

# **Chapter 8: Land Use**



# Chapter 8: Land Use

Goal: Manage growth. Provide for orderly growth and development while protecting the rural character of the county.

**M**adison County is located north of Athens-Clarke County and comprises a portion of the Athens metropolitan area. The dominant land use in Madison County continues to be agricultural but as the population increases many of these agricultural acres are converting to residential subdivisions.

Information obtained from the 2000 tax records formed the basis for the Existing Land Use analysis. Data from the initial 1991 Comprehensive Plan was compared with the 2000 existing land use to further describe how land use patterns have changed over the past decade.

## 8.1 Purpose and Organization

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) states that the land use element should be used to allocate land resources for uses that accommodate and enhance other elements of the Plan, and to protect and improve resident quality of life.

The existing land use map categorizes every parcel according to its predominant land use. The land use map uses eight categories to classify land, developed by DCA for regional and local government agencies. They are as follows:

- ◆ **Agricultural:** Includes commercial and vacant forest lands.
- ◆ **Commercial:** Includes both retail and wholesale, as well as professional offices.
- ◆ **Industrial:** Includes manufacturing, processing, warehousing, mining, and other similar activities.
- ◆ **Residential:** Includes both single-family and multi-family dwelling units.
- ◆ **Public/Institutional:** Includes both government uses, such as city halls and police departments, and institutional uses such as churches and hospitals.
- ◆ **Transportation/  
Communication/Utilities:** Includes power generation plants, railroad facilities, radio towers, and other similar uses.
- ◆ **Parks/Recreation/  
Conservation:** Dedicated public or private land for recreational uses, or natural conservation areas.
- ◆ **Undeveloped:** Land that has not been developed for a specific use or has been abandoned.

The Land Use element is divided into three sections. The first section provides an inventory of the existing land uses and describes how land uses have changed since the 1991 plan. The second section will analyze the current trends and assess future land use needs. Finally, the goals outlined in the previous elements will be

incorporated into the assessment of land use needs to determine policies to guide local officials in making land use decisions.

## 8.2 Section I: Inventory

The existing land use map is a general picture of overall land use patterns in the county. The dominant use continues to be agricultural, which includes commercial forests and vacant forest land. Residential land has increased significantly since the 1996 plan and has almost doubled since 1991.

Geographically, the Madison County existing land use can be described in terms of three regions. The eastern area of the county, bounded by highways 98 and 29, is predominantly agricultural and contains sensitive environmental areas. This section of the county houses the majority of the Parks/Recreation/Conservation lands. Development is limited in the eastern portion of the county because of the proximity to the Broad River. The majority of the county growth is concentrated in the southwest portion, below Highway 98 and eastward to Comer. Recent population figures have estimated that 82% of the county population lives below Highway 98. The northwest area of the county, bounded by highways 98 and 29, is predominantly agricultural with scattered residential development along major roads. Highways 106 and 29 have small commercial corridors extending north from Ila and Danielsville, respectively.

Table 8-1 lists the acreage of each land use classification for each of the three planning periods dating back to 1990. The percent of total land is compared between the 1990, 1995 and 2000 land use classifications to identify the pattern of land use change.

Table 8-1

Land Use Comparison - 1990, 1995, and 2000				
Land Use	1990	1995	2000	
Agricultural	86.4%	75.2%	74.1%	
Commercial	0.8%	0.3%	0.6%	
Industrial	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	
Public/Institutional *	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	
Parks/Recreation/Conservation	0.1%	0.7%	1.0%	
Residential	10.4%	13.7%	19.6%	
Estate	NA	5.9%	9.5%	
Low-Density	NA	7.4%	9.4%	
Medium-Density	NA	0.4%	0.5%	
High-Density	NA	0.002%	0.003%	
Undeveloped	1.3%	9.2%	3.7%	

\* Note: Transportation/Communication/Utilities was incorporated into the Public/Institutional classification for 1990 and was kept as such for 1995 and 2000.

Percentages based on county total acreage of 180,502.

The table illustrates the correlation between the decrease in agricultural land and the increase in residential land. The sharp increase in undeveloped land between 1990 and 1995 is explained by the conversion of agricultural

land into areas designated for subdivision development. Between 1995 and 2000, this undeveloped land was converted to residential use reducing the need to convert agricultural lands.

The changes in Commercial and Parks/Recreation/Conservation lands experienced between 1990 and 1995 can be attributed to Geographic Information System discrepancies between the two data sets.

The 1995 and 2000 residential classifications differentiate between densities. These are the correlating densities for the classifications:

Estate:	10.00	-	25 acres per dwelling unit
Low-Density:	1.00	-	10 acres per dwelling unit
Medium-Density:	0.25	-	1 acre per dwelling unit
High-Density:	0.00	-	0.25 acres per dwelling unit

Table 8-2 illustrates the same comparison for each of the municipalities for 1990, 1995 and 2000. In 1990 all of the cities classified the majority of their land as vacant. The 1995 classifications display increases in agricultural lands as a result of reclassification of vacant parcels.

Table 8-2

Classification	Municipal Land Use Comparison - 1995 and 2000											
	Carlton		Colbert		Comer		Daniels.		Hull		Ila	
	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000
Agriculture	42.2	39	29.6	14.0	54.1	47.6	23.3	18	12.6	10.7	28.5	19
Commercial	0.9	0.5	2.7	1.3	2.6	2.7	8.1	6.8	1.4	3.3	2.9	2.7
Industrial	0.2	0.4	0.4	1.4	1.6	0.5	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.3	0.25
Public/Institutional	2.4	3.8	4.2	2.5	2.5	1.7	10.4	21.5	6.9	7.7	6.7	4.6
Parks/Rec./Conser vation	3.3	NA	4.1	NA	1.8	NA	0.00	NA	0.00	NA	0.00	NA
Residential	32.0	45.9	41.8	45.8	24.9	36.2	35.5	55.2	47.0	47.6	40.4	40.1
Estate	3.8	NA	2.6	NA	5.2	NA	1.5	NA	8.1	NA	6.1	NA
Low-density	24.2	NA	28.8	NA	14.5	NA	26.8	NA	28.2	NA	27.3	NA
Med-density	3.9	NA	10.1	NA	4.9	NA	6.5	NA	10.5	NA	6.9	NA
High-density	0.03	NA	0.3	NA	0.4	NA	0.7	NA	0.3	NA	0.1	NA
Undeveloped	13.9	9.2	14.1	26.5	10.4	9.1	22.5	0.00	27.1	25.6	21.1	32.6
Transp./Comm./ Utilities	4.9	4.9	3.1	3.1	2.1	2.1	0.3	0.3	5.1	5.03	0.2	0.2

Values expressed as percentage of total land. Total acreage for each municipality is as follows:

Municipality	Acreage	Municipality	Acreage
Carlton	636.36	Danielsville	743.87
Colbert	583.06	Hull	197.87
Comer	2026.34	Ila	497.59

## **8.3 Section II: Assessment**

The underlying theme throughout the planning process has been to preserve the rural character of Madison County, which applies directly to the land use element. The citizens advisory committee stressed that rural areas need to be protected from development to ensure that the natural resources of the county remain intact.

The land use assessment is based on the following themes: historical factors that have led to current development patterns; relationship between land use and location of infrastructure; development policies affecting growth patterns; identified environmentally sensitive areas; opportunities for infill development; and land use projections based on population.

### **8.3.1 Historical Factors**

Madison County has been historically classified as a rural county, and by definition it still is. In 1990, much of the residential development was concentrated in the cities, with scattered developments in the unincorporated areas. However, the growth patterns that have emerged in the past decade signal that parts of the county are developing at a much faster pace and the majority of this development is occurring in the unincorporated areas.

Those qualities that the current residents are seeking to preserve are what attracted the majority of the population growth. Urban residents were able to find a rural setting in Madison County that provided them with close proximity to urban amenities, without living in the urban environment. The population has increased by approximately 20% in the past five years, and much of the increase has concentrated in the southwest, just beyond the Clarke County boundary.

### **8.3.2 Land Use Relationship to Infrastructure Location**

#### **Transportation**

There is a strong relationship between land use and transportation. Travel patterns and the location of roadways influence the location of development. This pattern holds true historically with the development of towns and cities along railroad lines, such as the CSX rail corridor through Carlton, Colbert, Comer and Hull. The increased dependence on the automobile has allowed the population to live further away from commercial and employment areas. This is evidenced in Madison County by the development along the major roadways, highways 29, 72 and 106 are all major transportation routes for people traveling to and from Athens—the density of development reflects this. Auto dependence is also reflected in subdivision design, with very little attention paid to alternative modes of transportation. Development of community trail systems for pedestrians and bicyclists linking commercial and residential areas would help lead to a decrease in automobile dependence.

#### **Availability of Water and Sewer**

Prior to 1995, the county did not operate a water system and the construction of the Madico system was primarily for commercial and industrial uses. Municipal water is provided in all communities but does not serve all of the households. According to the 1990 Census, only 21% of the 8,428 total households were served by municipal systems. Private wells are the main source of water for county households.

The construction of the new water system adjacent to the Hull-Sanford Elementary school allows the county the opportunity to expand their water service area to promote development in compatible areas. The availability of water is a major concern for potential entrepreneurs when choosing a location for their business. Expansion of the water system will allow the county to direct growth into designated areas and to manage growth through specific land use designations.

While transportation networks affect the location of developments, the availability of sewer strongly affects the density of developments. Without sewer, low density residential development is the predominant land use. This type of development can be supported by a septic tank system, which requires a large drain field. There are currently only two municipalities that provide public sewerage systems, Comer and Danielsville. Comer provides sewer to nearly 100% of its water customers, and Danielsville provides sewer services to approximately 33% of its water customers, the remaining households use septic systems for wastewater disposal.

This is an important issue concerning types of development that are able to occur. There has been a desire by the citizen's advisory committee to increase the amount of rental property available to county residents through multi-family housing, but the county zoning ordinance does not allow multi-family dwellings in areas that are not served by water and sewer. Expansion of the county water system and future development of a public sewerage system will allow the county to provide a greater diversity of housing options.

### **Development Policies Affecting Growth Patterns**

In many respects, regulation through zoning favors the separation of land uses which leads to a sprawl type of development. Current regulations promote large-lot housing developments which enforce the sprawling residential development patterns witnessed on the existing land use map.

The citizens advisory committee has expressed the desire to amend the zoning regulations to allow the opportunity to utilize more innovative design in new construction. Allowing mixed-use areas through planned unit developments would help to create self-sustaining communities and increase the opportunity to implement multi-modal transportation initiatives. Another option is to allow developers the opportunity to utilize conservation subdivision design to permanently preserve portions of the subdivision as green space in exchange for development density bonuses. These tools would allow for a greater diversity of development to occur with the hopes of compacting developments to decrease the unnecessary fragmentation of natural areas caused by sprawl.

### **Sensitive Environmental Areas**

As mentioned earlier, the majority of the eastern portion of the county contains sensitive environmental areas, particularly along the Broad River. The citizens support the continued preservation of this area through development restrictions to maintain its agricultural qualities. River corridor restrictions will be maintained, and possibly increased, along the Broad River and its major tributaries. These lands comprise the majority of the county's scenic resources and their preservation is a priority of the county citizens.

### **Opportunities for Infill Development**

In order to decrease the sprawling residential pattern currently in place, more compact development forms have to be implemented. However, the lack of infrastructure in the unincorporated areas impedes compact growth. The high density growth apartment complexes must be located within Comer and Danielsville to take advantage of available water and sewer infrastructures.

Vacant buildings within city limits are an excellent opportunity to attract potential commercial tenants. Infill economic development is an opportunity to create jobs in the community and help to revitalize an area's business district with innovative architectural design. County citizens would like to see the existing infrastructure utilized, wherever possible, prior to new construction taking place. This stems from the desire to promote the development of numerous small businesses as opposed to attracting one large "Big Box" retailer.

## Land Use Projections Based on Population

To ensure that land use regulations adequately serve future populations, the projected land use acreage must reflect population growth. This can be accomplished several ways, one of which is the per capita use rate. This method determines the rate of population per acre of each land use classification and determines future requirements based on population estimates. Table 8-3 illustrates the projected land use needs for the county. This is based on the assumption that the current development density will be maintained throughout the planning period.

As the table illustrates, the county will require a minimum of 50,000 acres of residential land to accommodate future growth. A small increase in the user rate, indicating a slight increase in density development, to 0.75 for residential land use would result in a decrease from 50,000 to 48,000 acres.

The current supply of parks and recreation land is inadequate. There are currently only 49 acres being used for active recreation. According to the standards developed by the National Recreation and Parks Association, Madison County requires an additional 209 acres of active recreation park space to adequately serve its current population. To serve the low estimate 2020 population, the county will require an additional 515 acres.

Table 8-3

Projected Land Use Needs - 2020				
Classification	2000 Acreage	User Rate <sup>1</sup>	Low Estimate <sup>2</sup>	High Estimate <sup>3</sup>
Residential	34,965	0.72	50,000	59,772
Commercial	860	29.3	1,229	1,468
Industrial	938	26.9	1,338	1,599
Public/Institutional	885	28.5	1,263	1,509
Parks/Recreation/Conservation	1,784	14.1	2,553	3,050
Developed Land	39,432	NA	56,383	67,348
Undeveloped Land <sup>4</sup>	141,171	NA	124,220	113,255

<sup>1</sup>User Rate refers to the 2000 population estimate of 25,208 divided by the existing acreage for each land use classification.

<sup>2</sup>Low Estimate refers to the low population projection for 2020 of 36,000.

<sup>3</sup>High Estimate refers to the high population estimate for 2020 of 43,000.

<sup>4</sup>Incorporates all land designated as agricultural and undeveloped.

## 8.4 Section III: Needs/Policies/Implementation

The land use section is a compilation of the goals and policies of each previous element of the plan. This section offers some overall policies to help guide land use decisions and offer some more specific policies pertaining to each element.

### Needs

- Land use decisions should preserve agricultural resources.
- Incorporate the future land use map into planning and zoning decisions to ensure that new development occurs in a suitable location.
- Land use decisions need to reflect the goals and policies outlined in all sections of the comprehensive plan.
- Identify and confine growth areas within the designated boundaries.
- Define rural subdivisions and impose subdivision regulations on them.
- All development needs to be done in a sensitive fashion to maintain the environmental qualities associated with Madison County. Avoid strip commercial developments through clustering in appropriate locations.

### Policies

- Make land use decisions based on the long-term vision for the county, not on short-term solutions.
- Incorporate the future land use map into the planning and zoning decision making process to ensure developments are compatible with their location.
- Encourage infill development in established areas that is at a compatible scale with the surrounding area, and that can be adequately supported by public infrastructure.
- Incorporate the overall goal of rural preservation into all land use decisions.

### Natural and Historic Resources

- Prevent development on sensitive environmental areas.
- Protect agricultural and undeveloped rural areas.
- Instill sensitive development practices surrounding known historic resources to preserve their intrinsic qualities.

### Economic Development

- Encourage the expansion of existing commercial and industrial facilities.
- Encourage diversification of the economy.

- Allow for mixed-use zones to enhance community self-sufficiency.
- Provide land for commercial expansion that does not adversely impact current residential areas.
- Encourage commercial growth in areas that have road accessibility to adequately handle traffic volumes.
- Encourage the utilization of existing commercial space prior to new construction.
- Encourage industrial enterprises to locate in Madico Industrial Park.

### **Community Facilities**

- Extension and expansion of public utilities should only be made after careful evaluation of all potential impacts are made.
- Seek available land for park expansion.
- Ensure new development has adequate infrastructure in place to accommodate all emergency services.

### **Housing**

- Preserve the integrity of residential areas by discouraging the intrusion of incompatible land uses into neighborhoods.
- Discourage commercial development in residential areas unless it is compatible with the scale of the neighborhood and is of a local serving nature.
- Improve and maintain neighborhood quality through the provision of sidewalks or multi-use trails.
- Regulate sprawling rural development through the implementation of rural subdivision regulations.

### **Implementation**

- Amend zoning ordinance to allow developers to use innovative development designs, such as conservation subdivisions, to preserve green space within residential areas. ( Madison County Planning and Zoning Commission with citizen input; Initiate 2001; estimated cost 3,500; potential funds - local)