

# **Part 1: Inventory and Assessment**



# **Chapter 1: Introduction**



# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose

The Oconee County Comprehensive Plan provides county and city elected officials, staff, and residents with a set of goals and policies to help manage future growth and development over the next twenty years. This is a joint city/county plan, incorporating unincorporated Oconee County and its municipalities. The plan represents the county's participation in, and contribution to, the statewide planning process required by the *Georgia Planning Act of 1989*. The Oconee County Comprehensive Plan establishes a framework for planning for the provision of public facilities and services, choosing desirable economic growth, preserving the natural environment, protecting unique historic buildings or districts and scenic areas, and establishing compatible future land uses.

Comprehensive Plan updates must, at a minimum, occur every ten years. However, after five years, community leaders should determine if the Comprehensive Plan needs a major update or revision, based upon the degree of change in the community. If little has changed, a small revision is sufficient to address changes in the community. However, if major changes have occurred, such as shifts in population or in the economic base, a more thorough revision of the Comprehensive Plan should be initiated.

This plan update represents a major revision to the 1992 Oconee County Comprehensive Plan. Because the previous plan was completed under now out-of-date planning standards, and Oconee County's significant population growth, an estimated 31.8 percent since 1990, the Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center, in consultation with county staff, recommended a comprehensive plan update in lieu of simply the short term work program update.

## 1.2 Planning Process

The Oconee County Comprehensive Plan consists of a three-step planning process: Inventory and Assessment of existing conditions; Goals and Policies; and Implementation Strategy. The Inventory and Assessment addresses the seven planning elements using the basic planning process required by the *Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures of the Georgia Planning Act*. The Goals and Policies are based upon the inventory and assessment, and address existing and future needs and aspirations of the community. The Implementation Strategy is a five-year work program based on the community needs and goals.

### 1.2.1 Inventory and Assessment

The Inventory and Assessment lists the resources within Oconee County and its municipalities and addresses the following seven elements. The adequacy of the community's resource base is assessed based on identified needs through meetings with elected officials, county and city employees, and county residents.

- (A) **Population:** The population element provides historic population statistics as well as projections of future population trends in the county. This data is analyzed in increments from 1970 until 2015. Also included are data on the numbers of households, education levels, sex and race composition, and income of the population, as well as a comparison of Oconee County with the Northeast Georgia region and the state.
- (B) **Economic Development:** The economic development element examines various aspects of the Oconee County economy, including employment by industry, the labor force and an analysis of the economic base.

- (C) **Natural Resources:** The natural resources element includes the environmentally sensitive and ecologically significant areas that are unique to Oconee County. Included in the inventory are discussions of soil types, hydrology, topography, prime agricultural land and forest resources, plant and animal habitats, wildlife, parks and recreation areas, wetlands, watersheds, and the Apalachee and Oconee rivers and their tributaries.
- (D) **Historic Resources:** The historic resources section catalogs the historic sites and structures in Oconee County, including individual properties, historic areas, and archaeological sites.
- (E) **Community Facilities:** The community facilities section inventories existing public facilities and services that are important to the safety and well-being of Oconee County residents. This section addresses, in particular, law enforcement, fire protection, emergency medical services, infrastructure, solid waste management, governmental, recreational, educational and cultural facilities.
- (F) **Housing:** This element provides an inventory of the existing housing supply in Oconee County, and includes an assessment of the quantity, quality, cost and age of housing, as well as projected demand for the various categories of housing units.
- (G) **Existing Land Use:** The land use element of the plan surveys existing land uses at the tax parcel level. Categories of land use include parks, recreation and conservation; agricultural (including crop forest); commercial; residential (single-family and mobile homes, and multi-family housing); industrial; public/institutional; government; transportation, communications and utilities; and undeveloped or unused properties.

### 1.2.2 Statement of Needs and Goals

Based on the inventory and assessment, existing needs are identified. Goals and objectives are developed to meet identified needs of each jurisdiction. While the plan's goals and policies are a product of perceptions formulated by the public, county officials and community leaders, they are also consistent with, and supportive of, the state wide planning goals as stated in the *Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures*.

### 1.2.3 Implementation Strategies

Based upon the needs assessment and goals and policies, a strategy to put the plan into action was prepared. This section of the plan includes a five-year work program that outlines projects and programs to meet identified needs and to achieve future goals. These programs are outlined on a year-by-year basis, and will need to be completed or underway by the year 2001. The implementation strategies were written in cooperation with elected officials and members of the Oconee County Comprehensive Plan Citizen Advisory Committee.

The work program should be reviewed annually not only to note accomplishments, but also to determine adjustments in the work program. The work program is a realistic plan of local activities; however, circumstances, particularly financial, may necessitate adjusting the work program.

Updates to the five-year work program must be submitted to the regional development center six (6) months prior to the expiration of the existing five-year work program and should follow the Minimum Procedural Standards.

## 1.3 Minimum Planning and Procedural Standards

The *Minimum Planning Standards* require that all local governments follow the three-step planning process outlined above. The planning process is applied to the six minimum planning elements.

The *Minimum Procedural Standards* require holding two public hearings during the planning process. An initial public hearing is held before any planning begins to inform the community about the purpose of the plan, the planning process used in its preparation, and to encourage community input on local needs, issues and goals. Another public hearing is held after the draft plan is prepared and before it is submitted for review. At this hearing, the community is informed about the content of the plan, its recommendations, and is allowed to make suggestions, additions or revisions.

## 1.4 Public Participation

A Citizens Advisory Committee was appointed by the Board of Commissioners from applicants responding to newspaper advertisements for volunteers. The Citizens Advisory Committee consisted of approximately twenty-two (22) individuals representing a cross-section of the county's interests and occupations. The committee met monthly over a period of two years to discuss a wide range of issues under each planning element and produced a written recommendation to the Board of Commissioners regarding goals, policies and short term work program. The public hearing on the final draft of the short term work program was held on March 25, 1997.

The final document was presented at a public hearing held in Oconee County on March 9, 1999.

## 1.5 Plan Products

Preparation of the Oconee County Comprehensive Plan followed the guidelines provided in the *Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures*. This plan consists of an Inventory and Assessment; Goals, Policies and Objectives; an Implementation Strategy; and Existing (1997) and Future (2017) Land Use maps.

To be an effective tool for planning, general procedures must be followed in the utilization of the Comprehensive Plan.

- (A) Both the land use map and plan document should be applied together during the evaluation of any development alternatives and proposals.
- (B) The plan's policies must be applied in a practical, flexible manner to ensure that they will be responsive to new opportunities and changing conditions.
- (C) The plan will be implemented through a coordinated program establishing short, middle and long-term courses of action.
- (D) The plan should be used as a framework for guiding and coordinating planning where possible. This includes future development and transportation improvements, parks and recreation facilities, schools, fire stations, water and sewer systems, and other community facilities.

## 1.6 Planning Area

The Oconee County Comprehensive Plan includes unincorporated Oconee County as well as Bishop, Bogart, North High Shoals, and Watkinsville.

Insert Map 1-1            Regional Location Map, Oconee County