

## **Chapter 9: Needs Assessment**



# NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## 9.1 Economic Development

Jackson County, Arcade, Braselton, Commerce, Hoschton, Jefferson, Nicholson, Pendergrass and Talmo

- < Substantial residential growth is expected over the next twenty years. The county needs to expand and diversify the commercial and industrial base, increase employment opportunities, and promote quality of life through protection of the environment and conservation of rural character.
- < Communication and cooperation among the various jurisdictions in Jackson needs to improve. The county should establish formal dialog among all municipalities to promote a consensus on economic development goals, policies and implementation strategies.
- < Low skill jobs are susceptible to plant closings and relocations. Increasing skill levels among the local work force is crucial to sustaining employment and higher wages.
- < The county needs to continue to promote vocational training between the current and future workforce. The public education system should also continue to encourage occupational training in their curriculum and work with the private sector to promote occupational experience (i.e., internships) for students.
- < The economic development organizational effort in Jackson is too fragmented. The various industrial development authorities should consolidate into one authority that serves all of Jackson County and its cities.
- < Currently, the industrial development authorities do not work with the Chamber of Commerce in economic development matters. The industrial authority and the chamber should share ideas, strategies and work toward the same goals.
- < No avenues exist for private citizens to participate in Jackson's economic development strategies. County and city government entities involved in economic development should create a method for county-wide public involvement in planning decisions.
- < Jackson County does not have sufficient water supply or sewerage system capacity to serve future economic development that will occur in the county.
- < Citizens do not want industrial or commercial establishments to conflict with other types of land uses (especially residential). Therefore, businesses should locate in designated zones where their activities and location are compatible and consistent with adjacent land uses. Growth should be controlled to avoid the negative effects of commercial sprawl. The county should employ proper planning techniques while pursuing economic development. The county needs to determine the appropriate locations for future industrial and commercial growth tourism.
- < Jackson needs to maximize promotion of its economic development resources through a statewide database (i.e., Internet, Geographic Information Systems, Georgia Power Resource Center).
- < Small businesses represent a significant part of Jackson's economic growth. The Chamber needs to continue to monitor and identify the needs and concerns of small businesses and maximize business expansion and retention.
- < Need to identify and target specific types of businesses that are compatible with the labor force and who will contribute favorably to the local economy and quality of life.

## 9.2 Natural Resources

- < Protect environmental, natural, and rural resources. Little, if anything, has been done to actively protect resources since the 1992 Comprehensive Plan. The county needs to aggressively implement some protection mechanisms before the resources are severely degraded or destroyed.
- < Protect agricultural resources, both active agricultural parcels and those parcels with agricultural landscapes.
- < Consider the Middle Oconee River watershed area north of I-85 between highways 82 and 98 for open space protection. This area has a high potential for changes in stormwater runoff and natural drainage patterns which could result from unchecked conversion to more developed uses.
- < Forest resources should be protected for their environmental and aesthetic value as well as the increased value of development when these resources are protected. Clear-cut harvesting prior to development should be prohibited in order to preserve existing, mature trees which will enhance the completed development and facilitate mitigation of future water quality degradation.
- < In an effort to look beyond solely regulatory measures, the county should focus on education initiatives concerning forest resource protection and consider an annual recognition of development projects that protect the forest resources.
- < Provide for education on the importance of protection of natural resources and their value to the community. Citizens need to understand how degradation of a natural resource will affect them. Additionally, there are programs in place that can assist the property owner with natural resource conservation; however, they may not be sufficiently publicized.
- < Require vegetative cover replacement of all development if existing vegetation is not maintained.
- < Protect water resources from contamination and degradation. Water resources should be viewed on a local and regional perspective. Development approval decisions should consider the downstream impact of the proposed activity.
- < Enforce Erosion and Sedimentation Ordinance. Maintenance of erosion mitigation measures is the primary problem.
- < Protect surface water supply by developing and adopting a watershed protection management plan to ensure quality water supply for present and future growth. Encourage use of undisturbed vegetative buffers adjacent to streams and fencing of cattle from streams. At a minimum, the DNR watershed protection criteria should be adopted.
- < Amend land development regulations to implement the DNR river corridor protection criteria for third order streams except the minimum lot size should be increased from two acres to five acres. A 25-foot vegetative buffer should be required adjacent to all perennial first order streams (this is currently required through the Erosion and Sedimentation Act), second order streams should be protected with a 50-foot buffer, and third order streams with a 100-foot vegetative buffer.
- < Protect recharge areas from contamination. Jackson County should attempt to comply with the DNR recharge area protection criteria and undertake any necessary amendments to local regulations.
- < Development should be reviewed based on not just its impact on water quality but also on the cumulative effects of the particular development on water quality.
- < Prohibit degradation and destruction of wetlands. Applicable jurisdictions should adopt a local ordinance based on the DNR wetlands protection criteria.

- < Allow only appropriate development in floodplains.
- < Protect agricultural resources from incompatible land uses.
- < Protect sufficient forest resources to maintain diversity of species. Educate developers about the monetary and economic value of trees. Promote Georgia Forestry Commission's Forest Stewardship program and tax abatement through conservation use designation.
- < Protect identified scenic areas, scenic roadways, and Native American sites from adverse development as many of these areas define the county's rural character. Some of these areas may be suitable for protection via conservation easements or fee simple acquisition. Others may be protected through conservation design techniques which include open space and resource protection.
- < Utilize existing studies to determine location of sensitive plant habitats in preparation for development review.
- < Inventory areas suitable for preservation as greenspace.
- < Long-term, develop a multi-jurisdictional greenway by participating in the proposed Athens-Clarke County greenway through an extension of the greenway into Jackson County. In anticipation of the greenway development, educate property owners about benefits of developing a greenway including financial incentives.
- < Enforce ordinances.
- < The zoning classification for a parcel and its allowable use on that parcel should be compatible with the ability of the parcel to support that land use.
- < Long-term, consider establishing a Transfer of Development Rights program to facilitate natural resource protection.

### 9.3 Historic Resources

- < During the historic resources element meetings, the following issues and concerns were discussed. They represent the larger areas of consideration that need to be addressed for preservation-planning purposes.
- < Historic resources in Jackson County require funding for repairs to ensure their immediate stabilization and long-term preservation. Many buildings, including residential, commercial, and institutional, suffer from neglect. Historic buildings that are in the ownership of governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations need to apply for preservation grants, both from state and federal sources. Individual property owners also should take advantage of tax-incentive programs to preserve residential and commercial buildings in Jackson County. Over the past 2-3 years, however, Jackson County and several of its cities have applied for and received funding for preservation projects. Grant requests of this kind should continue in Jackson County.
- < Jackson County is considered a desirable place to live because of its mostly rural, small-town qualities. People continue to live and others relocate in Jackson County for its rural qualities. The projected growth for Jackson County may threaten its rural qualities and historic resources. The county should help manage new growth and development so it will not destroy Jackson County's desirable qualities as a livable place and community. Historic farms should be recognized by a Centennial Farm Award; nominations need to be prepared for eligible farms. Historic farms that evidence the county agrarian past also should be preserved.
- < Historic resources should be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places for possible future listing.
- 0 Preservation and protection of significant historic resources in the county and municipalities.
- < Promotion of historic resources as tourist destinations. Development and improvement of these historic resources for public use.
- 0 Greater public awareness about historic preservation. Educational materials and programs about historic resources.
- < Preservation education is needed in Jackson County. Information about the history of the county also needs to be provided to residents. The county has several historical museums and/or parks that help provide information about the county's history. These facilities should continue to operate and others, where appropriate, should be started and developed.
- < A comprehensive inventory of the county's historic resources, including buildings, cemeteries, and archaeological sites, needs to be conducted. This information should be used to help protect significant historic resources.

## 9.4 Community Facilities

### Law Enforcement

- < Need to ensure that the Sheriff's Department and municipal departments have sufficient staff and equipment to meet the demands of increased growth.
- < Community policing should be promoted as a way to reduce crime.
- < A joint service plan for Jackson and Banks counties is needed to clearly define jurisdiction and responsibility for responding to calls in the outlet mall area.
- < Commerce is the only jurisdiction in the county to provide animal control. Task Force members suggest that the county provide this service as well.

### Fire Protection

- < All fire protection in the county is provided by independent volunteer fire departments. Although Task Force members agree that current service is adequate, it is felt that a professional fire department would better serve the growing population.
- < A service delivery plan is needed to determine if it would be more cost effective and efficient to establish professional municipal fire departments.
- < Water pressure in Nicholson needs to be increased to avoid potential fire hazards.
- < Response times in Jefferson could be improved with the addition of new substations near I-85 and in downtown Jefferson.
- < The Harrisburg VFD would like to add more fire hydrants to help improve their ISO rating. This is dependent on water line expansion.
- < The South Jackson VFD Station #1 is in need of additional sleeping quarters.

### EMS

- < There are only three ambulances located throughout the county. Building additional substations and/or housing ambulances at county-wide VFDs would contribute to more efficient response time.

### Transportation

- < The lack of public transportation will continue to force residents to rely on single occupancy vehicles, resulting in increased traffic congestion and deteriorating roads.
- < Safety is a concern on GA 15 between Commerce and Jefferson due to curves and the narrowness of the road. Passing lanes would help alleviate this problem.
- < Congestion along Jefferson River Road continues to be a problem due to its narrowness and a lack of maneuverability by school buses. Road widening is one possible solution.
- < Many roads in Jackson County are unpaved and in need of repair.
- < A bypass around Jefferson would help mitigate transportation problems due to rush-hour traffic and school buses that must pass through downtown.

- < More sidewalks are needed within Jefferson's city limits.
- < Traffic volume and speed create safety problems at county schools located along GA 441 and GA 129. The Sheriff's Department and the police departments in Hoschton and Braselton provide traffic control when available. Turning and/or deceleration/acceleration lanes are needed.
- < Signalization at GA 441 and the Commerce bypass is not effective. Many accidents occur due to limited sight distance.
- < Safe bike lanes need to be promoted throughout the county. A comprehensive bike lane study should be undertaken to locate the best routes and determine projected usage.

**Water and Sewerage Systems**

- < A water and sewer infrastructure plan for the I-85 corridor should be conducted within the next ten years.
- < Water distribution is limited throughout the county. Task Force members recommend extending lines to cover more area, possibly in conjunction with the operation of the Bear Creek Reservoir.
- < Water conservation efforts need to be promoted throughout the county.
- < Need sufficient sewer service to support business and industry to increase the tax base.
- < A county-wide effort should be made to reduce the reliance on septic systems, as they are land intensive and costly to install and operate.
- < The county needs to begin a comprehensive study to determine the requirements of establishing a public sewerage system and wastewater treatment for the unincorporated areas of the county. A possible starting point is to create a county system by linking existing municipal systems and extending distribution.
- < According to projections, municipal water and sewer systems will continue to experience demand pressure, especially Braselton and Jefferson. Pragmatic, long-term planning will be crucial for jurisdictions to continue to attract residential and commercial development.
- < Water treatment and storage capability in Commerce should continue to be increased.
- < Many Arcade residents who rely on individual wells are faced with groundwater contamination problems. These households must tap into the county water system to avoid potential health risks.
- < As demand for water increases, the need to protect water supply becomes even more crucial. Jefferson officials recommend adopting a watershed protection plan.

**Solid Waste and Recycling**

- < Solid waste management in the county is very limited. There are only two privately owned compacter sites and one county transfer station where residents dispose of their trash.
- < There are plans to locate an additional compacter in west Jackson County by the end of 1997. Additional compacter sites and expansion of the transfer station would be beneficial to county residents and would help curtail illicit trash dumping.
- < Recycling is also very limited. Recyclables are separated at the transfer station, but this accounts for only 8% of the waste stream. County personnel have suggested starting a county composting program to reduce waste.

- < Increase citizen awareness of disposal options and involve them in key solid waste decisions.
- < Better trash separation is needed to comply with state mandated reduction requirements. Funding is needed to establish more recycling centers in strategically placed locations.

**Health Care**

- < Community centers, located in libraries, churches, city halls, schools, etc., are needed in the remote areas of the county. Part-time floating staff could be utilized to provide services when demand is greatest.
- < The county does not provide transportation to and from hospitals for bedridden patients. As a result, residents rely on expensive private contractors.
- < The senior center only provides transportation to and from the center. Services offered to senior citizens need to be expanded.
- < A public nursing/retirement home is needed.
- < South Jackson County is in need of a health center due to the distance to existing facilities.

**Schools**

- < School expansion is needed, as Jackson County schools have already surpassed projected enrollment for the year 2000, and Commerce schools are near capacity.
- < The SPLOST referendum passed in March 1997 will help pay for the most critical projects. Funding will continue to be the most pressing issue for all three school systems, as enrollment, especially at the elementary school level, is projected to dramatically increase.

**Parks and Recreation**

- < Develop a park and recreation plan that addresses service delivery, needs and potential funding sources.
- < More land should be dedicated for passive recreation and open space.
- < More bike trails are needed to provide for safer recreation options. Abandoned rail corridors could be used for cycling and walking trails.
- < Facilities at Hurricane Shoals Park should be improved and expanded to encourage use and increase passive recreation opportunities.
- < The Jackson County Parks and Recreation Complex is in need of additional ballfields and a gymnasium.
- < Construct additional recreation facilities and continue improving existing sites in Commerce.

**Government Facilities**

- < Several existing government facilities are crowded and need additional space.
- < Task Force members expressed a need for a county government/administration center that would localize most county departments and provide for more convenient service.

### **Libraries**

- < Expand and improve resources, including audio/visual, book collection, computer capability and staffing.
- < There is a demand for a library in South Jackson County. Currently, residents must go to Jefferson or Athens.
- < The Commerce library may need more storage space in the future.

### **9.5 Housing**

- < The lack of public sewers in the county should be a limiting factor for future development. Higher density development should be concentrated in the municipalities if county facilities are nonexistent or unable to meet demand. A major issue concerns school facilities since there is a correlation between new development, especially smaller, lower-priced stick-built and manufactured homes, and increased school enrollment. All three school systems in the county are currently dealing with rapidly increasing enrollment. Subcommittee members want to ensure that the capacity of county and municipal services and facilities are taken into account before any development is approved.
- < Continued residential growth in the county should be limited by environmental concerns (i.e., watersheds, flood plains, wetlands, soils unsuitable for septic tanks, etc.).
- < Convey to developers the importance of not destroying or encroaching on sensitive natural resources or features.
- < Subcommittee members want the county to retain a balance of new housing developments (high-end, starter, manufactured). At present, there is a good mix of housing types. However, approximately 70 percent of building growth is single development not subdivisions. The concern is that if land continues to be divided into small parcels for starter and manufactured homes, there may be a shortage of large tracts to accommodate larger lot-sized developments.
- < New housing units should be developed in a clustered pattern as opposed to scattered residential development fronting the county's thoroughfares. Residential clustering and open space design will promote community open space, lower development cost and conserve the rural landscape.
- < Require manufactured homes to satisfy standard lot size and placement requirements for similarly zoned single-family homes, and to comply with aesthetic standards such as subdivision open space requirements, landscaped buffers, roof and/or siding material and reasonable square footage requirements.
- < All jurisdictions need to continue to reduce the housing vacancy rate, and promote the revitalization of substandard housing.
- < Ensure strict compliance with building codes and sufficient staff to allow for more frequent inspections.
- < Improvements to the existing housing stock should be considered in order to reduce the percentage of substandard housing units. The county and the municipalities need to be aware of funding sources and programs for the construction and renovation of housing for the elderly, handicapped, and those that are considered low to moderate income.

## 9.6 Land Use

- < Maintain the integrity of land uses and avoid adjacent conflicting land uses.
- < Locate high density development in water and sewerage serviced areas.
- < Residential areas need to have safeguards to protect from intrusive activities (i.e., noises, odors and visual blight).
- < Preserve the rural character. Steps that could be taken to achieve this include: overlay zones, vegetative screens/buffers, lower density and less intrusive development along roadways, and offer incentives to encourage desired development.
- < All perennial streams should have a vegetative buffer to protect the quality of the county's water resources.
- < Zoning decisions should follow the general characteristics of the Future Land Use Map.
- < Utilize sewerage availability as an incentive for industrial and commercial growth rather than residential land use. Citizens do not want the availability of sewer to cause residential densities to skyrocket at the expense of commercial/industrial growth.
- < Parks, recreation and conservation areas should include bike trails that can be accessed from adjacent land uses.
- < Locate commercial and industrial development along major thoroughfares (I-85, GA 29, GA 441).
- < Avoid strip commercial development. Develop commercial areas in nodes with emphasis on maintaining proper transportation flow and preserving rural character of the area.
- < Development along main thoroughfares should be set back from roadway to allow for future placement of utilities and roadway expansion.
- < The county and cities need to incorporate efficient methods when developing land. Examples of this include infill development of undeveloped\unused land parcels before developing agriculture parcels. The clustering of residential and commercial development will allow for more open space land. Also, in municipal areas, upper floor space should be used for residential use.
- < Devote more land to recreation (active and passive) and parks.
- < Due to the projected growth in Jackson, update Existing and Future Land Use maps more frequently, perhaps every two years.
- < The county needs to ensure that individual septic tank drainfields do not contaminate adjacent land parcels.

