett County Households in Each Regional Income Quintile as a Percent of Total Gwinnett Households
1990-2005



Source: U.S. Census

Impacts of Income Shifts

One aspect of Gwinnett's fiscal picture that is tied to income trends is what the County might need to spend on poverty related programs and services. As Table 20 shows, Gwinnett currently spends far less on such programs as a percentage of their budget than neighboring or comparable counties like Cobb. This has implications both for the current level of services that the County is providing (a point reinforced anecdotally in our focus groups with lower income residents) as well as future needs.

Table 20: Poverty Spending as a Percent of General Revenues for FY2005 using Georgia Department of Community Affairs Data

County	Poverty Spending	Difference from Median
Cobb	8.23%	0.12%
DeKalb	7.98%	-0.12%
Fulton	15.15%	7.04%
Gwinnett	4.48%	-3.62%
Median	8.10%	

Table 21: Poverty Rates Range* for 2005 and 2006

County	2005	2006
Cobb	7.2% - 9.6%	8.6% - 10.4%
DeKalb	14.6% - 17.6%	12.9% - 15.9%
Fulton	14.1% - 16.7%	14.3% - 16.5%
Gwinnett	6.2% - 8.6%	8.0% - 10.4%

** Poverty rates are from the American Community Survey. Ranges are inclusive of the confidence intervals.*

All this points to a growing need for Gwinnett to increase its spending on poverty. Our finding in Table 20 above suggests that the poverty rates between Cobb and DeKalb counties should be similar and both Gwinnett and Fulton counties should differ, with Gwinnett County having a lower poverty rate than any of the other counties based on poverty spending. Table 21 shows the poverty rates in 2005 and 2006 for the counties of interest. As shown in Table 21, Gwinnett and Cobb counties had very similar poverty rates in 2006, while DeKalb had a higher poverty rate. Focusing on just the two years offered, in Table 21 we see that both Cobb and Gwinnett counties poverty rates are rising while DeKalb County's poverty rate is declining. In the future, poverty-related spending will likely equal that percentage spent by Cobb County in 2005, 8.23 percent of general revenue as shown in Table 20.

Income is also factor that correlates with demands for public safety. Lower and lower middle income households make more calls for fire and police services. An analysis of calls made by Sub-County Areas(see Figure 33 for the areas) showed the highest call rates in sub-area 6, followed by sub-area 8, then sub-area 2. Figure 34 shows this pattern for 2006 for all Sub-County Areas compared to the median number of calls. To the degree these trends persist, the County will face increasing public safety needs as the proportion of such income groups rises. Indeed Gwinnett, at 0.9 personnel per 1000 persons, is currently well below the minimal staffing guideline for police officers of 1.1 personnel per 1000 people. (Dekalb has about 1.95 per 1000, Fulton 1.8 and Cobb has 1.1 personnel per 1000 people). To plan for better staffing, the fiscal analysis done for this Plan has selected a ratio of 1.3 personnel per 1000 people.

These potential future expenditure adjustments will need to be balanced with the County's revenue, bearing in mind that there is little potential to generate more revenue from the existing revenue sources. In 2005, Gwinnett County's economic base was at a healthy 98 percent of revenue capacity. The County also already collects 125 percent of its tax capacity, the highest in the ARC 20-county area.

Figure 33: Gwinnett Sub-County Areas

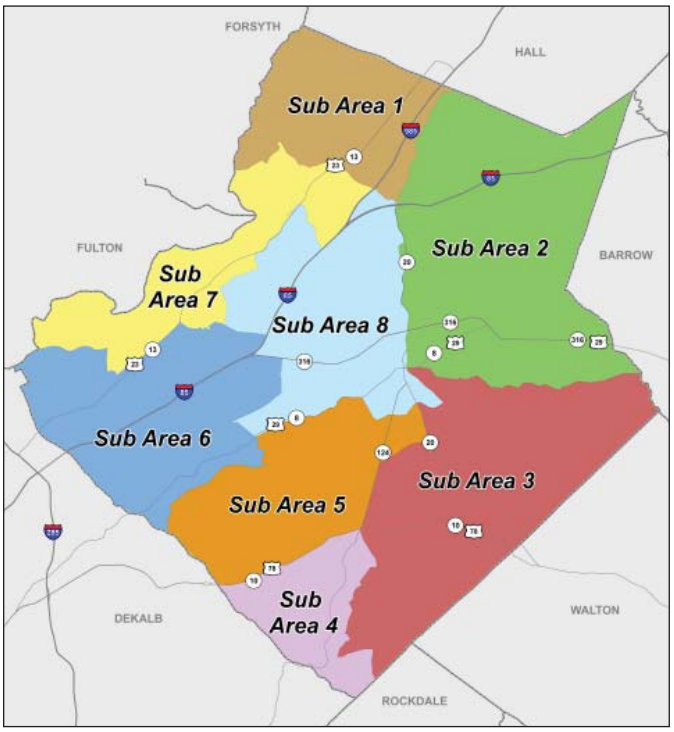
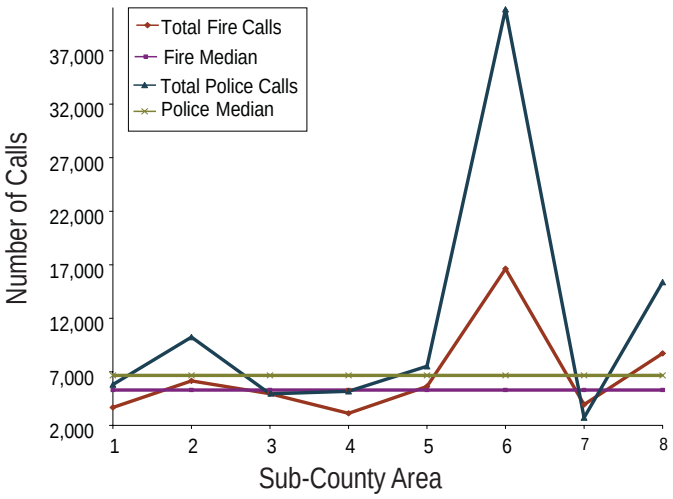


Figure 34: Gwinnett County FY2006 Calls for Service Police and Fire



Source: Gwinnett County Police Department, Gwinnett County Fire and Emergency Services Department

C.9.3 Issues to Address

- Need for Greater Fiscal Awareness
  The emerging fiscal challenge has been largely overlooked as the rising tide of rapid growth has made possible the provision of facilities and services with little worry about the County's taxable base, or the need to make hard choices regarding tax rates, debt financing, or other means to raise adequate revenues. Without a change of approach, such good times will not last forever. Consequently, key aspects of this plan and the scenario development and testing that helped define the Unified Plan stem directly from the analysis of the fiscal consequences of different planning choices, including maintaining the status quo.

- Increasing Fiscal Strains
  The declining average income of the population will provide less resources from property and sales taxes and less social capital as well. As housing and the related retail/service sector job growth slow and build-out is approached, a pro-active plan to maintain job growth in other sectors and stepped up revitalization efforts are needed or Gwinnett County revenues will decline.

  Economic development strategies for attracting better paying jobs, to temper this current trend are therefore a priority of the Unified Plan.

- Rising Operating and Maintenance Costs
  Maintaining roads, the sewer system and recreation and parks facilities will eat up a higher proportion of future County revenues. As the County matures, more and more public resources will need to go into the operations and maintenance of existing facilities and programs and ultimately their replacement. If the fiscal condition of the County deteriorates, such maintenance of the status quo could preempt the funding of new facilities needed to sustain Gwinnett's robust economy and quality of life. Failure to keep revenues in line with needs can lead to a declining quality of life for Gwinnett's residents as declining revenue leads to deferred maintenance or even closing of facilities too expensive to maintain and operate.

The emerging fiscal challenge has been largely overlooked. Without a change of approach, such good times will not last forever.

- Rising Public Safety Costs
  Public safety issues correlate, as we have seen, with income levels. Consequently, the expected rise in public safety costs associated with an increase of lower income groups will also put pressure on the County's fiscal resources. Even if increased police needs related to shifts in the County's income profile is averted, costs of providing basic public safety such as fire and police will skyrocket as the population increases and continues to spread at low densities over more of the County. Furthermore, if the demographic trends that have been occurring since 1980 continue, an ever growing proportion of the overall population will be increasingly dependent on a variety of social services and health related programs, whose costs are likely to rise.

D. SUMMARY OF ISSUES

The Issues to Address highlighted in the above discussion of trends and driving forces for the various aspects of Gwinnett today set up the main work of Unified Plan development that is summarized in Part 2. The following is a complete list of these issues by general topic.

Demographic and Socio-Economic
- Aging Population
- Continued Pressure on Schools
- Multi-Ethnic Community Needs
- Multiple Impacts of Less Affluent Overall Income Profile
- Rising Proportion of Population Below Poverty Line

Land Use
- Future of Remaining Undeveloped Lands
- Increasing Need to Redevelop Existing Uses
- Location of Potentially Developable Lands in Relation to Transportation Network

Economic
- Promote Shift From Industrial To An Office Dominated Economic Base
- Prevent Future "Over-Retailing" Of Gwinnett
- Develop Strategies To Deal With Redevelopment Needs
- Create New Centers Within Gwinnett

Housing
- Limited Housing Choices
- Limited Supply of Affordable Housing
- Economic Development Impacts of Limited Housing Affordability
- Quality of Housing Stock
- Impact of Foreclosures on Households Losing Their Homes.
- Transportation-Housing Nexus
- Housing and Other Services for Special Needs Populations
- Dealing with "Latch-Key" Child Issues

Transportation
- Congestion Mitigation
- Increase Connectivity in New and Existing Developments
- Lack of Access Management along Many Key Roads
- Increasing Transit Coverage and Ridership
- Finding Adequate Sources of Transportation Funding

Water and Sewer
- Need to Replace or Upgrade Older Segments of Sewer Network
- Expensive Extensions of System to Serve Low Density Development
- Loss of Revenue from Decreased Water Sales
- Rising Operating Costs of Water Distribution and Wastewater Treatment
- Lack of Funding for Water and Sewer System Sustainability
- Potential Barriers to Increasing Water Supply and Discharge Limits
- State and Federal Differences regarding Water Withdrawals and Costs

Environmental Quality, Cultural Resources and Parks and Recreation

Environmental Quality
- Threats to Wetlands
- Improving Impaired Streams
- Tree Conservation

Cultural Resources
- Limited Concern for Historic and Cultural Resources
- Need for Non-Regulatory Historic Preservation Incentives

Parks and Recreation
- Lack of Sufficient Small Locally Accessible Park Space
- Piecing Together a Continuous System of Greenways

Gwinnett Government and Fiscal Responsibilities
- Need for Greater Fiscal Awareness
- Increasing Fiscal Strains
- Rising Operating and Maintenance Costs
- Rising Public Safety Costs

This list of issues constitutes one primary input into the scenario building and testing process described in Sections B and C of Part 2. One of the ways the scenarios differed from each other is in how they addressed many of these issues.