

Chapter 8: Existing Land Use

EXISTING LAND USE

1.1 Introduction

The following section provides an inventory and assessment of existing land use in Oconee County. The information, obtained from 1996 tax records, is the basis for the material presented in this chapter. Two primary resources in this chapter include a map showing existing land use in Oconee County and its four cities and statistical tables describing how much land in each land use category. This information will provide a base upon which a future land use plan will be prepared.

1.2 Inventory

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has established a statewide land use classification system for regional and local government agencies in Georgia. The system, based on the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code, consists of eight categories required by the *Minimum Planning Standards*. In addition to the land use categories required by DCA, subcategories were created, including four subcategories of residential land use based on the density of development.

Where there is a mixed use on these parcels the predominant use is shown. For instance, no agricultural parcels are shown as residential, although many have houses or mobile/manufactured homes located on them. Maps 8-1 through 8-5 illustrate the existing land use (1996) in Oconee County and its four municipalities.

The following land use categories were used to survey existing land use in Oconee County and its municipalities. Large tracts of land (more than 25 acres) are typical throughout the unincorporated portion of the county. These tracts are predominantly classified as agricultural.

Agriculture: All land used for agricultural purposes, such as cropland, livestock production, and pasture, and commercial timber, where total acreage exceeds 25 acres.

Crop Forest: All land which is listed by the county tax assessor as commercial forest.

Commercial: All property where business and trade are conducted, including professional offices. This category includes both retail and wholesale, and accessory use areas, such as parking.

Government: All property used for governmental purposes including administration buildings, schools, and public safety facilities.

Industrial: All land used for manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction facilities, or similar uses.

Park/Recreation/Conservation: This category is for land dedicated to active or passive recreation uses and is accessible to the public. These areas include both privately and publicly-owned facilities, and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, golf courses, recreation centers, and similar uses.

Public/Institutional: All land owned by federal, state, or local government for the provision of services and semi-public uses such as churches and their grounds. Land owned by a government for recreational purposes is classified under recreation.

Transportation/Communication/Utilities: This category includes such uses as power generation plants and other non-office utilities, transmission lines, railroad and highway rights-of-way, radio towers, airports, or other similar uses.

Residential: The predominant use of the land within the residential category is for single-family and multi-family dwellings.

- 1. Single-family housing (except mobile homes). Residential densities are defined by the following acreage ranges:

High-Density:	0.00	-	0.25 acres per dwelling unit
Medium-Density:	0.25+	-	1.00 acres per dwelling unit
Low-Density:	1.00+	-	10.00 acres per dwelling unit
Estate:	10.00+	-	25.00 acres per dwelling unit

- 2. Multi-family housing, including duplexes, apartments, and public housing.

- 3. Mobile home, including mobile home parks.

High-Density:	0.00	-	0.25 acres per dwelling unit
Medium-Density:	0.25+	-	1.00 acres per dwelling unit
Low-Density:	1.00+	-	10.00 acres per dwelling unit
Estate:	10.00+	-	25.00 acres per dwelling unit

Undeveloped/unused: All land not developed for a specific use or assigned another classification and 25.00 acres or less.

1.3 Existing Land Use Distribution

1.3.1 Oconee County

Similar to many counties in the Northeast Georgia region, Oconee County is predominantly rural. Agricultural and residential land uses together represent 85.31 percent of the total land area. Agriculture is the single largest land use, accounting for 81,633.16 acres, or 71.82 percent. The second largest land use category, general residential, comprises 13.49 percent. Nearly all residential uses are single-family. It should be noted that the county and the municipalities have manufactured housing within their jurisdictions that isn't captured in the land use tables. Often, these homes are located throughout the county without clearly defined land use areas. In many cases, parcels with manufactured homes are identified on tax records as being single-family residential. Without doing a windshield survey of all the jurisdictions, it is virtually impossible to identify all of the parcels and tracts with manufactured homes on them. Additionally, in the housing chapter, 1990 Census data are used to identify housing types. During the 90s, much of the manufactured housing development was replaced by other housing types and the more definable manufactured home parks have nearly disappeared. Undeveloped/Unused land in Oconee County is the third most prevalent land use category, representing 7,798.96 acres or 6.86 percent of the county's total land area. Park/recreation/conservation and crop forest combine for 3.5 percent of the county's total land area. Industrial and commercial land uses are expanding but still occupy a small percentage of total land area. It should also be noted that much of the "undeveloped/unused" category is zoned for commercial use but not yet developed for that purpose.

Oconee County has a Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations as well as numerous other development related ordinances.

Table 8-1

Land Use in Oconee County 1996			
Classification	Acres	Square Miles	% of Total
Single-Family Residential			
High-Density	-	-	-
Medium-Density	-	-	-
Low-Density	-	-	-
Estate	-	-	-
Multi-Family Residential	4.79	0.01	<0.00
Mobile Home Residential			
High-Density	-	-	-
Medium-Density	-	-	-
Low-Density	-	-	-
Estate	-	-	-
General Residential	15,327.64	23.95	13.49
TOTAL RESIDENTIAL	15,332.43	23.96	13.49
Commercial	359.03	0.56	0.32
Park/Recreation/Conservation	1,825.31	2.85	1.61
Public/Institutional	412.38	0.64	0.36
Industrial	517.43	0.81	0.46
Agriculture	81,633.16	127.55	71.82
Crop Forest	2,136.79	3.34	1.88
Transportation/Communication/Utilities	3,416.89	5.34	3.01
Government	152.31	0.24	0.13
Undeveloped/Unused	7,798.96	12.19	6.86
Unclassified	77.76	0.12	0.07
TOTAL LAND USE	113,662.45	177.60	100.00
Source: Oconee County Tax Digest, 1996.			

Assessment

Agriculture, the most prevalent land use, is found throughout the county. The western and southern portions of Oconee County are still overwhelmingly rural, with most of land classified as agricultural or undeveloped. Residential development is mainly found in the northern part of the county. The heaviest concentrations of residential development occur along Mars Hill Road, U.S. 441, Whitehall Road and Hodges Mill Road. Undeveloped/unused land is primarily concentrated adjacent to residential land, and will increasingly be converted to residential land use. Commercial and industrial development in the county is limited, however, a sizeable tract of land adjacent to the GA 316 and Mars Hill Road intersection is currently designated as commercial. Additionally, some commercial development has and is in the process of being developed along Epps Bridge Road, Mars Hill Road and U.S. 441. The GA 316 corridor is considered to be a transitional area, and the county expects a shift in this area from its current rural character to more of a commercial center. In an effort to contain growth and mitigate incompatible land uses, county officials have been limiting development primarily to the northern 1/3 of the county. Such action also protects the wetlands, recharge areas and prime agricultural soils in the more rural parts of the county. Oconee County is experiencing rapid growth which, in spite of many years of planning and infrastructure development, is placing significant pressure on its water, sewer, transportation and school systems. It is expected that their growth management strategy and localization of development will allow the county to continue controlled growth without sacrificing the quality of public services. No areas of the county were identified as being blighted.

1.3.2 Bishop

Agricultural land use accounts for the largest amount of acreage in the city (312.32 acres or nearly 63 percent of all land in Bishop). Residential land use accounts for just over 20 percent of all acreage in the city. The majority of residential land use is low-density, single-family, with some medium-density development. Undeveloped/unused land accounts for approximately 5 percent of the total acreage. Commercial, Industrial and Parks/Recreation/Conservation land each comprise less than 2 percent of the city's total.

Table 8-2

Land Use in Bishop 1996				
Classification		Acres	Square Miles	% of Total
Single-Family Residential	High-Density	-	-	-
	Medium -Density	19.47	0.03	3.92
	Low-Density	80.75	0.13	16.27
	Estate	-	-	-
Total Single-Family Residential		100.22	0.16	20.19
Multi-Family Residential		-	-	-
Mobile Home Residential	High-Density	-	-	-
	Medium -Density	-	-	-
	Low-Density	-	-	-
	Estate	-	-	-
TOTAL RESIDENTIAL		100.22	0.16	20.19
Commercial		6.19	0.01	1.25
Park/Recreation/Conservation		9.32	0.01	1.88
Public/Institutional		8.20	0.01	1.65
Industrial		7.83	0.01	1.58
Agriculture		312.32	0.49	62.94
Transportation/Communication/Utilities		27.15	0.04	5.47
Undeveloped/Unused		24.90	0.04	5.02
Government		0.06	>.01	0.01
TOTAL LAND USE		496.19	0.78	100.00
Source: Oconee County Tax Digest, 1996.				

Assessment

As is evident on the land use map, Bishop is a small, rural town. Most of the city is bounded by large tracts of agricultural land. Much of the development in Bishop is found along U.S. 441 and Price Mill Road. Nearly all of the development is single-family residential, with a few homes being used for commercial business such as antique stores. Because of the town's small size and population, no incompatible land uses or problems with infrastructure have been identified. Additionally, no areas have been designated as being blighted. No environmental concerns that should affect development were identified. However, future development should not come at the expense of the town's historic resources and character.

1.3.3 Bogart

Bogart is the only jurisdiction in Oconee County that has the majority of its land classified as residential. Nearly 36 percent of the city’s acreage is residential. Most of this development is low-density with some concentrations of estate and medium-density development. Only 408 acres or 25 percent of the city’s land is agricultural. The next largest land use classification is undeveloped/unused, which accounts for approximately 17 percent of the total area. Although the city is mainly residential, several large industrial areas exist. The most notable is in the southernmost part of Bogart which extends into Oconee County. Nearly 7 percent of the city is designated as transportation/communication/utilities, which is mainly due to U.S. 29, GA 8 and the railroad corridor. Commercial, park/recreation/conservation and public/institutional land uses each account for less than 2 percent of the total land area.

Table 8-3

Land Use in Bogart 1996				
Classification		Acres	Square Miles	% of Total
Single-Family Residential	High-Density	1.92	>.01	0.12
	Medium -Density	106.96	0.17	6.56
	Low-Density	326.17	0.51	20.01
	Estate	136.03	0.21	8.34
Total Single-Family Residential		571.08	0.89	35.03
Multi-Family Residential		7.55	0.01	0.46
Mobile Home Residential	High-Density	-	-	-
	Medium -Density	7.49	0.01	0.46
	Low-Density	-	-	-
	Estate	-	-	-
Total Multi-Family and Mobile Home Residential		15.04	0.02	0.92
TOTAL RESIDENTIAL		586.12	0.91	35.95
Commercial		28.38	0.04	1.74
Park/Recreation/Conservation		20.62	0.03	1.26
Public/Institutional		32.23	0.05	1.98
Industrial		158.57	0.25	9.73
Agriculture		408.15	0.64	25.03
Transportation/Communication/Utilities		111.64	0.17	6.85
Undeveloped/Unused		278.28	0.43	17.07
Government		6.42	0.01	0.39
TOTAL LAND USE		1,630.41	2.55	100.00
Source: Oconee County Tax Digest, 1996.				

Assessment

Residential land is found throughout Bogart, with the exception of the northwest corner. The majority of residential development is located near Bogart Road, North and South Burnson avenues, and Westwood Avenue. Low-density development is most prevalent throughout the city, although a few medium-density developments are located near U.S. 29. The majority of commercial land exists near U.S. 29 and GA 8. As previously mentioned, a large industrial area is located in southeastern Bogart. This is part of a larger industrial development in unincorporated Oconee County. Much of Bogart is developed, which has caused infrastructure problems and concerns, namely with respect to transportation, water and sewer. The city and county are aware of such development pressures and are actively limiting development to areas with adequate infrastructure to accommodate continued growth. Given the existing development in Bogart and the lack of available land, future development pressure should not be too excessive. Although the city is nearly built-out, no incompatible land uses or blighted areas were identified. There are no environmental constraints that should further limit development. The main development constraint is available land, water and sewer.

1.3.4 North High Shoals

Only 13.42 percent of North High Shoal's land area consists of residential use. Most of this development is low-density single-family. Medium-density single-family residential accounts for only 28.66 acres or 1.80 percent of all residential land use. Agriculture is far and away the largest land use category, comprising 63.15 percent of all city land. More than 15 percent of the land in North High Shoals is classified as undeveloped/unused, and will most likely convert to residential use in the future. Park/recreation/conservation land comprises less than 2 percent of the city's total area. There are no commercial or industrial land uses in the city.

Table 8-4

Land Use in North High Shoals 1996				
Classification		Acres	Square Miles	% of Total
Single-Family Residential	High-Density	-	-	-
	Medium -Density	28.66	0.04	1.80
	Low-Density	184.55	0.29	11.62
	Estate	-	-	-
Total Single-Family Residential		213.21	0.33	13.42
Multi-Family Residential		-	-	-
Mobile Home Residential	High-Density	-	-	-
	Medium -Density	-	-	-
	Low-Density	-	-	-
	Estate	-	-	-
TOTAL RESIDENTIAL		213.21	0.33	13.42
Commercial		-	-	-
Park/Recreation/Conservation		25.96	0.04	1.63
Public/Institutional		14.24	0.02	0.90
Industrial		-	-	-
Agriculture		1,003.29	1.57	63.15
Transportation/Communication/Utilities		89.76	0.14	5.65
Undeveloped/Unused		240.32	0.38	15.13
Government		1.98	>.01	0.12
TOTAL LAND USE		1,588.76	2.48	100.00
Source: Oconee County Tax Digest, 1996.				

Assessment

North High Shoals is largely agricultural and undeveloped. Residential development is mainly contained to areas near Cole Springs, Jefferson, Plantation, and Elderroads and GA 186. Most of this development is low-density, with a few medium-density lots found within each development area. As there are no commercial, industrial or high-density land uses, incompatible development is not a concern. Also, given the limited population, demands on public infrastructure are minimal. There are no environmental constraints that should further limit development. No blighted areas were identified.

1.3.5 Watkinville

Although the majority (37.33 percent) of land in Watkinville is classified as agricultural, the city is generally viewed as a rural residential community comprised mainly of single-family homes and undeveloped parcels in residential areas. Approximately 29 percent of all land in the city is residential. The third most prevalent classification is undeveloped/unused land which accounts for slightly more than 11.5 percent. Land designated as transportation/communication/utilities, which is associated with road right-of-way and railroad corridors, comprises around 8.5 percent. Industrial land accounts for a little more than 5 percent, while commercial uses represent nearly 3 percent of the total land area. Park/recreation/conservation and public/institutional each account for about 2 percent. Government land use represents 28.59 acres or 1.4 percent of Watkinville's land area.

Table 8-5

Land Use in Watkinsville 1996				
Classification		Acres	Square Miles	% of Total
Single-Family Residential	High-Density	1.92	>.01	0.09
	Medium -Density	359.23	0.56	17.65
	Low-Density	215.14	0.34	10.57
	Estate	10.96	0.02	0.54
Total Single-Family Residential		587.25	0.92	28.85
Multi-Family Residential		-	-	-
Mobile Home Residential	High-Density	-	-	-
	Medium -Density	-	-	-
	Low-Density	-	-	-
	Estate	-	-	-
TOTAL RESIDENTIAL		587.25	0.92	28.85
Commercial		53.51	0.08	2.63
Park/Recreation/Conservation		42.86	0.07	2.11
Public/Institutional		44.17	0.07	2.17
Industrial		104.91	0.16	5.15
Agriculture		759.97	1.19	37.33
Transportation/Communication/Utilities		174.09	0.27	8.55
Undeveloped/Unused		235.03	0.37	11.54
Government		28.59	0.04	1.40
Unclassified		5.43	0.01	0.27
TOTAL LAND USE		2,035.81	3.18	100.00
Source: Oconee County Tax Digest, 1996.				

Assessment

Land use in Watkinsville is devoted almost entirely to agriculture, low and medium density residential, and undeveloped/unused land use classifications. Nearly all of the residential development is found north of the railroad tracks that bisect the city. Medium-density subdivisions located near Whitehall, High Shoals, Experiment Station and Harden Hill roads comprise the majority of all residential land use in Watkinsville. Some commercial development is located within the residential areas near U.S. 441 and Experiment Station Road, but for the most part, commercial land use is localized near the intersection of GA 15 and U.S. 129. All of the city's industrial land is found in this area as well. Due to the city's Zoning Ordinance, incompatible land uses are generally avoided. In addition, no blighted areas were identified. As mentioned for other jurisdictions, increased development has affected the quality and longevity of public

infrastructures and services. City and county officials are working together to ensure that new development is located in the most suitable locations with the best access to roads, water and sewer. In addition, demands on the school system due to increased population growth are being factored into the development process. Aside from infrastructure constraints, development should be limited near river and creek corridors, and wetlands.

Insert Map 8-1 Land Use, 1996, Oconee County, Georgia

Insert Map 8-2 Land Use, 1996, Bishop, Georgia

Insert Map 8-3 Land Use, 1996, Bogart, Georgia

Insert Map 8-4 Land Use, 1996, North High Shoals, Georgia

Insert Map 8-5 Land Use, 1996, Watkinsville, Georgia