

**SAVANNAH – CHATHAM COUNTY
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2040 UPDATE**

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**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2040 UPDATE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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Executive Summary

The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update

Savannah and Chatham County’s Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update is the community’s principal guiding or “vision” document—designed to formulate a coordinated, long-term planning program to maintain and enhance the health and viability of the jurisdiction. The Comprehensive Plan is fact-based and creates an environment of predictability for business and industry, property owners, investors, and residents. The Comprehensive Plan lays out the desired future for the City of Savannah and Unincorporated Chatham County and relates how that future is to be achieved. It is a living document and should be updated and amended regularly as conditions change and shifts occur in public policy.

The Plan serves as a resource to both the public and private sector by projecting:

- How and where land will develop,
- How housing will be facilitated to meet the changing needs of the community,
- How employment generators will be attracted and retained,
- How open space and the environment will be protected, how public services and facilities will be provided,
- How quality of life can be maintained and improved,
- How transportation facilities will be improved.

In short, the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update is intended to provide consistent policy direction to leverage strengths and address challenges. Savannah’s City Council and Planning Commission, the Chatham County Commission, and local community leaders will use the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update in the following ways:

The Future Land Use Map shall be referenced in making rezoning and capital investment decisions:

The Future Land Use Map is a graphic interpretation of the community’s vision to guide development based on community preferences. Character Area designations identify where various types of land uses should be permitted and establish general parameters guiding existing and potential growth.

The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update provides policies that help guide day-to-day decisions:

These policies are reflections of community values identified through public outreach efforts and as incorporated in existing adopted plans. These policies will be used as guidelines in the analysis of zoning decisions, redevelopment and other capital investment decisions.

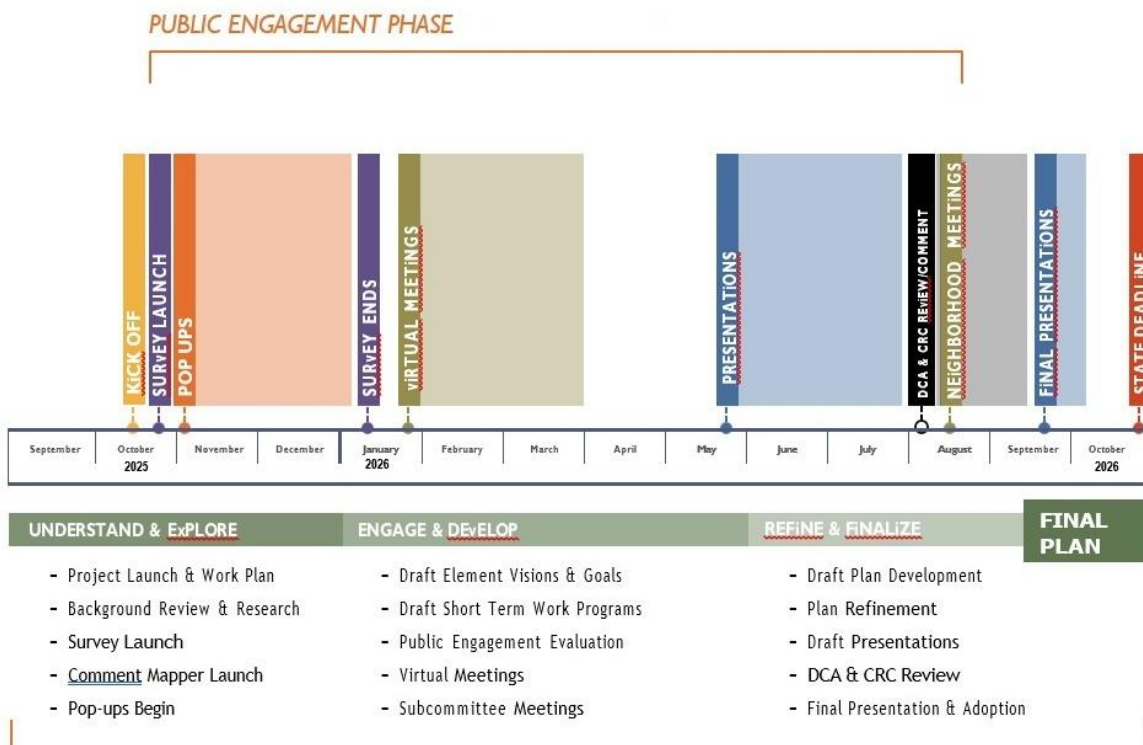
The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update includes an Implementation Program that will direct public investment and private initiative:

Plan implementation is carried out through the adoption and revision of regulations, including zoning and development codes, and through the completion of projects and programs outlined in

the Community Goals and Community Strategic Plan, the Work Program and the Capital Improvements Element. The Work program identifies steps to be taken to usher in economic development, combat blight, facilitate housing opportunities, improve community facilities, build a stronger, healthier local community, and provide access to the area’s resources. Some of the efforts included are ongoing in current programs or have been proposed yet not yet undertaken, while others require new efforts and actions to bring them into reality.

Plan Schedule

The comprehensive planning process required approximately 12 months to complete. From October 2025 to October 2026, the MPC worked closely with Savannah and County planning staff, the Chatham County Commission, the Savannah City Council, and citizens to identify issues, share strengths and update visions, goals, and strategies for the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update. The Chatham County Commission, Savannah City Council and Planning Commission, along with various stakeholders regularly reviewed planning concepts and provided feedback on critical issues.



Purpose Of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update

The Georgia Planning Act requires that cities and counties maintain comprehensive plans that help shape future growth. These plans generally recognize the physical, economic, social, political, and aesthetic factors of a community and are developed in a process that includes thoughtful analysis and robust public engagement. As stated in the standards and procedures for local comprehensive planning, it is essential that local governments recognize that:

- Assets can be accentuated and improved
- Liabilities can be mitigated and changed over time
- Potential can be sought after and developed

The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update serves as the comprehensive plan for Savannah and Chatham County and is a five-year update as required by the “The Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning,” (Minimum Standards) adopted by Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The Plan follows the minimum standards and procedures for local government planning set out in O.C.G.A. 45-12-200 and 50–8–7.1(b), reflecting the principles of partnership and the unique needs, conditions, and aspirations of the community. In meeting these standards, this plan update enables the county and cities to maintain their Qualified Local Government (QLG) Status, making them eligible to receive certain types of state funding. This update reassesses where Chatham County and Savannah are today and how they intend to develop.

To ensure that public participation in the planning process resulted in meaningful implementation through zoning and other administrative mechanisms, a policy of "consistency" was discussed at public meetings during the Plan 2040 process. This proposed policy was strongly endorsed by the public. The official policy established in Plan 2040 will be carried forward to the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update document to become the basis for making zoning and land use decisions, amending other implementing ordinances as well as establishing practices for government officials and staff concerning the development of the communities.

Components of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update

The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update is a tool used in evaluating future proposals and policy changes to ensure consistent decisions are made. In keeping with the *Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning* (Minimum Standards) Subject 110-12-1 -.01 through 11–12-1-.05, the update addresses three components:

Community Vision

Lays out the future vision and goals that the community wants to achieve in text and maps. Each **element** is comprised of a **vision statement, goals, objectives** and **strategies** to accomplish the vision.

Element: The primary elements that must be included, at a minimum, in each community's Comprehensive Plan include:

- Quality of Life/Broadband
- Economic Development
- Land Use
- Housing
- Transportation
- Natural Resources (Including Resiliency and Environmental Planning)



Vision: Each element contains a vision statement that is supported by multiple goals. A vision statement can become a compass, pointing the way to a common direction.

Goal: General overarching, broad statements describing the direction that a community wants to go.

Objectives: Expresses the kinds of action that are necessary to achieve the stated goals without assigning responsibility to any specific action.

Strategies: Statements of specific actions that should be taken, identifying the responsible party or parties, the time frame within which the action should occur, and other details for implementation to occur.

Needs And Opportunities

Provides analysis of the various needs and opportunities that the community will address, by Planning Element. Chapter 110-12-1-.02 of the Georgia State Statutes requires local governments to evaluate their immediate needs and opportunities while addressing long-term goals. To understand Savannah and Chatham County's needs and opportunities, public engagement sessions focused on asking questions and presenting information regarding the process. The results have helped support the short-term goals identified in the Community Goals and Policies chapter and the policy goals within the Future Land Use Element. Effective public engagement and technical data analysis are paramount in identifying the needs and opportunities for a Comprehensive Plan. A community engagement webpage with a survey mechanism was a cornerstone of the engagement plan. The information provided was then analyzed and contributed to the description of needs and opportunities.

Community Work Program

Based on the Plan 2040 Work Program strategies identified to implement each goal's objectives, establishes a 5-year Short Term Work Program designed to address the needs and opportunities. This program includes activities, initiatives, programs, ordinances and administrative systems to be put into place or maintained to implement the plan. In addition, the plan incorporates planning elements as defined by the DCA Minimum Standards that are important to shaping the future of Savannah and Chatham County. A Record of Accomplishments highlighting the success of the previous Short Term Work Program, on-going programs and new strategies introduced to address the public involvement process issues are included.

HOUSING

VISION

In 2045.... *Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah achieve affordable, diverse and safe housing for their residents through efficient and effective policies and programs.*

GOAL:

Increase affordable housing stock.

Objectives:

Develop public policy/legislation, ordinances, zoning and subdivision regulations, building designs, and construction methods/materials that help reduce housing costs without sacrificing quality and that facilitate increasing affordable housing availability

Strategies:

Adopt policies and ordinances to allow for a wider variety of housing types to be built in existing neighborhoods

Relevant Plans and On-Going Initiatives

While the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update is a new document that reflects the current state of Unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah, the prior Plan 2040 served as the foundational document for this update. The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update also builds on the work of previous planning documents. These prior plans vary in scale and scope and include regional and community focused plans. Several critical documents and plans are listed.

Relevant Plans and Studies
100% Savannah Clean Energy Plan (2021)
2020 Chatham County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020 & 2025 Update)
2023-2027 Consolidated Housing and Community Development (HCD) Plan
2024 - 305(b) 303(d) Impaired Waters Report (2024)
Canal District Master Plan (2025)
Chatham County Blueprint (2015), Status Report (2018) and 2024 Application Overview
Chatham County-Savannah Comprehensive Plan 2040 (2020)
Chatham County Multi-Jurisdictional Pre-Disaster Hazard Mitigation Plan (2025)
Chatham County Emergency Management – 2025 EOP
Chatham County Greenway Implementation Study (2016)
Chatham County Heat Effect Study (2025)
Chatham County MPC Flood Study Final Report (2023)
Chatham County Repetitive Loss Area Analysis & Natural Functions Plan (2025)
Chatham County Open Space & Recreation Master Plan (2019)
City of Savannah Natural Floodplain Protection Plan (2015)
City of Savannah Accomplishments Report 2020–2023
Continuum of Care Strategic Plan 2020-2025 (2021)
CORE MPO 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (2024)
Downtown Savannah 2033 (2018)
Flood Mitigation Plan - Chatham County (2025) & Flood Mitigation Plan Action Plan – Savannah (2024)
Housing Savannah Action Plan (2021)
Multimodal Transportation Implementation Plan ("Savannah Moves" 2025)
Natural Floodplain Protection Plan (2018)
Non-Motorized Transportation Plan (2020)
Parking Matters (2025 Update in process)
Red Zone Plan (2018)
REAL Task Force Reports
Savannah-Chatham County Interagency Council 5-Year Strategic Plan to End Homelessness (2025)
Savannah Civic Center Redevelopment (2018)
Savannah GPS Strategic Plan (2025)
Savannah National Historic Landmark District Assessment (2018)
Savannah Repetitive Loss Area Analysis RLAA - Public Version (2021)
State of Trees: Canopy Assessment (2020)
Vision 2033 Savannah Growth Management Plan (2020 and 2025)
Vision Zero Initiative (2022)

Major Issues And Strategies Summary -

(TO BE DRAFTED FOLLOWING AGENCY & STAKEHOLDER REVIEW AND REVISION)

Savannah's 300th Anniversary

The year 2033 will mark 300 years since the founding of Savannah. The Savannah Development and Renewal Authority designed a plan for goals to be accomplished by 2033 including reestablishing green space in Savannah, removing the Civic Center arena and the I-16 flyover ramp. Another goal, Tide to Town, will be a protected network of walking and biking trails connecting all of Savannah and Chatham County. The core route will cover 30+ miles of continuous transportation connecting 62 neighborhoods, 30 schools, 3 major hospitals, and several economic centers, according to the City website. <https://www.savannahga.gov/2952/Tide-to-Town>

Georgia US250

As part of the nationwide commemoration of the founding of the United States of America, Georgia will participate in the 250th anniversary with a series of programs and events throughout the year. The Georgia US250 Committee was established by Governor Brian Kemp to empower communities to plan and celebrate with events to educate and honor this milestone. Georgia was one of the original 13 colonies and as such played a critical role in the American Revolution working towards the founding of the United States.

The Georgia US250 Committee members include the Georgia Historical Society, the Georgia Humanities Council, and the Georgia Department of Economic Development. https://www.georgiahistory.com/resource/georgia-at-the-us250-publication/#flipbook-df_68184/1/

Definitions

Character Areas	<p>A specific geographic area or district within the community that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has unique or special characteristics to be preserved or enhanced, • Has Potential to evolve into a unique area with more intentional guidance of future development, • Requires special attention due to unique development issues. Each character area is a planning sub-area within the community where more detailed, small-area planning and implementation of certain policies, investments, incentives, or regulations may be applied to preserve, improve, or otherwise influence its future development patterns in a manner consistent with the Community Goals
Community	Local jurisdiction (county or municipality) or group of local jurisdictions (in the case of a joint plan) that are preparing a local plan
Comprehensive Plan	<p>A plan meeting the Minimum Standards and Procedures.</p> <p>The comprehensive plan must be prepared pursuant to the Minimum Standards and Procedures for preparation of comprehensive plans and for implementation of comprehensive plans, established by the Department in accordance with O.C.G.A. 50–8–7.1(b) and 50–8–7.2</p>
Comprehensive Planning Process	Planning by counties or municipalities in accordance with the Minimum Standards and Procedures in O.C.G.A. 50–8–7.1(b) and 50–8–7.2
Conflict	<p>Any conflict, dispute, or inconsistency arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between or among plans, or components thereof, for any counties or municipalities, as proposed, prepared, proposed to be implemented, or implemented • Between or among plans for any regions, as proposed, prepared, proposed to be implemented, or implemented • Between or among plans, or components thereof, for any counties or municipalities and plans for the region which include such counties or municipalities, as such plan are proposed, prepared, proposed to be implemented, or implemented
Core Elements	<p>Community, Goals, Needs and Opportunities, and Community Work Program.</p> <p>These are the primary elements that must be included, at a minimum, in each community's comprehensive plan</p>
County	Any county of this state
Days	Meaning calendar days, unless otherwise specified
Density	An objective measurement of the number of people or residential units allowed per unit of land, such as dwelling units per acre
Department	Department of Community Affairs established under O.C.G.A.50–8–1
Governing Body	Board of Commissioners of a county, sole commissioner of a county, council, commissioners, or other governing authority of a county or municipality
Infrastructure	Man-made structures which serve the common needs of the population, such as: sewage disposal systems; potable water systems; potable water wells serving a system; solid waste disposal sites or retention areas; stormwater systems; utilities; piers; docks; navigation channels; bridges; roadways
Local Government	Any county, municipality, or other political subdivision of the state
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization, a federally designated agency created in urban areas containing more than 50,000 people that are charged with conducting comprehensive, coordinated planning processes to determine the transportation needs of their respective constituencies, and prioritizing and programming projects (bicycle and pedestrian projects) for federal funding

Minimum Standards and Procedures	Minimum Standards and Procedures, including the minimum elements which shall be addressed and included, for preparation of comprehensive plans, for implementation of comprehensive plans, for updates of comprehensive plans including update schedules, and for participation in the coordinated and comprehensive planning process
Mediation	The process to be employed by the Department and Regional Commissions for resolving conflicts which may arise from time to time in the comprehensive planning process. Procedures and guidelines to govern mediation are as established by the Department pursuant to O.C.G.A. 50–8–7. l(d)
Municipality	Any municipal corporation of the state and any consolidated government of the state
Plan	The comprehensive plan for any county or municipality
Plan Amendment	A change to the adopted plan that occurs between plan updates. Amendments of the adopted plan are appropriate when the conditions, policies, etc., on which the plan is based, have significantly changed so as to materially detract from the usefulness of the plan as a guide to local decision making, or when required by the Department as a result of changes to the Minimum Standards and Procedures
Plan Update	A more or less complete re-write of the plan, which shall occur approximately every five years, in accordance with the recertification schedule maintained by the Department
Planning	The process of determining actions which state agencies, Regional Commissions, and local governments propose to take
Qualified Local Government	A county or municipality that adopts and maintains a comprehensive plan as defined in the Minimum Standards and Procedures.
Regional Commission	A Regional Commission established under O.C.G.A 50–8–32
Regional Plan	The comprehensive plan for a region prepared by the Regional Commission in accordance with the standards and procedures established by the Department
Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria	Those standards and procedures with respect to natural resources, the environment, and vital areas of the state established and administered by the Department of Natural Resources pursuant to O.C.G.A. 12–2–8, including, but not limited to, criteria for the protection of water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, protected mountains and protected river corridors.
Service Delivery Strategy	The intergovernmental arrangement among municipal governments, the county government, and other affected entities within the same county for delivery of community services, developed in accordance with the Service Delivery Strategy law. To ensure consistency between the plan and the agreed upon strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The services to be provided by the local government, as identified in the plan, cannot exceed those identified in the agreed upon strategy • The service areas identified for individual services that will be provided by the local government must be consistent between the plan and Strategy As provided in Code Section 36–70–28 (b)(1), Service Delivery Strategies must be reviewed, and revised if necessary, in conjunction with county and municipal comprehensive plan updates

Supplemental Recommendations

The supplemental recommendations provided by the Department to assist communities in preparing plans and addressing the Minimum Standards and Procedures. The plan preparers and the community are encouraged to review these recommended best practices where referenced in the Minimum Standards and Procedures and choose those that have applicability or helpfulness to the community and its planning process.

Update Schedule

The schedule or schedules for updating comprehensive plans on an annual or five-year basis as provided for in paragraph (2)(b) of Section 110-12-1-.04. The term "Update Schedule" also means an additional schedule for the review of Service Delivery Strategy agreements by counties and affected municipalities on a ten-year basis in conjunction with comprehensive plan updates

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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

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Community Participation Program

The vision for 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update represents the voice of our community. Through the two-year planning process, Chatham County and Savannah community members shared their unique perspectives on what makes their community great and their suggestions for improvements. The goal of the engagement process was to bring as many voices into the planning effort as possible to get a wide range of ideas and perspectives and build a broad base for implementing the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update.

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update process collected valuable input from diverse platforms, community members, and stakeholders to shape the Plan's vision and goals. The outreach process involved a variety of different approaches, which are listed below:

- Internal and external meetings
- Announcements at community meetings
- Over 532 survey responses
- A dedicated Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update website

Survey Overview

MPC staff developed a survey aimed at collecting a wide range of input. The survey took an average of 18 minutes to complete. The survey aimed to collect a wide range of input and covered various topics including:

- Quality of Life
- Housing
- Land Use
- Natural Resources (Sea Level Rise)
- Transportation
- Economic Development

The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update survey consisted of multiple choice and open-ended response questions. The MPC staff participated in the survey and made suggested changes prior to publication. The survey was available online and in print versions. The survey was open from September 30, 2025 to the end of January 2026. A total of 471 responses were received, with 357 responses received from Savannah and 114 responses received from unincorporated Chatham County. Additional responses were attributed to Garden City separately.

Survey Respondent Characteristics

To get a better understanding of the citizens who participated in the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update Survey, additional socio-economic and demographic information about each respondent was requested. Overall, respondents were primarily White or Black/African American, were homeowners, over the age of 60, had obtained a college degree or above, and drove alone as the primary means of transportation. The basic survey informational questions include:

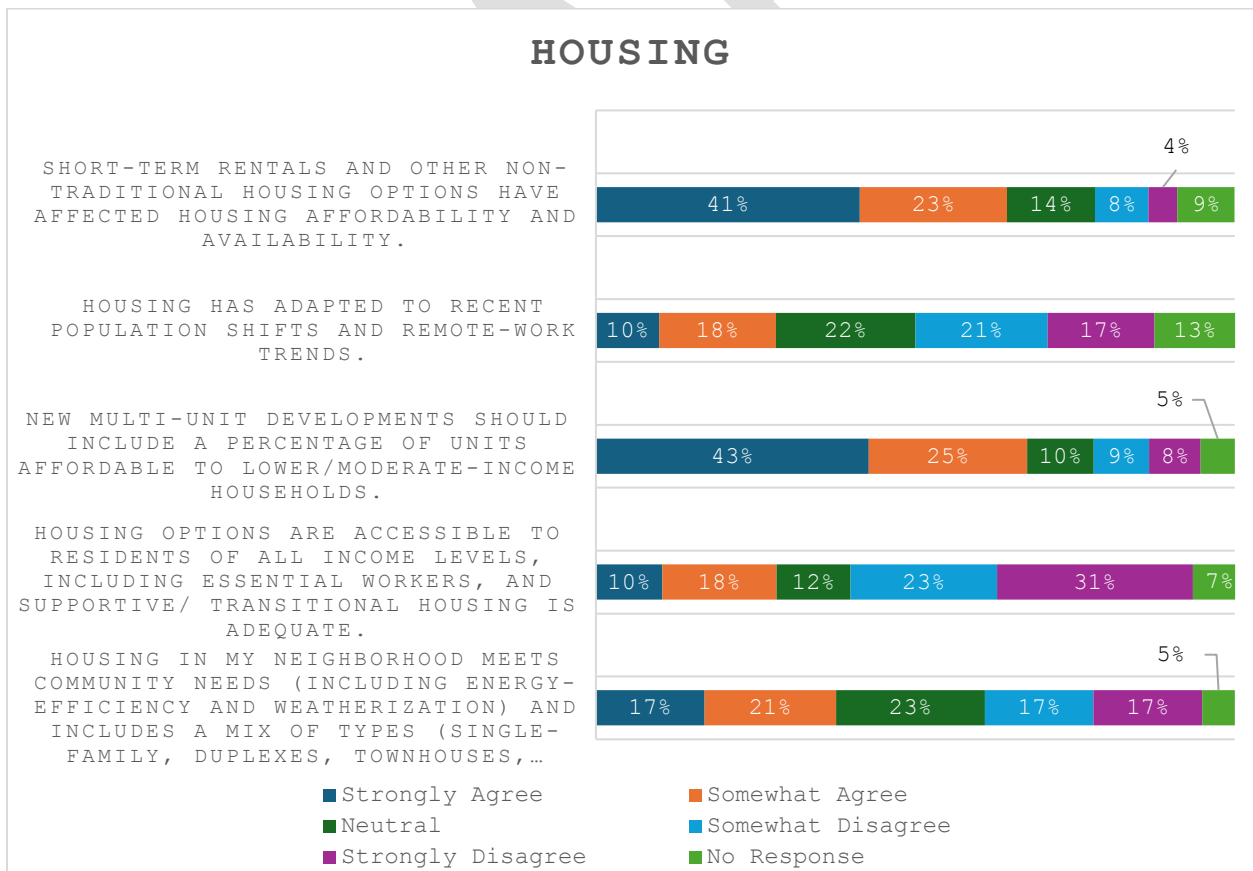
Survey Respondent Characteristics
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Race/Ethnicity	Age	Tenure	Education	Travel Mode
43.2% - White	18-29 2.8%	70.5% - Homeowner	1.2% - Some high school, no diploma	71.3% - Drive Alone
39.1% - Black or African American	30-39 9.6%	4.9% - Rental Property owner	15.3% - High School/GED	3.9% - Carpool
2.0% - Hispanic or Latinx or Spanish	40-49 12.1%	19.2% Renter	10.4% - Some college, no degree	4.3% - Bus
6.1% - Another Race	50-59 16.1%	2.7% - Short-term vacation rental	9.6% - Associate Degree	2.87% - Rideshare (Lyft)
8.5% - All Other (incl. Asian)	60-69 30.9%	11.6% - Other	21.7% - 4-year college B.A.)	6.81% - Bike/Walk
1.2% - Asian, Native Hawaiian, Native American	70+ 22.5%		32.1% M.A or Professional Degree	10.75% - Other

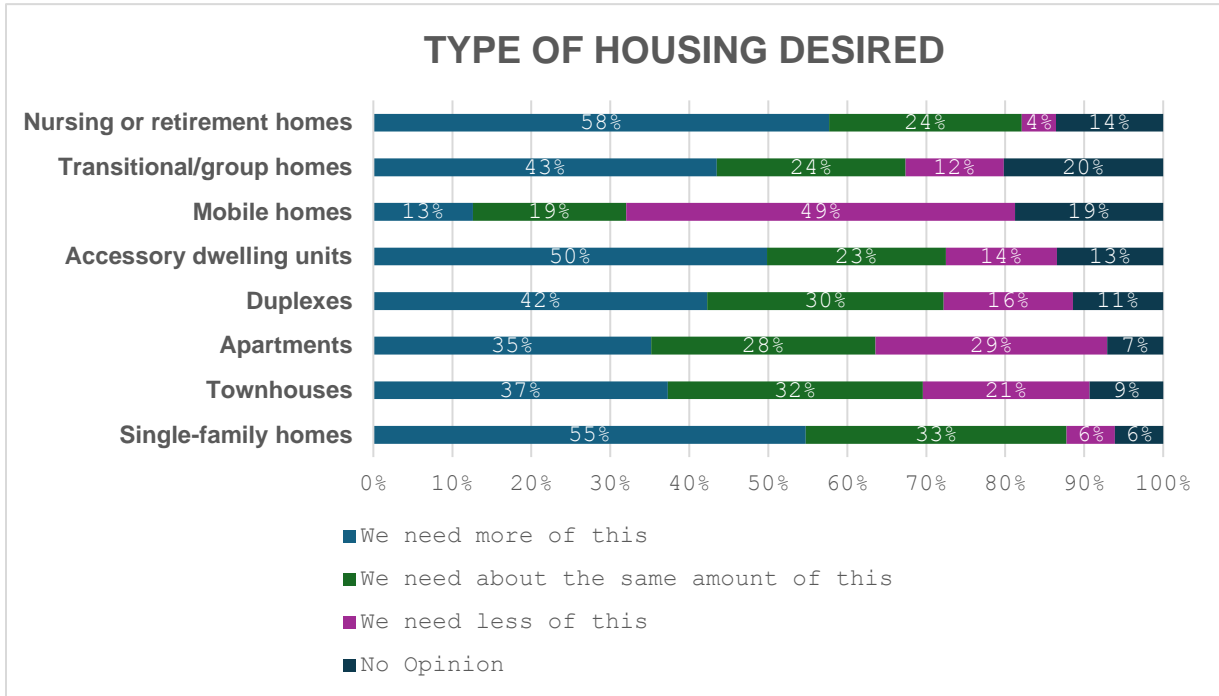
Comprehensive Plan Update Questions

Housing Types

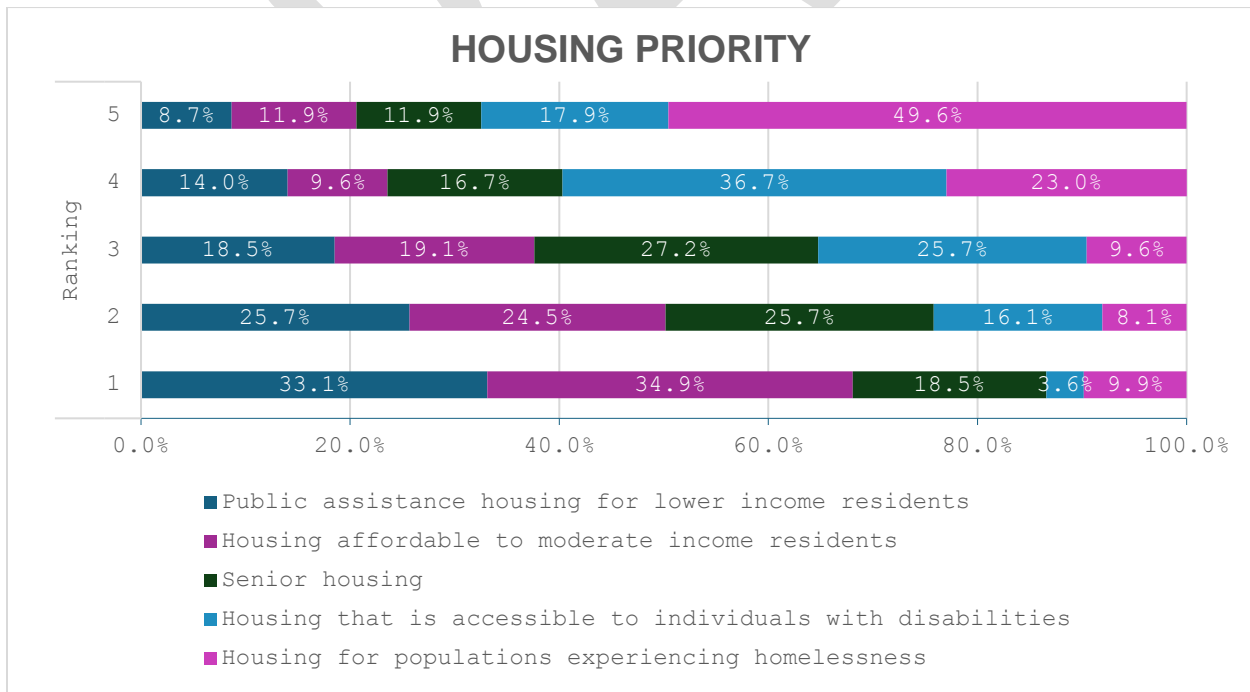
How strongly would you agree with the following statements about housing in Chatham County, Savannah, or Garden City?



In your opinion, do Chatham County, Savannah or Garden City need more, less, or about the same amount of the following housing types?



Which housing option should be the FIRST priority in the next 5 years? Please rank them below.

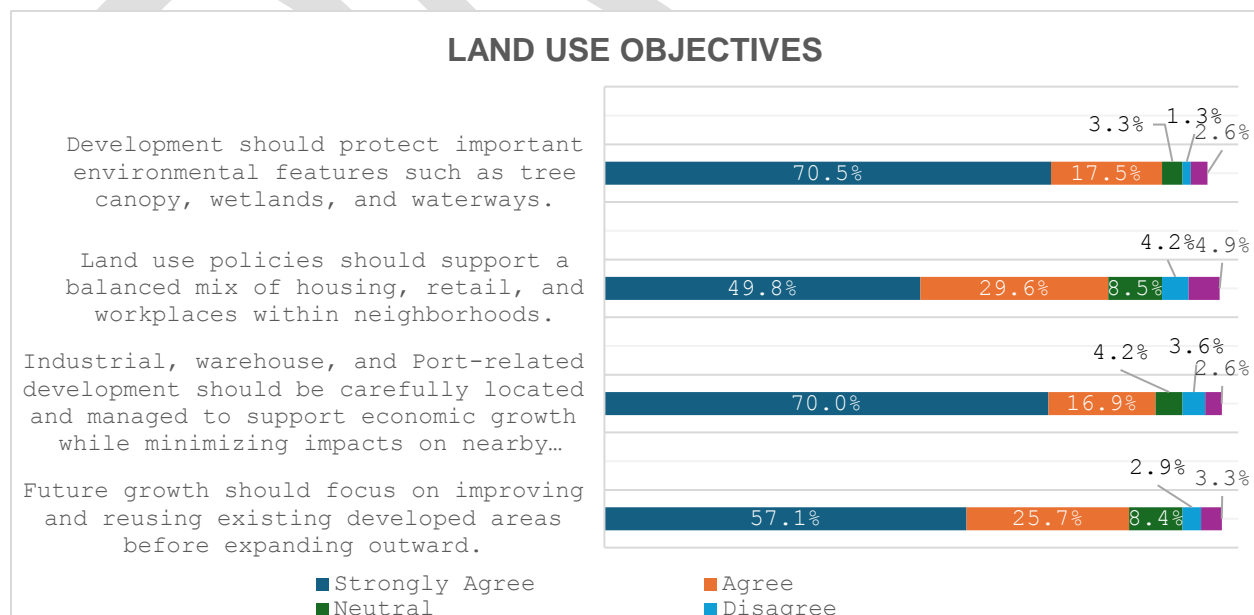


Housing Survey Response Summary

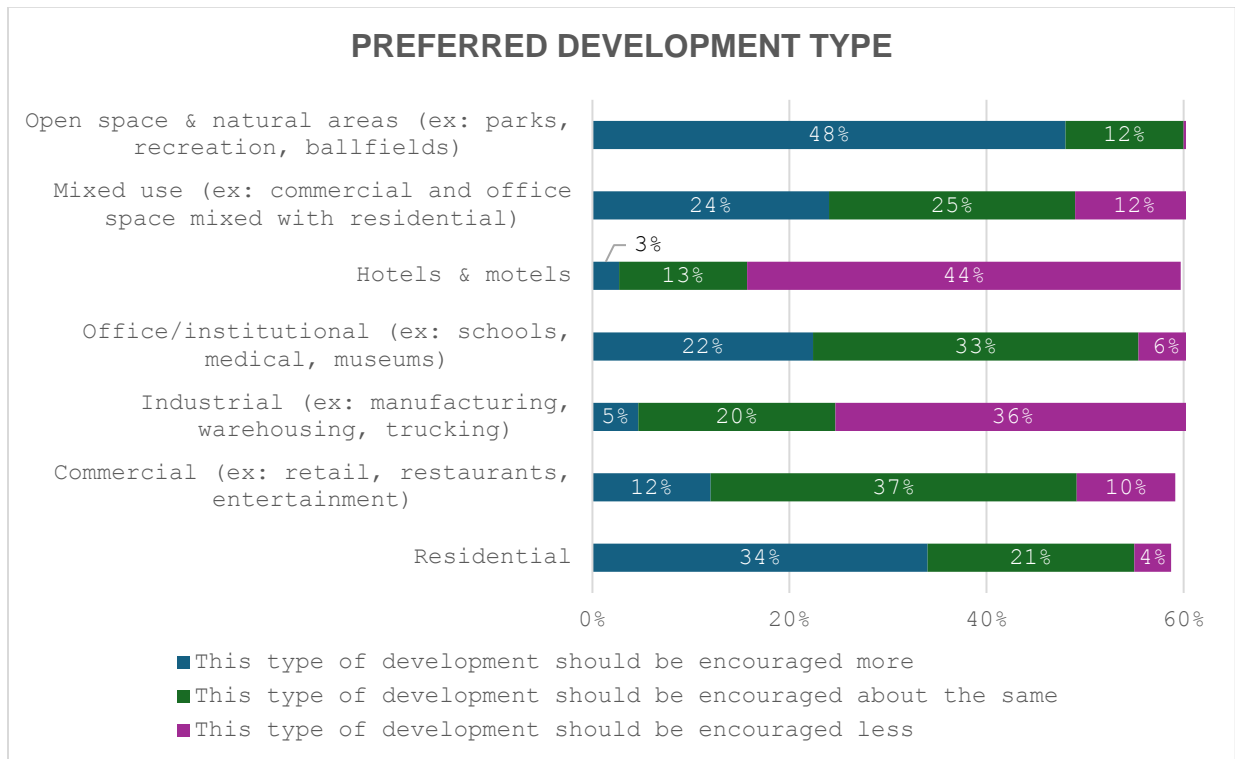
- Short-term rentals, visitor accommodations and expansion of the hotel base has affected the availability of affordable and rental housing.
- Housing options are not accessible to all segments of the population and not adapted to changing demographics, particularly for lower-income, those needing transitional/supportive housing, and essential workers; housing does not meet community needs with a diversity of housing types, weatherization, and energy efficiency. The priority question reiterates support.
- New multifamily developments should be required to set aside a proportion of units affordable to moderate and lower-income households.
- The need for unit types to meet the needs of changing demographics is reflected in responses citing more ADUs and priority for retirement communities, as well as more diversified housing stock, including duplexes, townhomes and transitional/group homes. The majority of respondents did not feel the community needed additional mobile homes. The survey did not distinguish between traditional mobile homes and newer container and modular designs, which are organically more affordable.
- Provision of more single-family units continues to dominate the most requested housing type. However, the socio-economic base of survey respondents suggests that more traditional housing types are preferable. Although not captured in the survey questions, this majority of respondents may be more financially secure than the younger, and less educated component of the respondents.
- Lodging for the unhoused and persons with disabilities were generally the lowest priority.

Land Use

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about land use in Chatham County, Savannah or Garden City?



In your opinion, should your city/county encourage the following types of development more, less, or about the same over the next 10 years?

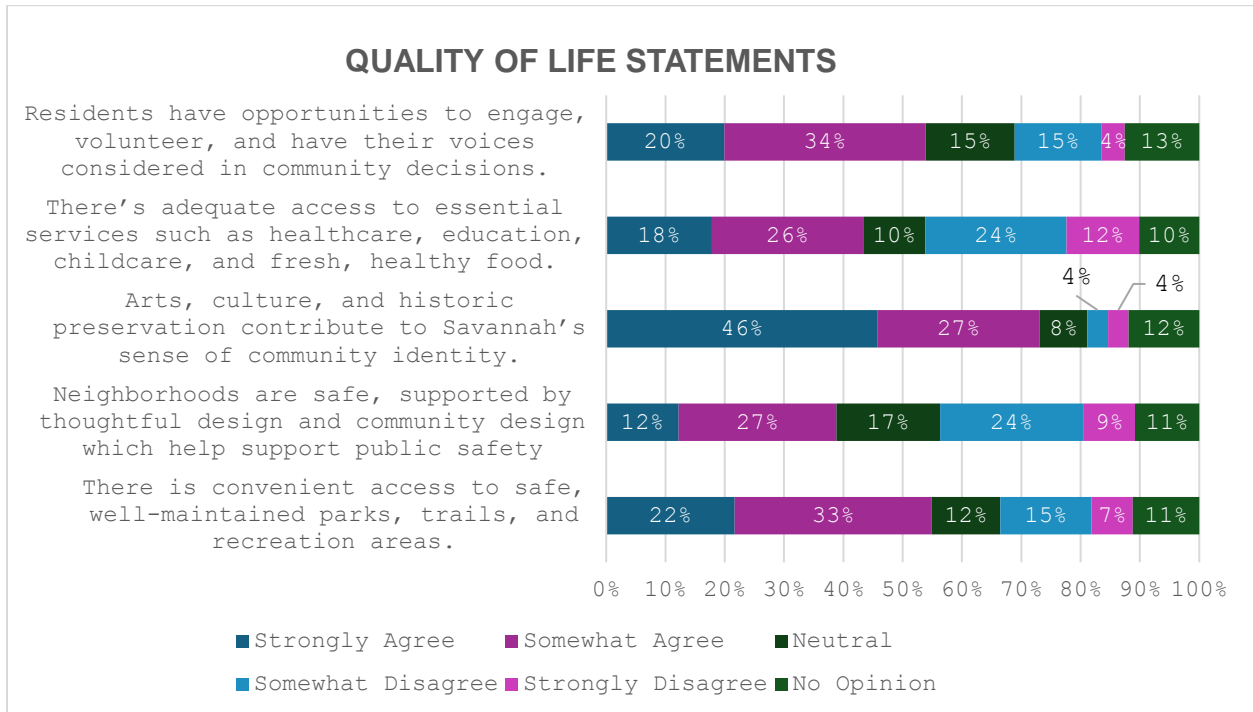


Land Use Survey Responses Summary

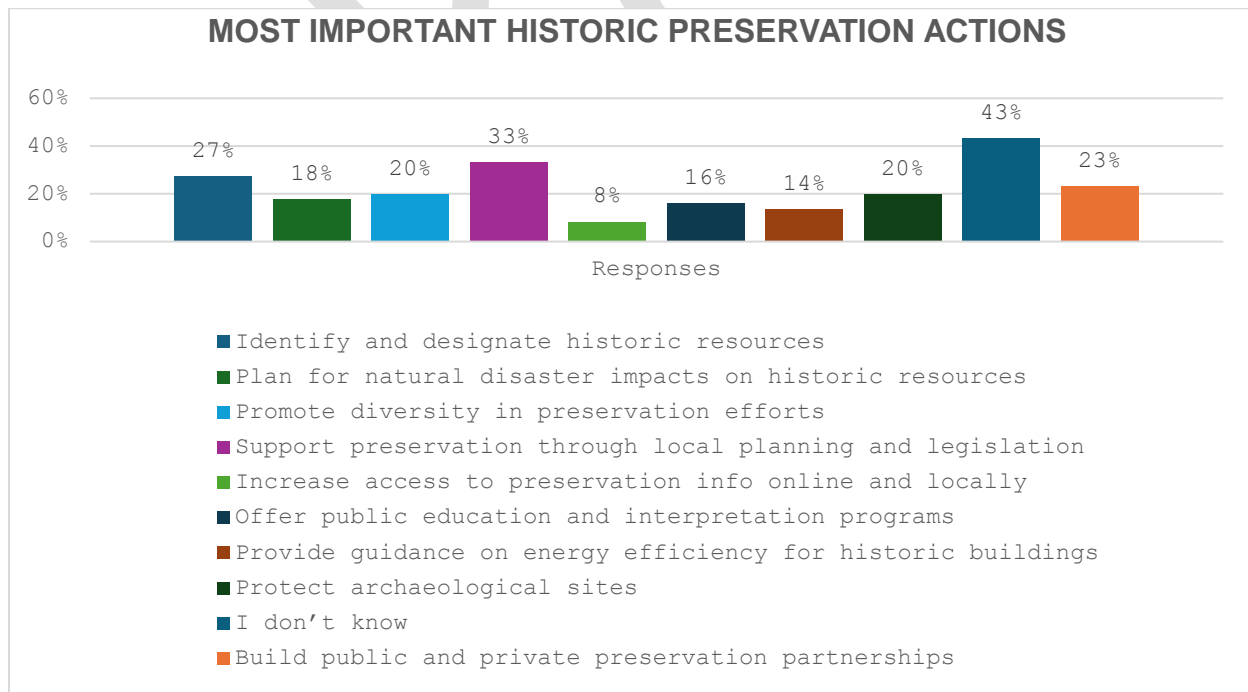
- Protection of the environment and natural resources, as well as residential areas and quality of life from existing and future expansion impacts of Port operations were overwhelmingly supported; closely followed by support for land use policy focusing on reuse of existing grayfield and brownfield properties before consumption of greenfields and scattered development outward.
- Mixed-use concept planning was also highly supported, yet “strongly Agree” was at a lower proportion than the above three objectives.
- Open space was the top preference for future land use development, followed by residential and mixed-use. The respondents indicated that the amount of public servicing and commercial uses was generally satisfactory, although the region could use a limited amount of additional resources.
- The two most discouraged uses include hotels and motels, corresponding to responses to Housing questions, and industrial expansion.

Quality of Life

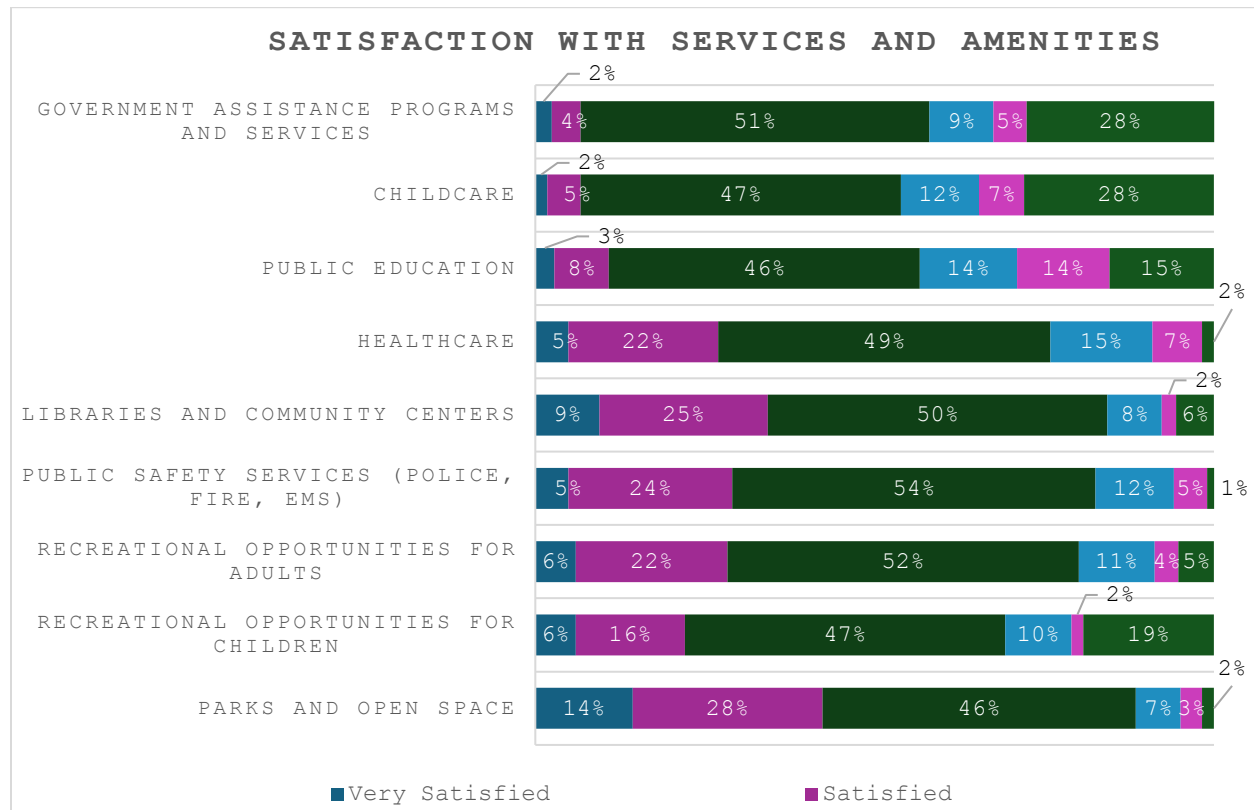
How strongly do you agree with the following about quality of life in your city/county?



Please select what you believe are the three most important historic preservation actions for your municipality.



Please rate your satisfaction with the following public amenities and services in your community.



Quality of Life Responses Summary

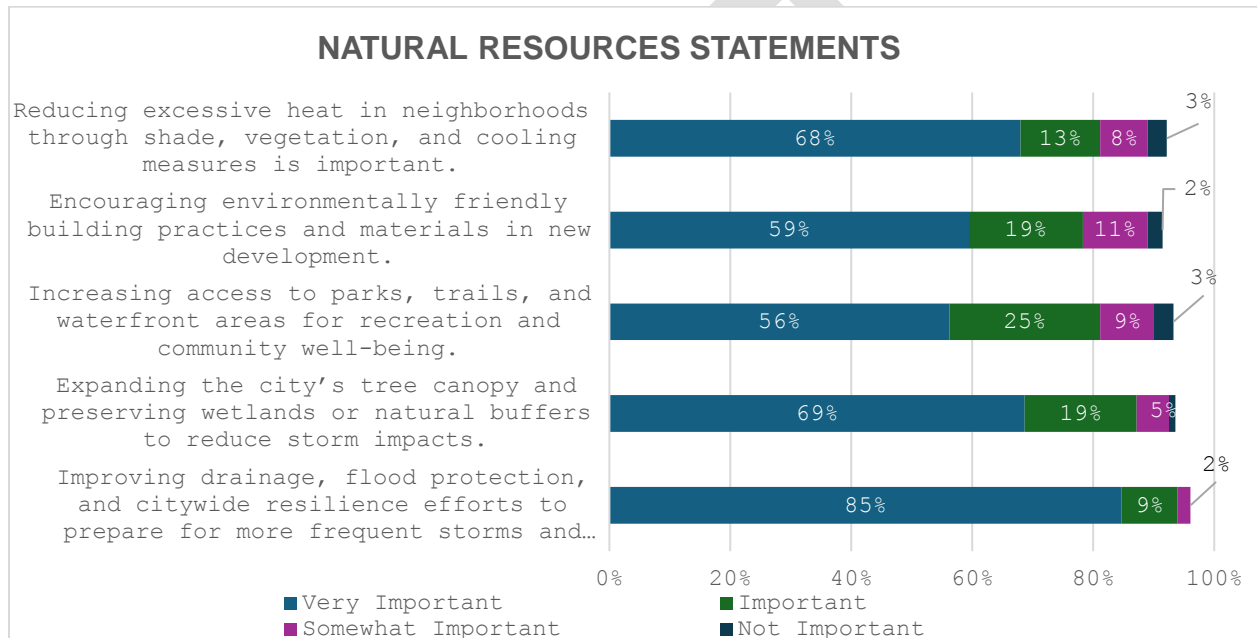
- The integration of arts and culture, and preservation historic properties, which contribute to the region’s identity is the most important quality of life objective, followed by access to safe, well-maintained parks, trails and recreation facilities, and opportunities for residents to be considered, engaged and heard in community decisions.
- From a different perspective, roughly one-third of respondents do not believe that neighborhoods are safe and that there is adequate access to essential services that are the foundation of quality of life.
- Pertaining to actions residents feel should be taken to pursue preservation of historic resources, the most important places responsibility on local government and legislation. Identification, and identification and designation of historic resources follows. As the City of Savannah has a robust inventory of historic properties and districts, and the County has a number of designated historic properties, this response suggests that a more aggressive public education program regarding historic preservation efforts, as well as continued research and identification of significant racial and ethnic historic sites, should be undertaken.
- Respondents rating of amenities and services is generally ambivalent. The majority of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, However parks and open space, the

library and community centers, and public safety received positive support from approximately one-third of the respondents.

- A sizeable proportion of respondents do not participate in activities that entail public education, childcare, children’s services or governmental support.
- The service residents exhibited the most dissatisfaction with is public education.

Natural Resources

How strongly would you agree with the following statements about natural resources in your city/county?

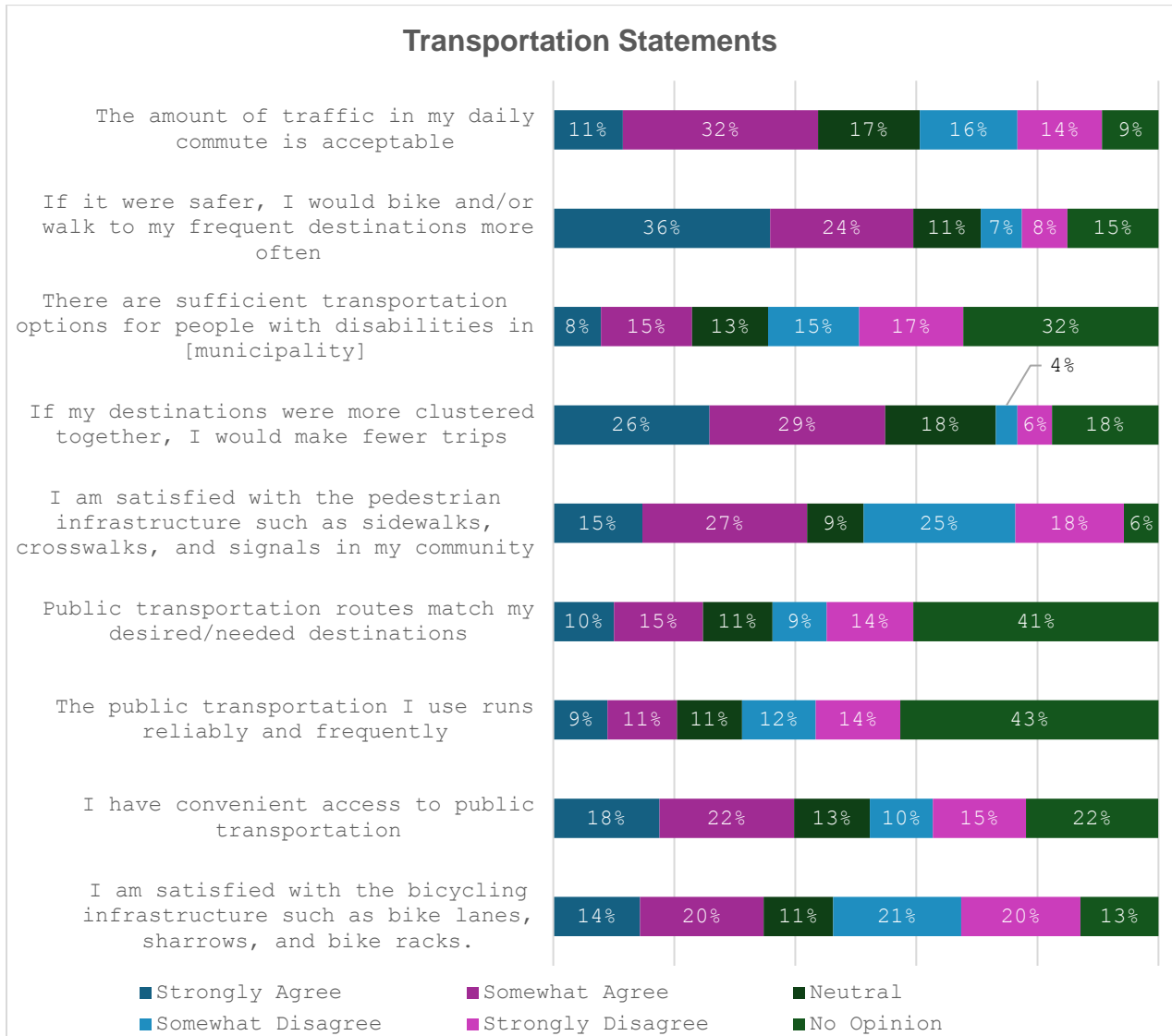


Natural Resources Survey Responses Summary

- Management of natural resources appears to be an important topic for respondents to the survey, with over 85% finding the statements to have some level of importance.
- Almost 100% of respondents feel that improving drainage, flood control, and overall resilience measures is essential.
- Three percent or less of the respondents believe that reducing heat islands, integrating environmentally friendly building practices into new development (and by extension renovation) and increasing access to parks, trails and waterfront areas for recreation has any importance to community well-being.

Transportation

How strongly do you agree with the following statements about transportation in your city/county?



Transportation Survey Responses Summary

- The statement receiving the largest positive support referred to safety of pedestrian and bicycle systems infrastructure as an impediment to usage, and that if improved, would be more effectively utilized, which is supported also in the responses to the statements that there is satisfaction with the bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure, to which 43% and 41% respectively responded with dissatisfaction.
- The concept of mixed-use was supported by almost 60% of respondents, who claimed they would make less trips if their destinations were more conveniently clustered.

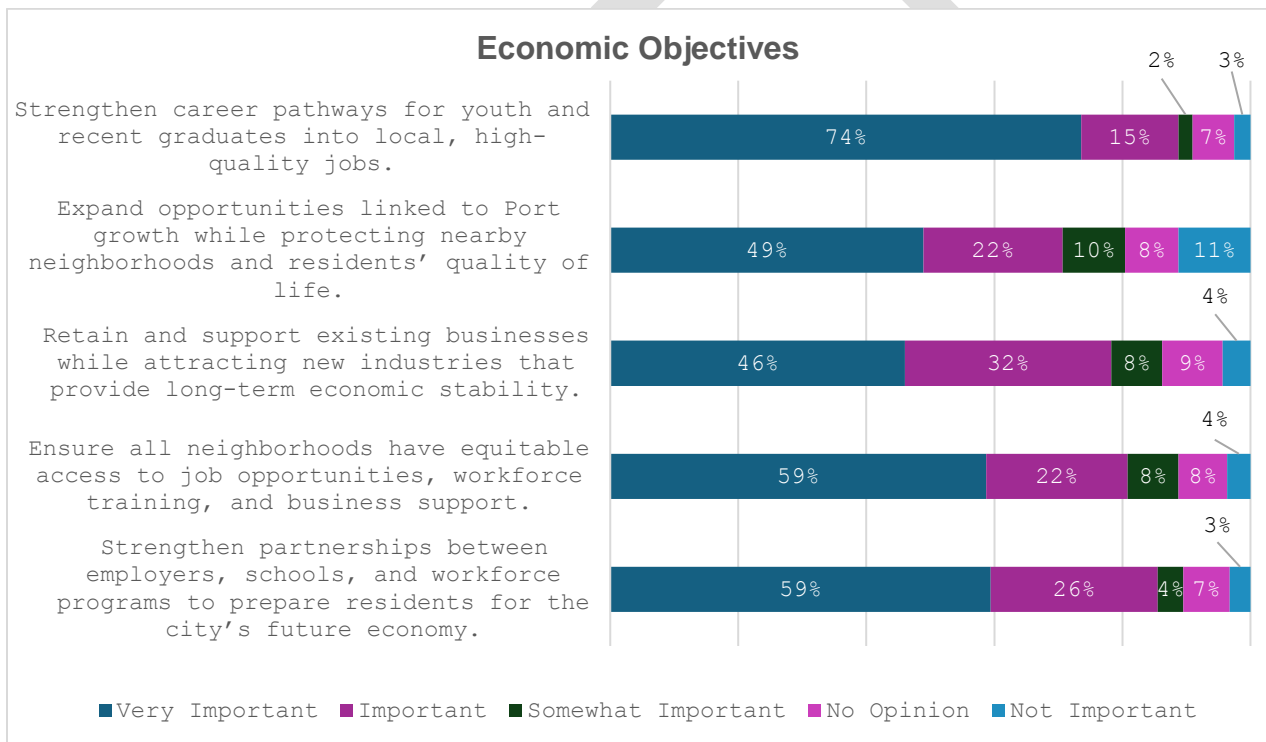
- In contrast, a number of statements regarding public transportation received “no opinion: or “neutral” responses. Based on the respondents primarily reporting driving alone to destinations, such responses are not surprising.

Economic Development

On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most negative and 5 being the most positive, how would you rate the general growth of your community in the past 5 years?

Specific responses were not available for this question. Based on 281 responses the overall average rating was 3.0. This response indicates that there is room for improvement in both the Unincorporated County and City of Savannah’s approach to growth management.

How important are the following economic objectives to your city/county?



Economic Development Survey Response Summary

- Overwhelmingly, the strength of the economy is important to residents, with roughly 80% and above of the responses supporting the identified objectives as either “very important” or “important”. Only a small percentage of respondents had a “No Opinion” response to economic development issues.
- Objectives residents feel most strongly about relate to improving and preparing the current and future workforce for economic success. This includes strengthening the transition of graduates from either high school or a secondary educational level into the

workforce, and providing the tools, connections to employers, programs and training necessary.

- The objective least supported dealt with expansion of opportunities linked to Port growth, even though neighborhood and quality of life protection was specially tied to the growth.

Web Page

To engage the community further, the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update team designed and maintained a web page to be a dedicated platform for all planning, public outreach and social media information.

The web page was set up and designed to be user friendly, easily read, and interactive for all users. The page included a diverse mix of information including a project summary, history, a meeting library, post-draft review comment mapper, draft chapters, a link to the survey, and a bulletin board of upcoming events.



Community Outreach Pop-Ups

The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update team conducted a series of community pop-up events throughout Chatham County and the city of Savannah. The pop-up events were held at various times to reach as many residents as possible across the county.

- Girls Engineer it Day – June 5, 2025
- Starland Yard Mini Market – October 3, 2025
- Oktoberfest – October 4, 2025
- Tybee Island Pirate Festival – October 9, 2025
- Westin Fall Fest – October 11, 2025
- Savannah Weiner Dog Races – October 11, 2025
- Humane Society for Greater Savannah – October 18, 2025
- Farmer's Market at Tybee Island – October 20, 2025
- Tatumville Community Center – October 23, 2025
- Pink Market: Riverwalk – October 24, 2025
- SCAD Film Festival – October 25, 2025
- Liberty City Community Center – October 28, 2025
- Overcoming By Faith Church Fall Festival – October 31, 2025

- Forsyth Park Farmer's Market – November 1, 2025
- Savannah State University – November 4, 2025
- Liberty City Community Center – November 6, 2025
- Hudson Hill Community Center – November 7, 2025
- Starland Yard First Friday – November 7, 2025
- Tybee Post Music Festival – November 7, 2025
- Cloverdale Community Center – November 12, 2025
- Mary Flourney Golden Ade Center – November 13, 2025
- Half-Marathon/5K and Eastern Wharf Food Truck – November 15, 2025
- Carver Village Community Center – November 17, 2025
- Garden City Senior Center – November 18, 2025
- Mary Flourney Golden Age Center – November 19, 2025
- Garden City Library – November 20, 2025
- Harvest Market at Savannah Hydroponics and Organics – November 22, 2025
- Afro-Rhythm Dance and Wellness Experience - November 27, 2025
- Bull Street Library – December 2, 2025
- Oglethorpe Mall Library – December 4, 2025
- Port City Library – December 5, 2025
- Savannah Irish Festival – February 1, 2026
- Savannah Book Festival – February 5, 2026

Chatham County Commission and Savannah City Council Meetings

Chatham County Commission Regular Meeting 10/3/2025

An overview of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update process and schedule was presented by the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Planning Commission. Topics covered included:

- A discussion highlighting a focus on land use to evaluate growth and priority areas that have been dealt with in recent zoning cases as well as other cases that involved infrastructure, transportation and other access modes. In essence, land planning targeted towards “development nodes” supported by infrastructure to reduce unsupported conversion of greenfield development and to clarify sphere of influence planning.
- The difference between the Savannah Economic Development Authority Vision 2033 Plan and the Comprehensive Plan.
- The community participation program.
- Required elements and the inclusion of the Quality-of-Life Element to respond to issues brought up by members of the community.
- Coordination with County staff related to Service Delivery Strategy.
- Interrelation of unincorporated area planning with incorporated jurisdictional developments and annexations
- Relationship of the Comprehensive Plan to each City’s individual plans – a macro/micro approach to guide growth. The master and small area plans developed at the jurisdictional level implement the Comp Plan.
- The clarification that the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update starts at what is existing. It attempts to mitigate land use determinations of the past where feasible, but has limitations on as-built conditions arising from land use decisions executed prior to the current planning period guidance.

This was for informational purposes only, no Chatham County Commission Action was taken.

RESERVE FOR FUTURE PUBLIC MEETINGS SUMMARIES

City of Savannah City Council Meeting 11/13/2025

An overview of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update process and schedule was presented by the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Planning Commission. Topics covered included:

- There may have been issues or concerns with the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Future Land Use Map in certain neighborhoods. How will the Vision 2033 map and changes to the FLUM be integrated in the 2045 Update.
- Importance of the public taking the survey and participation

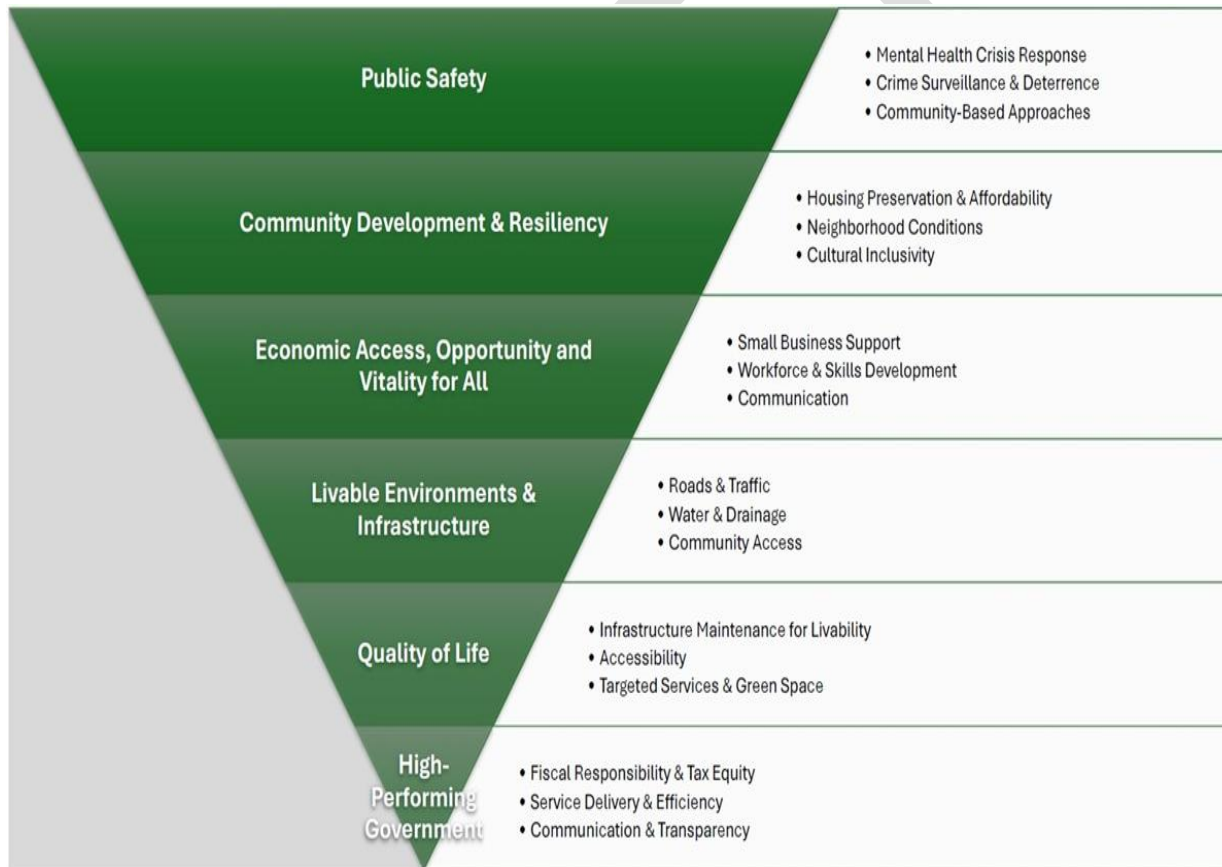
Savannah Guiding Performance Strategy (GPS) Program

In March 2024, the Savannah City Council convened a Visioning session to determine priorities for the City. The session resulted in refinement of multiple priorities into six goals and eight organizational values. The City Council directed the City Manager to perform a strategic planning process (GPS) with the community.

Community Meetings

Seven community meetings were held between February 1 and 10, 2025, at which nearly 300 community members attended. Key meeting themes by priority include:

Community Meetings – Key Themes by Priority



Feedback was further defined by Alderman District and the two at-large posts to ascertain locational priorities. However, one persistent theme was shared in each district – Infrastructure Maintenance for Livability, which encompasses roads and traffic, water and drainage, and community accessibility.

Community Meetings – Key Themes by Location

District 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure Maintenance for Livability • Neighborhood Conditions • Communication & Transparency
District 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health Crisis Response • Infrastructure Maintenance for Livability • City Employee Compensation • Service Delivery & Efficiency
District 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure Maintenance for Livability • More Recognition of Public Safety Top Performers • Communication
District 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal Responsibility & Tax Equity • Infrastructure Maintenance for Livability • Water & Drainage
District 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Delivery & Efficiency • Infrastructure Maintenance for Livability • Communication
District 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure Maintenance for Livability • Handicapped Accessibility • Housing Preservation & Affordability

Savannah GPS Online Survey

An online survey was available between February and April 2025, with over 1,229 responses received. Respondents were predominantly female; over 50 years old; 44% lived and worked in the City; the majority of other respondents claimed residency; 50% of respondents were White and 33% were Black/African American; and approximately 50% had incomes above the 2025 median. Crime and safety, affordable housing, quality of life, economic development and homelessness were the most common concern among respondents. Key aspects generating the most pride are:



- Historic charm and beauty – well preserved history, beautiful architecture, unique squares, lush greenery, charming ambiance
- Strong community and culture – friendly, diverse population, sense of community, vibrant arts scene, culture and festivals
- Walkability and Culinary Scene – ease of exploring City on foot (especially downtown), diverse and appealing restaurant options

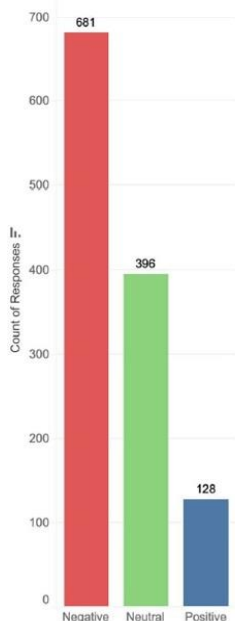
GPS Survey Response Highlights

What Issues are Most Important to You for Your Quality of Life? How Could the City Work to Improve?



Q5: How Concerned are you about Homelessness in Savannah? How should the City respond to homelessness? – 57% expressed negative sentiments

Q5 Sentiment Analysis



Recommendations

Increase the number of available beds in emergency shelters.

Provide more options for transitional housing

Develop long-term housing solutions combined with supportive services

Address underlying issues: mental health services, substance abuse treatment, job training

Implement systemic approaches, foster partnerships, and improve leadership

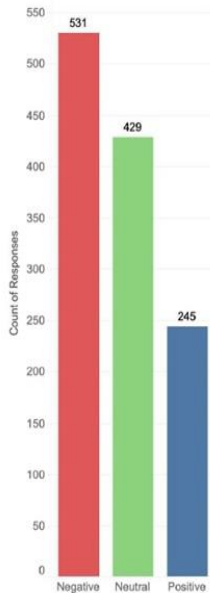
Increase resources and make programs more accessible

Utilize evidence-based solutions, including targeted prevention and supportive services

Prioritize compassionate, resource-based solutions over solely enforcement-focused approaches

Q6: How Concerned are you about Public Safety in Savannah? Do you feel safe in your Neighborhood? What should the City do to Improve Public Safety? - 44% expressed negative sentiments

Q6 Sentiment Analysis



Recommendations

Address underlying issues contributing to crime (poverty, lack of opportunity, drug addiction, mental health, unemployment).

Improve street lighting in neighborhoods and public areas

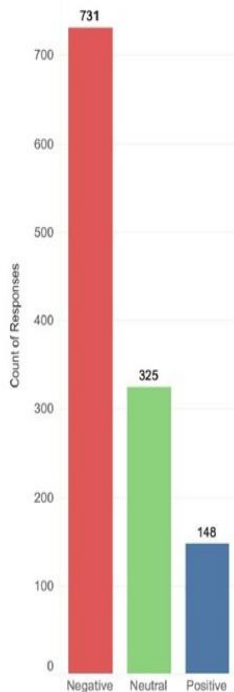
Implement focused attention on reducing gun violence

Improve prosecution of crimes

Adopt a balanced approach incorporating compassion and accountability

Q7: How Concerned are you about Affordable Housing in Savannah? How should the City respond to this problem? 61% expressed negative sentiments

Q7 Sentiment Analysis



Recommendations

Construct more affordable units

Offer incentives to developers to include affordable housing in their projects

Support diverse housing types, such as tiny homes, accessory dwelling units, and duplexes/triplexes

Rehabilitate existing blighted properties for housing

Regulate short-term rentals through increased enforcement, limiting numbers (especially in residential areas), and increasing fees/taxes to potentially fund affordable housing

Implement rent control or stabilization measures

Reform zoning regulations to allow for more diverse and affordable housing options

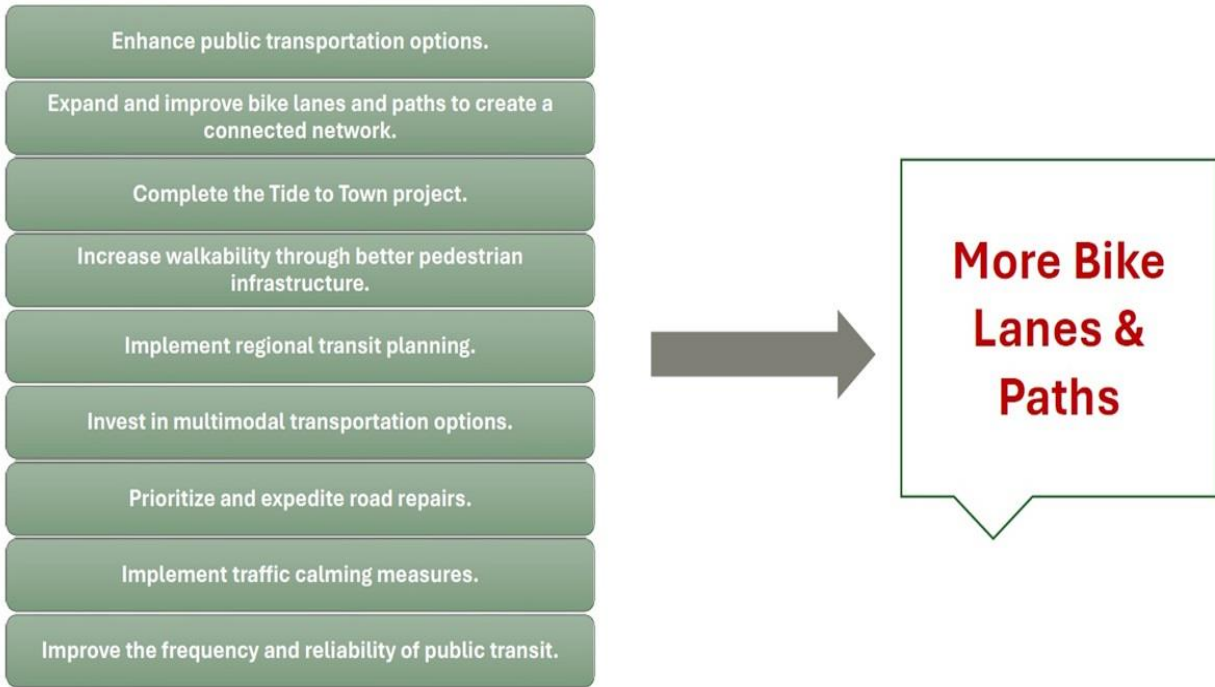
Utilize city-owned land for affordable housing development

Provide property tax relief for residents

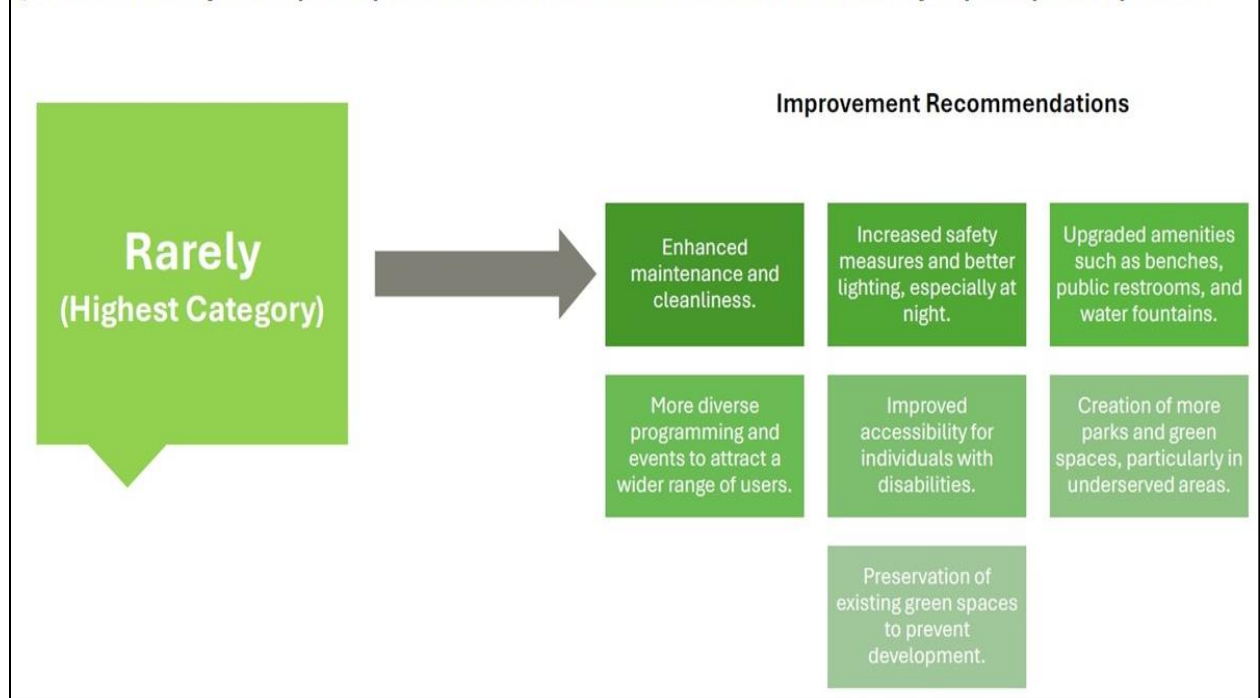
Increase support for homeownership initiatives

Focus affordable housing efforts on middle-income workers in addition to the lowest income brackets

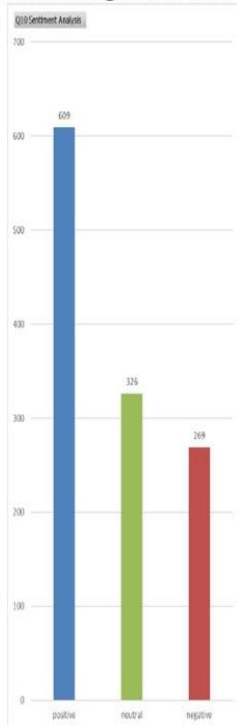
Q8: What could the City of Savannah do to improve transportation? What would you like to see more of in Savannah: bus routes, bike lanes, walking and bike paths, traffic calming, and road improvement projects?



Q9: How often do you use public parks and recreation facilities? How could the City improve public spaces?



Q10: How important is having a strong local economy to you? How would you like to see the City support local economic growth and vitality? - 51% expressed positive sentiments



Recommendations

Support local and small businesses through reduced bureaucracy, financial assistance, and promotion

Invest in workforce development and provide support for entrepreneurs

Reduce barriers to opening local businesses, particularly by addressing high commercial rent costs

Diversify the economy by attracting and supporting industries beyond tourism, such as technology, manufacturing, healthcare, and the arts, to create more stable, higher-paying jobs

Provide targeted support, resources, and opportunities for minority-owned (particularly Black-owned) businesses

Ensure economic growth initiatives consider the impact on residents' quality of life, infrastructure capacity, and housing affordability

Needs, Opportunities and Priorities

Based upon the results of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update community participation program, the following overarching themes were heard:

Needs, Opportunities and Priorities	
Housing	
Need for more housing options for all income levels	Reform zoning regulations to allow for more diverse, non-traditional housing options
Protection of the housing market from the impacts of short-term rentals	Need for more duplexes, tiny homes, ADUs and transitional/group homes
Need for more nursing or retirement homes	Desire for fewer mobile homes
Utilize jurisdictional land for affordable housing development	More housing units set-aside for lower and moderate income households
Rehabilitate existing blighted properties for housing (industrial lofts, motel conversions)	Developer incentives or affordable housing requirements code amendments
Land Use	
More open spaces and residential land uses	Land Use should protect environmental features
Limiting the impact of industrial and warehouse developments on homes and neighborhoods	Improving existing areas and utilizing adaptive reuse over expanding outward
Less industrial developments and fewer motels and hotels	More mixed-use land uses
Quality of Life	
Support culture and diversity	Improve neighborhood safety
More recreational opportunities	Better public education
More support for historic preservation through identification, planning and legislation	Better childcare, healthcare, libraries and community centers options
Support and invest in local neighborhoods	Manage impacts of tourism on residents
Adopt a balanced public safety approach integrating compassion and accountability	Address underlying issues contributing to crime and homelessness
Natural Resources	
Increasing access (disability) to open spaces	Reducing excessive heat
Expanding the tree canopy and protecting natural resources	Encouraging environmentally friendly practices
Improving resilience and flood protection efforts	Enhance cleanliness, amenities and safety of parks and public spaces

Transportation	
Improve transportation options for people with disabilities	Make desired destinations closer to where people live
Improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure	Improve access to public transportation, route coverage and increased scheduling
Improve safety for walking and biking	Complete the Tide to Town network
Implement traffic calming measures	Address transit options regionally
Economic Development	
Prepare residents for the city's future economy through partnerships	Ensure equitable access to jobs, training, and business support
Become business friendly	Manage impacts of tourism on residents
Expand opportunities from port growth	Support local and small businesses
Strengthen pathways of students into employment	Reduce bureaucratic impediments and barriers to small business viability
Diversify the economy beyond tourism	Invest in workforce development
Ensure the impact of economic growth initiatives on quality of life, infrastructure and housing	

Figure CP.1 – Savannah-Chatham County Needs, Opportunities and Priorities

CHAPTER 1
COMMUNITY PROFILE

DRAFT

Community Profile

Introduction

Chatham County was established in 1777 as one of the original counties of Georgia. It is the most urbanized county in the 200-mile coastal area between Charleston, South Carolina and Jacksonville, Florida. It serves as an economic, cultural, and governmental hub for a six-county, bi-state region, and an international trade focal point.

Chatham County has grown considerably since the start of the 20th century. With one exception, the county's rate of population growth has remained above 5% in each decennial Census since 1900. Chatham County has a long tradition of planning, and the community intends to maintain its historic character and natural resources while welcoming new residents, many of whom become the strongest advocates of local planning.

Regional Population

Savannah MSA

Chatham County is the largest county in the Savannah Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which also includes Bryan and Effingham counties. The Savannah MSA, together with Bulloch, Liberty, Long, and Wayne counties, comprises the larger Savannah–Hinesville–Statesboro Combined Statistical Area (CSA). The CSA is bordered by the Hilton Head Island–Bluffton MSA to the north and the Brunswick MSA to the south. Chatham County is comprised of nine municipalities.

Savannah MSA
A metropolitan statistical area is a region consisting of a city and surrounding communities that are linked by social and economic factors, as established by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget

Throughout the past 100 years, the population of the region has grown as a result of health, climate and transportation technological advances that improved quality of life in the region. The area's economy has grown to serve regional, national, and international markets in a variety of sectors, a great deal of which is associated with the Port of Savannah.



Historically, Chatham County and the City of Savannah have served as the region's largest population center, commercial core, and industrial hub. While this remains true today, suburbanization has led to significant population increases in Effingham and Bryan counties over the past 50 years as jurisdictions in Chatham County become more densely populated. A growing network of highways and relatively inexpensive land have accelerated this move away from the denser urban core in Savannah and the port cities, a trend that is projected to continue in the coming decades.

County Population

Chatham County, inclusive of nine municipalities and unincorporated county area is home to over 300,000 residents, depicted in Exhibit 1.1. It is the most populous county in the coastal region, and the second most populous county in Georgia after the Atlanta metropolitan region. The City of Savannah has the largest population among incorporated cities, contributing almost one-half of the total population.

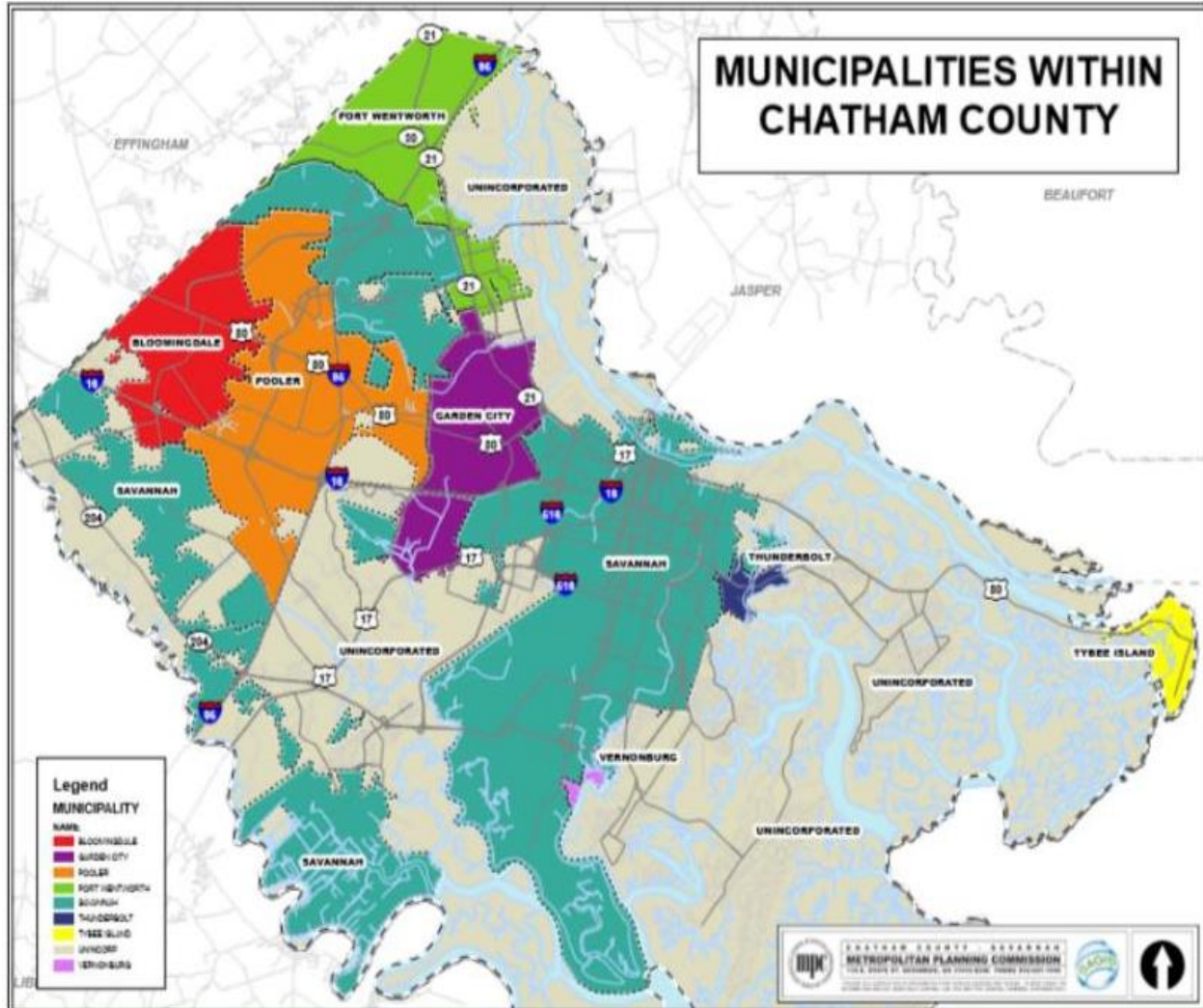


Exhibit 1.1 – Municipalities Within Chatham County

Figure 1.1 displays the population change between 2020 and 2024 within the MSA. While Chatham County has grown overall within the prior 2040 Plan period, proportional growth in adjacent Bryan and Effingham Counties surpasses Chatham County, although not numerically.

Savannah MSA Population Growth 2020-2024				
County	Jurisdiction	2020	2024	% Change
Chatham County		289,649	300,879	3.9%
	City of Savannah	145,492	149,465	2.7%
	Unincorporated Chatham	93,478	90,834	-2.8%
	City of Pooler	24,575	28,466	15.8%
	Port Wentworth	8,886	12,892	45.1%
	Garden City	8,597	10,426	21.2%
	Tybee Island	3,094	3,123	0.9%
	Bloomingtondale	2,801	3,007	7.4%
	Town of Thunderbolt	2,638	2,533	-4.0%
	Vernonburg	88	133	51.1%
Effingham County		62,241	69,143	11.1%
Bryan County		38,321	48,263	25.9%
Source: 2020 and 2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates				

Figure 1.1 – Savannah-Chatham County: Savannah MSA Population Change 2020-2024

Annexation History

Although the total County population continues to increase overall, the population is shifting from unincorporated to incorporated areas as land is annexed and infill parcels are developed within the jurisdictional boundaries of Savannah and the smaller communities within the County, particularly Garden City, Pooler and Port Wentworth. A summary of annexations executed between 2020 and mid-year 2025 is provided in Figure 1.2, although this list may not be exhaustive. Particularly large annexations into the City of Savannah included multiple transactions involving over 1,200 total acres for the Rockingham Farms warehouse and industrial development. Starting in late 2024 and continuing into 2025, Savannah shifted focus toward large-scale planned developments to support housing, most notably the Speir Property (near Little Neck Road) and Old River Road annexations which account for over 800 combined acres. Multiple smaller annexations (such as Bamboo Lane and Grove Point Road) were initiated by property owners seeking access to City utility rates and services. In 2023, Port Wentworth annexed 762 acres from the County along Highway 21 for the Port Wentworth Commerce Center.

One 6.75-acre annexation was conducted as a land swap between Pooler and Savannah, and did not detract from existing County acreage. In March 2024, the City of Pooler reached an agreement with the City of Savannah and Chatham County to annex three church properties, which were de-annexed from the City of Savannah. Pooler de-annexed the "Landmark Property", which was annexed into the City of Savannah to align with municipal services and facilitate economic development. Similar land swaps are not reflected on Figure 1.2, as they do not impact Unincorporated County land base.

Annexation History 2020-2025			
Recipient	Effective Date	Acreage	Address
Savannah	1/1/2020	1.7	4009 Ogeechee Road
Savannah	6/1/2020	1036.69	Rockingham Farms on the Southwest Bypass (Veterans Parkway)
Savannah	1/1/2021	6.75	De-annexation of 6.75 acres on Dean Forest Rd
Garden City	4/1/2021	6.75	Dean Forest Road - from Savannah
Savannah	7/1/2021	12.34	Sweetwater Station Drive near Clubhouse Drive
Savannah	10/1/2021	20	Veterans Parkway at Rockingham Farms.
Savannah	9/1/2021	5.019	Ogeechee Road near Canebrake Road.
Bloomingtondale	11/1/2021	18.205	Resolution Morgan Property
Savannah	10/1/2021	14.585	Thankful Baptist Church off Ogeechee Road near Canebrake Road
Savannah	12/1/2022	2.593	3 parcels near Sweetwater
Savannah	8/1/2022	18.989	Capital Partners. Finance file number 11.440
Savannah	8/1/2022	30.425	S&R Savannah Partners LLC.
Savannah	10/1/2022	85.573	Rockingham Farms LLC 11.442
Savannah	11/1/2022	10.08	340 Buckhalter Road near Veterans Parkway
Savannah	1/1/2023	278.16	Little Neck Road near Ogeechee Road
Savannah	2/1/2023	52.86	Buckhalter Road near Veterans Parkway to expand Rockingham Farms Development.
Savannah	3/1/2023	13.3	115 Bamboo Lane for Telfair Business Center
Port Wentworth	12/1/2023	762	Port Wentworth Commerce Center Highway 21
Garden City	5/1/2024	6.56	
Savannah	6/1/2024	5.8	Diggs Avenue near ACL Boulevard.
Savannah	8/1/2024	5.77	1721 Grove Point Road
Savannah	10/1/2024	7.21	Two parcels on SR 204 & Middle Landing Rd
Savannah	11/1/2024	668	Little Neck Road
Garden City	1/1/2025	40.174	Withdrawn
Savannah	3/1/2025	159.7	Old River Rd.
Savannah	7/1/2025	4.6	4119 Ogeechee Rd

Figure 1.2 – Savannah-Chatham County: Annexation History 2020-2025

Population Projections

Figure 1.3 illustrates the future projections for each county in the Savannah MSA from 2025 to the end of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update period in 2045. While Chatham County is expected to retain its status as the largest population center in the metropolitan area, its neighboring counties are forecast to experience a greater rate of growth in the coming years. This equates to a population increase of approximately 14.2% in Chatham County over a period of 20 years and an increase of approximately 25.3% in the Savannah MSA overall.

Population projections were prepared using a standard cohort component demographic methodology. This approach models population change as a function of initial population estimates broken down by age and sex, fertility, mortality, and migration.

Savannah MSA Population Projections 2025-2045				
County	2025	2040	2045	% Change 2025-2045
Chatham County	310,554	346,708	354,532	14.2%
Effingham County	64,769	97,004	104,577	61.5%
Bryan County	52,262	70,188	76,838	34.3%

Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB)

Figure 1.3 – Savannah-Chatham County: Savannah MSA Population Projections 2025-2045

Population by Gender

According to Figure 1.4, there are slightly more female residents in the region than male residents. The differential in representation is slightly lower in the Unincorporated County in comparison to Savannah and the County overall, potentially reflecting the more agricultural character and family units in the more rural areas.

Population by Gender		
Jurisdiction	Male	Female
City of Savannah	47%	53%
Unincorporated Chatham	49%	51%
Chatham County	48%	52%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates (S0101)

Figure 1.4 – Savannah-Chatham County: Population By Gender

Chatham County Population by Age

According to 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates, the median age in Chatham County is 37.1 years old, comparable to the median age in Georgia (37.4) and the United States (38.7). The younger median age (33.7) in the City of Savannah may reflect the concentrated student population, the more varied composition of employment opportunities, and young professionals, often associated with availability of rental housing. The largest age range is 35-54, nearly one-fourth of the population, closely followed by the 0-19 and 20-34 age groups. The senior population, while a smaller proportion of the County total, exceeds the statewide representation (roughly 15.6% to 16%) of residents. Marginally, there are more males in younger age groups and slightly more females in the older age groups, commensurate with state and national trends.

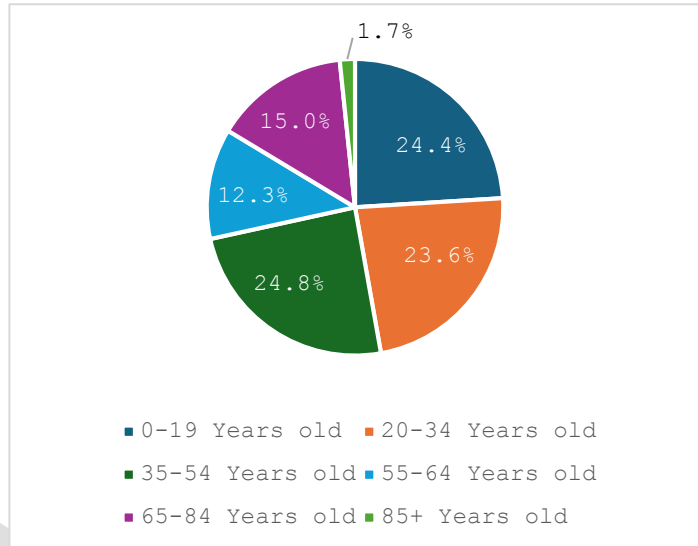
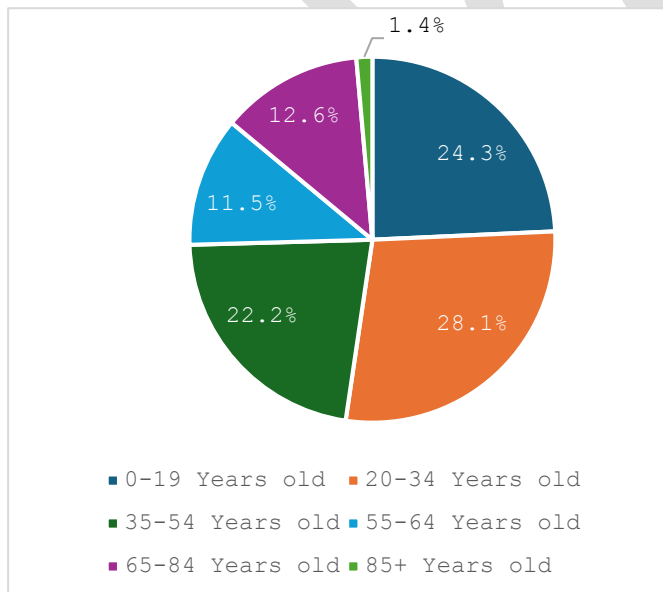


Figure 1.5 – Chatham County Age Cohorts



Savannah Population by Age

The median age in the City of Savannah is 33.7 years old. According to 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates, in the City of Savannah the largest age cohort falls within the 20–34 year-old age group, likely reflecting the student population and young professionals, followed by residents aged 0-19. The 35–54 year-old age cohort is the third largest age group, commonly the age group markedly comprised of household units, many with children, in alignment with the 0-19 age cohort. Only 14% are over age 65, with the highest concentrations in the core central neighborhoods.

Figure 1.6 – City of Savannah Age Cohorts

Households and Families

Household Composition

As shown in Figure 1.7, Chatham County and the City of Savannah have similar household and family sizes. These averages are slightly smaller than the household and family sizes for the state of Georgia. Additionally, around one-quarter of households in both Chatham County and Savannah contain children. This is slightly lower than the state of Georgia, in which nearly one-third of households contain children, again likely reflecting the high representation of younger student and young professional residents, particularly in the City of Savannah.

Household Characteristics			
	Average Household Size	Average Family Size	Percentage of Households with Children
Georgia	2.64	3.25	32.1%
Chatham County	2.41	3.05	26.0%
City of Savannah	2.35	3.12	24.5%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates (S1101)

Figure 1.7 – Savannah-Chatham County: Household and Family Size

Housing Tenure

In Chatham County, the majority of occupied housing is owner-occupied. In Savannah the majority of households are renter-occupied, which is higher than the state and national average, both at 35%. The high proportion of renters in the City correlates to population characteristics, including a younger population, the presence of students, young professionals and military, racial composition, historical challenges to generational wealth, and income. Statistics indicate that the renter population in Savannah are more likely to be people of color, correlating to census tracts with lower median incomes in comparison to census tracts in the City where ownership tenure prevails. Current trends of investors purchasing single family homes and conversion to rental properties also is potentially a contributory factor, removing a segment of more naturally occurring affordable ownership units from the housing inventory.

Housing Tenure Chatham County and Savannah		
Tenure Type	Chatham County	Savannah
Owner-occupied housing units	56.3%	44.4%
Renter-occupied housing units	43.7%	55.6%

2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Figure 1.8 – Savannah-Chatham County: Housing Tenure

Household Income and Poverty Rate

According to data from the 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates, median household income in Chatham County is higher than the City of Savannah, although both are lower than the state’s median household income. The City of Savannah’s much lower household income generally corresponds to a greater proportion of both individuals and families with incomes below the poverty threshold, with approximately one-fifth of residents living in poverty. In 2023, the federal poverty level in Georgia, applicable to Chatham County, was \$14,580 for a single adult and \$30,000 for a family of four. In 2025, the threshold has risen to \$15,650 for an individual and \$32,150 for a family, well below the median.

Household Income and Poverty			
	Median Household Income	Percent of Population in Poverty	Percentage of Families in Poverty
Georgia	\$74,664	13.5%	9.9%
Chatham County	\$69,575	14.5%	9.8%
City of Savannah	\$56,782	19.5%	13.2%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates (S2503, S1701, S1702)

Figure 1.9 - Savannah-Chatham County: Median Household Income/Poverty Rate

Overall, the proportion of individuals living below the poverty level is lower than the proportion of families in poverty. Poverty rates for individuals include high numbers of single-person households and unrelated individuals (such as students or roommates), who are not counted in the lower, specific "family" poverty category, drawing from a larger pool that includes both impoverished family members and single-person households. In addition, roughly 40% of households in Chatham County consist of individuals living alone or with non-relatives. These non-family households often have lower median incomes compared to family household units which often are comprised of two income earners, therefore exhibiting a higher frequency of individuals falling below the poverty line.

The City of Savannah has a higher percentage of individuals and families in poverty in comparison to Chatham County and the state of Georgia, likely in response to a combination of conditions contributing to a concentration of local poverty in the downtown and midtown portions of the City central to Savannah's tourism, business, and historic, residential, and commercial districts. These conditions have been documented in the *Chatham County Blueprint* and the REAL Task Force report *Seeing Savannah Through a Racial Equity Lens* and include: residential segregation; persistent generational poverty, more heavily experienced among communities of color; economic structural factors such as lower wages associated with tourism and service jobs; and urban development patterns. Many of these individuals are unhoused, while others may be student permanent resident with little or no source of income.

Race and Ethnicity

Overall, Chatham County is a racially diverse community, with patterns of concentrated racial and ethnic populations while some areas of the county remain more homogeneous. The largest pluralities of racial groups are White and Black/African American. However, since 2010 the proportion of the population composed of these citizens has decreased by almost 10%, and the proportional representation has grown slightly closer, while the representations of other racial and ethnic groups has increased. This suggests that the County is becoming more racially diverse as intermarriage between races increases.

As well, additional racial categories have been added in the 2020 Census in response to the increasing trends of inter-marriage and blending of races, as well as the stigmatism of having to choose one specific racial category for identity. Therefore, the decreases in the White and Black/African American populations in 2024 may be partially attributed to the addition of the Two or More Races classification, which might account for almost 7% of the decrease in the White and Black categories. In contrast, in 2010, respondents descending from combinations of two or more races either identified as Some Other Race or within the larger categories of Black or White, whichever race they most identified with. There were no residents identifying as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander alone in 2024, suggesting either a blending of racial classifications with affiliation in a different category, or reporting in the Some Other Race or Two or More Races classification.

Racial Classification Chatham County 2010 - 2024				
Year	2010		2024	
Racial Classification	Number	% of Population	Number	% of Population
Total	254,900	100.0%	307,336	100.0%
White	137,351	53.9%	147,173	47.9%
Black or African American	104,892	41.2%	115,191	37.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	670	0.3%	1,954	0.6%
Asian	6140	2.4%	10,967	3.6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	241	0.09%	0	0
Some Other Race	5606	2.2%	11,056	3.6%
Two or More Races	--	--	20,995	6.8%

Source: 2010 DEC Summary File 2 and ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Figure 1.10 - Chatham County Population by Race 2010 -2024

In the City of Savannah, the two most represented racial groups are White and Black/ African American. However, the largest population classification is Black/African American followed by White, a reversal of the pattern in the County overall. Similar to the trends identified in the County, the proportional representation of both the Black/African American and White categories has decreased over the period, likely due to the addition of a new classification responding to the increasing trends in racial blending and increased reporting in the Some Other Race category.

The differential between the two primary race classifications, similar to the County, has also diminished by a few percentage points over the period as the City continues to diversify.

Racial Classification in Savannah 2010-2024				
Year	2010		2024	
	Number	% of Population	Number	% of Population
Total:	147,898	100%	148,809	100.0%
White	51388	39.1%	53,604	36.0%
Black or African American	74676	56.7%	73,481	49.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	346	0.3%	179	0.1%
Asian	6140	2.0%	5,446	3.7%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	142	0.1%	0	0
Two or More	0	0	9,824	6.6%
Some Other Race	2387	1.8%	6,275	4.2%

Source: 2010 DEC Summary File 2 and ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Figure 1.11 - Savannah Population by Race 2010 -2024

Unlike other localities In Georgia, the majority of residents throughout Chatham County do not identify as Hispanic, which is not a racial classification in and of itself; rather it is an ethnic category. Therefore, persons who identify as Hispanic may be classified in any of the racial categories. This distinction may also account for the increases in the Some Other Race and Two or More Races classifications, as residents who are of Hispanic origin may not identify as a particular race and select one of those categories. However, the proportion of persons identifying as Hispanic has increased between 2010 and 2024 both in Chatham County overall and the City of Savannah.

Hispanic Ethnicity 2010 - 2024								
Year	2010				2024			
	Chatham County		Savannah		Chatham County		Savannah	
Hispanic Ethnicity	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total Population	254,900	100%	131,595	100%	300,879	100%	147,898	100%
Not Hispanic/ Latino	244,005	95.7%	124,490	94.6%	275,921	91.7%	136,843	92.5%
Hispanic or Latino	10,895	4.3%	7,105	5.4%	24,958	8.3%	11,055	7.5%

Source: 2010 DEC Summary File 2 and ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Figure 1.12 – Savannah-Chatham County: Hispanic Ethnicity 2010-2024

The proportion of Hispanic residents countywide has increased more significantly than in the City

of Savannah, potentially driven by strong regional economic growth attracting workers in expanding job opportunities in sectors such as construction and services, in addition to slightly higher birth rates, accelerating natural population increase. These factors mirror the overall growth of Hispanic communities in the Southeast, which has seen significant demographic shifts driven by labor demand and increased settlement, although the representation in Chatham County is below that of the state at roughly 11%, with the highest concentrations in the Atlanta metro area compared to coastal communities.

Racial/Ethnic Groups by Neighborhood and Census Tract

Exhibit 1.2 displays the predominant largest racial and ethnic groups by census tract in Chatham County in 2023. As shown, White and Black/African American race groupings dominate the County, with predominant concentrations of Black/African Americans in Savannah surrounding the downtown. As shown in Exhibit 1.2, the central core of the City has a higher proportion of White residents, with neighborhoods flanking the core presenting a higher representation of populations of color.

Other portions of Chatham County with census tract with predominant populations of color are located in Garden City, west of Georgetown and Grove Point, Henderson, and the northeastern tip of the County. The remaining portions of the County and Savannah are predominantly White, with one tract in Garden City in the Chatham Parkway, Lynes Parkway/Industrial Park and Westgate Industrial Park neighborhoods with a high proportion (40.8%) of the population identifying as Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

Predominant Savannah Populations of Color Neighborhoods			
West Stiles	Carver Heights	West Savannah	Bayview
Hudson Hill	Woodsville/Bartow	West Broad St. Corridor	East Stiles
Cloverdale	Tremont Park	Beach High/Kilowatt Dr.	Azalea Plaza/Buckhalter
Kayton/Fraizer	Cuyler/Brownsville	Cann Park	Bingville
Jackson Park	Summerside	Brandlewood/Lamarville	Laurel Grove/Gadson
Midtown	Benjamin Van Clark	Gordonston	Winter Garden
Hillcrest	Runaway Point	General MacIntosh	Causton Bluff
Abercorn Strip	Mayfair	Savannah St. University	Oakland Park/Eastgate
Victory Square/Pinehurst	East Hill/Victory Manor	Southside Commercial District	Skyland Terrace/Grove Park
Forrest Park	Twinkenham	Savannah Gardens	Daffin Heights
Club at Savannah Harbor	Savannah State/Glynnwood	Magnolia Park/Blueberry	Ft. Jackson/Kerr-McGee/Wahlstrom Rd
Bacon Park	East Savannah	Avondale	Victory Heights
Sunset Park	Oakhurst	Wilshire Estates	Largo Woods
Mohawk/Shawnee	White Bluff Estates	Paradise Park	Vernonburg
Robin Woods	Colonial Village/Leeds Gate		Hitch/Wessels

Figure 1.13 – Predominant Savannah Populations of Color Neighborhoods

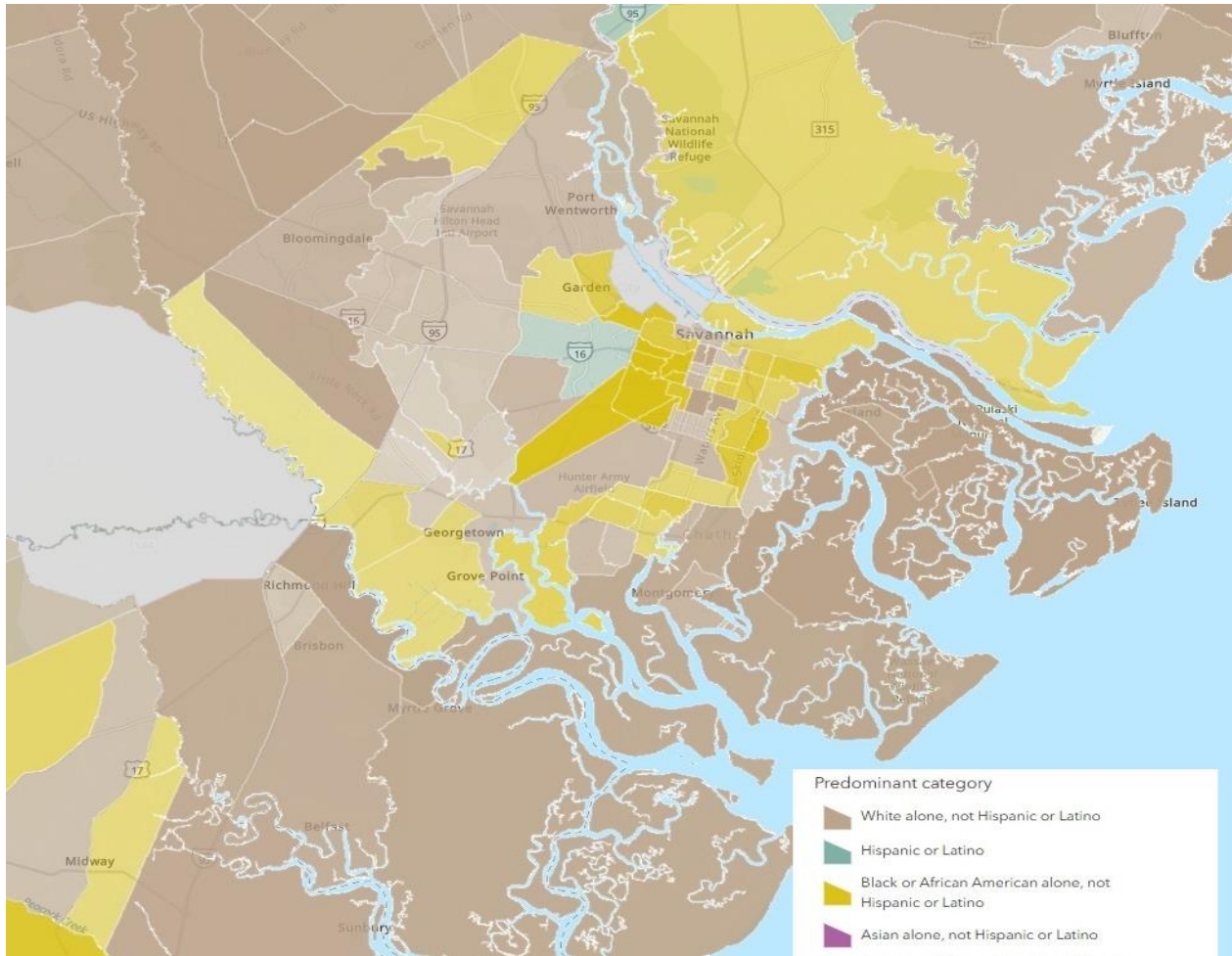


Exhibit 1.2 – Racial and Ethnic Distribution

Diversity Index

The diversity index determines the likelihood that two people chosen at random from a given area will be from different racial or ethnic groups. Higher values indicate more diversity in an area, and lower values indicate less diversity. Exhibit 1.3 – Diversity Index depicts census tracts with high racial and ethnic diversity index scores, based on U.S. census data. Overall, Chatham County has a diversity index of 63.1%, meaning that if one were to pick two people at random in the County, there is over a 60% chance that those two people would be of a different race or ethnicity. This is slightly higher than the United States diversity index of 61.1%. Generally, the tracts with the highest diversity index (dark green) correspond to census tracts with the highest representations of communities of color, while pale green and white shades represent tracts with predominantly White populations.

Nativity

According to data from the 2023 ACS 5-Year estimates, 8% of the population in Chatham County was born outside of the United States. Within the City of Savannah, nearly 7% of the population is foreign-born.

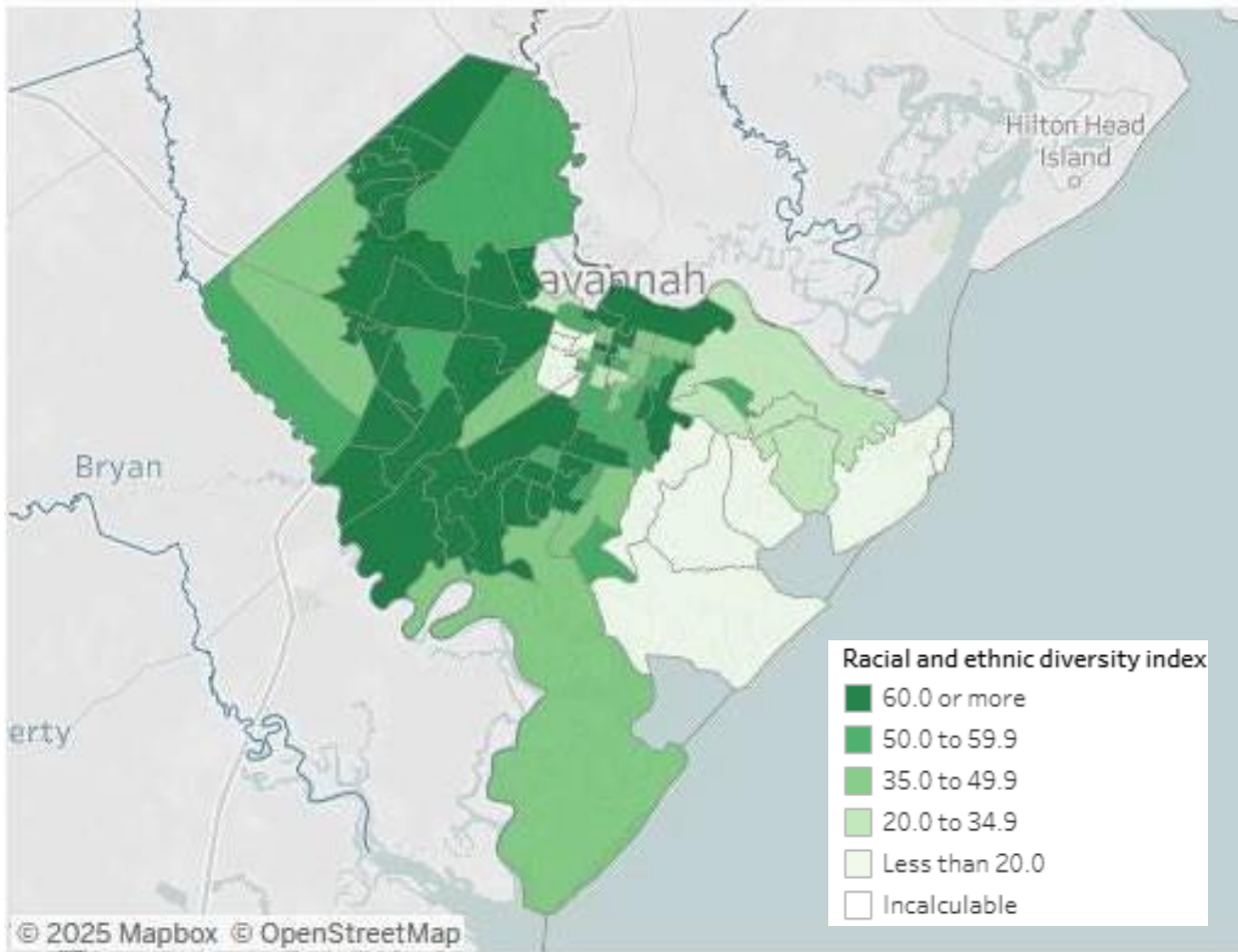


Exhibit 1.3 – Diversity Index Census Tracts in Chatham County

Population Density

Chatham County population density is roughly just over 700 people per square mile, based on a total 2024 population of over 307,000 residents. This represents a significant density increase from the 2020 census data, which recorded roughly 680 people per square mile. As shown in Exhibit 1.4, unincorporated areas of the county have a lower density, with lows approaching 210 persons per square mile.

High concentrations of population are found in the city of Savannah and surrounding incorporated municipalities. In the Historic and Victorian Districts within Savannah, population density may reach as high as 10,000 persons per square mile, including:

Downtown and Historic Districts:

- Bull Street Corridor: Runs through the heart of the Historic District.
- Bay Street & River Street: Mixed-use, residential, and commercial developments near the Savannah Ocean Terminal and surrounding streets.
- Habersham Street & Lincoln Street: Major north-south arteries in the dense grid of the

Old Historic District and Victorian District.

- MLK Jr. Blvd/Indian Street: Area near the river and the northwest side of downtown.

Major Thoroughfares and Mixed-Use Corridors

- Abercorn Street: A primary artery running through the City, surrounded by high-density commercial and residential areas, particularly as it moves toward the midtown area.
- DeRenne Avenue: A central, high-traffic artery separating downtown from Southside
- Victory Drive: A major east-west connector surrounded by older neighborhoods.

Near-Downtown Residential Neighborhoods

- Victorian District & Thomas Square: Historic, close-packed housing south of Liberty St.
- Waters Avenue Corridor: Specifically between Bolton Street and Victory Drive,
- Yamacraw Village: Located to the west of the main tourist center.

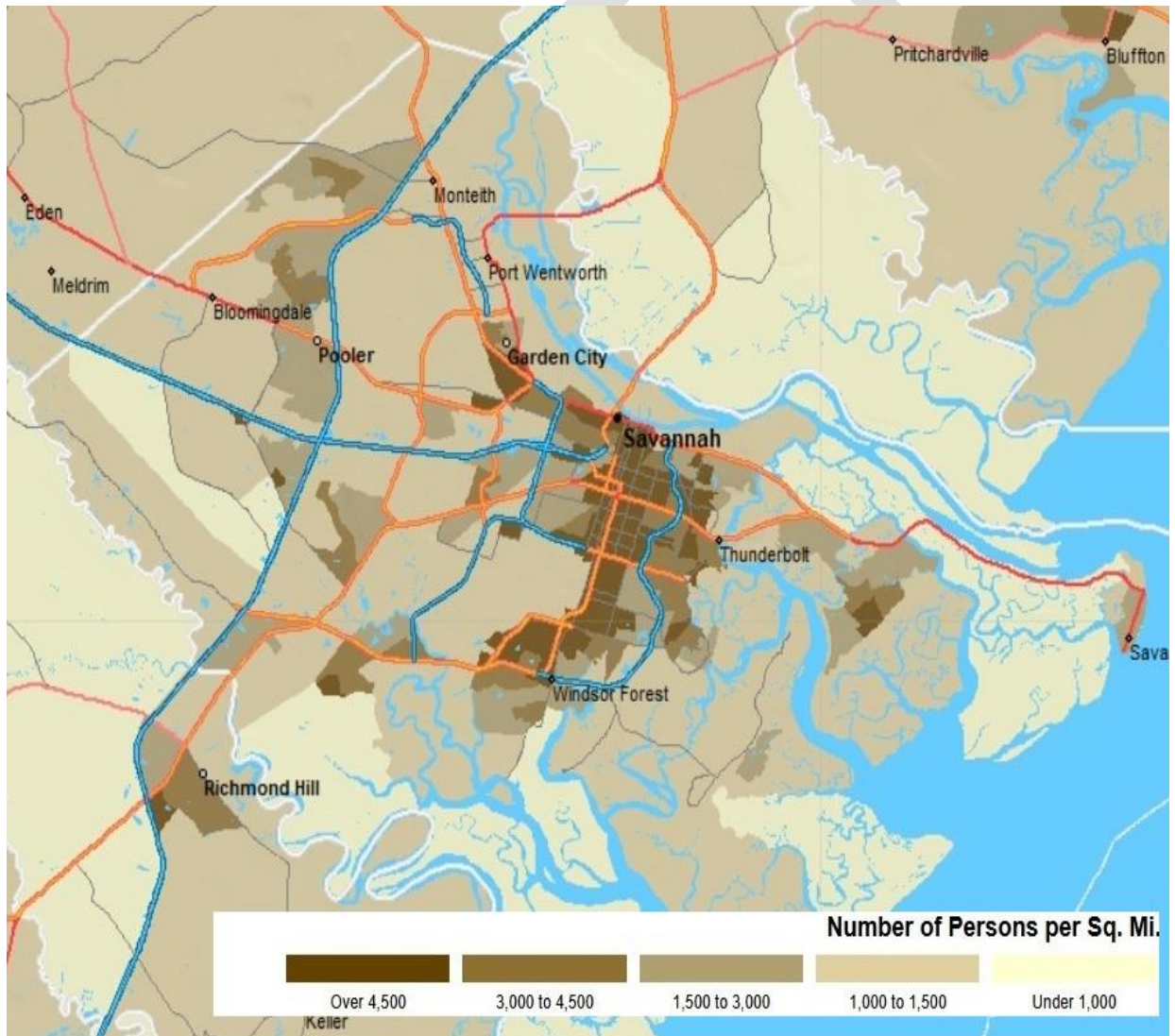


Exhibit 1.4 –Population Density

Economics and Workforce

Educational Attainment

Chatham County and the City of Savannah have fairly similar rates of educational attainment as shown in Figure 1.14. Roughly 90% of Chatham County residents over the age of 25, inclusive of Savannah, have a high school education. However, a greater proportion of higher-level educational attainment is reported countywide (36.8%) than within the City (32%). Educational attainment often correlates to income and racial/ethnic composition of the population, although the prevalence of a student population component, many of whom may be furthering their post bachelor’s degree credentials, and the concentration of young professionals in Savannah likely contributes to the elevated attainment of upper level educated residents.

Educational Attainment		
Population 25 years and over	% Chatham County	% Savannah
Less than 9th grade	2.90%	2.90%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	5.80%	7.20%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	24.60%	27.00%
Some college, no degree	22.40%	23.70%
Associate's degree	7.40%	7.20%
Bachelor's degree	22.00%	20.60%
Graduate or professional degree	14.70%	11.50%
High school graduate or higher	91.20%	89.90%
Bachelor's degree or higher	36.80%	32.00%
2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates (S1501)		

Figure 1.14 Savannah-Chatham County: Educational Attainment

Labor Force Participation

According to the ACS 2023 5-Year Estimates, roughly 64.0% of people 16 years and older were employed in the civilian labor force in both Chatham County and Savannah. The unemployment rate differs slightly, at 6.1% and 6.7% respectively.

Employment Status		
Population 16 years and over	Chatham County %	Savannah %
In labor force:	64.0%	64.3%
Civilian labor force	62.5%	62.8%
Employed	58.9%	58.6%
Unemployed	3.6%	4.2%
Armed Forces	1.5%	1.5%
Not in labor force	36.0%	35.7%
Unemployment Rate	6.1%	6.7%
2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates (DP05)		

Figure 1.15 - Savannah-Chatham County: Employment Status

Industry Participation

In both Chatham County and Savannah, the largest industry was educational services, health care and social assistance, at almost one-quarter of all employment opportunities. Employment in three sectors: arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services; professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services; and retail trade all represented between 12.5% to 12.8% of the employment sectors in the County. In comparison, the arts and entertainment sector in Savannah occupied a larger slice of the employment opportunities due to the tourism trade. While construction and manufacturing are more highly represented in the County, transportation and warehousing, and utilities; information; and other services occupy a slightly greater proportion of the workforce in Savannah, likely in association with Port activities, tourism, and a more concentrated population density requiring a greater range of services.

Workforce Participation by Industry		
Industry	Chatham County %	Savannah %
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	0.4%	0.6%
Construction	5.2%	4.3%
Manufacturing	7.7%	6.2%
Wholesale trade	2.0%	2.0%
Retail trade	12.5%	12.1%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	8.9%	9.6%
Information	1.6%	1.9%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	5.1%	4.5%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	12.7%	12.7%
Educational services, health care and social assistance	22.5%	22.2%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	12.8%	15.4%
Other services, except public administration	4.1%	4.6%
Public administration	4.5%	3.8%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates (DP05)

Figure 1.16 - Savannah - Chatham County: Workforce Participation by Industry

Data & Calculations

All data presented in the Community Profile are for Chatham County, Unincorporated Chatham County, and the City of Savannah unless otherwise noted. Most of these data are from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) multiyear estimates covering the January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2023 period (the most current publicly available ACS multiyear data at the time of access). ACS 5-year estimates represent data collected over a period of 60 months, and describe the general social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics of a

geographic area over that entire period of time. These multiyear estimates offer the additional benefit of having smaller margins of error and being more statistically reliable than the single-year estimates also published by the ACS.

The Census Bureau publishes ACS 5-year data for multiple different geographies, including counties, cities/towns, census tracts, and block groups (among many others). While ACS data for the city of Savannah were obtained directly from the Census Bureau, estimates for Unincorporated Chatham County—a non-standard geographic area for which ACS data are not explicitly published—had to be derived separately. Typically, this is done by aggregating data for smaller geographic units such as tracts up to the desired geographic level. In Chatham County, however, this method was not suitable because municipal boundaries do not line up with the boundaries of any smaller geographic units.

DRAFT

CHAPTER TWO
PLAN 2040
COMMUNITY GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

DRAFT

Plan 2040 Goals

The previous Plan 2040 Vision & Goals were derived from stakeholders, County and City staff, community advisory committees and members of the public. Through virtual meetings, pop-up events and surveys in years 2025-2026 an assessment can be made on the progress towards the 20-year planning horizon. Each element of the Comprehensive Plan has a vision, goals and strategies which allows for the Plan to serve as a guide to Unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah officials in day-to-day decision making. The 2026 mid-cycle review of the Plan, vision, goals, and strategies spotlights numerous successes.

Visions and goals are aspirational in general; however, Unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah have been able to demonstrate steady achievability through strategic planning and implementation.

Element #1: Economic Development

Vision: *Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah are anchors to a thriving, business-friendly, regional economy in which all workers are prepared for quality jobs, and residents feel empowered to attain a high quality of life*

Goals:

1. Using accurate and reliable data, link current and projected needs of employers through the development of apprenticeship and vocational programs for the placement of individuals with quality employment leading to self-sufficiency
2. Foster a positive environment that provides opportunities for all businesses
3. Increase economic mobility by reducing barriers and creating opportunities for quality employment for young adults, the economically disadvantaged, justice involved, and individuals with behavioral health needs
4. Implement outreach and programming that lead to economically inclusive entrepreneurial growth and innovation through the enhanced presence of small business support services and collaboration among local businesses
5. Become a community with economically vibrant, safe neighborhoods and commercial centers

Land Use Element

Vision: Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah are healthy and safe places to live, work, play and raise a family, and have social and economic values that integrate the area's history, natural resources, efficient government, and public mobility system

Goals:

1. Establish growth policies for the City of Savannah that seek to guide development and redevelopment in a responsible manner, encouraging compact development, walkable neighborhoods, increased connectivity, and open space preservation
2. Identify and prioritize future annexations that are regionally coordinated and promote responsible growth
3. Utilize small area and corridor plans as a means to protect the character of existing areas and ensure new development is compatible
4. Continue to create innovative ways to connect people with places
5. Enhance the character and image of major corridors by implementing the design and construction of safe, attractive, vibrant, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes that project a positive image while encouraging walking

Transportation Element

Vision: *Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah prioritize safe mobility for all users; offer efficient mobility options to support economic vitality; provide infrastructure that is sensitive to unique local characteristics; connect neighborhoods to education, employment, and services; and sustain environmental quality with clean mobility modes*

Goals:

1. Support safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation designs and improvements that enhance neighborhood connectivity for all modes of travel including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists
2. Improve accessibility to employment centers, institutions, commercial corridors, and recreational facilities equitably through multi-modal connections, bikeways, trails and greenways
3. Maintain and preserve transportation infrastructure in a manner that protects unique regional characteristics, quality-of-life, and the environment
4. Maintain and enhance transportation infrastructure that supports and enables local, regional and global economic vitality and competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency
5. Promote and provide equitable neighborhood connectivity and built environments that encourage active and healthy lifestyles through the strategic placement of bicycle and pedestrian pathways, public parks, enforcement of road regulations, and education about health benefits

Housing Element

Vision: *Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah achieve affordable, diverse and safe housing for their residents through efficient and effective policies and programs*

Goals:

1. Improve neighborhood stability where all residents, regardless of income, can occupy, maintain, and improve their homes without undue financial hardship
2. Increase supportive housing for special needs populations, such as individuals who are homeless, mentally ill, disabled, and residents in drug recovery
3. Increase affordable housing stock
4. Decrease homelessness

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Natural Resources Element

Vision: *Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah are enhanced by the protection and maintenance of natural resources and ecosystems*

Goals:

1. Protect the public health, safety, and welfare of residents from flood hazards
2. Enhance water, flooding, and hazard related public education and outreach efforts
3. Monitor projections for changing future conditions and implement plans, policies, and property protection to reduce potential damages
4. Preserve and protect potable water sources to ensure adequate drinking water supplies for existing and future residents
5. Protect and preserve existing tree canopy and require planting of additional native trees during the development process to mitigate negative impacts of stormwater runoff and the heat island effect of large areas of impervious surfaces, in addition to improving air quality
6. Increase communities' adaptive capacity and resiliency
7. Manage the impacts of climate change as it relates to land use and development through mitigation and adaptation measures
8. Proactively manage stormwater runoff
9. Plan for the mitigation and redevelopment of brownfields for productive use

Quality of Life Element - Historic Resources

Vision: *Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah as historical and emerging cultural resources provide unique advantages to balance preservation with development and economic growth*

Goals:

1. Survey culturally, historically, and architecturally significant sites, buildings, and structures in unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah
2. Incorporate affordable housing strategies into current and future preservation plans
3. Identify and address community health issues that impact historic preservation efforts and encourage healthy communities through historic preservation
4. Identify and address climate resiliency strategies and incorporate them into a Climate Resiliency Plan for unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah's historic and cultural resources
5. Broaden historic preservation efforts to highlight and include historically underrepresented stories, sites, and communities
6. Create new and support existing heritage tourism programs in unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah in order to highlight their cultural and historic heritage
7. Promote the preservation and public awareness of culturally and archaeologically significant sites in unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah

Quality of Life Element - Education

Vision: *Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah are innovative and inclusive educational systems, and are a model of academic excellence that enables students to have the knowledge, skills, and ability to succeed at chosen pathways*

Goals:

1. Ensure equitable access of critical life skills including soft skills, financial, social, and conflict resolution skills are available to parents/legal guardians and taught to all students through the use of technology, community partnerships, and counseling
2. Implement career track, internship, and mentorship programs between employers and students while increasing leadership development programs between community organizations, businesses, and public schools to prepare students for employment and promote upward mobility
3. Plan for changing populations, capacities, and overcrowding and increase the quality of education and academic performance at SCCPSS
4. Incentivize and promote parental involvement in schools by teaching parents to advocate for their child(ren), facilitating better communication between parents and school leadership, and eliminating barriers to parent engagement
5. Ensure families and community members have the ability to promote and reinforce literacy and numeracy instruction that takes place in a student's learning experience

Quality of Life Element - Community Health

Vision: Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah have a culture of health including equal access to quality and affordable healthcare, chronic disease prevention, health inclusive policies, and healthy environmental design

Goals:

1. Effectively address mental health by educating the public and reducing stigma, increasing early intervention programs, removing gaps and barriers, and increasing access to treatment including returning and detained residents, children, adolescents, and the homeless
2. Invest in community-based health resources to increase health equity by providing access to preventive health services, health education, and strategies to encourage individuals and families to adopt healthy behaviors
3. Instill healthy practices in schools by providing comprehensive health education, nutrient-rich foods, opportunities for physical activity, and prevention education including, but not limited to, violence prevention
4. Increase access to healthy food for populations that are most likely to be food-insecure such as older adults, children, those in poverty, and those who live in food apartheid

Quality of Life Element - Public Safety

Vision: Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah provide a community that is a safe place to live, work, and raise a family, and within which protection of residents is considered an integral part of its social and economic values

Goals:

1. Ensure better quality of life through multifaceted strategies of public safety. The strategies include reducing crime by focusing on asset building; meeting community needs; expanding visibility and capacity of resources and programs provided by first responders; and building trust between law enforcement and residents
2. Develop local and regional collaboration among organizations to improve the delivery of social services and to expand resources including, but not limited to, behavioral health and public health services
3. Provide effective and efficient government services while ensuring that processes and procedures are planned and executed with transparency

Quality of Life Element - Broadband & Fiber Optics

Vision: Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah have closed the digital divide to ensure access to fast affordable, and reliable broadband while acquiring world class broadband network capabilities to accelerate high-tech business development

Goals:

1. Ensure all of Chatham County has access to broadband service

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ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Chatham County and the City of Savannah have demonstrated meaningful progress by aligning strong public engagement with established best practices and coordinated regional collaboration. Through this unified approach, 98 strategies have been completed, implemented, or advanced, reflecting measurable progress toward a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous community. These accomplishments represent the collective work of local governments, regional planning agencies, community organizations, educational institutions, and private sector partners whose collaboration has strengthened implementation efforts and expanded the region's capacity to achieve shared goals.

The goals included in this Plan 2040 Update are supported by deliberate and sequential actions that advance long term outcomes. These actions reflect key accomplishments rather than isolated activities, demonstrating continued progress toward community priorities. Recognizing these milestones is important because each completed strategy contributes to broader regional objectives such as economic opportunity, responsible growth, improved mobility, housing stability, environmental stewardship, and enhanced quality of life.

Regional partners have advanced workforce alignment, supported entrepreneurship, and expanded pathways to quality employment through Economic Development initiatives. Land Use and Transportation efforts have promoted compact development, multimodal connectivity, and improved infrastructure planning. Housing strategies have strengthened neighborhood stability and expanded affordable and supportive housing options. Natural Resources initiatives have advanced resilience planning, conservation efforts, and protection of critical environmental assets. Quality of Life initiatives have supported historic preservation, educational planning, community health programs, and equitable public safety practices that strengthen trust and transparency.

Overall, the Plan includes 48 goals supported by more than 200 strategies. The accomplishment tables that follow provide a structured summary of key accomplishments and demonstrate the continued momentum achieved through coordinated regional action.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Element Overview

Economic Development initiatives focused on aligning workforce training with employer demand, expanding economic mobility, strengthening small business growth, and advancing vibrant, connected commercial areas. The accomplishments below demonstrate coordinated regional action among workforce partners, educational institutions, and local governments to support long-term economic resilience.

Goal 1

Using accurate and reliable data to align employer needs with apprenticeship and vocational pathways leading to quality employment

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
E.1.1	Established coordinated employer–training provider network connecting workforce programs to living-wage career pathways.	CGIC, CWDB, SACC, STC, SU	2023
E.1.2	Expanded job shadowing, internship, and apprenticeship opportunities aligned with regional workforce demand, prioritizing youth and young adults.	ASU, CGIC, CWDG, LG, SACC, SEDA	2023
E.1.3	Increased workforce training capacity supporting employment and entrepreneurship outcomes.	CGIC, STC, EOA, SU	2024
E.1.4	Convened employer working group advancing living-wage practices and improved access to benefits.	CGIC, CWDB, SACC, STC, SU, LG	2023
E.1.6	Strengthened collaboration through a shared apprenticeship and internship clearinghouse linking employers and job seekers.	CGIC, CWDB, SACC, STC, SU, LG	2024

Impact Summary:

Regional partners strengthened collaboration between employers and workforce providers, expanded apprenticeship and internship pipelines, and improved access to training opportunities that lead to living-wage careers. These efforts created clearer pathways to employment while improving alignment between education systems and industry needs.

Goal 3

Increase economic mobility by reducing barriers to quality employment.

Impact Summary:

Partners advanced equitable workforce initiatives by expanding scholarship access, strengthening employer retention practices, and increasing financial support awareness for residents facing the greatest barriers to employment. These actions supported broader economic mobility and helped diversify regional industry growth.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
E.3.1	Implemented community-based scholarship and training connections for economically disadvantaged and justice-involved populations.	CGIC, SACC, SEDA, SU, GDCS, LG	2024
E.3.4	Advanced cross-sector initiatives addressing inequities affecting housing, health, and economic mobility.	CGIC, SEC, SACC, SEDA, LG	Completed
E.3.5	Delivered employer best-practice guidance to improve retention and reduce workforce turnover.	CGIC, SEC, SEDA, SACC, LG	Completed
E.3.6	Expanded outreach and access to financial support services in high-poverty ZIP codes.	CGIC, HAS, SU, UW, LG	Completed
E.3.9	Developed funding strategies supporting economic diversification and regional innovation.	CGIC, SEDA, SACC, LG	Completed
E.3.10	Advanced initiatives supporting growth of the local film industry sector.	SEDA, SFC, LG	Completed

Goal 4

Support inclusive entrepreneurial growth and small-business innovation.

Impact Summary:

Economic development partners strengthened the regional small-business ecosystem through workforce up-skilling initiatives and policy incentives designed to encourage entrepreneurship and support business expansion.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
E.4.2	Expanded employee up-skilling programs to support career advancement and workforce competitiveness.	LG, SEDA, SBAC, SBDC, SBEN	2023
E.4.3	Implemented policy incentives supporting startup development and growth of existing small businesses.	LG, SBAC, SBDC, SBEN	2024

Goal 5

Become a community with economically vibrant, safe neighborhoods and commercial centers

Impact Summary:

Planning and transportation initiatives supported sustainable development patterns, promoted mixed-use growth, and advanced active transportation infrastructure that improves access to commercial areas while enhancing community livability.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
E.5.1	Promoted mixed-use development strategies encouraging sustainable density and reduced vehicle dependency.	MPC	Completed
E.5.2	Advanced active transportation policy prioritizing walking, biking, and transit connections to commercial corridors.	MPC, LG, CAT	2022

LAND USE

Element Overview

Land Use initiatives focused on guiding responsible growth and redevelopment through policy alignment, zoning improvements, and planning practices that support walkable neighborhoods, compact development, and environmental sustainability. These actions help ensure that future development strengthens community connectivity while preserving open space and enhancing quality of life.

Goal 1

Establish growth policies for the City of Savannah that guide development and redevelopment in a responsible manner, encouraging compact development, walkable neighborhoods, increased connectivity, and open space preservation

Impact Summary

Planning and policy partners advanced land use strategies that promote pedestrian-oriented development patterns and diversified housing opportunities. By aligning zoning regulations with long-term growth goals, these efforts supported more connected neighborhoods, improved accessibility, and sustainable urban form across the city.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
L.1.1	Updated zoning framework to support pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development and a broader mix of housing types aligned with responsible growth policies.	LG	2024

TRANSPORTATION

Element Overview

Transportation initiatives focused on advancing safe, efficient, and sustainable mobility options that improve connectivity across neighborhoods and employment centers. Regional partners collaborated to expand multimodal access, strengthen infrastructure resilience, and promote equitable transportation systems that support economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, and quality of life.

Goal 1

Support safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation designs that enhance neighborhood connectivity for all modes of travel

Impact Summary

Transportation partners advanced multimodal planning and infrastructure improvements that prioritize safety and accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. Policy development and corridor enhancements supported more connected neighborhoods while improving access between residential areas, employment centers, and community destinations.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
T.1.1	Advanced multimodal transportation planning connecting workforce populations to employment centers.	LG, CAT, CORE MPO, MPC	Completed
T.1.2	Implemented road diets and traffic calming strategies improving safety and mobility on existing corridors.	LG, CAT, CORE MPO, MPC, GDOT	2023
T.1.3	Prioritized pedestrian infrastructure improvements near homes, schools, transit stops, and commercial corridors.	LG, CAT, CORE MPO, GDOT, MPC	2023

Goal 2

Improve equitable access to employment centers, institutions, and recreational facilities through multimodal connections

Impact Summary

Partners strengthened regional mobility by expanding transit planning, improving pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, and advancing accessibility-focused policies. These initiatives enhanced transportation options for residents while supporting equitable access to jobs, education, and community resources.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
T.2.1	Advanced funding strategies supporting expansion of public transit service across Chatham County.	LG, CAT, CORE MPO	2023
T.2.2	Secured funding pathways to improve pedestrian and bicycle access between transit hubs and major destinations.	LG, CAT, CORE MPO, GDOT	2024
T.2.3	Updated accessibility policies to improve accommodations for individuals with disabilities across sidewalks and crosswalks.	LG, CAT, CORE MPO	2025
T.2.4	Evaluated transit system enhancements to increase service frequency and reliability along high-demand corridors.	LG, CAT, CORE MPO, GDOT	2024

Goal 3

Maintain and preserve transportation infrastructure while protecting regional character, environmental sustainability, and quality of life

Impact Summary

Infrastructure planning efforts emphasized resilience, historic preservation, and environmental stewardship. Partners integrated sea level rise considerations, safety recommendations, and context-sensitive design criteria to ensure transportation investments support long-term sustainability and regional identity.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
T.3.1	Established evaluation criteria ensuring road projects align with local context, historic preservation, and transportation amenities.	LG, CAT, CORE MPO	2024
T.3.2	Integrated sea level rise impact analysis into transportation planning for roads, bridges, and infrastructure improvements.	LG, CAT, CORE MPO, GDOT	2024
T.3.3	Advanced policy and infrastructure recommendations from the Freight Transportation Plan to improve safety and efficiency.	LG, CAT, CORE MPO, GDOT	2024

Goal 5

Promote equitable neighborhood connectivity and built environments that encourage active and healthy lifestyles

Impact Summary

Transportation and community partners strengthened active transportation networks, expanded equitable transit planning, and advanced green infrastructure initiatives that support healthier communities. These actions improved access to parks, transit, and walkable environments while promoting long-term environmental and public health benefits.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
T.5.2	Developed equitable transit routing plans expanding access across Chatham County through coordinated regional partnerships.	CGIC, MPC, CORE MPO, BWS, CAT, LG	2024
T.5.8	Strengthened tree planting and replacement ordinances supporting expanded green space and environmental resilience.	LG, MPC, STF, GLT, GC	2022
T.5.10	Established measurable benchmarks for equitable access to biking, walking, transit,	CGIC, MPC, CORE MPO, BWS, CAT,	2023

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
	and greenspace resources.	LG, GDOT	

HOUSING

Element Overview

Housing initiatives focused on strengthening neighborhood stability, expanding supportive housing opportunities, and increasing the availability of affordable and diverse housing options. Regional partners advanced policy improvements, resilience planning, and coordinated service delivery to support residents across all income levels while promoting long-term community sustainability.

Goal 1

Improve neighborhood stability so all homeowners, regardless of income, can maintain and improve their homes without undue financial hardship

Impact Summary

Housing partners advanced policies that encourage preservation and rehabilitation of existing housing while improving access to housing counseling resources. These efforts supported energy efficiency, long-term affordability, and improved housing stability for residents across the community.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
H.1.1	Updated housing policies promoting preservation, rehabilitation, and energy-efficiency improvements supporting long-term housing stability.	LG, CHSA, HSF, HAS	2023
H.1.2	Strengthened housing counseling practices through adoption of best-practice guidance and program improvements.	LG, CHSA, HAS, HSF	2022

Goal 2

Increase supportive housing for special needs populations

Impact Summary

Partners strengthened coordinated housing strategies addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including individuals experiencing homelessness, disability, or recovery challenges. Planning efforts supported expanded service alignment and long-term supportive housing development.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
H.2.1	Developed a comprehensive supportive housing plan addressing the needs of special populations across the community.	LG, CHSA, HAS, LIFE, CSAH	2025

Goal 3

Increase affordable housing stock

Impact Summary

Housing and planning partners advanced zoning, resilience, and development strategies that expand affordable housing options while supporting innovative housing models. These actions strengthened long-term housing supply, improved climate resilience considerations, and promoted diverse housing opportunities for residents at all stages of life.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
H.3.2	Evaluated inclusionary zoning strategies to support expansion of affordable housing supply.	MPC, LG	2022
H.3.3	Adopted policies enabling a broader range of housing types within existing neighborhoods.	MPC, LG	2023
H.3.4	Advanced infill housing policy options supporting innovative housing models such as tiny homes and prefabricated units.	MPC, LG, HAS	2025

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
H.3.6	Integrated climate vulnerability considerations into residential and commercial development planning.	LBA, LG, CHSA	Completed
H.3.7	Expanded affordable housing options tailored to the needs of a growing senior population.	MPC, LG, HAS	2022

Goal 4

Increase coordinated outreach connecting individuals experiencing homelessness to housing and supportive services

Impact Summary

Community partners strengthened cross-agency collaboration to improve outreach, engagement, and referral pathways for individuals experiencing homelessness. These efforts enhanced access to housing interventions and supportive services across the region.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
H.4.3	Expanded coordinated outreach efforts connecting individuals experiencing homelessness with housing and service resources.	CSAH, LG, CHSA, HAS, LH, PD, EMS, FD	Completed

NATURAL RESOURCES

Element Overview

Natural Resources initiatives focused on strengthening environmental resilience, protecting water and ecological systems, and advancing climate adaptation strategies that safeguard public health and infrastructure. Regional partners coordinated policy development, education, conservation planning, and hazard mitigation efforts to support sustainable growth while protecting natural assets for future generations.

Goal 1

Protect public health, safety, and welfare from flood hazards

Impact Summary

Planning and infrastructure partners advanced growth management strategies that guide development away from vulnerable areas. These actions reduced flood risk exposure while supporting responsible long-term land use and infrastructure investment.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
N.1.11	Directed infrastructure planning toward appropriate growth areas to reduce exposure to flood hazards.	LG, MPC	2023

Goal 2

Improve public education and outreach related to water, flooding, and hazards

Impact Summary

Partners strengthened community awareness through expanded outreach programs and educational initiatives focused on flood preparedness and stormwater management. These efforts encouraged residents to adopt mitigation practices while promoting stewardship of critical water resources.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
N.2.3	Expanded flood hazard communication and outreach programs to improve public awareness and preparedness.	LG, CEMA	2023
N.2.4	Advanced community education initiatives encouraging property-level mitigation practices.	LG, GA, STF, GADNR	2023
N.2.6	Delivered public education on stormwater management and water resource protection.	LG, GA, GAEPD, GADNR	2024

Goal 3

Reduce potential damages from climate change through planning and mitigation

Impact Summary

Regional partners integrated climate adaptation strategies into infrastructure planning, hazard mitigation, and shoreline management. These actions improved resilience to sea level rise, extreme weather, and long-term environmental change while supporting coordinated regional response efforts.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
N.3.4	Identified climate adaptation technologies and mitigation practices for local implementation.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA	2022
N.3.5	Integrated climate considerations into planning, infrastructure design, and emergency management processes.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA, CEMA	2023
N.3.6	Prioritized elevation or relocation planning for infrastructure vulnerable to sea level rise.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR	2022
N.3.8	Strengthened shoreline and wetland monitoring to identify and mitigate erosion risks.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR	2022
N.3.9	Improved coordination and capacity for regional hazard mitigation projects and programs.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR	2023

Goal 4

Protect potable water sources and ensure long-term drinking water supply

Impact Summary

Water resource planning efforts strengthened long-range strategies addressing sea level rise and regional water management. These initiatives supported sustainable growth while

protecting critical drinking water systems.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
N.4.1	Developed regional adaptation planning for potable water protection and conservation.	LG, GAEPD, DCA	2023
N.4.2	Updated regional water management planning to evaluate system capacity and future growth needs.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA, CEMA	2023

Goal 5

Preserve and enhance scenic views

Impact Summary

Planning partners advanced studies supporting green space protection and preservation of scenic assets, contributing to environmental stewardship and community character.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
N.5.1	Completed regional scenic views study informing green space conservation strategies.	LG, GA, GAEPD, GADNR, DCA	2024

Goal 6

Conserve tree canopy and expand native tree planting

Impact Summary

Urban forestry initiatives strengthened development standards and preservation practices that enhance tree canopy coverage, mitigate urban heat impacts, and support stormwater management goals.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
N.6.1	Implemented updated tree preservation and replanting procedures during development.	LG, GFC, MPC, STF	2023
N.6.3	Established tree canopy coverage standards supporting environmental resilience.	LG, GFC, MPC, STF	2023

Goal 7

Improve community adaptability to changing natural and built environments

Impact Summary

Partners advanced resilience planning through renewable energy initiatives, open space conservation, improved data systems, and regional sustainability policies. These actions strengthened the community's ability to prepare for disruptive events while reducing environmental impacts.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
N.7.1	Developed preparedness strategies supporting resilience to disruptive environmental events.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA, CEMA	2023
N.7.2	Implemented policies reducing carbon emissions and supporting sustainable development practices.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA, CEMA	2023
N.7.3	Expanded renewable energy initiatives including solar, wind, and alternative energy sources.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA	2023
N.7.4	Acquired open space for parks, greenways, and conservation areas.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA,	2022

		CEMA	
N.7.5	Improved data systems supporting hazard mitigation and emergency response.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA, CEMA	2023
N.7.6	Advanced policies promoting energy-efficient industries and cleaner technologies.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA, CEMA	2023
N.7.8	Strengthened regional solid waste management planning supporting coastal resilience.	LG, GA, Private Partners	2023

Goal 8

Address climate impacts through mitigation and adaptation measures in land use and development

Impact Summary

Cross-sector coordination strengthened climate-informed land use planning, green infrastructure preservation, and flood mitigation strategies. These efforts reduced long-term risk while supporting resilient and sustainable development patterns.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
N.8.2	Integrated climate projections into land use and transportation infrastructure planning.	LG, MPC, GDOT, CORE MPO	2023
N.8.3	Strengthened development standards preventing infrastructure placement in flood-prone areas.	LG, MPC, GDOT	2023
N.8.5	Aligned policies with smart growth and energy efficiency best practices supporting long-term resilience.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA	2023
N.8.6	Supported energy-efficient green building techniques reducing	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR,	2023

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
	emissions.	GAEPD, DCA	
N.8.8	Preserved large contiguous green spaces supporting carbon sequestration and conservation.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT	2023
N.8.9	Restored and preserved wetlands to enhance flood mitigation and stormwater management.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR, GDOT, GAEPD, DCA, CEMA	2023
N.8.10	Maintained open floodplains protecting property and accommodating shoreline migration.	LG, MPC, GA, GADNR	2025

Goal 9

Develop brownfields for productive uses

Impact Summary

Partners advanced redevelopment strategies that transform underutilized sites into productive community assets while supporting environmental restoration and economic revitalization.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
N.9.2	Defined reuse strategies for brownfield sites supporting mixed-use development and open space opportunities.	LG, MPC, SEDA	2025
N.9.5	Reduced barriers to brownfield redevelopment to support healthy and vibrant community growth.	LG, MPC, SEDA	2022

Goal 11

Implement a municipal clean energy action plan

Impact Summary

Energy initiatives advanced building efficiency improvements, workforce training, and incentive research supporting long-term clean energy adoption and reduced environmental impact.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
N.11.2	Evaluated municipal facilities for clean-energy retrofit opportunities.	LG	Completed
N.11.3	Expanded workforce development initiatives supporting energy efficiency and clean energy careers.	LG, SEDA, STC	Completed
N.11.7	Identified incentives promoting energy efficiency and natural resource protection in new construction.	LG, MPC, GA, GAEPD, GADNR, DCA	Completed

QUALITY OF LIFE

Element Overview

Quality of Life initiatives focused on strengthening historic preservation, education, community health, and public safety through collaborative planning and community-based programs. Regional partners advanced cultural preservation, improved access to health and wellness resources, supported educational planning, and implemented equitable public safety strategies that enhance community well-being and resilience.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Goal 1

Survey culturally, historically, and architecturally significant sites and structures

Impact Summary

Historic preservation partners strengthened local preservation capacity through coordinated planning efforts and Certified Local Government designation. These actions supported long-term stewardship of cultural resources while aligning preservation strategies with community growth.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
HP.1.1	Reinstated Certified Local Government status to strengthen historic preservation planning and coordination.	LG, MPC	2023

Goal 2

Incorporate affordable housing strategies into preservation planning

Impact Summary

Partners expanded collaboration between preservation and housing agencies to balance affordability with historic resource protection. These efforts supported flexible preservation approaches that maintain existing affordable housing options.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
HP.2.1	Strengthened partnerships integrating historic preservation with affordable housing strategies.	LG, MPC, HAS, CHSA, LBA, SHF	Completed
HP.2.2	Advanced preservation flexibility policies supporting retention of affordable historic housing.	LG, MPC, HAS, CHSA, LBA, SHF, HPD	Completed

Goal 3

Address community health issues impacting historic preservation

Impact Summary

Planning partners developed contingency strategies ensuring preservation programs remain resilient during public health emergencies while protecting cultural assets and community stability.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
HP.3.2	Established contingency planning addressing preservation impacts during public health emergencies.	LG, MPC, HAS, CHSA, LBA, SHF	Completed

Goal 5

Highlight historically underrepresented stories and communities

Impact Summary

Preservation initiatives expanded recognition of diverse cultural narratives by advancing recommendations from community-led historical initiatives.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
HP.5.3	Expanded historic interpretation efforts following Civil War Memorial Task Force recommendations.	LG, MPC	Completed

Goal 7

Promote awareness of culturally and archaeologically significant sites

Impact Summary

Partners strengthened protection and ethical stewardship of archaeological resources through policy development and collaborative community engagement.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
HP.7.1	Advanced legislation and planning efforts protecting archaeological resources.	LG, MPC, SHF, HPD	Completed

HP.7.2	Established ethical partnership framework for archaeological artifact stewardship.	LG, MPC, SHF, HPD	2023
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EDUCATION

Goal 3

Plan for changing populations and improve education system performance

Impact Summary

Education and planning partners strengthened coordination to ensure school expansion aligns with future growth and community needs, supporting long-term educational quality.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
E.3.1	Coordinated school planning efforts aligning educational facility expansion with projected growth patterns.	SCCPSS	2023

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Goal 1

Address mental health needs through education, coordination, and expanded access to services

Impact Summary

Community health partners strengthened regional coordination, expanded behavioral health awareness initiatives, and improved access to services through collaborative outreach and training efforts.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
C.1.1	Expanded cross-agency behavioral health coordination improving service delivery and resource alignment.	UWCE, CGIC, LH, LG, PD, SBHU, DJJ, CCSD, BHU, GCSB	Completed
C.1.7	Increased employer and workforce awareness of behavioral health resources and insurance benefits.	UWCE, COC, CGIC, LH, LG, PD, SBHU, GCSB	2022
C.1.8	Expanded suicide prevention and	UWCE, CGIC, LH, PD, SBHU, DJJ, CCSD,	2023

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
	resilience training initiatives.	BHU, GCSB	
C.1.9	Strengthened advocacy efforts improving access to health care resources.	UWCE, CGIC, LH, LG, PD, SBHU, DJJ, CCSD, BHU, GCSB	2023

Goal 3

Instill healthy practices through education and wellness programming

Impact Summary

Partners expanded youth health education, physical activity initiatives, and employer wellness engagement to support healthier lifestyles across the community.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
C.3.1	Delivered adolescent-focused health education addressing risky behaviors and wellness.	SCCPSS, HS, UWCE, CHD	2024
C.3.2	Implemented daily physical activity initiatives supporting student health and leadership development.	SCCPSS, HS, UWCE, CHD	2025
C.3.3	Expanded workplace wellness initiatives promoting employee health programs.	SCCPSS, HS, UWCE, CHD, COC, LG, CGIC	2023

Goal 4

Increase access to healthy food for food-insecure populations

Impact Summary

Community partners advanced food access initiatives through education, policy exploration, and expansion of community gardens supporting nutrition and food security.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
C.4.1	Advanced policy and funding strategies addressing food insecurity and improving access to healthy food.	SCCPSS, HS, UWCE, CHD, LG, CGIC	2023
C.4.3	Delivered nutrition education and healthy cooking programs promoting long-term wellness.	SCCPSS, HS, UGAE, CHD, LH, LG	2022
C.4.6	Expanded community gardens supporting education, food access, and neighborhood engagement.	HS, UGAE, CHD, LG	2023

PUBLIC SAFETY

Goal 1

Improve quality of life through equitable and community-centered public safety strategies

Impact Summary

Public safety partners strengthened training, policy evaluation, and community-centered design approaches that improve trust, transparency, and effectiveness of local safety initiatives.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
PS.1.2	Enhanced trauma-informed and culturally responsive training for first responders.	PD, FD, EMS, LH, CCSD, LG	2022
PS.1.6	Implemented recognition programs encouraging advanced training and best practices in law enforcement.	PD, CCSD, LG	2023
PS.1.11	Updated public safety policies through community-informed equity review processes.	PD, DJJ, GA, CCSD, LG	2023
PS.1.13	Strengthened internal policy audits supporting accountability within	PD, FD, EMS, DJJ,	2023

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
	emergency response agencies.	GA, CCSD, LG	
PS.1.14	Integrated environmental design strategies into public spaces to reduce crime risks.	PD, MPC, LG	2023

Goal 2

Strengthen regional collaboration to improve social service delivery

Impact Summary

Partners enhanced coordination across jurisdictions and organizations to align long-term planning efforts and improve resource delivery for residents.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
PS.2.5	Convened annual community and funder meetings to assess needs and outcomes.	LG, UWCE, CGIC	2023
PS.2.7	Strengthened regional planning coordination among neighboring jurisdictions.	MPC, CORE MPO, LG, PD	2023

Goal 3

Improve transparency and efficiency in government services

Impact Summary

Local government partners advanced transparency initiatives, modernized communication tools, and strengthened infrastructure planning processes to improve public service delivery.

Strategy #	Key Accomplishment	Responsible Partners	Completion
PS.3.1	Clarified SPLOST funding processes supporting community infrastructure investments.	LG, CGIC	2023
PS.3.2	Completed countywide policy and ordinance review improving administrative efficiency.	LG	2025
PS.3.4	Implemented neighborhood-specific communication tools improving resident engagement.	LG, CGIC	2022
PS.3.5	Established asset lifecycle replacement planning for public infrastructure.	LG	2022

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CHAPTER 3
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

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Introduction

The Economic Development Element of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update provides an inventory and assessment of the region's economic base, labor force characteristics, and economic development opportunities and resources. This element explains the foundation of the Savannah Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and provides a complete picture of the area's workforce, major industries, and strategic direction for economic growth through 2045.

The economic development policies and activities of Chatham County and the City of Savannah are intentionally designed to encourage development and expansion of businesses and industries that create quality employment opportunities aligned with regional workforce capabilities, community values, and long-term sustainability.

In preparing this update, particular attention has been paid to the structural shift in the regional economy driven by the recent logistics boom and the arrival of the Hyundai Metaplant, which together are increasing demand for technical skills while putting new pressure on regional housing and transportation systems.

Regional Economy

Savannah Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) Overview

The MSA, comprised of Chatham County, Effingham County, and Bryan County, creates an integrated economic system where residents and workers regularly cross county lines for employment, services, and commerce. The MSA encompasses approximately 431,589 residents per the 2024 ACS 5-Year Estimate, growing at approximately 1.8% annually, making it Georgia's third-largest metropolitan area after Atlanta and Augusta.

The region has demonstrated sustained economic growth and resilience. Per the Georgia Department of Labor, regional employment reached 199,762 jobs in the second quarter of 2025, with recent expansion driven by advanced manufacturing, continued port operations, tourism recovery, and logistics growth. The Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America (HMGMA) facility in adjacent Bryan County and its supplier ecosystem represent the most significant new employment driver in the region's recent economic history. Recruitment of the Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America was led by a regional Joint Development Authority, reflecting the multi-county nature of the project's benefits and workforce.

In parallel with these private investments, regional partners have launched the Regional Industry Support Enterprise (RISE) initiative to help align workforce, supplier development, and infrastructure planning with the needs of advanced manufacturing firms. RISE functions as a collaborative platform that convenes local governments, educational institutions, workforce agencies, and major employers to identify shared bottlenecks; such as skills gaps, transportation constraints, and supplier capacity; and to coordinate targeted solutions that support the long-term success of the Hyundai Metaplant and its supplier network.

Chatham County remains the primary economic engine of the Savannah MSA, hosting a substantial concentration of the region's physical job opportunities. Per the Bureau of Labor Statistics Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) program, in first quarter

2025, there were 170,424 jobs located within the county's borders across approximately 11,012 business establishments. This 'place-of-work' figure significantly exceeds employed residents, confirming its status as a major regional destination that supports both local workers and a large daily influx of commuters from neighboring jurisdictions.

Taken a step further, Chatham County's role as the regional employment core is evidenced by the imbalance between jobs and available housing. There are approximately 158,617 households within the entire SMA. With 170,424 physical jobs located in Chatham County compared to only 137,422 housing units, Chatham maintains a jobs-to-housing ratio of 1.24. This ratio indicates that the County's economic activity far outpaces its internal housing capacity, necessitating the large-scale daily in-migration of workers from Bryan and Effingham counties, as well as locations external to the MSA, thus placing sustained pressure on the regional transportation network.

The region's economy is characterized by diversification across six major sectors: logistics and Port operations, advanced manufacturing, tourism and hospitality, healthcare, military and federal government, and creative industries. This diversification has provided resilience during economic cycles, particularly evident during COVID-19 recovery. See Figure 4.2 in the Land Use Element for a description of Major Employment Sectors.

Labor Force Characteristics

Employment Profile

The labor market in the Savannah area is currently undergoing a period of steady expansion and structural change. By the second quarter of 2025, total employment reached nearly 200,000 workers, marking a modest annual increase of 1.4%. While the local unemployment rate rose slightly from 2.9% to 3.1% over the past year, these figures continue to signal a highly competitive job market that outperforms national benchmarks.

The region's labor force participation rate has remained steady at 65.5%. This stability suggests a balanced demographic shift: while the local population is aging, the area continues to successfully attract new working-age residents who are filling essential roles in the growing economy. The average weekly wage, derived from the statistics in Figure 3.1, was \$1,184 in 2025, representing a 4.3% increase from 2024. The median household income in the MSA was \$74,632 in 2023.

Commuting Patterns and Labor Shed

The Savannah SMA functions as an integrated labor market where workers routinely cross jurisdictional boundaries for employment. Daily commuting flows underscore the region's economic interdependence and the role of Chatham County as both a job center and a residential community.

Employment By Industry - Savannah MSA			
Sector	Employment	Percent	Weekly Wage
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	48,410	24.2%	\$1,118
Accommodation & Food Services	28,201	14.1%	\$583
Health Care & Social Assistance	27,742	13.9%	\$1,253
Manufacturing	24,642	12.3%	\$1,803
Retail Trade	23,422	11.7%	\$794
Government	24,927	12.5%	\$1,291
Professional & Business Services	21,818	10.9%	\$1,063
Education & Training	3,987	2.0%	\$1,471
Construction	9,432	4.7%	\$1,403
Finance & Insurance	3,065	1.5%	\$1,926

Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Area Labor Profile for Savannah SMA, December 2025

Figure 3.1 - Employment by Industry - Savannah MSA

According to Census OnTheMap and Longitudinal Employer–Household Dynamics (LEHD) data, a substantial share of workers employed in Chatham County reside in surrounding counties, with 45.3% of the workers in Chatham County residing in other locations, including 5.3% from Bryan County, 9.6% from Effingham County, and roughly 3.5% each from both Bulloch and Liberty Counties. Conversely, over one-quarter of Chatham County residents commute to jobs throughout the broader Savannah MSA and Coastal Georgia, although the majority of Chatham County residents live and work within the County. This bi-directional movement reflects the concentration of employment opportunities in industrial corridors and port-adjacent areas, contrasted with significant residential growth in west Chatham, Bryan County, and Effingham County.

Inbound and Outbound Employment Travel Patterns		
Employment Location	Number	%
Employed in Chatham County	168,123	100.0%
Employed in Chatham County but Living Outside	76,134	45.3%
Employed and Living in Chatham County	91,989	54.7%
Living in Chatham County	126,561	100.0%
Living in Chatham County but Employed Outside	34,572	27.3%
Living and Employed in Chatham County	91,989	72.7%

Source: US Census OntheMap 2023

Figure 3.2 - Inbound and Outbound Employment Travel Patterns – Chatham County

Commuting flows are characterized by four key dimensions: where Chatham County workers live, where Chatham County residents work, the directional distribution of jobs within the county, and the destinations of outbound commuters. Inbound workers cluster along major highway corridors such as Interstates 16 and 95, U.S. 17, and key arterials connecting Pooler, Richmond Hill, Rincon, and unincorporated Chatham County to employment hubs in Savannah, Garden City, and Port-adjacent industrial areas.

Commute times generally remain within a regional range that makes cross-county employment feasible, but growth pressures and congestion on key routes may increase travel times in the absence of transportation investments on a regional basis. Understanding commuting and labor shed patterns is essential for aligning workforce strategies, transit planning, housing policy, and economic development initiatives so that residents across the MSA can reliably access emerging job opportunities.

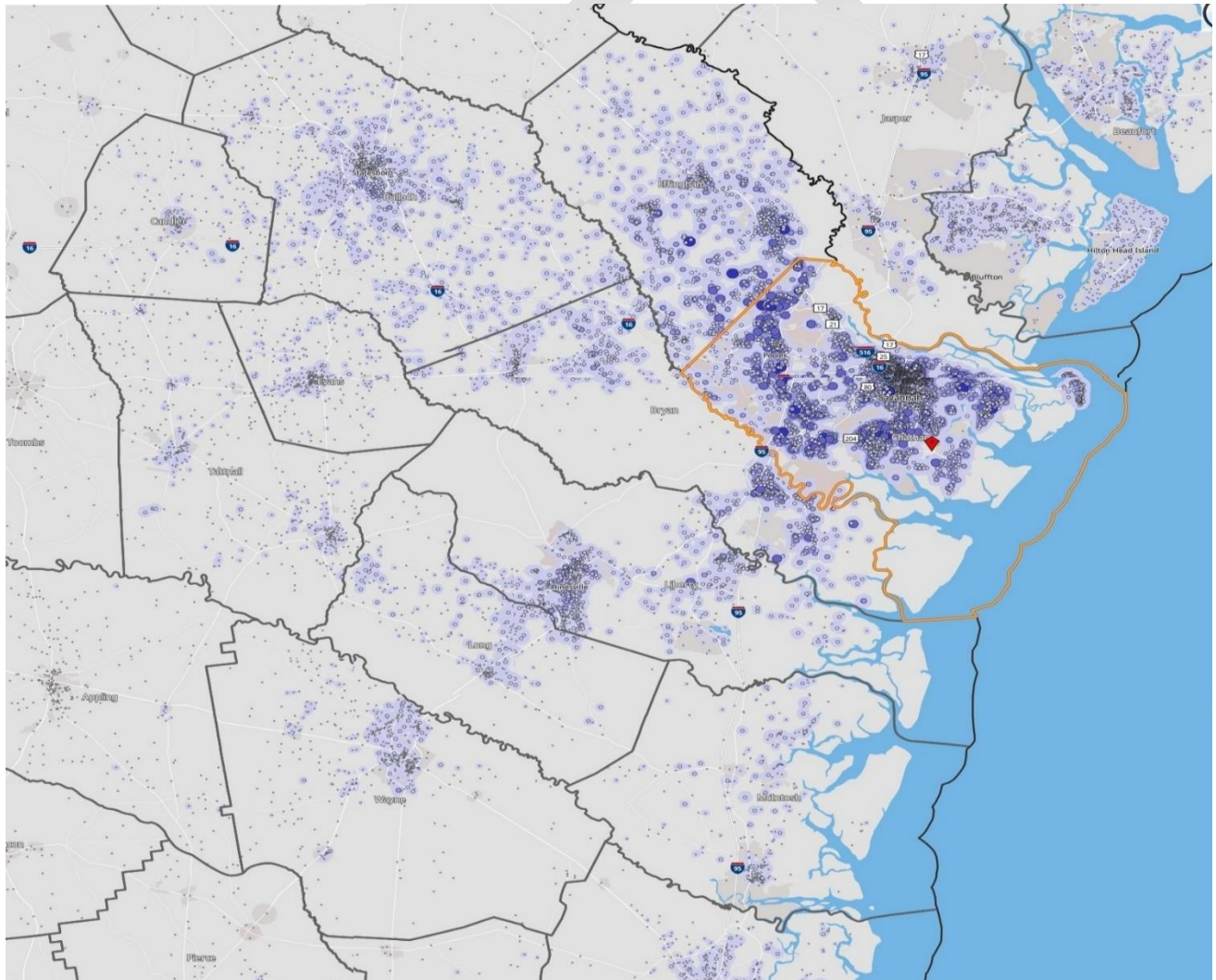


Exhibit 3.1 - Worker Place of Residence Employed in Chatham County

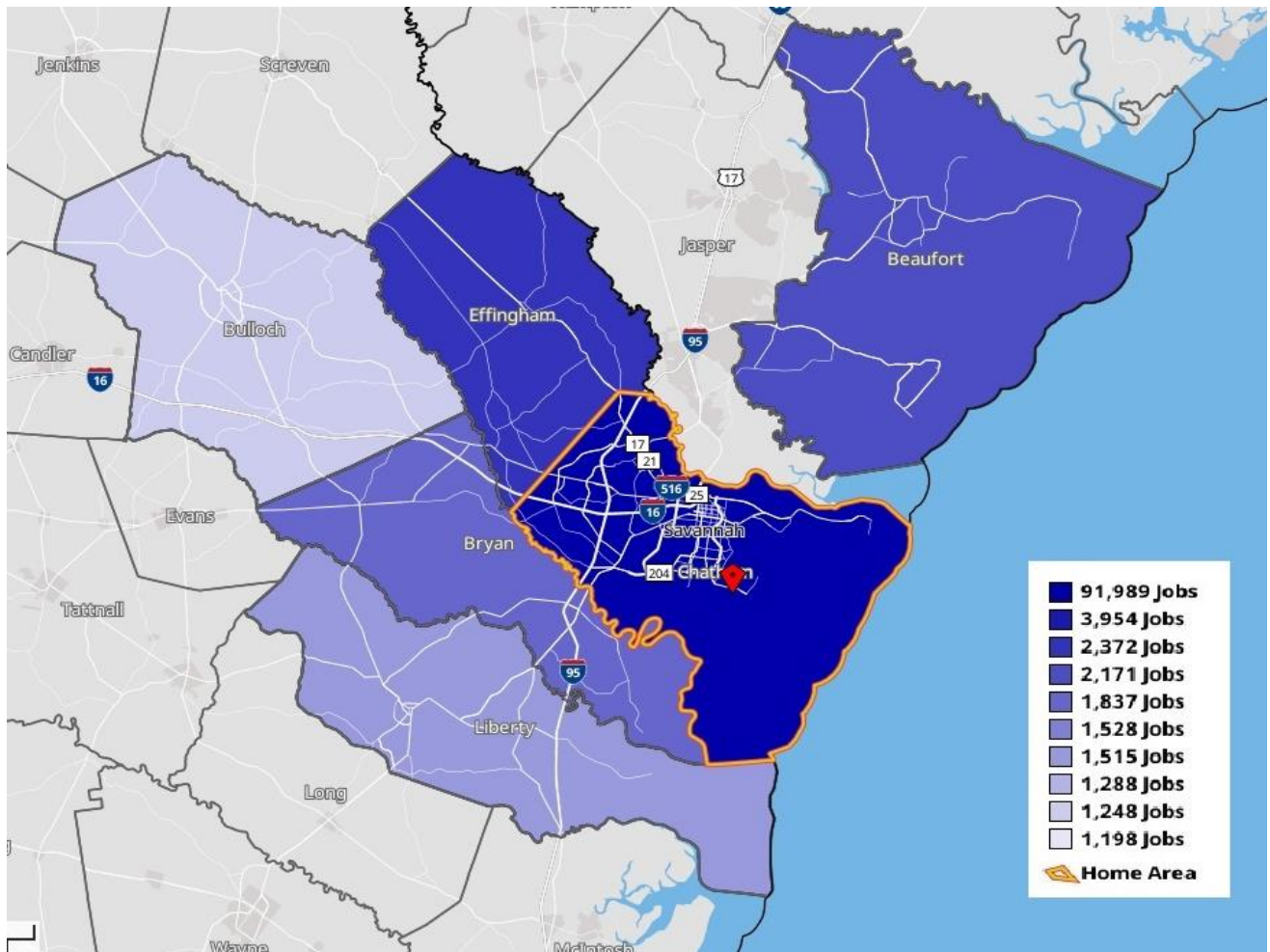


Exhibit 3.2 - Where Chatham County Residents Work

Workforce Education and Composition

Educational Attainment

As presented in the Community Profile and Quality of Life chapter, the region benefits from several four-year universities (Savannah State University, Georgia Southern University's Armstrong Campus, Savannah College of Art and Design) and Savannah Technical College, which collectively produce approximately 78,000 student enrollments annually with significant graduation output. According to the ACS 2024 5-Year Estimates, approximately 90% of the population over 25 has completed high school or equivalent; over one-third countywide have attained a B.A. or higher, and 12% furthered their education with a graduate or professional degree.

Workforce Equity and Inclusive Economic Development

Ensuring that economic development benefits reach across all demographic groups remains a priority. Historical income and wealth disparities persist, with median household income varying significantly by neighborhood and demographic group. The region's median household income of

\$74,632 masks important variations: while some districts report incomes exceeding \$90,000, others fall below \$50,000.

From the Comprehensive Plan 2024 Update survey responses, objectives residents feel most strongly about relate to improving and preparing the current and future workforce for economic success. Technical college graduates from underrepresented populations remain underutilized in advanced manufacturing and logistics sectors. Strategic efforts to expand recruitment, training partnerships, and mentorship programs targeting African American, Hispanic, and female workers in high-wage technical fields represent ongoing opportunities to build more inclusive prosperity.

Workforce equity initiatives should integrate with infrastructure planning, housing affordability measures, and accessible transportation; recognizing that employment access requires not just job availability but also affordable pathways to work.

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Economic Base and Major Economic Drivers

Overview

The Savannah region's economy rests on six complementary pillars, each with distinct characteristics, employment signatures, and growth trajectories:

- **Logistics, Transportation & Port Operations**
- **Advanced Manufacturing & Aerospace**
- **Tourism & Hospitality**
- **Healthcare**
- **Military & Government**
- **Creative Industries & Technology**

Georgia Ports Authority and Logistics Ecosystem

The Port of Savannah, operated by the Georgia Ports Authority, represents the region's most globally significant economic asset. The Port is the third-busiest container terminal in the United States and the largest single-terminal container facility in North America. Its contribution to the Georgia State Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is \$59 billion annually, generating \$3.8 billion in sales and local taxes, and supporting roughly 561,000 direct and indirect jobs. Due to its coastal location and direct access to port, rail, airway, and interstate transport systems, Chatham County is often the first choice for international

operations looking to locate in the United States. Proactive organizations such as the World Trade Center Savannah (WTCSav) and Savannah Economic Development Authority (SEDA), aid in connecting international companies to contacts, programs, and potential sites, thereby driving growth within the region. Goods entering the Port of Savannah can be shipped quickly to other nearby large metropolitan areas, thereby contributing to the growing hauling industry.

The Port of Savannah's continued expansion and modernization have positioned it as a critical piece of East Coast container infrastructure. The recently completed Savannah Harbor Deepening Project increased channel depth to 54 feet at high tide, enabling larger Neo-Panamax vessels to call with fewer tidal restrictions. The Peak Capacity project added 820,000 TEUs of additional capacity. The Mason Mega-Rail Terminal provides the largest on-dock rail capacity at any North American port.

Inland Expansion: Georgia Ports Authority's Blue Ridge Connector, opening in early 2026 near I-985 in Gainesville, will deliver 200,000 containers annually via rail to the Port of Savannah, extending the Port's hinterland reach.

Port Performance (FY 2024)

-Containers (TEUs) Handled: 5.25 million (FY 2024)

-Market Share: 22% of East Coast container trade; 11.6% of all U.S. containerized exports

-Shipping Connections: 160 countries, 800+ direct ports globally

-Freighter Lines: 30 major lines operating regularly

Logistics Sector Growth: Port expansion has catalyzed significant logistics and distribution facility development. Companies including Burlington Stores, Bradshaw Homes, Aertssen Logistics, and numerous cold-storage and food-processing facilities have announced major investments. These projects represent a total of over 1,400 announced jobs with more than \$1 billion in private investment in the immediate Savannah region since 2022.

Advanced Manufacturing and Aerospace

Manufacturing represents the region's second-largest private employment sector (12.3% of MSA employment) and commands the highest average wages. The sector has experienced significant transformation and growth.

Aerospace Cluster: Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation remains the region's largest manufacturer, employing approximately 13,144 workers. The company's long-standing presence and continued expansion have catalyzed a robust aerospace supply chain. Over 30 aerospace-related companies operate in the region, creating a true aerospace cluster with advanced manufacturing, engineering, and technical capabilities.

Aerospace Manufacturing Profile 2025

Establishments: 400
Employment: 24,642 (up 4.3% from prior year)
Average Weekly Wage: \$1,803 (highest of all private sectors)
Specialization: Transportation equipment, aircraft/aerospace, chemicals, food processing, paper products

Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America (HMGMA): The announced \$7.6 billion joint investment between Hyundai Motor Group and LG Energy Solutions represents a transformational event for the region. Key economic impacts of the facility, located in Bryan County, include:

- Direct Employment: 8,500 jobs projected at full capacity (operational ramp-up through 2025-2026)
- Current Status: First vehicles (IONIQ 5) began production in Q3 2024; ramping to full capacity through 2025
- Production Capacity: 300,000 electric vehicles annually
- Supply Chain Impact: 40+ tier-1 and tier-2 supplier facilities announced for the region, creating additional 2,000+ jobs
- Payroll Impact: Average wage of \$58,000 per job announced

The HMGMA facility drives significant secondary impacts: residential construction, infrastructure expansion, supplier consolidation, and workforce training demands. Population in Bryan County is projected to grow 13% by 2031, concentrated in areas near the facility.

Other Major Manufacturers:

- SNF Savannah: 1,766 employees (water treatment chemicals)
- Georgia-Pacific: 1,045 employees (forest products)
- JCB: 982 employees (construction equipment)
- Medline Industries, Anatolia Tile, and numerous food processing facilities

Tourism and Visitor Economy

Tourism remains a vital economic driver and cultural cornerstone. The 2023 visitor economy generated \$4.75 billion in direct spending with an estimated total economic impact of \$12+ billion including indirect effects. The majority of revenue is attributed to lodging, followed by food and beverage. Travel to Savannah is generally leisure, although business travel is becoming more prevalent.

Recovery and Growth: The leisure and hospitality sector was significantly impacted by COVID-19 but has achieved full recovery and exceeded pre-pandemic performance.

Visitation surged in 2022-2023 as travel patterns normalized and new tourism products (Plant Riverside District, renovated historic hotels, enhanced riverfront amenities) attracted diverse visitor segments.

Product Development: New tourism investments position Savannah for continued growth:

- Plant Riverside District: 500,000+ square feet with dining, entertainment, 350 hotel rooms
- Ritz Carlton (Johnson Square): 160 rooms, 2025 opening
- Left Lane Hospitality (Manger Building conversion): 230 rooms, 2026 opening
- Tide-to-Town Trail System: \$10 million investment in multimodal connectivity
- Savannah Waterfront Redevelopment: \$30 million in capital improvements planned

Convention and Business Travel: The Savannah Convention Center drives substantial economic activity, hosting 160+ events annually and approximately 200,000 tourists. The facility generates \$1.4 billion in economic impact over its 20-year lifecycle and supports an estimated 28,000 tourism and hospitality jobs.

The region's 2015 preservation of the Oglethorpe Plan and Historic District, combined with investment in cultural attractions and natural amenities (Forsyth Park, riverfront, beaches), ensures tourism's continued appeal.

Tourism Performance (2023)

Annual Visitors: 17.3 M (10 M overnight, 7.3 M day visitors)

Direct Spending: \$4.75 billion

Room Tax Revenue: \$48.7 million

Supported Jobs: 27,000-28,000 direct hospitality jobs

Lodging Supply: 18,767 rooms (with 480+ new rooms announced through 2025-2026)

Visitor Composition

Type: 89% leisure travel; 11% business and convention
68% repeat visitors, averaging 2.8-night stays

Primary interest categories: Historic sites/cultural activities, culinary experiences, outdoor recreation, shopping, entertainment

Healthcare Sector

As the population of the area ages, access to healthcare will become increasingly more crucial. This sector already comprises a large portion of the economy, as it is one of the top 10 employment segments in the area. Healthcare has emerged as a major employment sector and economic driver. The sector comprises 13.9% of MSA employment (27,742 jobs) with above-average wages (\$1,253 weekly, Q2 2025).

Major Healthcare Facilities:

- Memorial Health University Medical Center (HCA Healthcare): 900+ employees, Level 1 trauma center, pediatric hospital, neonatal ICU, stroke center; \$325+ million invested in capital improvements since 2018
- St. Joseph's/Candler Health System: 700+ employees with expanding Bryan County presence (2024 Richmond Hill campus opened)
- Medical College of Georgia Savannah Campus: Four-year medical degree program
- launched at Georgia Southern University in partnership with St. Joseph's/Candler
- Ambulatory Care & Clinics: Expanding network of freestanding ERs, urgent care, specialty practices

Growth Drivers

Aging population: 65+ cohort growing fastest)

Expanded specialties: women's health, robotic-assisted surgery, orthopedics, comprehensive cancer care

Medical education expansion: MCG Savannah, nursing programs, allied health training

Growth: Healthcare employment projected to grow 3-4% annually through 2030

Military and Government

Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield (HAAF) represent major economic anchors with profound regional impact. HAAF is the sister installation to Fort Stewart and located within the Savannah city limits. Its mission is to provide air transport to Fort Stewart, home of the 3rd Infantry Division, located nearby. HAAF, centrally located in Savannah, plays a critical role in the installation's deployment capabilities as a power projection platform with access to rail, port operations, and a major interstate road network.

Strategic Importance:

- HAAF operates the longest Army runway on the East Coast
- Strategic deployment capability: full equipment load and deployment within 18-hour timeline
- Supports 3rd Infantry Division's rapid power projection mission
- Critical infrastructure for regional employment, spending, and property tax base

Fort Stewart/HAAF Profile

Combined Acreage: 285,000 acres (Fort Stewart); 5,400 acres (HAAF, Savannah)

Military Personnel: 20,850

Civilian Employees: 4,153

Total Employment: 25,000

Combined Annual Payroll: \$1+ billion
Estimated Regional Economic Impact: \$4.9 billion annually

The direct spending from military operations, staff, and residents helps to sustain local communities by creating employment opportunities across a wide range of sectors, both directly and indirectly. Active duty and civilian employees spend their military wages on services such as retail, food service, real estate, and education. The Savannah MSA also benefits from defense contracts with private companies for equipment, supplies, construction, and various services such as health care and information technology.

Government Workforce: Beyond Fort Stewart/HAAF, approximately 24,927 MSA residents work in government positions (12.5% of MSA employment), including City of Savannah, Chatham County, school boards, state agencies, and federal offices.

Creative Industries and Technology

Savannah has developed a distinctive economic niche in creative industries: motion picture/television production, digital media, music, visual arts, and design complemented by growing technology and knowledge-based services.

Film and Entertainment Production:

Georgia ranks #1 nationally for film production incentives and facilities. Savannah's contribution to this statewide industry. Notable recent productions include: Disney's *Lady and the Tramp* (2019, \$51M spending impact alone); *Forrest Gump*, *Midnight in Paris*, *The Hunger Games* series, and numerous television productions (*Outer Banks*, *Daytona*, etc.)

The Savannah Regional Film Commission, an AFCL certified Film Commission, is the central point of contact for entertainment production in the Chatham County region. The Film Commission promotes the Savannah region as a premier film destination for motion picture, television, and commercial productions. The Film Commission functions as a liaison between film companies and the municipalities in the Chatham County region, in addition to providing location assistance and coordination with local crew and support services. The Film Commission is a division of the Savannah Economic Development Authority (SEDA). In addition to the state of Georgia's tax incentives, the Savannah Regional Film Commission offers a local entertainment production rebate available for qualified productions.

Direct Spending Impact (2019): \$2.9 billion statewide; Savannah region's share approximately \$500M-\$700M

Support Infrastructure: Savannah Regional Film Commission, production studios, diverse locations (historic squares, waterfront, marshlands, beaches), local crew resources

Employment: 1,000+ direct jobs in production, post-production, equipment rental, location management

Creative Coast Initiative: Established in 1997, Creative Coast functions as a public-private partnership to support entrepreneurial creative businesses. Focus areas include:

- New media and digital content
- Visual arts and design
- Music and performance
- Food culture and culinary innovation
- Technology startups

Since the development of the Creative Coast in 1997, numerous organizations and efforts have come together to better meet the needs of Savannah's creative community. By focusing on creative entrepreneurialism, technology, new media, art, music, and food culture, these groups are helping to support and shape the future of Savannah. Additionally, the Creative Coast and others continue to market and bring in high tech and knowledge-based businesses to the area as highly technical jobs have been identified as a needed resource to improve economic growth in the region

Tech Sector Growth:

- Savannah Logistics Technology Corridor (SLTC): Designated in 2018 to support logistics technology development and innovation along I-16/I-95 corridors
- Tech startups and companies attracted by quality of life, lower cost of living, educated workforce, business-friendly environment
- Growing number of coworking spaces, incubators, and technology business parks

Competitive Advantages:

- Presence of Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD): 4,500+ students, faculty expertise, facility resources
- Educated, creative workforce
- Cultural vibrancy and quality of life
- Reasonable cost of living compared to other creative hubs

Business Profile

Largest Employers

The Savannah MSA's employment base includes a mix of major private employers, public institutions, and federal and military installations. Large enterprises provide a substantial share of total jobs, especially in manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, education, and government.

Key employers include Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation, major hospital systems such as Memorial Health University Medical Center and St. Joseph's/Candler, the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System, Savannah Technical College and other higher education institutions, local governments, and large logistics and manufacturing firms associated with the Port of Savannah and the Hyundai Metaplant and its suppliers.

Based on Georgia Department of Labor data, the following are the largest employers in the Savannah MSA. Service industry employers, such as hospitals, retail, and grocery stores, represent the bulk of these major employment centers.

Top Employers in Savannah MSA		
Candler Hospital, Inc.	Gulfstream Aerospace Corp	St. Joseph's Hospital, Inc
Savannah Health Services, LLC	Gulfstream Services Corporation	Savannah College of Art and Design
Gateway Terminals, LLC	Publix Super Markets, Inc.	FedEx
Walmart		
Source: Georgia Department of Labor Area Labor Profile for Savannah MSA (12.25)		

Figure 3.3 – Top Employers in Savannah MSA

Small Business and Large Employer Mix

While a relatively small number of very large employers account for a significant share of total jobs, the majority of business establishments in the Savannah MSA are small firms with fewer than 20 employees. Small businesses play a critical role in entrepreneurship, innovation, neighborhood vitality, and economic resilience, even as mega-projects such as the Hyundai Metaplant and major port-related facilities shape regional employment trends.

The region’s economic development strategy must balance the attraction and retention of large employers with continued support for small and medium-sized enterprises, including locally owned firms and startups. This includes ensuring access to capital, technical assistance, and streamlined permitting processes that are accessible to businesses of all sizes.

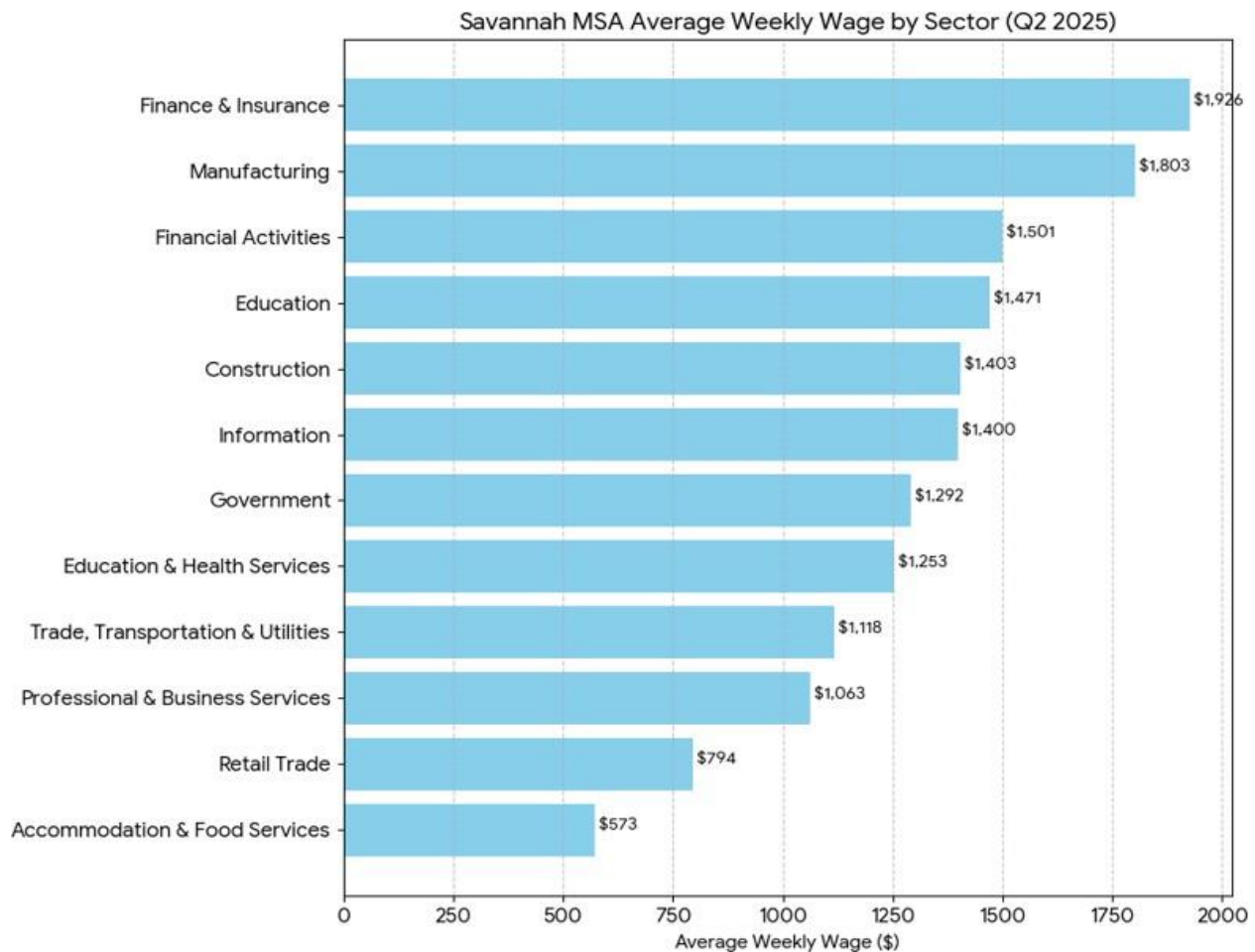
Employer Characteristics		
Employee Size Class	Number of Establishments	Total Employment
0-4	8,134	9,821
5-9	1,955	13,126
10-19	1,423	19,324
20-49	1,148	34,630
50-99	363	24,714
100-249	231	34,089
250-499	45	15,794
500-999	17	11,407
1,000+	11	34,743
Total	13,327	197,648

Figure 3.4 - Employer Characteristics in Savannah MSA

Income and Wage Structure

Average pay in the Savannah region has risen consistently as local businesses compete for workers and high-paying industries like manufacturing and finance continue to expand. Even with these gains, local weekly pay still trails the national average for major cities. This gap highlights a need for the region to attract companies that provide not just jobs, but careers with competitive salaries that can support a household.

The best-paying jobs are currently found in "industrial" sectors—such as aircraft parts, chemicals, and advanced manufacturing—as well as in professional fields like finance and technology. In contrast, many of the region’s largest employers in the tourism, retail, and hospitality sectors offer much lower pay. While these service jobs are vital because they provide many people with their first start in the workforce, the disparity in pay between the industrial and service sectors remains a central challenge for the region’s economic growth.



Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Area Labor Profile for Savannah MSA (December 2025)

Figure 3.5 - Savannah Weekly Wage by Sector

Industry Breakdown

The organizational landscape of the Savannah MSA is characterized by a high volume of small-scale entrepreneurial activity balanced by a few large-scale institutional anchors. While the vast majority of the region’s 13,327 establishments are small businesses, with over 60% employing fewer than five people, employment remains heavily concentrated in a select group of large-scale operations. This is most evident in the government sector, where only 199 establishments provide stable, middle-wage employment for nearly 25,000 residents, averaging 125 workers per location. This structural duality, consisting of a vibrant

small-business ecosystem operating alongside a highly centralized public and industrial core, forms the basis of the region’s economic resilience and will be a primary focus of the strategic goals aimed at fostering long-term stability and growth.

Industry Breakdown - Savannah MSA			
Economic Domain	Establishments	Employment	Avg. Weekly Wage
Goods - Producing	1,524	34,351	\$1,701
Service - Producing (Private)	10,797	140,483	\$1,003
Government	199	24,928	\$1,292
Unclassified	807	45	\$1,146
Total Savannah MSA	13,327	199,807	\$1,184

Figure 3.6 – Industry Breakdown – Savannah MSA

Wage Competitiveness

While the Savannah MSA has seen consistent wage growth, the region continues to navigate a gap in national wage competitiveness. As of the second quarter of 2025, the average weekly wage in the Savannah MSA reached \$1,184, a notable increase reflecting the region's expanding industrial and logistics base. However, this figure remains approximately 15% below the national metropolitan average. This disparity is most pronounced in the Service and Hospitality sectors, whereas the local Manufacturing and Finance sectors have reached near-parity with national trends, offering weekly wages of \$1,803 and \$1,926 respectively. Closing this overall wage gap is essential not only for improving the standard of living for local residents but also for ensuring the region can continue to attract and retain highly skilled talent in an increasingly mobile national labor market.

Growing vs. Declining Industries

Growing Industries - Which Industries Are Growing?

Regional employment forecasts and recent project announcements indicate that the fastest-growing industries through 2035 will include healthcare and social assistance, advanced manufacturing, logistics and distribution, construction, and professional and business services. Growth is driven by demographic trends, port expansion, the Hyundai Metaplant and supplier network, continued tourism strength, and ongoing infrastructure and residential development.

Based on available workforce development data and economic forecasts from the Georgia Department of Labor, the following industries are projected to experience fastest employment growth:

Projected Employment Growth				
Industry	2024 Employment	Projected 2030	Growth	Annual Growth
Healthcare & Social Assistance	27,742	31,200	3,458	2.20%
Accommodation & Food Services	28,201	29,800	1,599	1.10%
Manufacturing	24,642	27,500	2,858	2.20%
Construction	9,432	10,500	1,068	2.30%
Professional & Business Services	21,818	23,400	1,582	1.40%
Government	24,927	25,600	673	0.60%
Note: Projections based on Georgia Department of Labor industry trends, HMGMA ramp-up, and regional growth patterns. Actual outcomes dependent on trade policy, interest rates, and infrastructure investments.				

Figure 3.7 – Savannah-Chatham County: Projected Employment Growth

Targeted Growth Industries

Manufacturing, Ports, and Logistics

Manufacturing, ports, and logistics continue to function as a core regional growth engine, now amplified by the Hyundai Metaplant, expanded container capacity, and inland port investments. These sectors offer some of the region’s highest average wages and extensive supply chain opportunities across multiple counties.

Healthcare and Life Sciences

Healthcare remains one of the fastest-growing industries due to population aging, expanded specialty services, and the growth of medical education programs. Emerging opportunities in life sciences, medical technology, and health services integration strengthen this sector’s long-term outlook.

Creative and Technical Services/Technology

Creative and technical services, including design, digital media, software development, and logistics technology, are increasingly intertwined. The Savannah Logistics Technology Corridor, SCAD’s creative talent pipeline, and growing tech entrepreneurship support the emergence of a blended creative-tech network.

Entertainment Production

Film and entertainment production remain high-growth segments, supported by state tax incentives, Savannah’s historic urban fabric, and specialized training programs in film and media. This industry generates high-value spending and offers a range of creative and technical career pathways.

Retail Logistics and E-Commerce

The growth of e-commerce has driven demand for distribution centers, fulfillment hubs, and last-mile logistics, reinforcing the region’s role as a logistics hub beyond traditional port activities. This sector overlaps with manufacturing and warehousing but warrants continued attention for land use, transportation, and workforce implications.

Emerging Sectors

Advanced Energy and Climate-Resilient Infrastructure Investments in electric vehicle manufacturing, battery production, and advanced materials point to emerging opportunities in advanced energy and clean technologies. In parallel, demand for infrastructure upgrades and climate-resilient design is expected to grow as communities adapt to sea level rise, storm impacts, and aging infrastructure systems.

Declining Industries - Which Industries Are Shrinking?

While the regional economy is growing overall, several sectors are projected to experience flat or declining employment through 2035 due to technological change, automation, changing consumer behavior, and long-term structural trends. These may include traditional print publishing, selected manufacturing niches, some brick-and-mortar retail segments, and certain administrative or back-office functions.

Declining Industries				
Industry	2022 Base Employment	Projected 2032	Total Change	Percent Decline
Publishing Industries	330	220	-110	-33.20%
Private Households	1,260	1,150	-110	-8.70%
Printing & Related Support	640	540	-100	-15.00%
Forestry and Logging	820	730	-90	-10.70%

Figure 3.8 – Declining Industries

In the context of regional economic data, the "Private Households" category refers to individuals who are employed directly by private residences to provide domestic services. Unlike typical businesses or commercial agencies, these are informal or direct-hire relationships where the employer is the homeowner. This category includes essential support roles such as nannies, housekeepers, private cooks, gardeners, and personal caregivers. The projected decline in this sector does not suggest a drop in demand for these services; rather, it reflects a structural shift toward the "professionalization" of domestic work. Tasks that were once performed by direct household employees are increasingly being outsourced to specialized service firms and gig-economy platforms, moving those jobs into the administrative and professional service sectors of the formal economy.

Economic Resilience and Recovery

COVID-19 Pandemic Impact and Response

The region experienced significant but manageable disruption from COVID-19. Initial 2020 lockdowns caused sharp employment declines, with unemployment briefly exceeding 6%. However, the region's economic diversification proved protective.

The regional economic timeline since 2020 illustrates a clear transition from a sharp contraction to a period of record-setting expansion, based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), 2019-2025; and Georgia Department of Labor, Workforce Statistics Division reporting. The initial impact of the pandemic in 2020 was marked by a peak unemployment rate of 6.9% and a 4.2% decline in total employment. This was followed by a swift recovery phase during 2021 and 2022, where employment surged by 5.8%. This rebound was driven by the reopening of local businesses and the rapid acceleration of high-growth sectors, particularly e-commerce logistics and outdoor tourism.

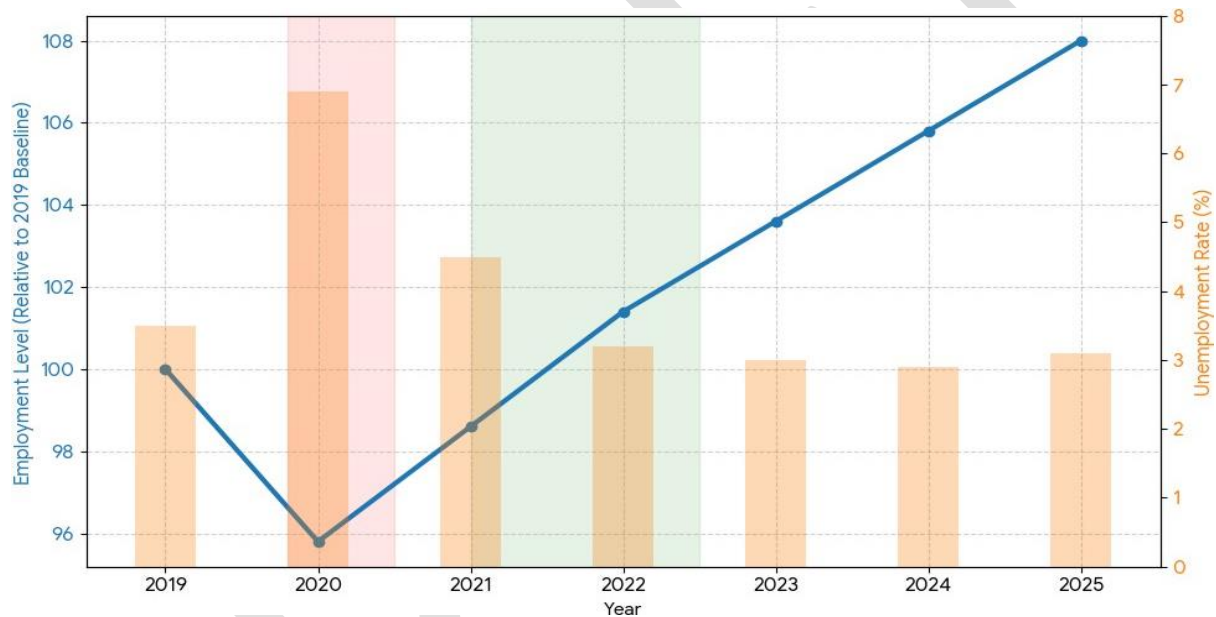


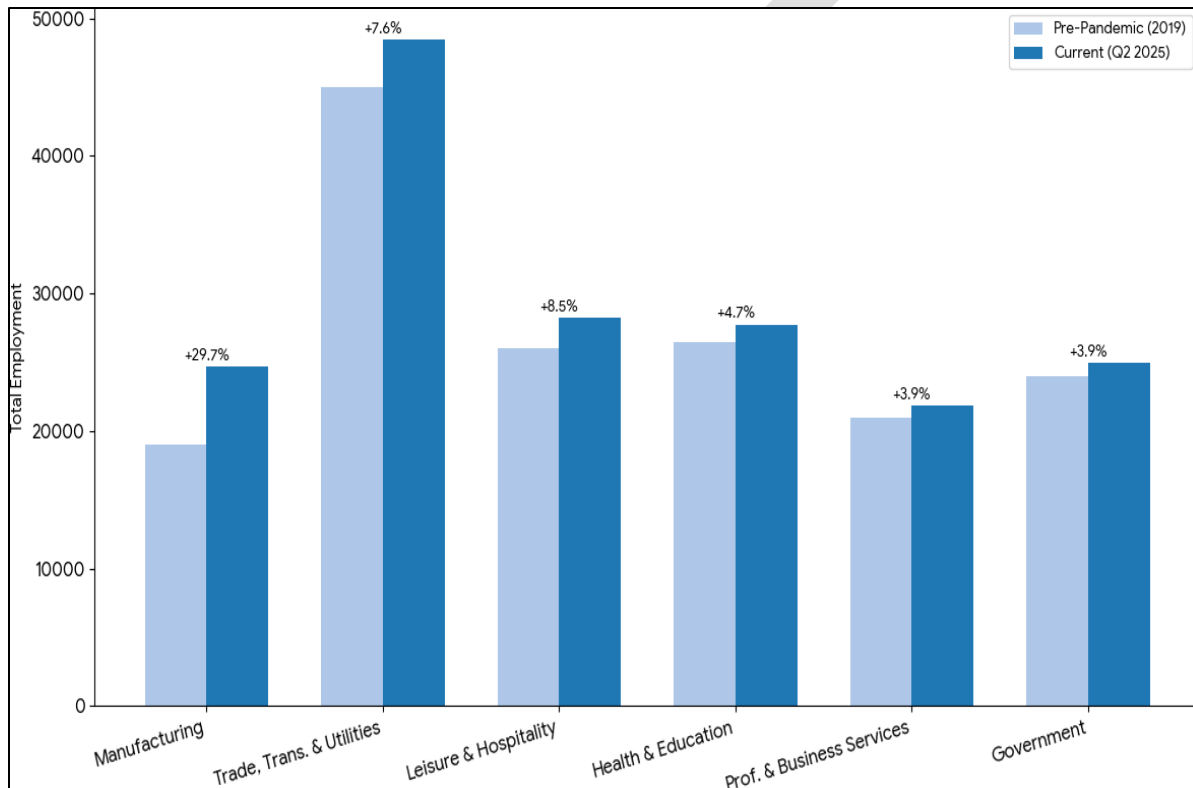
Figure 3.9 - Savannah MSA Economic Transition Recovery & Expansion 2020-2025

Between 2023 and 2025, the region entered a stage of sustained expansion as unemployment normalized to the 3% range. By early 2025, the local labor market reached a historic milestone, with regional employment levels exceeding pre-pandemic benchmarks by 8%. This growth trajectory underscores the area's successful pivot toward a more modern, logistics-oriented economic base.

The regional economic recovery has been defined by varying trajectories across its core sectors. The hospitality industry, which was initially the hardest hit, demonstrated a remarkable rebound, fully recovering by late 2022 and exceeding pre-pandemic visitor levels by 2023. In contrast, the manufacturing sector proved highly resilient throughout the

period, as aerospace and port-related operations remained functional. Similarly, the healthcare sector underwent significant expansion, driven by the development of new facilities and increased staffing requirements to meet regional demand.

The logistics sector experienced an accelerated growth phase, spurred by the surge in e-commerce, and has maintained its upward momentum through 2025. Finally, the government and military sectors provided a vital stabilizing force for the Savannah MSA, maintaining consistent employment levels and providing a reliable revenue base that supported the region during the broader economic transition.



Source: Savannah Economic Development Authority (SEDA) 2019 Annual Review; and Georgia Department of Labor Q2 2025 Area Labor Profile

Figure 3.10 – Savannah MSA Employment Comparison: Pre-Pandemic vs. Current

The regional economy demonstrated significant strength during recent periods of instability, largely due to a well-balanced and diversified industrial base. By maintaining an environment where no single industry represents more than 15% of total employment, the Savannah area successfully navigated sectoral shifts, allowing growth in emerging fields to offset temporary losses elsewhere. This stability was further anchored by "essential services." These included healthcare, food production, and government and military operations, which remained fully operational throughout the recovery period.

A critical driver of this resilience was the Port of Savannah. As a piece of national trade infrastructure, the Port not only prioritized continuous operations but actually expanded its activity, serving as a reliable economic engine while other global logistics hubs faced disruptions. Local businesses also showed a remarkable capacity for innovation, quickly adapting to new operational models such as remote work, curbside services, and outdoor dining, while the tourism sector successfully pivoted to highlight the region's expansive outdoor attractions.

The flexibility of the local workforce also played a vital role, supported by a robust technical training infrastructure that allowed workers to quickly gain new skills for emerging opportunities. This individual adaptability was reinforced by a highly coordinated response from municipal leaders, business associations, and regional nonprofits. Together, these factors created a unified support system that protected the region's economic health and set the stage for the sustained expansion currently being observed.

Post-Pandemic Trends and Emerging Challenges

Several critical economic patterns have emerged since 2022 that will shape the region's growth through 2045:

- **The Housing Affordability Gap:** The local population is growing by about 1.8% each year, but the construction of new homes has not kept pace. In Chatham County, median home prices reached \$370,000 in 2024, a 56% increase from just five years ago. While average rents are around \$1,284 per month, there is a severe shortage of housing that is affordable for the core workforce earning between \$40,000 and \$60,000. This gap makes it difficult for companies to recruit the staff they need, especially for technical and service roles that keep the region running.
- **Competition for Workers:** With unemployment sitting at a very low 3.1%, nearly everyone who wants a job has one. While this high demand for workers has pushed average pay up by 4.3% annually, those gains are often swallowed up by the rising costs of housing, childcare, and transportation. As a result, finding and keeping reliable employees has become the number one challenge for local business owners.
- **Infrastructure and Coastal Risks:** Our coastal location and older drainage and road systems face long-term risks from rising sea levels and more frequent flooding. From an economic standpoint, these aren't just environmental issues; they are direct threats to the stability of our business districts and industrial zones. Ensuring that our ports and commercial corridors can stay open and functional during storms is vital to keeping the region competitive.
- **Global Trade Uncertainty:** Because so much of our local economy depends on the Port of Savannah, we are highly sensitive to changes in international trade rules. Shifts in government trade policies or new taxes on imported goods (tariffs) can create "headwinds" for our manufacturing and shipping companies. To stay strong, the region must be ready to adapt its strategy if global shipping patterns change.

- **An Aging Population:** Residents aged 65 and older are the fastest-growing group in our community. This shift creates a massive opportunity for our healthcare and senior-service industries, but it also means there are fewer younger people entering the workforce to replace those who retire. As more people leave the workforce, the region will need to find new ways to fill essential jobs and maintain a stable tax base for local services.

Workforce Education and Preparedness - Higher Education Institutions

The region benefits from four major higher education institutions producing skilled graduates:

Savannah State University

- Enrollment: 4,200+
- Focus Areas: Liberal arts, STEM, business, teacher education
- Regional Role: Historically Black University with strong recruitment in African American communities and diaspora; partnership with Fort Stewart/HAAF for military education

Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD)

- Enrollment: 4,500+
- Focus Areas: Design, architecture, visual arts, film, digital media, fashion, business
- Regional Role: Major driver of creative industries cluster; faculty expertise attracts companies; graduates fill design/creative positions in local and national firms

Georgia Southern University - Armstrong Campus

- Enrollment: 7,000+
- Focus Areas: Engineering, business, health professions, education, liberal arts
- Regional Role: Engineering program supports aerospace/manufacturing sectors; nursing and allied health programs serve healthcare sector; MCG Savannah partnership expanding medical education

Savannah Technical College

- Enrollment: 12,000+ (including dual enrollment)
- Focus Areas: Nursing, healthcare, aviation maintenance, welding, electrical, HVAC, manufacturing technology, logistics, culinary arts, information technology
- Regional Role: Primary workforce development institution; strong alignment with manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality sectors

Technical Education and Workforce Training

Savannah Technical College represents the primary workforce development institution, with enrollment exceeding 12,000 across certificate, diploma, and degree programs.

Program Highlights (2024 Graduates)

Technical Education and Workforce Training			
Program	Graduates	Trend	Employment Alignment
Welding	495	↑ Growing	Manufacturing, Construction
Nursing Assistant	161	↑ Growing	Healthcare
HVAC Technician	105	↑ Growing	Construction, Facilities
Aircraft Maintenance	60	↑ Growing	Aerospace, Aviation
Commercial Truck Driver	160	→ Stable	Logistics, Transportation
Cosmetology	142	→ Stable	Hospitality, Services
Heating/AC/Refrigeration	105	↑ Growing	Construction, Facilities

Source: Technical College System of Georgia via GDOL MSA Labor Profile

Figure 3.11 – Savannah-Chatham County: Technical Education and Workforce Training 2024

Program Alignment with Employer Demand:

Strong growth in welding, HVAC, nursing, and aircraft maintenance reflects robust employer demand in manufacturing, construction, and healthcare sectors. Declining enrollments in mechanical drafting and nursing aide positions suggest workforce transition to higher-skill occupations.

Challenges:

- **Graduate Placement:** Not all graduates remain in region; many move to Atlanta or other coastal cities
- **Program Capacity:** HVAC and welding programs operate near capacity; expansion needed to meet demand
- **Credential Recognition:** Alignment with industry certifications (AWS for welding, NATE for HVAC) ensures national portability but requires ongoing curriculum updates

Workforce Equity and Access

Educational attainment disparities persist across racial and ethnic groups. Interventions to expand workforce access and support underrepresented populations in high-wage technical fields include:

- **K-12 Pipeline Development:** Expand awareness of technical careers; support STEM enrichment in underserved schools; provide internship opportunities
- **Apprenticeship Programs:** Create registered apprenticeships linking classroom learning to paid employment; particularly effective for manufacturing, construction, and healthcare

- **Support Services:** Childcare assistance, transportation support, and mental health services improve persistence in training programs
- **Employer Partnerships:** Direct recruitment agreements between technical colleges and employers; incumbent worker training; tuition assistance programs
- **Community-Based Organizations:** Partner with minority chambers, nonprofits, faith institutions, and community groups for program awareness and support

Economic Development Goals and Strategies

The regional economic development strategy is organized around the following goals, which build on and refine the goals and objectives previously established in Plan 2040.

Goal 1 - Grow a Skilled and Inclusive Workforce

Ensure that Chatham County and the Savannah Metropolitan Statistical Area maintain an educated, skilled, and adaptable workforce that is aligned with current and emerging employer needs and that connects local residents, including youth, economically disadvantaged residents, justice-involved individuals, and individuals with behavioral health needs, to quality jobs and career pathways.

Objectives:

- Create a network of employers and training providers through incentives to align training programs with opportunities for jobs
- Increase the number of opportunities for job shadowing, apprenticeship programs, and internships to include “green” careers, particularly targeted to youth and young adults
- Increase capacity and opportunities for individuals to receive skills that lead to employment
- Develop apprenticeship and vocational programs based on the needs of Chatham County employers

Goal 2 - Strengthen the Business Climate for Existing and New Firms

Foster a competitive, predictable, and efficient business environment that streamlines permitting and licensing processes, supports the retention and expansion of existing local businesses, and attracts new employers whose job quality, skill requirements, and long-term sustainability are consistent with community goals and regional economic strengths.

Objectives:

- Streamline the business application process
- Collaborate with organizations like Creative Coast and SEDA to create entrepreneurship programs
- Prioritize growing local businesses as much as attracting new businesses
- Increase number of opportunities for youth and young adults to access job shadowing, apprenticeship programs, and internships to include “green” careers

Goal 3. Advance Economic Mobility and Equity

Increase economic mobility by reducing structural and practical barriers to participation in the regional economy and by expanding access to quality employment, entrepreneurship, and wealth-building opportunities for residents across all neighborhoods, with particular emphasis on communities and small businesses that have experienced historic disinvestment or disadvantage.

Objectives:

- Improve access to education and trades to help the working poor, ex-offenders, and those with mental illness by providing a community-based scholarship program or similar incentive to help those who cannot afford educational programs
- Increase case management capacity to provide employment, wrap-around, and supportive services for families; provide case management with education regarding best practices on the provision of services
- Increase awareness and use of tax incentives for employers serving and employing specific populations
- Explore funding mechanisms in order to provide more financial support to a more diverse economy and establish action steps that will promote regional innovation
- Increase efficiency of permitting and licensing policies for businesses through streamlining procedures, educating about the process, and potentially matching county and municipality requirements
- Expand capacity of formal and informal support systems to sustain and expand current, growing businesses throughout the county while considering the establishment of a program for existing businesses to mentor start-ups

Goal 4 - Support Entrepreneurship, Small Business, and Innovation

Promote a diverse and resilient local business ecosystem by expanding outreach, technical assistance, and access to capital for entrepreneurs and small businesses, including minority- and women-owned enterprises, and by encouraging innovation, collaboration, and the ability of local firms to start, grow, and scale within the region.

Objectives:

- Continue to facilitate the establishment of minority and women-owned businesses (M/WBE) as defined by the United States Small Business Administration Federal Contract Program
- Identify and remove obstacles to existing and proposed businesses in targeted redevelopment areas

Goal 5. Build a Resilient, Place-Based Regional Economy

Develop and sustain a diversified, resilient regional economy that leverages local assets—such as logistics, manufacturing, tourism, healthcare, education, and technology—while supporting economically vibrant and safe neighborhoods and commercial centers that offer a high quality of

life, and that can withstand, adapt to, and recover from economic, environmental, and technological disruptions.

Objectives:

- Promote mixed-use development where appropriate
- Propose a policy to prioritize active transportation infrastructure to facilitate walking, biking, and transit to commercial corridors
- Evaluate a policy to reduce regulatory barriers for new businesses by establishing "code-light" zones
- Evaluate flexible corridor-specific design standards to create attractive, functional, and harmonious buildings and public space

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CHAPTER 4
LAND USE ELEMENT

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Purpose and Intent

The Land Use Element guides the location, type, intensity, and character of development in unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah through the update period.

This element:

- Establishes a vision for the region's physical development emphasizing compact, connected, walkable communities concentrated in strategic nodes and corridors;
- Implements the Strategic Nodes and Corridors framework as the region's primary growth management strategy, identifying suitable locations for residential, employment, commercial, institutional, parks, and public uses based on infrastructure capacity, transportation connectivity, environmental constraints, compatibility, and coastal hazard risk;
- Coordinates land use decisions with the Transportation Element, Economic Development Element, Housing Element, and Hazard Mitigation Plan;
- Protects and preserves the region's natural systems, historic character, cultural resources, and environmental quality;
- Promotes equitable access to employment, services, housing, and community assets across all neighborhoods and socio-economic groups;

Chatham County is a unique coastal community in Georgia, with a range of land uses from environmentally sensitive and natural areas to highly developed, mixed-use urban areas. In both the City of Savannah and the County, this diversity requires character-based land use categories, consistent with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs approach (DCA).

This element includes a Character Area Map (CAM) and Future Land Use Map (FLUM), which work together to create a cohesive countywide guide for future growth and development. In addition to these components, this element includes a summary of physical context, regional growth, existing land uses, and historical development patterns, as well as an overview of issues and opportunities for Chatham County and the City of Savannah.

The land use information, recommendations, and strategies contained in this element are intended to provide guidance for the location and intensity of land uses to support Chatham County and the City of Savannah in future land use policy decisions.

Relationship of Planning Implementation Tools

To understand how the Comprehensive Plan guides growth, it is essential to distinguish between the three primary regulatory tools used in Chatham County and Savannah. They function as a hierarchy from "Vision" to "Law."

Character Area Map (CAM) – The Vision

- Describes the desired "look and feel" of a geographic area.
- It establishes the intent for design, streetscapes, and community identity. It does not set legal density limits but guides the application of the Future Land Use Map.

Future Land Use Map (FLUM) – The Policy

- A legally adopted map that designates specific land use categories.
- This is the primary decision-making tool for determination of rezoning cases. If a property owner requests a zoning change, the request must be consistent with the FLUM category assigned to that parcel.

Zoning Ordinance – The Law

- The legally binding code that governs specific parcel development.
- Dictates strict requirements such as building height, setbacks (distance from the street), permitted uses (e.g., retail vs. industrial), and parking requirements.
- The CAM guides the FLUM; the FLUM dictates whether a Zoning Map Amendment is valid.

The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update continues the application of Character Area designations begun with Plan 2040. All lands within the jurisdictions are classified in accordance with an ideal character that guides use intensity and the nature of development therein.

Historical and Regional Context

The Coastal Context and Environmental Constraints

The Savannah–Chatham region occupies a coastal landscape characterized by:

- Barrier islands and tidal marshes (Tybee Island, Wassaw Island, extensive salt and brackish marshes)
- Low-lying alluvial floodplains (Savannah River, Ogeechee River, Vernon River systems)
- Sea level rise and coastal hazard vulnerability (estimated 0.87 feet by 2050, 4+ feet by 2100 under intermediate scenarios; high risk from tropical cyclones, storm surge, and chronic tidal flooding).
- Wetlands and forested systems providing critical ecosystem services, habitat, and natural hazard buffering
- Limited upland available for development once wetlands, floodplains, and hazard-prone coastal areas are excluded

This coastal context profoundly shapes the Land Use Element. Greenfield development into low-lying areas has potential to exacerbate flood exposure, increase future disaster prevention expenditures, and constrain natural systems. Concentrating growth in strategic nodes in higher-elevation, better-connected interior areas is both economically sound and environmentally sensitive.

Municipalities In Chatham County

There are eight municipalities incorporated within Chatham County: Savannah, Thunderbolt Town, Vernonburg Town, Tybee Island, Pooler, Garden City, Port Wentworth, and Bloomingdale.

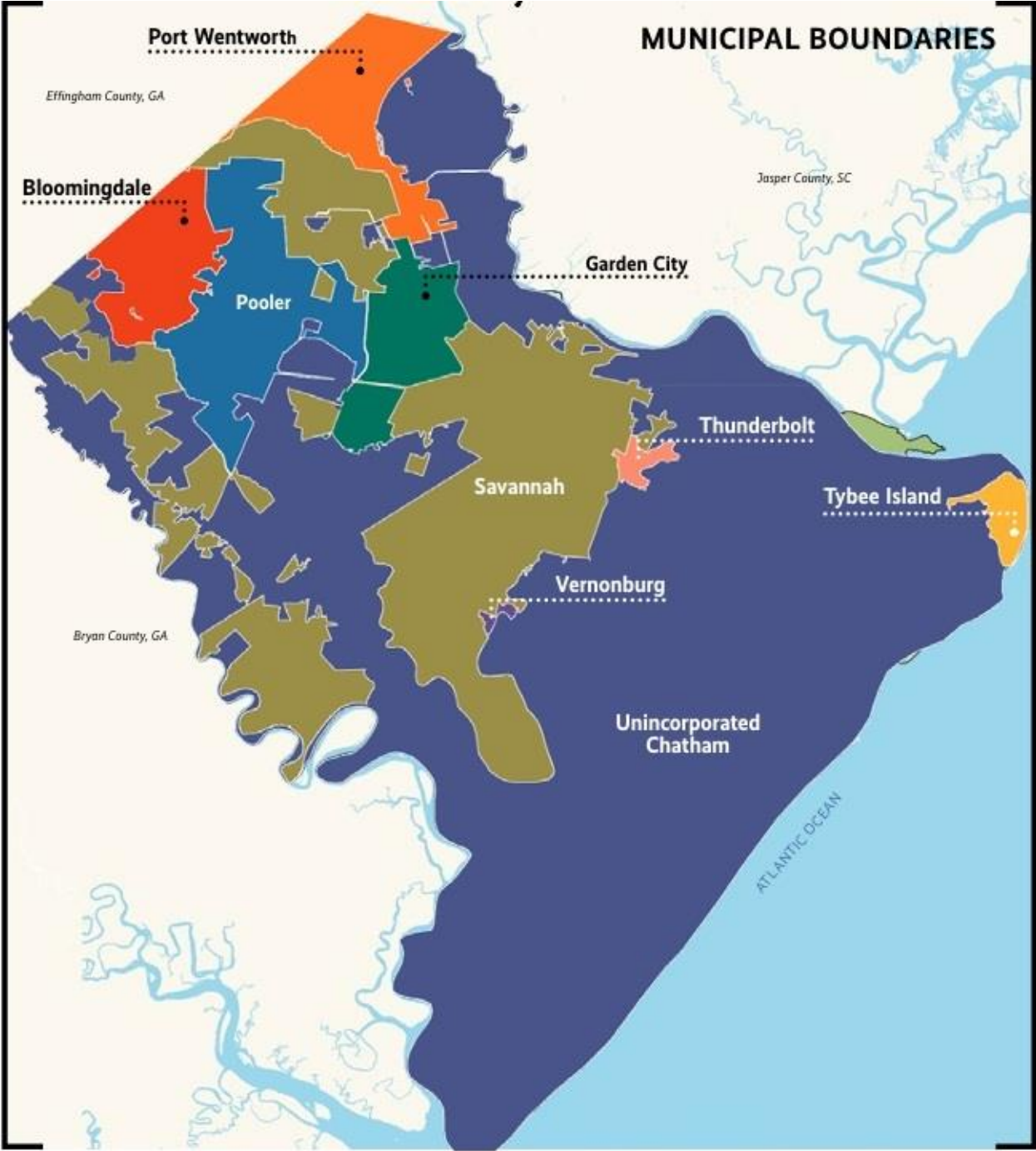


Exhibit 4.1 – Municipal Boundaries

Historical Development Patterns

The built environment of the City of Savannah is defined by distinct eras of planning philosophy, resulting in a structural split that underlies current infrastructure challenges. The first: compact, walkable, and grid-based; the second is dispersed, and auto-oriented.

The Original Grid (1733–1945)

The Oglethorpe Plan, with its redundant grid, integrated public squares, and mix of uses, established a model of density and connectivity that remains a standard for resilient urbanism. In this pattern, density was an organic component of viability. The connectivity of the grid dispersed traffic, which for many years was animal powered transport, allowing substantial volumes of movement without the need for high-capacity thoroughfares. This historic core remains the most fiscally productive land in Chatham County per acre.

This era produced a compact, walkable city where commerce, civic institutions, open space, and housing coexisted within a tight geographic footprint. The legacy of this era is a land use pattern that is highly efficient, utilizing relatively little land to support a significant population and tax base.

Suburban Expansion (1945–2020)

Following World War II, the region shifted toward an auto-centric development model. The post-war era introduced an auto-oriented expansion characterized by separated land uses, large residential lots, cul-de-sacs, and a reliance on a hierarchy of roadways. This pattern funnels traffic from residential subdivisions onto a few major corridors, including but not all inclusive: Abercorn Street (Highway 204); Habersham Street; Skidaway Road; White Bluff Road; and Waters Avenue; as well as I-16, Truman Parkway, Ogeechee Road and GA 21.

Unincorporated areas east of Savannah were developed and annexed into the City. As land became physically constrained, a significant share of the area's growth occurred in western Unincorporated County, and the municipalities of Bloomingdale, Pooler, Garden City and Port Wentworth, resulting in annexation of County land. While this model provided rapid expansion of affordable housing and space for a growing population, it created a dependency on arterial roadways and extended infrastructure lines that are costly to maintain and may have reached their capacity to support the spreading growth patterns.

The Present (2020 - Present)

The period from 2020 to present has been more defined by the regionalization of industry. The economic identity of Chatham County has shifted from a destination for freight transit to a hub for freight production and storage. A vast amount of greenfield land has been consumed in the building of logistics facilities reserved for expansion of future commerce. Although currently the vacancy rate is high, this trend is impacting residents' quality of life, particularly from a circulation perspective. The challenge is to simultaneously manage the City of Savannah with its efficient urban grid, suburban growth patterns and industrial intensification. The strategy moving forward is to improve the suburban model, by introducing connectivity and nodes of density to strengthen the urban fabric.

The region is currently navigating a period of surging industrial investment, driven by the continued prominence of the Port of Savannah and the arrival of the Hyundai Metaplant in adjacent Bryan County, with its associated supplier network. While these economic engines generate prosperity, they also exert pressure on the region's finite land supply, transportation networks, infrastructure and housing stock.

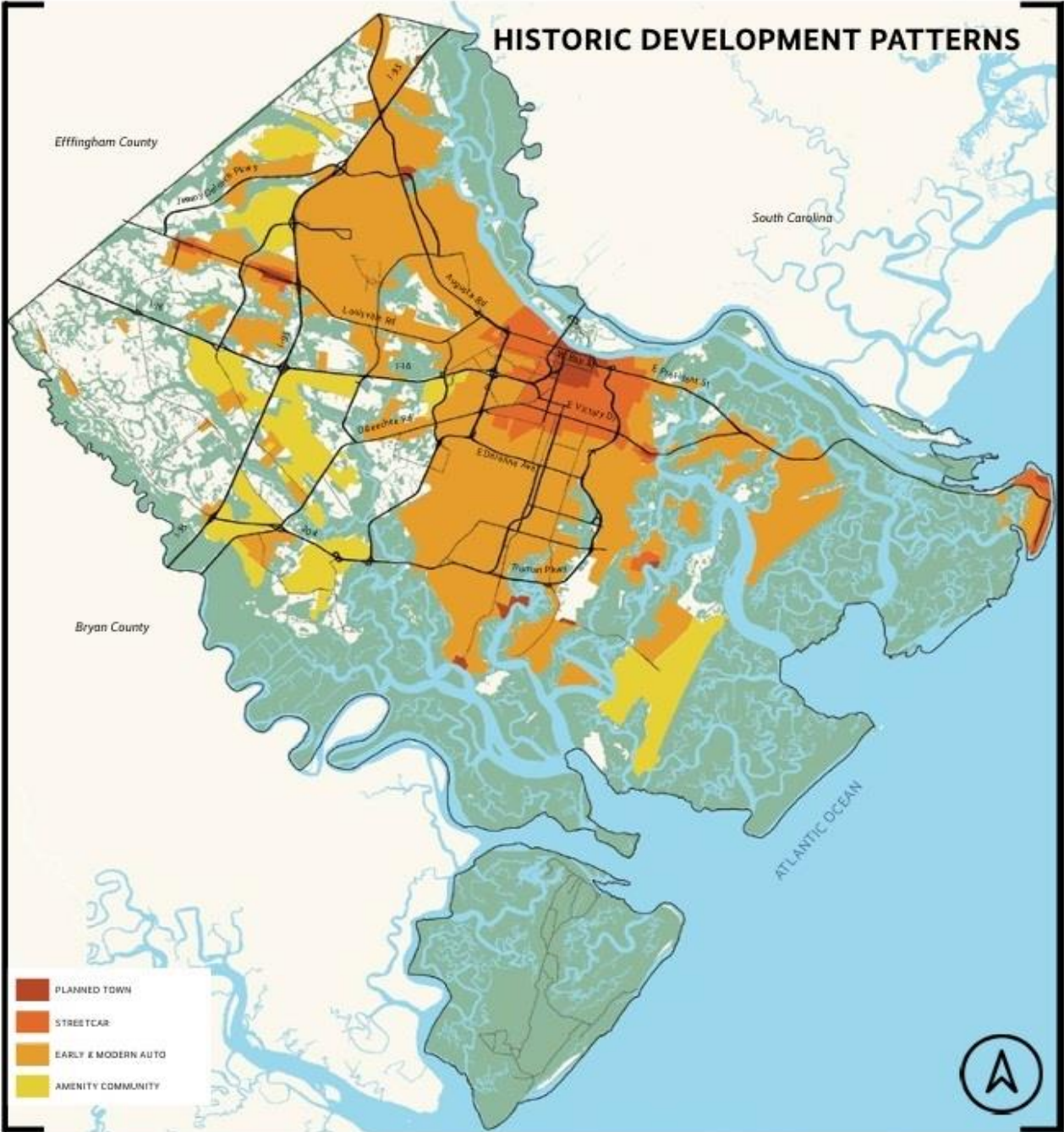


Exhibit 4.2 – Historic Development Patterns

Existing Land Use Distribution

Figure 4.1 presents existing land use distribution in Unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah. The character of each of these areas varies greatly as a result of distinctly different land use patterns, which have remained essentially the same since Plan 2040.

The City of Savannah is highly urbanized with large areas of mixed-use development. The City is chiefly growing through annexation. However, urban neighborhoods that have declined in population, former industrial lands, and vacant or under-performing commercial centers represent opportunities for internal growth in the form of infill and adaptive reuse development, thereby conserving undeveloped natural areas. To the east, Unincorporated Chatham County is developed at low densities and its character is strongly influenced by its setting amid marshes and tidal creeks. To the west, the County has a higher proportion of undeveloped area; however, as the City of Savannah and unincorporated eastern Chatham have built out, the western portion of Chatham County is emerging as a high growth area.

Existing Land Use - Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah		
Category	% of Area	Primary Characteristics
Residential (all types)	28%	Single-family (60%), multifamily (15%), mobile/other (25%)
Commercial (all types)	8%	Regional centers (50%), neighborhood (30%), office (20%)
Industrial (all types)	6%	Warehousing/distribution (70%), heavy industrial (20%), light industrial (10%)
Parks, Recreation, Open Space	4%	Public parks, golf courses, greenways
Institutional (Government, Education, Health)	4%	Schools, universities, hospitals, government offices
Transportation, Utilities	3%	Roads, rail, utility corridors, parking
Vacant/Underutilized	5%	Vacant lots, surface parking, abandoned buildings
Agricultural/Rural	18%	Farmland, forestry, rural residential
Water/Wetlands/Conservation	24%	Marshes, floodplains, conservation areas
Source: SAGIS		

Figure 4.1 Existing Land Use Classifications

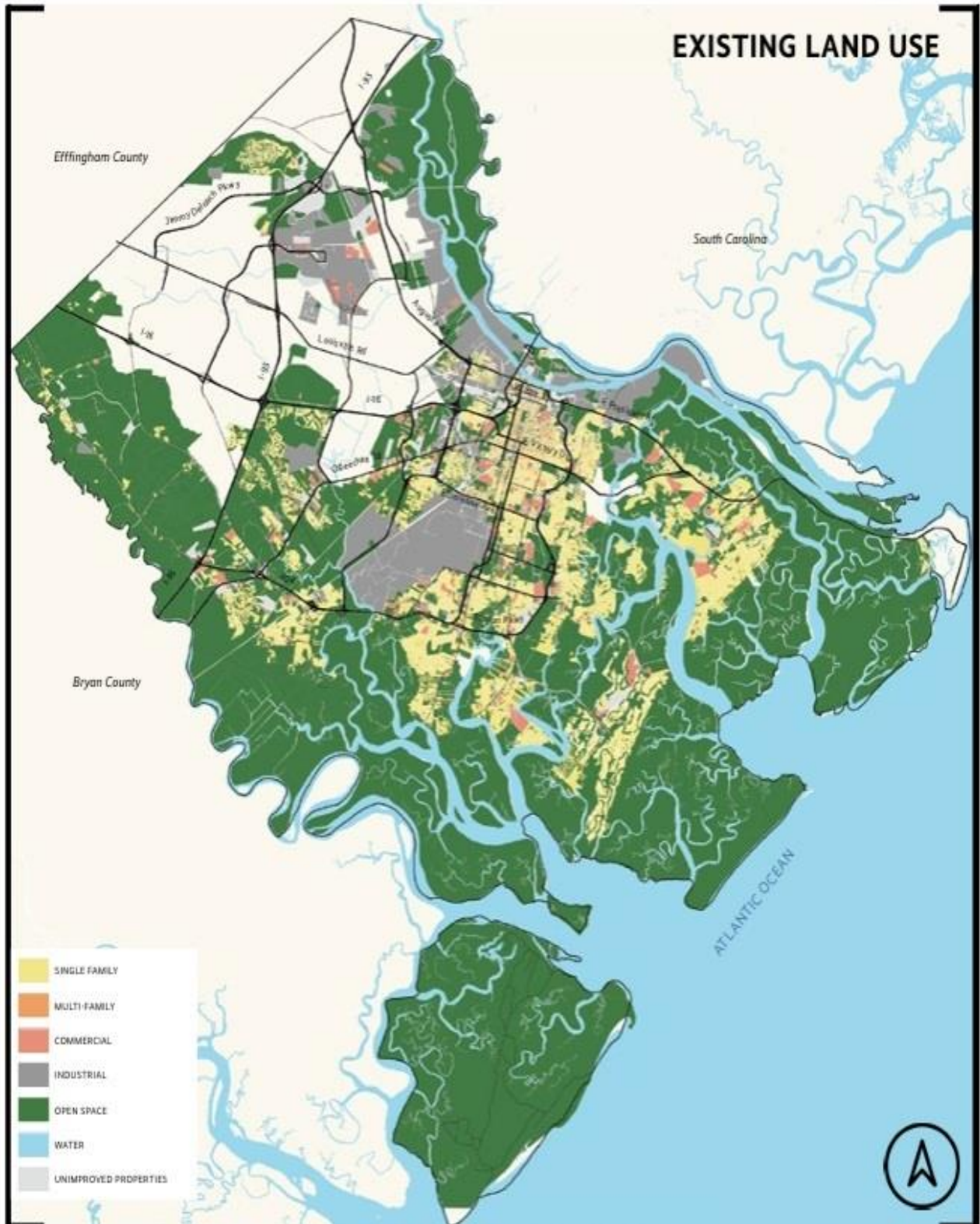


Exhibit 4.3 – Existing Land Use (GIS is updating)

Challenges of the Built and Future Urban Environment

The 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) projects significant population and employment growth associated with the regional industrial corridor. This also increases housing demand, much of which falls in the mid to lower income tiers, furthering the affordable housing shortfall.

As the primary service, cultural, and healthcare hub of the region, Savannah absorbs most of the workforce housing demand generated by industrial projects located in neighboring jurisdictions (Bryan, Effingham, Bulloch). The daily impacts show up on Savannah's arterials and in Savannah's neighborhoods. Consequently, land use decisions made within the municipal limits of Savannah have secondary effects on regional freight mobility and commuter traffic. Without adequate workforce housing near employment centers, the labor shed umbrella gets pushed further out, increasing reliance on our regional arterials.

The Land Use Element must be viewed, from one perspective, as an economic development tool to align zoning to allow for workforce housing density, while protecting the viability of the regional labor market and circulation system.

Positive Existing Patterns:

- Historic downtown and riverfront mixed-use development with walkability, density, and cultural vitality
- Established neighborhoods (Victory Drive, Waters Avenue, mid-town, West Savannah) with human-scale blocks, mixed housing, and local retail
- Port and logistics infrastructure supporting regional trade and employment
- Robust system of parks and open spaces, from urban parks (Forsyth, Daffin, Bonaventure) to regional trails and conservation areas
- Diverse institutional anchors (universities, hospitals, government) distributed throughout the region

Challenging Existing Patterns:

- Dispersed, low-density suburban expansion at the urban fringe consuming agricultural land and natural areas, diminished rural character
- Auto-oriented commercial corridors (Abercorn, DeRenne, Victory, Waters) with frontage roads, large parking lots, and fragmented parcels
- Downtown and inner-city disinvestment with vacant buildings, underutilized properties, and limited housing options
- Racial and class segregation persisting from historical policies; disparities in investment, services, and opportunity
- Industrial–residential conflicts in Environmental Justice communities adjacent to the Port of Savannah, warehousing, and heavy industry
- Limited transit connectivity; high car dependency despite density in urban core
- Past unsystematic governance across multiple jurisdictions limiting coordinated land use and infrastructure planning

Employment Centers and Drivers of Economic Development

While traditional sectors such as tourism, healthcare, and retail remain vital, future land use patterns are increasingly defined by the logistics landscape; a structural economic shift driven by the continued dominance of the Port of Savannah and the regionalization of industry associated with the Hyundai Metaplant.

Employment centers are no longer viewed in isolation but are integrated into the *Strategic Nodes and Corridors* framework. These areas are identified as "Employment/Freight Nodes" and "Regional Mixed-Use Nodes" based on their concentration of jobs, industrial output, and role within the regional labor shed. These nodes are critical not only for their economic output but for their profound pressure on the region's land supply, transportation networks, and housing stock, requiring coordination to manage the friction between industrial traffic and neighborhood safety.

Major Employment Centers		
Major Employment Sector (Proportion of MSA Employment)	Major Employers Chatham County Exclusively	Description of Activity
Logistics, Warehousing, Retail Trade, Transportation & Utilities 24.20%	Georgia Ports Authority	Seaport terminal operations; largest single-terminal container facility in North America.
	Target Distribution Center	Import warehousing and regional retail distribution.
	Walmart Distribution Center	Regional distribution hub for retail goods.
	Colonial Group, Inc.	Diversified energy, chemicals, and logistics; headquarters operations.
	Dollar Tree Distribution	Large-scale retail distribution logistics.
Education & Health Services Medicine, Higher Ed 13.90%	Memorial Health (HCA)	Region's largest private employer; Level 1 Trauma Center & Teaching Hospital.
	St. Joseph's / Candler	Health system specializing in cardiac, cancer, and outpatient services.
	Savannah-Chatham Co. Public Schools	Public K-12 education system (Largest county-wide employer).
	SCAD (Savannah College of Art & Design)	Private university for creative careers; major real estate holder.
Leisure & Hospitality Tourism, Dining, Accommodations 14.1%	The Landings Club	Private luxury golf and country club community operations.
	Various Hotel Groups	(Marriott, Westin, etc.) Supporting 17.3+ million visitors annually.

Major Employment Sector (Proportion of MSA Employment)	Major Employers Chatham County Exclusively	Description of Activity
Manufacturing Aerospace, Industrial 12.30%	Gulfstream Aerospace	Jet aircraft manufacturing, R&D, and maintenance (Largest employer).
	JCB North America	Manufacture of construction and agricultural heavy equipment (HQ).
	International Paper	Paper products, linerboard, and pulp production.
	Mitsubishi Power Americas	Manufacture of gas turbines and power generation equipment.
	Derst Baking Company	Large-scale commercial bakery (Nature's Own, Sunbeam).
Government Federal, Local, Defense 12.50%	Hunter Army Airfield	Military airfield, training, and logistics support (Part of Ft. Stewart complex).
	City of Savannah	Municipal services, police, fire, water, and administration.
	Chatham County Government	County administration, sheriff, courts, and engineering.

Figure 4.2 – Major Employment Centers

Managing Growth

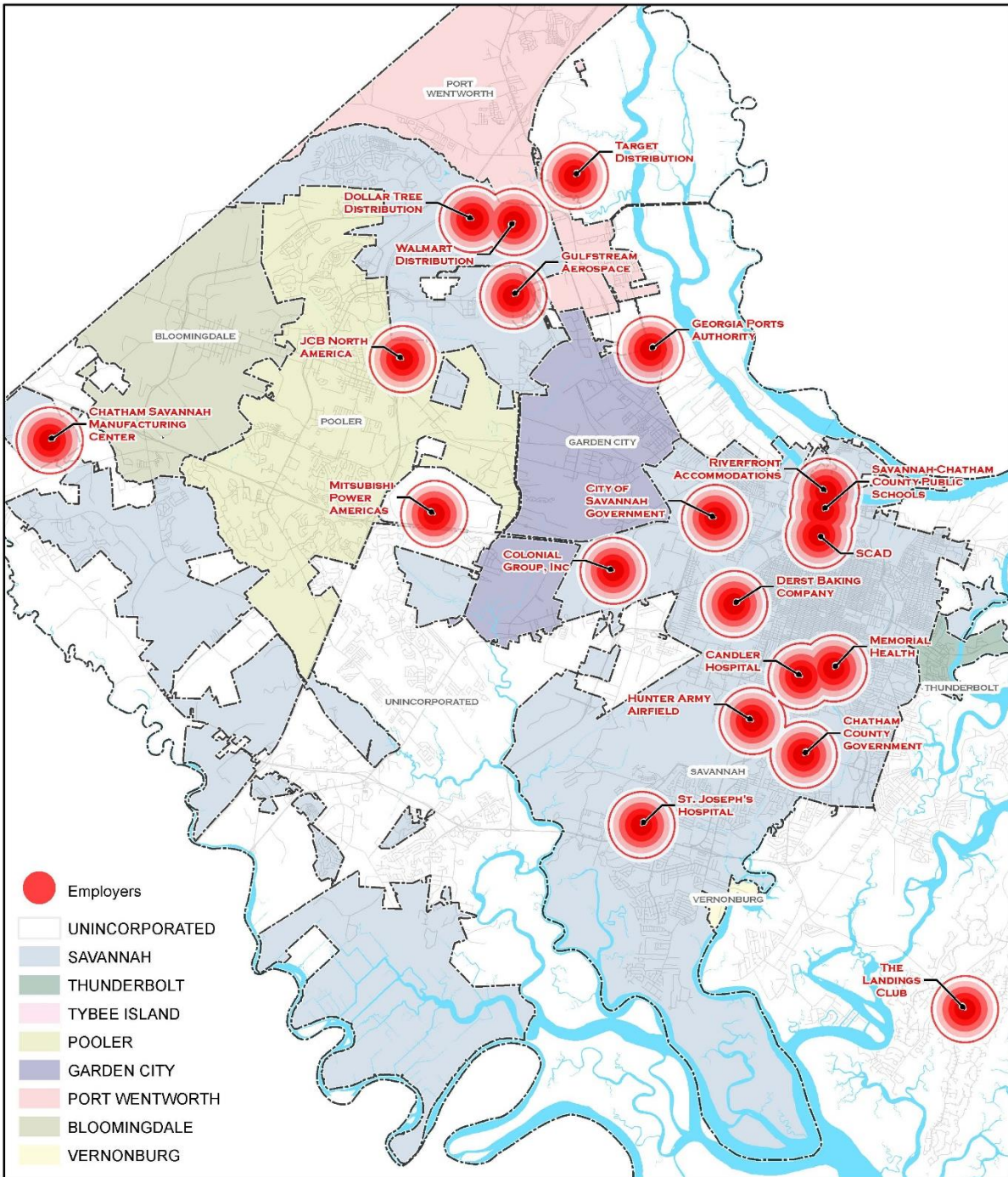
Unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah will accommodate substantial population and employment growth through the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update period. Without guiding principles, growth tends to extend outward as low-density, auto-oriented development, converting greenfields, adding pressure on infrastructure and community services, and intensifying fiscal, environmental, and coastal hazard risks.

Suburban Growth Issues

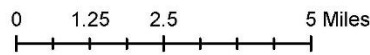
The strategic nodes and corridors approach responds to specific costs and risks associated with historic outward expansion growth trends in a coastal metropolitan county:

1. **Fiscal and infrastructure costs:** Low-density development requires more lane-miles, utilities, stormwater facilities, and emergency service coverage per resident. Over time, this produces higher operations and maintenance costs per unit of tax base and increases long-term liabilities for local governments.
2. **Congestion and freight conflicts:** Job growth in freight-intensive nodes (ports, logistics, manufacturing, warehousing) has outpaced housing production, requiring more workers to commute longer distances on regional corridors such as I-16, I-95, SR 21, SR 204, and US 80. This compounds congestion, increases truck–passenger conflicts, and undermines reliability for goods movement.
3. **Housing affordability and workforce access:** The Coastal Regional Housing Report documents rising housing costs, high renter cost burden, and limited availability of homes affordable at 80% of Area Median Income (AMI) across Chatham County and the City of Savannah, despite relatively strong regional incomes and a diverse housing stock.

Expansion pushes new workforce housing farther from job centers and transit, raising total transportation and housing costs.



mpc CHATHAM COUNTY - SAVANNAH METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION



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Exhibit 4.4 – Savannah-Chatham County: Employment Centers

4. **Coastal hazard and climate risk:** The Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies flood, tropical cyclones, sea level rise, and erosion as high-priority hazards. Sea level at Fort Pulaski is rising at approximately 3.66 mm/year, with an estimated 0.87 feet of rise by 2050 and at least 4 feet by 2100 under intermediate scenarios. Large areas of the barrier islands, marshes, and low-lying coastal tracts are vulnerable to chronic tidal flooding, storm surge, and long-term inundation. Spreading new development into these areas increases future disaster exposure and recovery costs.
5. **Loss of natural systems and rural character:** Continued loss of forest and wetland acreage and increases in high-intensity development in Chatham County further erodes natural buffers, marsh migration corridors, and rural vistas.

The Strategic Nodes and Corridors framework directly addresses these concerns by concentrating growth where infrastructure, transit, and hazard conditions can support it, while preserving environmentally sensitive and hazardous coastal lands for conservation, recreation, and lower-intensity uses.

Strategic Nodes and Corridors

The Strategic Nodes and Corridors framework is the Savannah and Chatham County's primary growth management strategy for the 2050 planning horizon. It focuses most new development, redevelopment, and infrastructure investment into:

- **Strategic Nodes** – a limited set of high-intensity, mixed-use centers and critical employment hubs; and
- **Strategic Corridors** – higher-order streets and highways that connect these nodes to each other and to the wider region.

This framework:

- Implements the "Strong Corridors" approach from *Plan 2040* and subsequent housing and freight planning efforts, which call for compact, walkable development along major transportation corridors and key nodes rather than continued outward sprawl.
- Aligns future land use, zoning, and capital projects with the multimodal investments identified in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and the CORE MPO Regional Freight Transportation Plan Update.
- Directs workforce housing and mixed-use infill to locations with adequate street and transit capacity, while maintaining buffers and separations from heavy industrial and high-risk coastal hazard areas.

In practice, this means that walkable mixed-use nodes along well-connected corridors become the default pattern for new greenfield planned developments and infill in traditional neighborhoods. While dispersed, low-density expansion at the fringe is discouraged.

Typology and Identification of Strategic Nodes and Corridors

For the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update, strategic nodes and corridors are organized into a clear typology to guide future land use, zoning, and capital programming. The following nested table structure organizes the strategic growth framework for the 2050 planning horizon, progressing from general classification to specific location identification and policy descriptors:

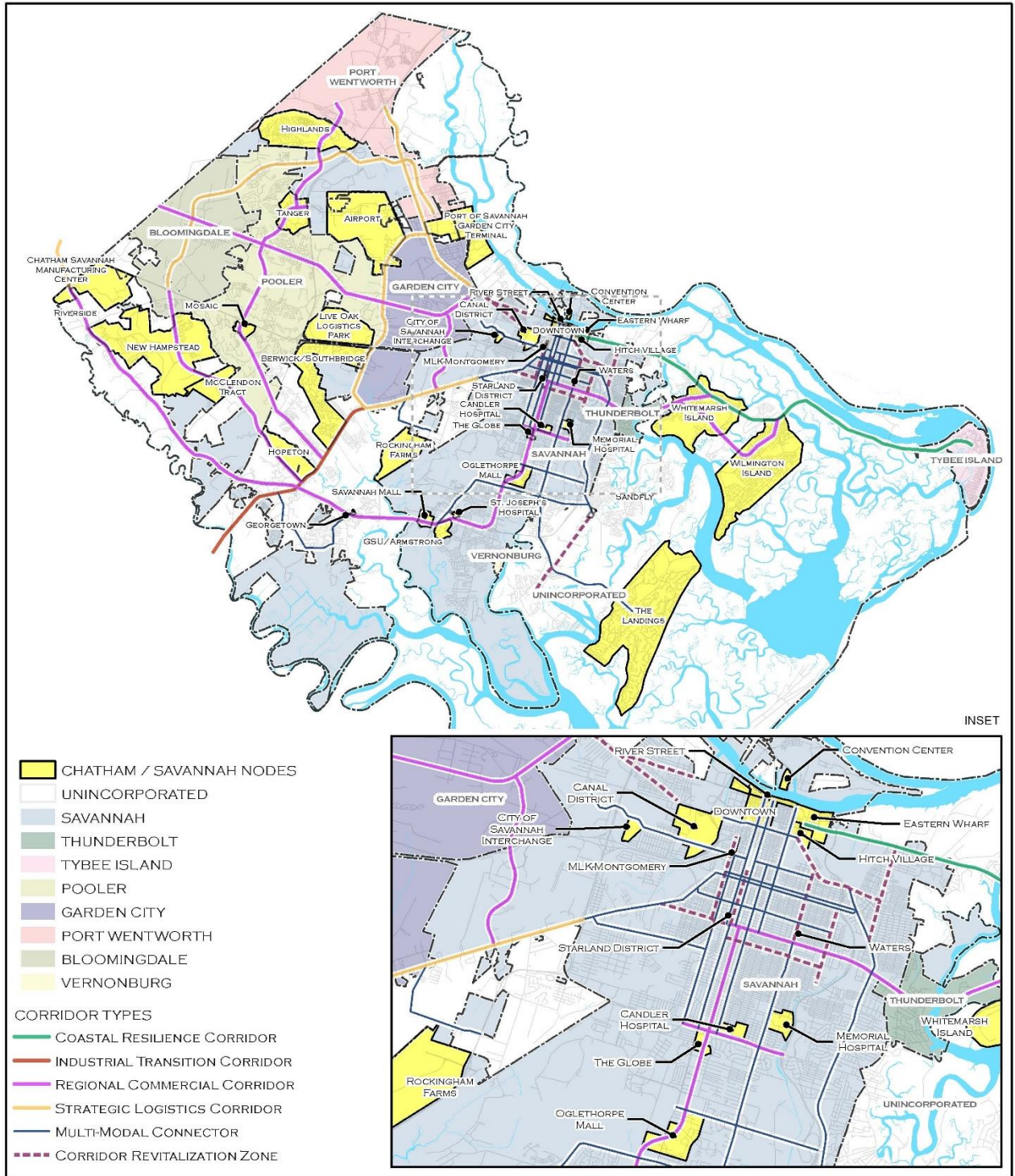
Strategic Nodes and Corridors			
	Typology	Designated Location	Special Descriptors
Strategic Nodes	Regional Mixed-Use Nodes		Historic preservation /coastal hazard resilience
	High-intensity, transit - supportive centers combining employment, higher-density housing (including workforce housing), retail, institutional uses, and civic spaces. Logical locations for mid- and high-rise development under appropriate zoning	Downtown Savannah / Eastern Wharf	Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets Workforce housing Tourism anchor with 18,767+ hotel rooms
		Canal District	Workforce housing Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets Emerging node with arena anchor Resilient design / floodplain management
		Oglethorpe Mall / Southside Regional Center	Workforce housing Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets First-last mile connectivity to job centers Auto-oriented retrofit toward walkable mixed-use
		Savannah Mall – GSU Armstrong / Southside Medical– University Node	Workforce housing (healthcare/education workers) First-last mile connectivity to job centers Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets Campus-adjacent mixed-use neighborhoods
		Community Mixed-Use Nodes	
	Medium-scale centers serving clusters of neighborhoods with a mix of commercial, institutional, and medium-density housing, typically at key intersections along strategic corridors.	West Savannah / MLK– Montgomery Node	Equitable development / community benefit agreements Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Cultural heritage preservation

	Typology	Designated Location	Special Descriptors	
Strategic Nodes	Employment / Freight Nodes	Port of Savannah / Garden City Terminal–Ocean Terminal	Environmental justice / buffering protections	
	Concentrations of port, industrial, logistics, warehousing, and advanced manufacturing activity, often anchored by interstate and freight rail access. Primarily employment-focused with tight controls on residential encroachment.		Rockingham Farms	Freight capacity / grade separation priority Limited residential with substantial buffering required 561,000 regional jobs supported
				First-last mile connectivity to job centers Residential incompatibility without robust buffering Transition to employment-dense industrial uses encouraged Air quality / noise protections required
	Savannah Chatham Manufacturing Center / Old River Road Node	Limited residential only with industrial impact mitigation Advanced manufacturing preservation Freight network access (I-16, I-95) Transportation capacity coordination		
		Emerging Greenfield Nodes	Workforce housing (diverse types beyond single-family)	
	Large, master-planned areas at the urban edge with zoning and infrastructure potential to evolve into complete, mixed-use communities with internal street networks and diverse housing types.	Highlands / I-95 – Jimmy DeLoach Node		Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets (internal networks) First-last mile connectivity to job centers Buffering from logistics/warehouse districts
		New Hampstead		Workforce housing priority Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets / greenway systems Walkable blocks and mixed-use centers Infrastructure capacity coordination
Strategic Corridors	Regional Mixed-Use Corridors	Abercorn Street / SR 204	Auto-oriented strip conversion to walkable centers Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets retrofit Workforce housing infill Transit-ready (high frequency)	
	High-capacity arterials with significant transit potential and redevelopment opportunities, where corridor-scale mixed-use intensification and complete streets retrofits are prioritized.		DeRenne Avenue	Workforce housing (medium-intensity mixed-use) Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Transit / bike / pedestrian access Institutional corridor support

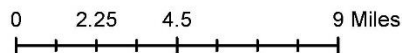
Strategic Nodes and Corridors			
	Typology	Designated Location	Special Descriptors
Strategic Corridors		MLK Jr Boulevard / Montgomery Street	Workforce housing with equitable development strategies Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Transit-ready, walkable urban format Adaptive reuse / anti-displacement tools
		Bull Street	Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Historic mixed-use corridor preservation Incremental infill with pedestrian priority Traditional urban form reinforcement
		Victory Drive (US 80 urban segment)	Workforce housing (corridor housing emphasis) Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets retrofit Small-scale centers at key intersections Mixed-use redevelopment
	Freight and Employment Corridors		Freight capacity/safety/access management priority First-last mile connectivity to job centers Limited residential or substantial buffering required Environmental justice/air quality protections
	Corridors that primarily move goods and connect major employment/ freight nodes to I-16, I-95, the port, and the airport. Require freight compatible design, intersection improvements, and careful management of sensitive uses	SR 21 / Jimmy DeLoach Corridor	
		Ogeechee Road / US 17	Context-sensitive mixed-use in appropriate segments Industrial-residential separation maintained Legacy industrial cluster respect Southwest growth corridor
		Quacco Road Fort Argyle Road (SR 204 West) New Hampstead Approaches	Workforce housing aligned with nodes Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Walkable mixed-use center emphasis Infrastructure capacity before build-out

Strategic Nodes and Corridors			
	Typology	Designated Location	Special Descriptors
Strategic Corridors	Coastal Corridors	President Street / Islands Expressway	Environmentally sensitive (flood/storm surge risk)
	Regional gateways and evacuation routes in coastal hazard zones requiring special resilience considerations and development limitations.		Pedestrian connectivity / complete streets Resilient building forms (elevated) Transit links with limited greenfield expansion
		US 80 (Tybee corridor)	Environmentally sensitive (coastal hazard/evacuation route) Development limitations in highest-risk segments Resilient infill focus in existing communities Dual-purpose evacuation/access corridor
	Neighborhood Connectors and Retrofits	Waters Avenue	Workforce housing (missing middle) Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets
	Corridors connecting neighborhoods to strategic nodes and corridors, often targeted for "suburban retrofit," missing-middle infill, and pedestrian/bicycle enhancements.	Augusta Avenue	Suburban retrofit priorities Neighborhood-scale mixed-use Workforce housing (missing-middle) Pedestrian connectivity/complete streets Suburban retrofit priorities Neighborhood-scale mixed-use
<p>Table Notes and Implementation Guidance:</p> <p><i>Workforce Housing:</i> Locations prioritized for housing affordable to households earning 80–120% Area Median Income (AMI)</p> <p><i>Pedestrian Connectivity/Complete Streets:</i> Areas requiring or incentivized for continuous sidewalks, safe crossings, multimodal facilities, and walkable block patterns</p> <p><i>First-Last Mile Connectivity to Job Centers:</i> Locations requiring enhanced transit, bicycle, and pedestrian links between residential areas and major employment concentrations</p> <p><i>Environmentally Sensitive:</i> Areas subject to coastal hazards (flood, storm surge, sea level rise), wetlands, or other environmental constraints requiring special design standards</p>			

Figure 4.3 – Savannah-Chatham County: Strategic Nodes and Corridors



CHATHAM COUNTY - SAVANNAH
METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION



Date: 3/18/2025



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Exhibit 4.5 – Savannah-Chatham County: Strategic Nodes and Corridors Map

Character Areas

The Character Area Map (CAM) identifies the land use character vision for Chatham County. The CAM is intended to work in coordination with the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) to establish a cohesive, countywide framework that guides responsible growth, reinvestment, and conservation over the next twenty years, with particular emphasis on development patterns influenced by major transportation corridors.

The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update builds upon the Character Area framework established in Plan 2040 by refining how land use character is described and applied across the county. While the CAM does not assign specific land use classifications or zoning, it provides policy guidance regarding the form, intensity, and organization of development, especially in areas shaped by existing and emerging corridor conditions. When considered together, the CAM and FLUM support informed decision making related to land development inquiries and long-term planning initiatives.

The CAM is not intended to deviate from the adopted land use goals of other municipalities within Chatham County that maintain separate planning programs. Rather, this countywide framework seeks to support municipal objectives while recognizing that land use patterns, infrastructure investments, and environmental systems extend across jurisdictional boundaries. The CAM therefore emphasizes alignment along shared corridors and edges, while focusing more directly on areas within unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah.

Character Areas are designed to capture the diversity of development patterns found throughout Chatham County and to expand upon the single use land categorization represented on the FLUM. Rather than identifying individual land uses, Character Areas describe places that may contain a mix of uses but share common defining characteristics such as development intensity, transportation orientation, parcel structure, and access to infrastructure or environmental resources. This approach is particularly important in corridor contexts, where land use character often evolves incrementally in response to mobility, access, and reinvestment pressures.

As corridor-based growth continues to shape development patterns across the county, some locations within broader Character Areas may experience distinct redevelopment pressures or opportunities that warrant more refined guidance. In these cases, Sub Areas are used to recognize locations where corridor conditions, parcel size, or infrastructure capacity support a different long-term evolution than surrounding areas. Sub Areas do not replace the underlying Character Area designation, nor do they establish new regulatory requirements. Instead, they provide additional policy direction to guide reinvestment and change in a manner consistent with the County's corridor focused growth strategy.

There are four primary Character Area categories, each with delineated land use designations. These are described on the following pages:

- Environmentally Sensitive
- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban

Development Factors

Character Areas are defined through a consistent set of Development Factors that reflect existing conditions and anticipated growth trends. These factors provide a framework for evaluating compatibility and appropriateness of future land use decisions, particularly in relation to transportation corridors and supporting infrastructure. The Development Factors used to describe each Character Area include:

- Primary and secondary uses
- Typical density ranges
- Transportation orientation and roadway classification
- Parking and utility characteristics
- Open space and environmental features

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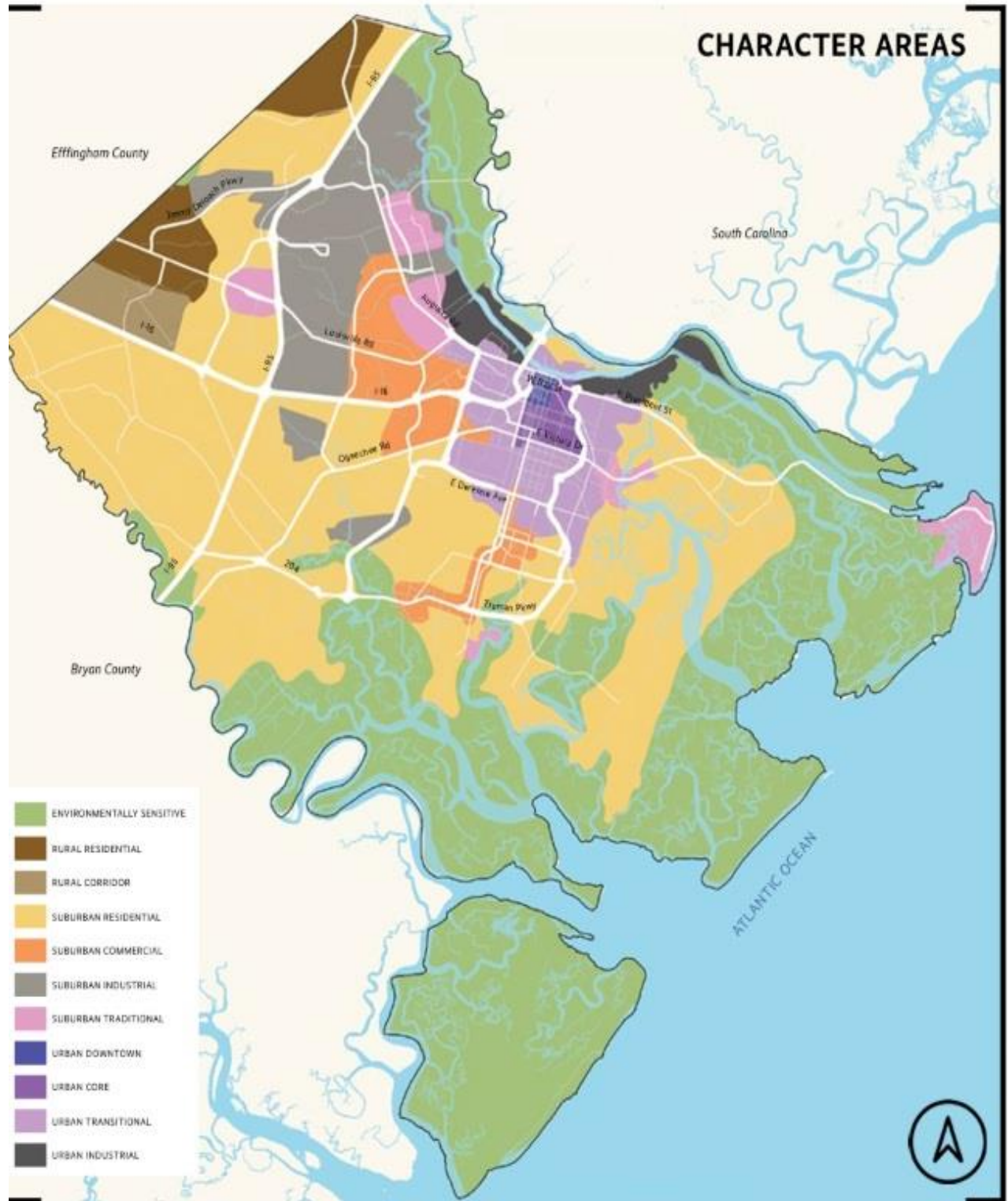


Exhibit 4.6 – Savannah-Chatham County: Character Areas

Character Area Categories

Environmentally Sensitive Character Area

Environmentally Sensitive character areas include lands designated for preservation or conservation, as well as areas containing natural features that are especially vulnerable to the impacts of development. These areas include rivers, wetlands, marshes, floodplains, and woodlands, along with sites protected at the local, state, or national level, such as Ossabaw Island, Wormsloe Historic Site, and Wassaw National Wildlife Refuge. Large portions of this character area are associated with major river systems, including the Moon, Ogeechee, Savannah, and Wilmington Rivers.



Exhibit 4.7 – Savannah-Chatham County: Environmentally Sensitive Character Area

These areas are defined by natural systems that are integral to the county's environmental health and are highly sensitive to disturbance. Development within and adjacent to Environmentally Sensitive character areas can affect not only ecological resources, but also public safety and quality of life by exacerbating environmental hazards such as flooding, degraded water quality, temperature extremes, and extreme weather impacts. As a result, land use decisions in these areas should prioritize resource protection, resilience, and long-term environmental health.

While many parks and open spaces are located within Environmentally Sensitive character areas, not all open space or recreational lands fall exclusively within this designation. In some cases, open space and recreational lands are embedded within other Character Areas and serve complementary roles. Regardless of location, any development occurring within or near an Environmentally Sensitive character area should incorporate appropriate measures to protect natural systems, minimize disturbance, maintain landscape continuity, and reduce vulnerability to environmental risks.

Suburban Character Areas

Suburban character areas are generally lower density areas shaped by the prevalence and accommodation of the automobile. These areas typically feature separated land uses, with residential development distinct from commercial and industrial activity. Detached single family homes are common, along with smaller scale multifamily residential development. Commercial uses, including retail and office clusters, are often organized in centers or along major thoroughfares and highway interchanges, frequently in strip malls supported by surface parking.

Suburban character areas include many locations that are expected to experience continued population growth and redevelopment pressure, particularly along major transportation corridors. While established residential neighborhoods within suburban areas are generally expected to remain stable, commercial corridors and large format sites may evolve over time in response to changing market conditions, infrastructure investments, and mobility needs. Future development within suburban character areas should emphasize efficient use of existing infrastructure, improved connectivity along corridors, and thoughtful transitions between different land use intensities. The impact of logistics-based industry vehicular and rail traffic on residential neighborhoods and commuting have been identified in the Community Participation Program as a particularly negative circumstance to be considered in future land use decisions.

As suburban areas continue to mature, reinvestment opportunities are increasingly shaped by corridor conditions, parcel size, and access to regional transportation networks. Planning efforts in these areas should focus on enhancing the public realm where appropriate, improving multimodal circulation along major roadways, and guiding redevelopment in a manner that strengthens surrounding neighborhoods while maintaining the overall suburban context.

Suburban Residential

Suburban Residential character areas include low to medium density residential development that is primarily dependent on the automobile. These areas are typically characterized by detached and attached single family homes on individual lots, as well as residential subdivisions with relatively uniform housing types, lot sizes, and development patterns. In some locations, smaller scale multifamily development, such as garden apartments or townhomes, may also be present.

Local street networks within Suburban Residential areas often follow curvilinear patterns, with cul de sacs, limited connectivity, and sidewalks that may be intermittent or absent. These patterns reflect the era in which many suburban neighborhoods were developed and contribute to their distinct physical character. Suburban Residential areas frequently function as stable, long-established neighborhoods that provide a significant share of the County's housing stock.

Where Suburban Residential areas are located adjacent to Suburban Commercial areas or major transportation corridors, future planning efforts should emphasize compatibility, buffering, and appropriate transitions in scale and intensity. To the extent feasible, neighborhoods should be designed or retrofitted to support internal connectivity, access to nearby services, and safe pedestrian and bicycle movement within the surrounding suburban context.

Suburban Residential - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Single family residential (detached and attached)
SECONDARY USES	Small scale multifamily residential, neighborhood serving commercial uses, civic and institutional facilities, neighborhood parks
DENSITY	Low to medium; 3 to 5 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Automobile oriented; limited public transit access
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials
PARKING	Off street parking, private driveways, garages
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities; some individual or community utility systems
OPEN SPACE	Neighborhood parks, community and regional parks, greenspaces, waterways, golf courses

Figure 4.5 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Residential Development Factors

A range of housing options should continue to be supported within Suburban Residential character areas to respond to changing household needs, including multigenerational households, seniors, and individuals seeking alternatives to traditional single-family homes. Such housing diversity should be introduced in a manner that respects existing neighborhood character and infrastructure capacity.

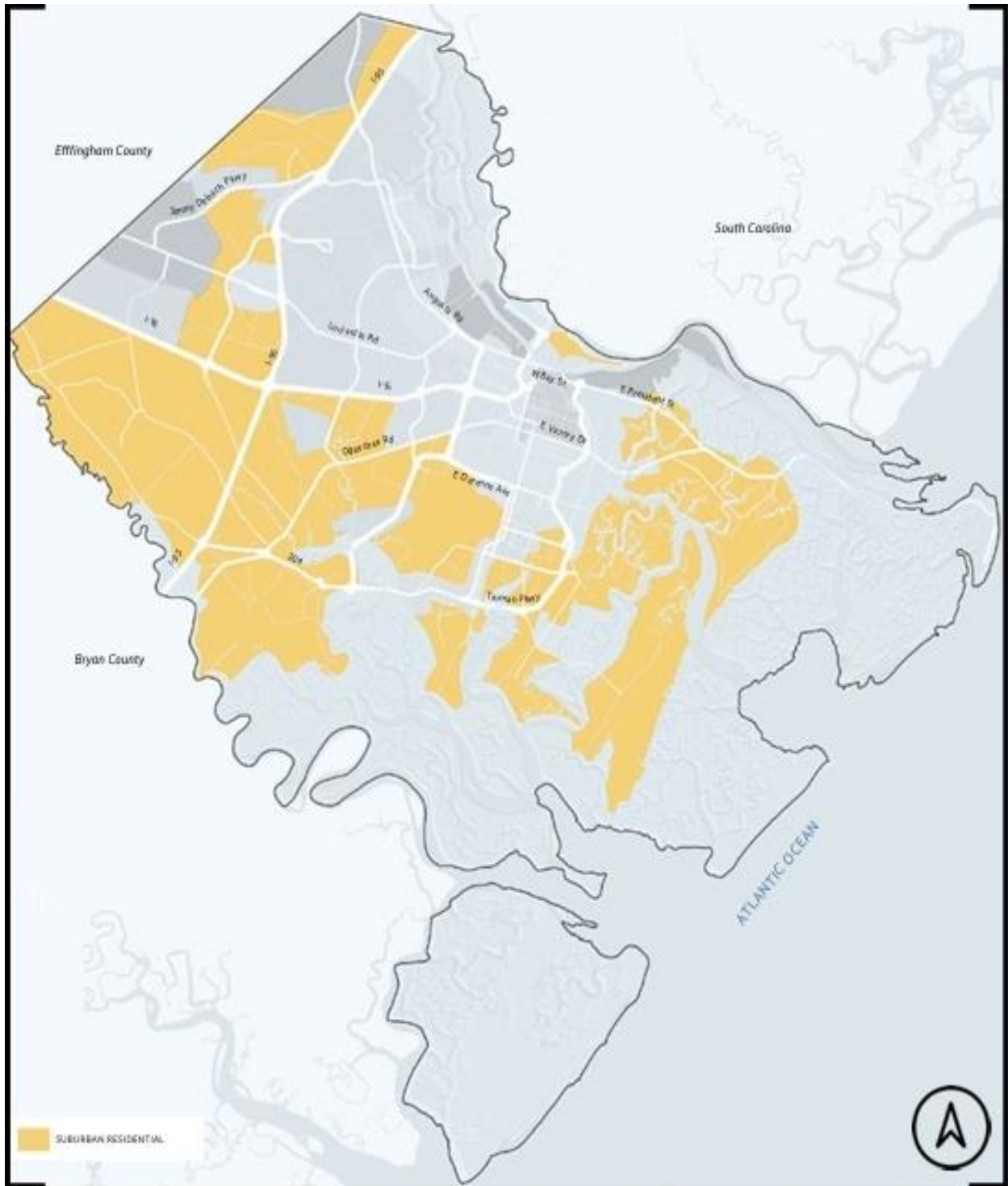


Exhibit 4.8 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Residential Character Area

Suburban Commercial

Suburban Commercial character areas are predominantly automobile oriented commercial districts that serve community and regional shopping and service needs. These areas are typically located along major transportation corridors and highways, including arterial roadways and interchanges such as Abercorn Street, U.S. 80, and Interstate 16. Development within this character area commonly includes shopping centers, malls, office buildings, and large format retail uses supported by surface parking and high visibility frontage.

Over time, many Suburban Commercial areas have experienced changing market conditions and evolving retail formats. As a result, some sites may undergo reinvestment or incremental change; however, most Suburban Commercial areas are expected to continue functioning primarily as single use commercial districts. Future development and reinvestment should prioritize efficient site layout, access management, internal circulation, and compatibility with surrounding land uses.

New and redeveloping commercial centers should emphasize site design strategies that reduce the visual and functional dominance of surface parking, improve circulation, and enhance the public realm. Approaches may include placing parking toward the interior of sites, improving pedestrian connections along corridor frontages, and incorporating landscape or civic elements where feasible.

Suburban Commercial - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Regional Commercial, Neighborhood Commercial
SECONDARY USES	Small scale apartment buildings, single family residential, office, civic and institutional facilities
DENSITY	Low, 3 to 12 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Automobile oriented
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials, expressways
PARKING	Off street, surface parking
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities, some individual and community utility systems
OPEN SPACE	Community and regional parks

Figure 4.6 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Commercial Development Factors

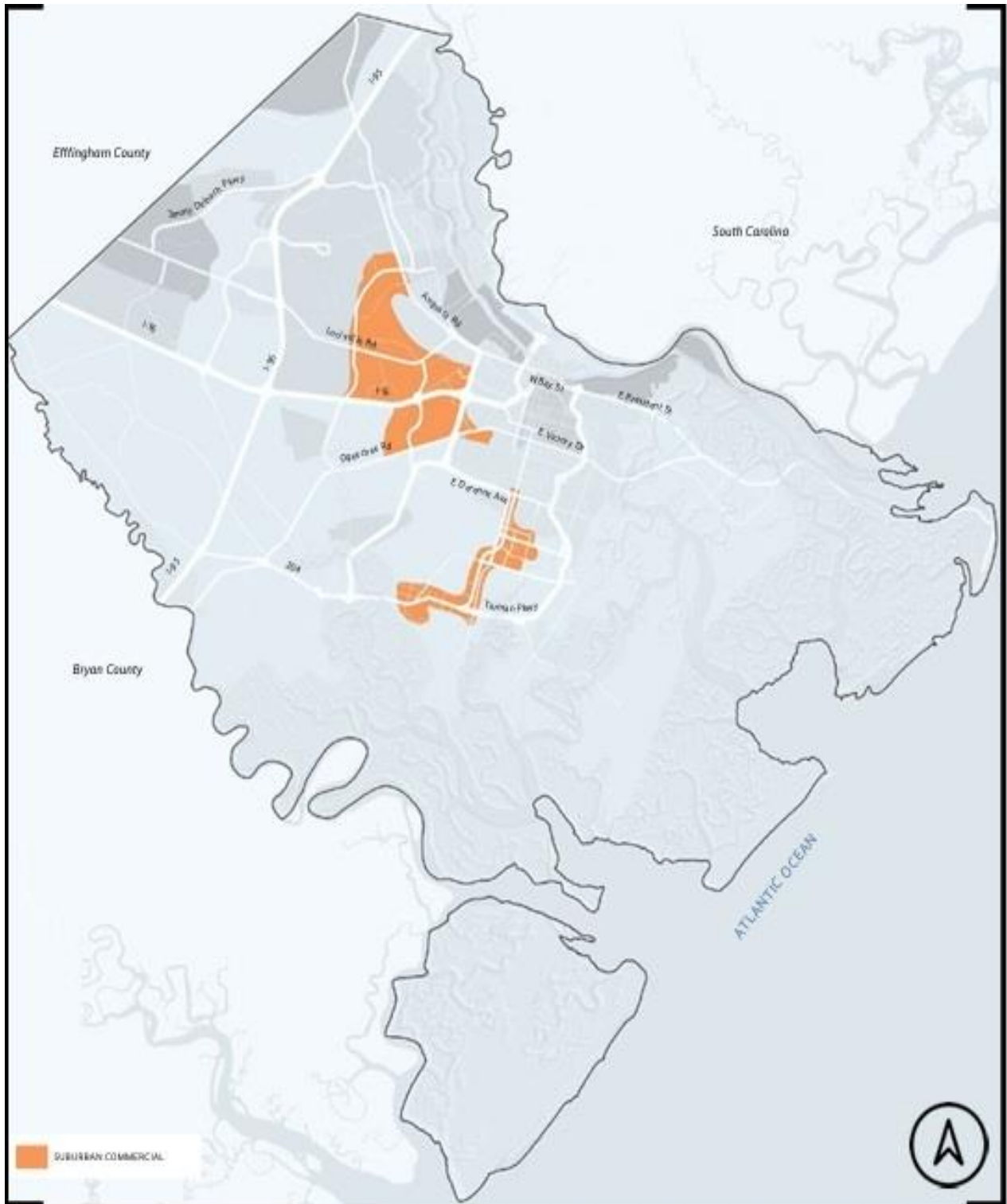


Exhibit 4.9 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Commercial Character Area

Suburban Commercial, Mixed Use Redevelopment Sub Area

Within the broader Suburban Commercial character area, select locations exhibit conditions that support long term transformation beyond conventional suburban commercial patterns. These areas are typically anchored by large regional shopping centers, major corridor intersections, or underutilized commercial parcels, and they possess the parcel size, infrastructure capacity, and corridor access necessary to accommodate more intensive redevelopment.

The Suburban Commercial, Mixed Use Redevelopment Sub Area identifies locations where a transition toward integrated, mixed use development is appropriate over time. Unlike other Suburban Commercial areas that are expected to remain primarily single use commercial districts, redevelopment within this sub area is envisioned to occur through suburban retrofit, including the introduction of residential, employment, and civic uses; improved internal street networks; shared or structured parking solutions; and enhanced pedestrian connectivity.

Suburban Commercial Mixed-Use Redevelopment Sub Area	
PRIMARY USES	Mixed use development including residential, commercial, office, entertainment, and civic uses
SECONDARY USES	Structured parking, hotels, mid scale apartment buildings, public spaces, green infrastructure
DENSITY	Redevelopment range, 20 to 35 units per acre, higher intensity may be considered through planned redevelopment
TRANSPORTATION	Multimodal oriented, improved pedestrian circulation, enhanced access to transit and corridors
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials, expressways, introduction of new internal streets and block structure
PARKING	Combination of structured parking, shared parking, and limited surface parking
UTILITIES	Fully supported by municipal utilities, capacity planning may be needed for intensified mixed use development
OPEN SPACE	Public plazas, pocket parks, greenways, enhanced streetscapes, and integrated civic space

Figure 4.7 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Commercial Mixed-Use Redevelopment Sub-Area

This sub area does not replace the underlying Suburban Commercial character area, nor does it establish new regulatory requirements. Instead, it provides refined policy guidance for locations where redevelopment can support more efficient land use, improved corridor function, and the absorption of growth in a manner that maintains appropriate transitions to surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Suburban Industrial

Suburban Industrial character areas are defined by large footprint buildings and employment focused uses that require substantial land area, regional access, and separation from residential neighborhoods. These areas typically accommodate warehousing, light industrial, manufacturing, logistics, office support functions, and specialized uses such as Airport related facilities or landfills.

A significant portion of the Suburban Industrial character area is located along major regional transportation corridors, including areas between Interstate 95 and Dean Forest Road and extending northward toward the Savannah River. These locations benefit from direct access to interstate highways, freight networks, and Port and Airport related infrastructure, reinforcing their role within the regional economy.

Suburban Industrial - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Warehousing, light industrial, manufacturing, logistics, distribution, landfill
SECONDARY USES	Office support uses, aviation related facilities, ancillary commercial uses serving industrial operations
DENSITY	Not applicable; large footprint, employment focused development
TRANSPORTATION	Automobile and freight oriented; limited public transit
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials, expressways
PARKING	Off street, surface parking; service and loading areas
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities and private utility systems
OPEN SPACE	Undeveloped greenspace, buffers, stormwater areas, waterways

Figure 4.8 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Industrial Development Factors

Given the scale and intensity of development within Suburban Industrial areas, site design and landscaping play an important role in minimizing impacts on adjacent properties and public rights of way. Landscaping, buffering, and building orientation should be used to screen service areas, loading docks, and large parking fields, particularly where industrial uses are located near residential or commercial areas.

Suburban Industrial areas often function as major employment centers within the County. As such, future planning efforts should consider opportunities to improve transportation connectivity for employees where feasible, while maintaining the operational needs and economic function of industrial uses.

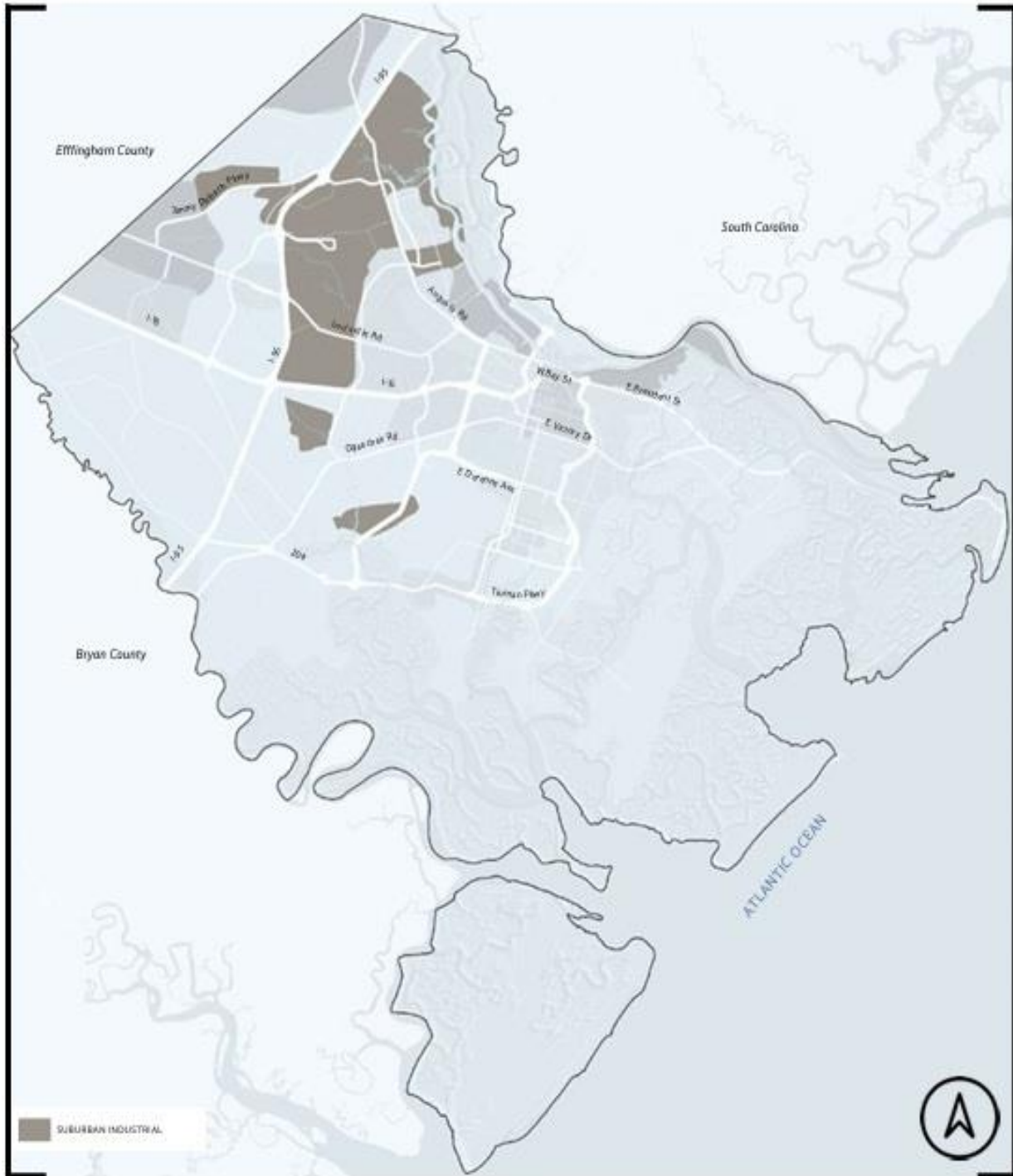


Exhibit 4.10 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Industrial Character Area

Suburban Traditional

Suburban Traditional character areas include established neighborhoods that reflect a more urban pattern of development within a suburban context. These areas are typically characterized by gridded or semi gridded street networks, interconnected blocks, sidewalks, and buildings oriented toward the street. Development patterns in these areas predate many post war suburban subdivisions and reflect early to mid-twentieth century neighborhood forms.

Housing within Suburban Traditional areas is primarily composed of single-family homes, both detached and attached, with some blocks including small scale apartment buildings, duplexes, or townhouses. The existing housing stock, particularly older homes and historic structures, contributes significantly to neighborhood character and should be preserved, rehabilitated, and sensitively improved over time.

Opportunities for infill and redevelopment may exist on underutilized or vacant sites within Suburban Traditional areas. Such development should be compatible in scale, massing, and character with surrounding buildings, and should reinforce established street patterns, pedestrian orientation, and neighborhood scale.

Suburban Traditional - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Single family residential, detached and attached
SECONDARY USES	Small scale multifamily residential, neighborhood serving commercial and office uses, civic and institutional facilities
DENSITY	Low to medium; 6 to 20 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Automobile oriented with strong pedestrian connectivity; limited public transit
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors
PARKING	On street and off-street parking, private driveways, garages
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities
OPEN SPACE	Neighborhood parks, city parks, beaches, waterways

Figure 4.9 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Traditional Development Factors

A broader range of housing options, including accessory dwelling units, may be appropriate within Suburban Traditional areas to accommodate multigenerational households, seniors, small families, and changing housing needs, provided these additions respect existing neighborhood form and infrastructure capacity.

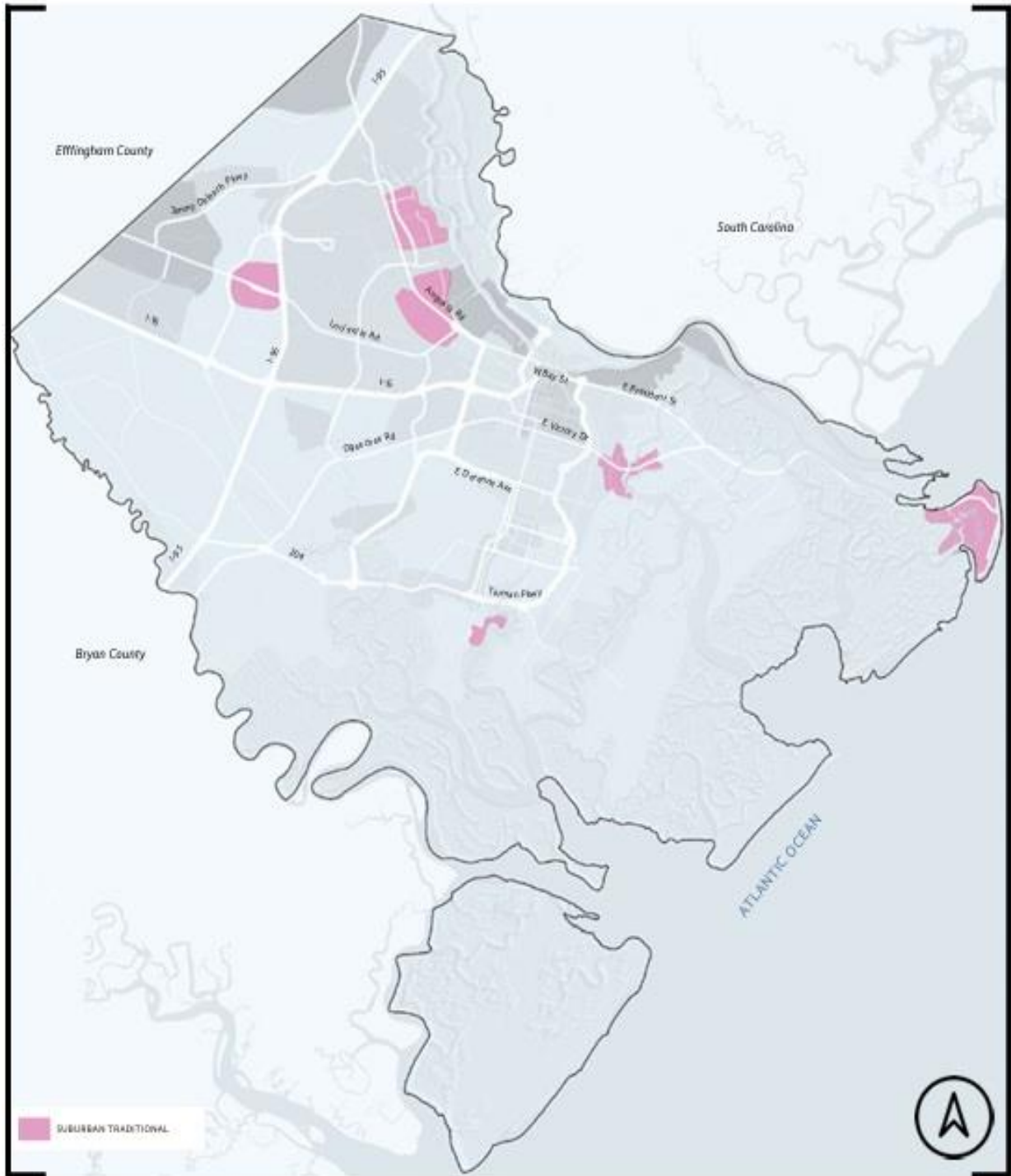


Exhibit 4.11 – Savannah-Chatham County: Suburban Traditional Character Area

Urban Character Areas

Urban character areas are defined by higher density development patterns and a concentration of mixed residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial uses. These areas include the historic downtown core of Savannah, established urban neighborhoods, Port related industrial areas, and transitional areas toward the edges of the urban core.

Urban character areas are positioned to accommodate a significant share of projected population and employment growth due to their access to services, jobs, infrastructure, and regional transportation systems. The future of these areas is shaped by infill development, adaptive reuse, and redevelopment that builds upon existing urban form. In transitional urban areas, growth is expected to occur through incremental change that reinforces established patterns while supporting continued economic activity and residential diversity.

Portions of Urban Character areas may be located adjacent to or overlap with lands designated as Environmentally Sensitive, as described earlier in this chapter. In such locations, development should be guided by the environmental constraints, preservation priorities, and resilience considerations associated with those areas.

Urban Downtown

The Urban Downtown character area encompasses Savannah's historic core, including local and National Register Landmark Historic Districts. The City's original grid network, established through early planning efforts and reinforced over time, continues to define block structure, development patterns, and the organization of public space. This Character Area is defined by its compact form, walkable scale, and concentration of residential, commercial, civic, and cultural activity.

Urban Downtown is characterized by a diverse mix of uses and building types, including midrise mixed use buildings, historic single and multifamily residences, townhomes, rowhouses, and institutional structures. Fine grained parcels, consistent street walls, and a strong relationship between buildings and public spaces contribute to the distinctive urban form of the downtown area. Public squares, green spaces, waterfront areas, and civic spaces play a central role in shaping the public realm and reinforcing downtown's identity.

The Urban Downtown area supports multimodal transportation, including pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and automobile movement, facilitated by an interconnected street grid. Due to its historic significance, established urban fabric, and regulatory framework, Urban Downtown operates within an intentionally constrained development context. While infill, adaptive reuse, and redevelopment opportunities may occur, the capacity for large scale or programmatically flexible development is inherently limited.

All development within the Urban Downtown character area is subject to applicable historic preservation ordinances and design review processes administered by the City of Savannah. These regulations ensure that reinvestment and change reinforce the historic, architectural, and spatial character of the downtown core while supporting continued vitality and use. Future development is expected to prioritize compatibility, context sensitive design, and the long-term stewardship of the historic urban environment.

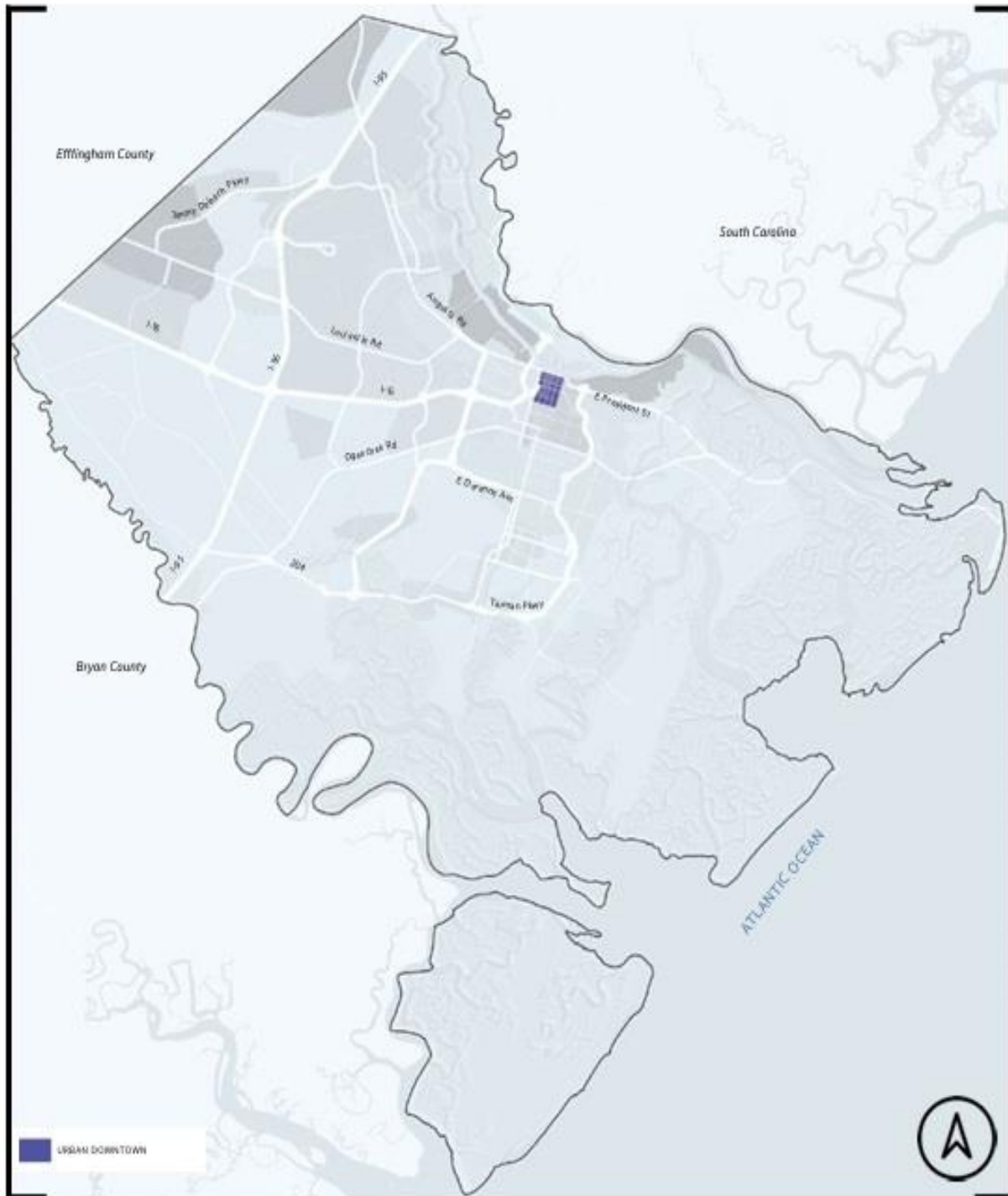


Exhibit 4.12 – Savannah-Chatham County: Urban Downtown Character Area

Urban Downtown - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Mixed use development, residential, commercial, civic and institutional uses, parks
SECONDARY USES	Office uses, parking structures, short term lodging and rentals where permitted
DENSITY	High, 20 to 40 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Interconnected street grid, multimodal transportation
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials
PARKING	On street parking, parking structures, limited private garages
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities
OPEN SPACE	Municipal parks, public squares, waterfront areas, cemeteries, limited private open space

Figure 4.10 – Savannah-Chatham County: Urban Downtown Development Factors

Urban Core

The Urban Core character area includes Savannah’s local and National Register Victorian and Streetcar Historic Districts, as well as adjacent historic neighborhoods within the City. These areas represent a compact, walkable urban form that developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and continues to define much of Savannah’s inner-city fabric.

Urban Core areas are characterized by a mix of detached and attached single family homes, mid-scale multifamily buildings, and small-scale neighborhood serving commercial uses. Street networks are typically well connected and supported by sidewalks, creating a strong pedestrian environment. Compared to the Urban Downtown character area, parcels are generally larger and building heights are lower, typically ranging from two to four stories, resulting in a more residentially scaled urban context.

Unlike the Urban Downtown, the Urban Core retains a greater capacity for infill and redevelopment. Future development in these areas should reinforce walkable densities, maintain compatibility with existing neighborhood character, and respect established patterns of massing, scale, and orientation. Infill and redevelopment should be designed to integrate seamlessly with surrounding buildings while supporting continued neighborhood vitality.

A range of housing options should be supported within the Urban Core to accommodate workers, students, seniors, small families, and multigenerational households. These additions should strengthen neighborhood stability, expand housing choice, and align with existing infrastructure capacity and historic context. The impact of short-term rental properties needs to be considered and monitored in this designation, which was an issue identified in the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update survey by the majority of residents.

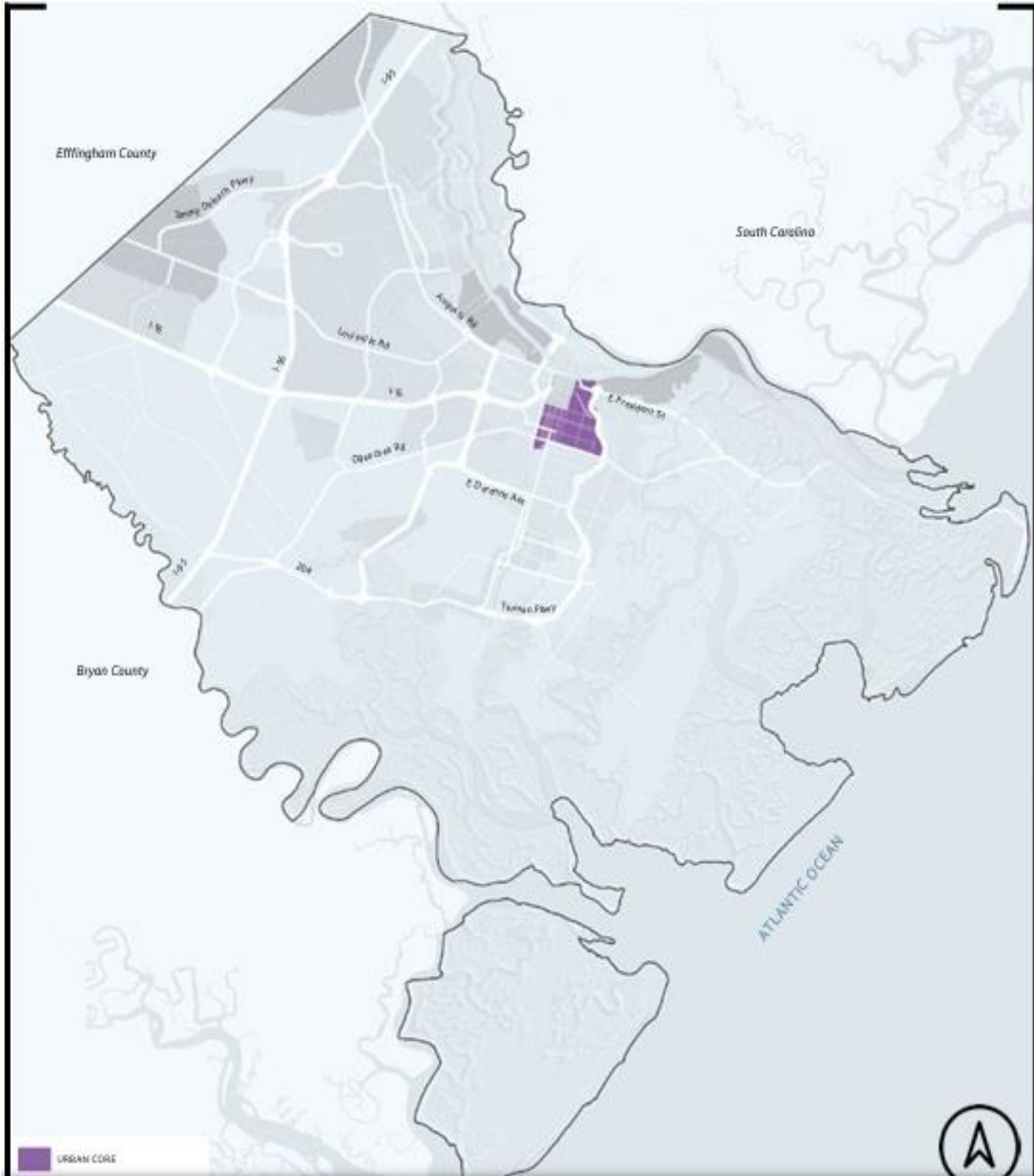


Exhibit 4.13 – Savannah-Chatham County: Urban Core Character Area

Urban Core - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Residential, including detached and attached single family and multifamily
SECONDARY USES	Neighborhood commercial, mixed use development, civic and institutional uses, short term lodging where permitted
DENSITY	Medium to high; 6 to 20 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Interconnected street grid; multimodal transportation
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials
PARKING	On street and off street parking; limited surface parking; private driveways
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities
OPEN SPACE	Municipal parks, public squares, cemeteries, waterfront areas

Figure 4.11 – Urban Core Development Factors

Urban Transitional

Urban Transitional character areas represent locations where development patterns shift between the historic urban fabric of the Urban Core and the more automobile oriented environments of suburban areas. These areas are often located along major corridors or at the edges of established urban neighborhoods and include a mix of residential, commercial, and institutional uses.

Urban Transitional areas typically contain detached and attached single family homes, small to mid-scale multifamily development, and neighborhood or corridor oriented commercial uses. While automobile access remains important, many of these areas retain walkable characteristics, including connected street networks, sidewalks, access to parks, and proximity to urban amenities. This combination of features reflects their role as transitional environments that support both urban and suburban functions.

Redevelopment and infill opportunities are more prevalent in Urban Transitional areas than in the Urban Core. Future development should reinforce walkable densities, improve site design along corridors, and enhance compatibility between residential neighborhoods and adjacent commercial uses. Corridor-facing development should prioritize improved building orientation, pedestrian access, and streetscape enhancements while maintaining appropriate transitions in scale and intensity.

Urban Transitional areas play an important role in accommodating growth while relieving pressure on more constrained historic districts. Development within this character area should support housing diversity, neighborhood services, and incremental reinvestment that strengthens connections between urban neighborhoods and corridor based commercial activity.

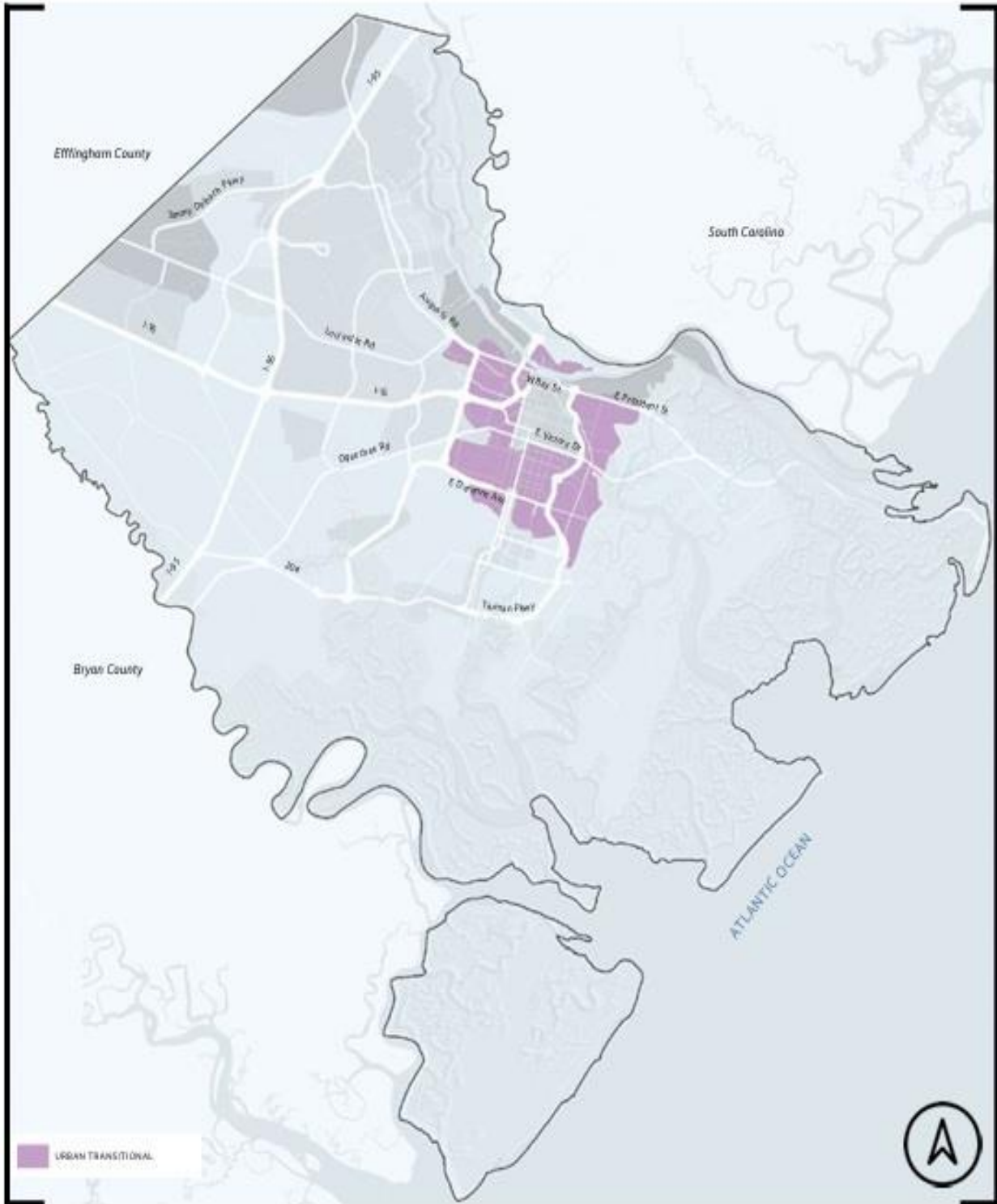


Exhibit 4.14 – Urban Transitional Character Area

Urban Transitional - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Residential, including attached and detached single family
SECONDARY USES	Multifamily residential, neighborhood and corridor commercial uses, civic and institutional facilities
DENSITY	Medium to high; 6 to 20 units per acre
TRANSPORTATION	Connected street network; automobile oriented with multimodal access
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Local roads, collectors, arterials
PARKING	On street and off street parking; surface parking; private driveways
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities
OPEN SPACE	Municipal parks, schools, community facilities, historic and civic open spaces

Figure 4.12 – Urban Transitional Development Factors

Urban Industrial

Urban Industrial character areas include locations near the Urban Downtown and Urban Core that accommodate higher intensity industrial and Port related uses essential to the regional economy. These areas support activities such as light and heavy manufacturing, warehousing, logistics, freight handling, and port operations. Due to the nature of these uses, development within Urban Industrial areas often generates noise, vibration, emissions, and heavy vehicle traffic that must be carefully managed on site.

Urban Industrial areas are typically directly connected to regional transportation infrastructure, including rail lines, waterways, and arterial roadways, and function as major employment centers within the County. While these areas are largely built out and expected to remain industrial in character, their proximity to urban neighborhoods and the downtown core requires careful attention to site design, buffering, and operational impacts.

Future planning efforts within Urban Industrial areas should prioritize measures that reduce conflicts with surrounding land uses while preserving industrial productivity. Landscaping, building orientation, screening of loading and service areas, and enhanced stormwater and environmental management practices should be used to improve site performance and visual quality along public rights of way and adjacent properties.

Given their role as significant employment hubs, Urban Industrial areas should also consider opportunities to improve workforce access where feasible, including transit connectivity and safe circulation for employees. These improvements should support access and efficiency without compromising the operational needs of industrial and Port related uses.

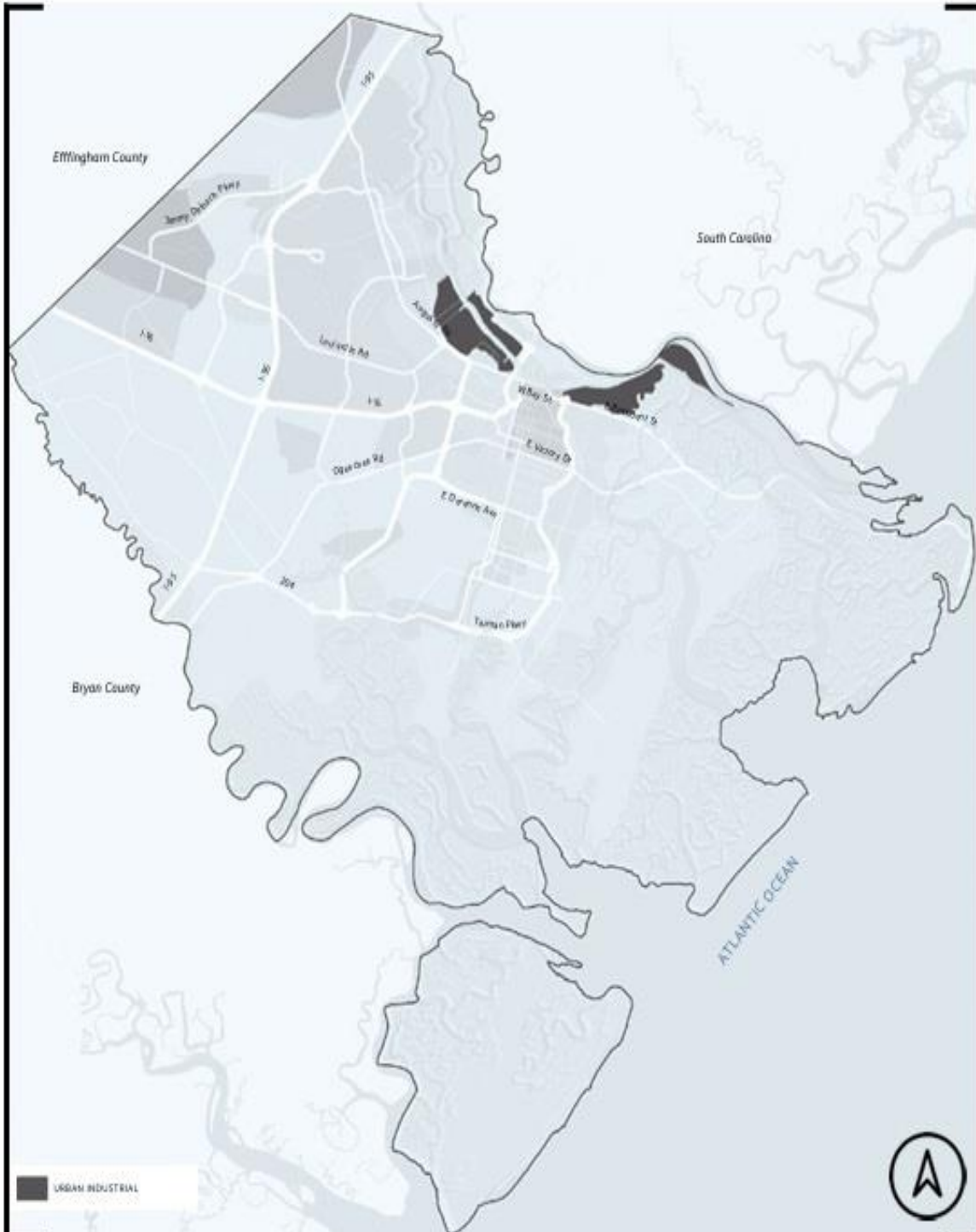


Exhibit 4.15 – Savannah-Chatham County: Urban Industrial Character Area

Urban Industrial - Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Heavy and light manufacturing, warehousing, logistics, Port and freight related uses
SECONDARY USES	Limited commercial and office uses accessory to industrial operations
DENSITY	Not applicable; high intensity industrial development
TRANSPORTATION	Freight and automobile oriented; limited multimodal access
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Arterials, expressways, industrial access roads
PARKING	Surface parking, service and loading areas
UTILITIES	Supported by existing municipal utilities
OPEN SPACE	Minimal intentional open space; buffers, stormwater facilities, and environmental mitigation areas

Figure 4.13 – Savannah-Chatham County: Urban Industrial Development Factors

Rural Character

Rural Character areas include lands that maintain a predominantly rural setting and support low intensity development patterns compatible with agricultural landscapes, open space, and environmental systems. In some locations, Rural Character areas are influenced by proximity to regional transportation corridors, such as Interstate 16, which provide access to regional markets and employment centers while still traversing largely rural environments.

Development within Rural Character areas influenced by regional corridors may include low intensity employment and service uses that rely on highway access, such as light industrial, warehousing, and service-related activities. These uses should remain dispersed in nature, with large parcels, substantial setbacks, limited building coverage, and minimal pedestrian orientation. Development should not require the level of infrastructure, intensity, or land use mix found in suburban or urban character areas.

Rural Character– Development Factors	
PRIMARY USES	Light industrial, warehousing, logistics, service-related uses
SECONDARY USES	Limited office or support uses accessory to primary industrial activity
DENSITY	Not applicable; low intensity, large parcel development
TRANSPORTATION	Automobile and freight oriented; no planned public transit
ROAD FUNCT. CLASS	Interstate (I 16), local roads
PARKING	Surface parking and service areas
UTILITIES	Individual or limited community water and septic systems; extension of municipal utilities not anticipated
OPEN SPACE	Natural areas, buffers, undeveloped land, conservation lands

Figure 4.14 – Savannah-Chatham County: Rural Character Development Factors

Future Land Use Framework and Map

Future Land Use Categories/Designations

The Future Land Use framework organizes the Plan area into 10 primary categories:

1. **Downtown/Mixed-Use Urban Core:** Historic downtown and riverfront with high-intensity, vertically mixed-use development, civic uses, tourism, and cultural institutions
2. **Urban Mixed-Use Neighborhoods:** Established neighborhoods in urban core with mixed housing types, small-scale commercial, walkable blocks, and strong pedestrian character
3. **Suburban Mixed-Use Neighborhoods:** Suburban neighborhoods with medium-density residential, neighborhood-serving retail and services, and walkable centers
4. **Suburban Residential:** Lower-density single-family and duplex neighborhoods with suburban form; typically automobile-oriented
5. **Office and Institutional:** Professional offices, educational institutions, government facilities, healthcare facilities, and cultural institutions
6. **Commercial – Neighborhood:** Neighborhood-serving retail, restaurants, and services; typically single-story; automobile-oriented or mixed-use transitioning
7. **Commercial – Regional:** Regional shopping centers, automotive services, and entertainment; typically automobile-oriented with significant parking
8. **Industrial – Light:** Light manufacturing, assembly, warehousing, and distribution with minimal external impacts; transition to residential possible
9. **Industrial – Heavy:** Heavy manufacturing, port operations, logistics, hazardous materials handling; significant external impacts; limited residential compatibility
10. **Parks, Recreation, and Open Space:** Public parks, recreational facilities, trails, golf courses, and protected environmental areas
11. **Agricultural and Rural:** Farmland, forestry, large-lot rural residential, and conservation lands
12. **Conservation and Environmental Protection:** Wetlands, marshes, floodplains, maritime forests, and protected habitats with minimal development

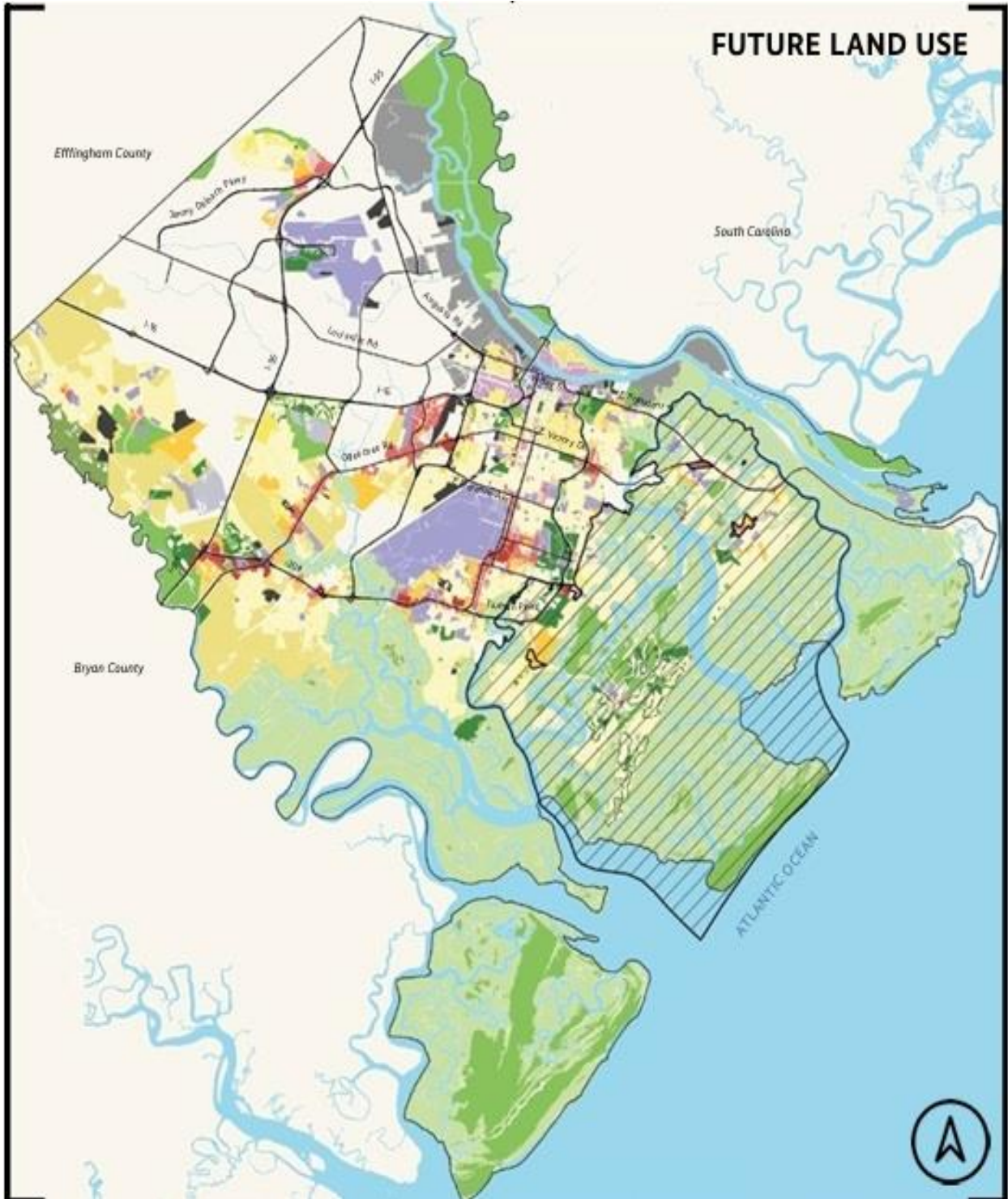


Exhibit 4.17 - Future Land Use Map

Issues and Opportunities

The Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update establishes a strategic, coordinated approach to growth that protects the region's economic vitality, environmental quality, and community character while accommodating projected population growth through a strategic Nodes and Corridors framework for growth management. This approach concentrates development where infrastructure, transit, and natural conditions support it, in strategic nodes with mixed uses and high density and in proximity to connected by walkable corridors. This supports preservation of rural, agricultural, environmental, and hazard-prone areas from sprawling development.

Successful implementation requires coordinated action across government, business, education, and community sectors, with explicit commitment to equitable development, environmental stewardship, economic resilience, and quality of life improvement. The policies and strategies outlined in this element provide the framework; consistent implementation through zoning text amendments, strategic capital investment, and public-private partnerships, however, will determine outcomes. The following critical issues may need careful attention and consideration:

Consistency

Intent: To address any inconsistency between the latest Chatham County Zoning Ordinance and the City of Savannah NewZO and the goals of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update. It emphasizes the need for continuous re-evaluation to ensure that land use policies align with equitable housing, promotion of compact growth, and natural resource preservation strategies, as well as streamlining review and processing procedures.

Gentrification

Intent: To acknowledge that rising property costs and investment in historic districts are displacing legacy businesses and long-term residents, particularly the elderly and people of color. It signals a need for policies that protect vulnerable residents and manage equitable relocation.

Redevelopment

Intent: To identify "Downtown Expansion" areas and other non-core locations as the primary targets for future sustainable growth. The intent is to prioritize Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and mixed-use strategies in these areas rather than continuing outward expansion.

Annexation

Intent: To highlight the absence of a comprehensive tracking or management system for municipal annexations. It calls for a coordinated "growth management plan" to prevent continued greenfield consumption and ensure that only infrastructure-ready areas are prioritized for future annexation.

Regional Coordination

Intent: To stress that issues like climate change, commuting, and the economy cross municipal boundaries and cannot be solved by individual jurisdictions. It argues that a "unified regional plan" is necessary to ensure the social and environmental welfare of the entire county.

Natural Resources

Intent: To emphasize that rapid development threatens the region's sensitive environment. The section is included to mandate proactive land use measures that increase resilience against flooding, sea level rise, and extreme weather events.

Preserving and Enhancing the Public Realm

Intent: To advocate for the protection of Savannah's unique historic plan (squares, parks) and to prevent the application of suburban codes that damage these assets. It aims to ensure that public spaces remain vibrant and welcoming for all residents and visitors.

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Land Use Goals and Strategies

The plan outlines five primary goals to guide future land use decisions:

Goal 1 - Establish growth policies for the City of Savannah to guide development and redevelopment in a responsible manner, encouraging compact/mixed-use development, walkable neighborhoods, increased connectivity, and open space preservation.

Creating an attractive and livable community requires the development of a comprehensive community vision as well as policies and regulations that will guide growth to occur in a manner that is consistent with that vision. Without appropriate policies and regulations in place, development and redevelopment will occur in a disjointed and incompatible manner to the detriment of the community's quality of life.

Objectives:

- Review zoning regulations and other ordinances to identify standards that do not support the community vision
- Assess the development review process to identify ways to expedite and/or reduce fees for infill and grayfield projects
- Incentivize projects that are located in areas with existing infrastructure and within close proximity to services, making greenfield development less attractive and economical
- Prioritize the preservation and enhancement of the existing public realm and encourage the incorporation of public realm spaces and elements in new developments
- Prioritize land acquisition for open space and conservation
- Decrease development pressures on environmentally sensitive lands

Goal 2 - Identify and prioritize future annexations that are regionally coordinated, and that promote responsible growth.

Coordination among municipalities within the region is crucial to plan for annexation and ensure growth occurs only in appropriate areas. These areas should have existing infrastructure to accommodate development that is compatible with the character of the surrounding area in both intensity and density. Proactively coordinating with the County to identify future annexation targets and agree upon responsible growth principles for those areas will result in an improved quality of life for all communities.

Objectives:

- Establish criteria for determining the appropriateness and readiness of development, including budgetary and other impacts
- Identify areas where future annexations would be appropriate and prioritize only those that promote responsible, compatible growth
- Develop protocol to analyze annexation requests to determine appropriateness of the annexation

Goal 3 - Utilize small area and corridor plans as a means to protect the character of existing areas and ensure new development is compatible.

Small Area and Corridor Plans are effective tools to provide more localized guidance for land use decision-making. They can be used to address current conditions and issues and ensure that future growth and development is consistent with existing development patterns and the character of the area. Such plans proactively address the needs of the community at a level of specificity that cannot be achieved through community-wide land use plans or zoning ordinances.

Objectives:

- Update existing small area plans and develop new small area plans as appropriate
- Develop criteria for identifying and prioritizing small area planning needs for areas where growth and development pressures are high
- Develop criteria for identifying and prioritizing corridor plans for areas where growth and development pressures are high or specialized protections are needed
- Identify corridors that could support TOD and create corridor plans to allow for and encourage TOD in an appropriate manner

Goal 4 - Continue to create innovative ways to connect people with places.

Land use and transportation policies and objectives are inevitably connected, and it is necessary to acknowledge and consider this relationship when making planning decisions in order to safeguard against unintended consequences. Transportation policies can undermine land use objectives and vice versa; it is necessary, therefore, to ensure that their respective efforts consider the impacts of one on the other to guarantee a positive outcome in both regards.

Objectives:

- Consider the impacts of all transportation decisions, strategies, and investments on surrounding existing land uses and the public realm, and potential deviations from land use objectives
- Encourage land use patterns that reduce distances between residences and services
- Increase opportunities for mass transit and other mobility options (walking, biking, etc.) through proper planning of the land use pattern

Goal 5 - Enhance the character and image of major corridors that implement the design and construction of safe, attractive, vibrant, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes.

Create a series of new and enhanced public spaces - including parks, plazas, green spaces, and pocket parks - throughout the City, and particularly in mixed-use areas, to improve the

experience for residents who gather and interact in these locations. Incorporate active programming and elements such as public art, trees and other plantings, seating, and water features to enhance the appeal of these spaces.

Objectives:

- Implement the design and construction of safe, attractive, vibrant, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes that project a positive image while encouraging walking
- Incorporate distinctive pavement textures and colors in streetscape designs, particularly in areas with high levels of pedestrian and commercial activity
- Research and pursue opportunities to relocate overhead power lines underground, particularly on major commercial corridors

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CHAPTER 5
TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

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Transportation Element

Introduction

Topics discussed in each of the individual chapters of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update are interconnected. As a result, transportation conditions in the future will be affected by policy recommendations located in other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update. Of these, the Land Use Chapter will have a particularly strong impact on transportation. Through its placement of commercial centers and residential areas, the Future Land Use Map will help determine the future spatial patterns of Unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah, which will affect factors such as road connectivity. Furthermore, the density of those developments will help determine the future viability of other modes of transportation, such as bus, bike, and rail.

Travel Characteristics

Regional Commuting Patterns

Chatham County overall and the City of Savannah are regional hubs for employment, shopping, recreation, military installations, Port of Savannah related industries, manufacturing centers, and medical and educational institutions. Savannah, with its Historic Landmark District, has become one of the top tourist destinations, both nationally and internationally, hosting over 14.1 million visitors each year.

Regional Commuting Patterns		
Location	% Work in County of Residence	% Work Outside County of Residence
Chatham	92.8%	4.7%
Savannah	94.1%	3.7%
Bryan	29.8%	67.5%
Richmond Hill	25.0%	72.3%
Effingham County	36.3%	58.8%
Rincon	33.8%	60.6%
Bulloch	68.6%	29.7%
Statesboro	73.5%	25.8%
Liberty	75.2%	23.7%
Hinesville City	76.6%	22.6%
Jasper, SC	40.3%	59.7%
Beaufort, SC	94.5%	4.0%

Figure 5.1 – Savannah-Chatham County: Regional Commuting Patterns

The influx of commuters from neighboring communities, greatly impacts the traffic patterns and overall efficiency of the transportation network. As shown in Figure 5.1, over 58% of the residents of adjacent Bryan and Effingham Counties commute outside their jurisdictions daily for

work, as well as nearby Liberty and Bulloch Counties at 23.7% and 29.7% respectively. Typical commute times reach one hour each way. Additionally, a sizeable percentage of commuters from South Carolina make Chatham County and Savannah their destinations.

Commute Mode Share

The proportion of travelers using a given method of transportation is called the "mode share" or the "mode split". Mode share is influenced by the types of facilities or services such as provision of more and wider roadways and "free" parking, rather than transit service, bikeways, or sidewalks. Alternatives include driving alone, taking transit, walking, bicycling, work at home, carpool and other.

Travel activity is reported by ACS 2022 data by mode of travel utilized for trips to and from work. Only the primary method of transportation is reported for trips involving multiple methods. As shown in Figure 5.2, similar to statewide (74.2%), most work trips in Savannah and Chatham County are by automobile, at 69% and 74.9% respectively. The slightly lower rate in the City of Savannah may be attributed to the more urbanized conditions and available alternative modes of travel including: higher densities; mixed uses; more comprehensive public transit service; the presence of bicycle and pedestrian networks; shorter inter-city trips; and a more balanced jobs/housing ratio. Statistics indicate a reduction of around 4% of workers driving alone for both jurisdictions compared to 5 years ago. Carpooling is also more prevalent in Chatham County and the City of Savannah overall, compared to nearby municipalities and the State.

Technological development and the impact from the pandemic, has resulted in more people working remotely. Compared to surrounding jurisdictions, the City of Savannah has the highest percentage of people working from home (9.5%) followed by Chatham County. Reflecting its urbanized nature, Savannah also exhibits the highest percentages of public transit (2.2%), walking (4.8%) and biking (1.9%) alternative modes.

It is important to note that reported travel behavior does not necessarily reflect the choices people would make if different transportation options were available at a safe and feasible level. While historic transportation policy, funding, and design decisions promoted auto travel and initially advanced mobility, unintended environmental, social, and financial consequences have also transpired.

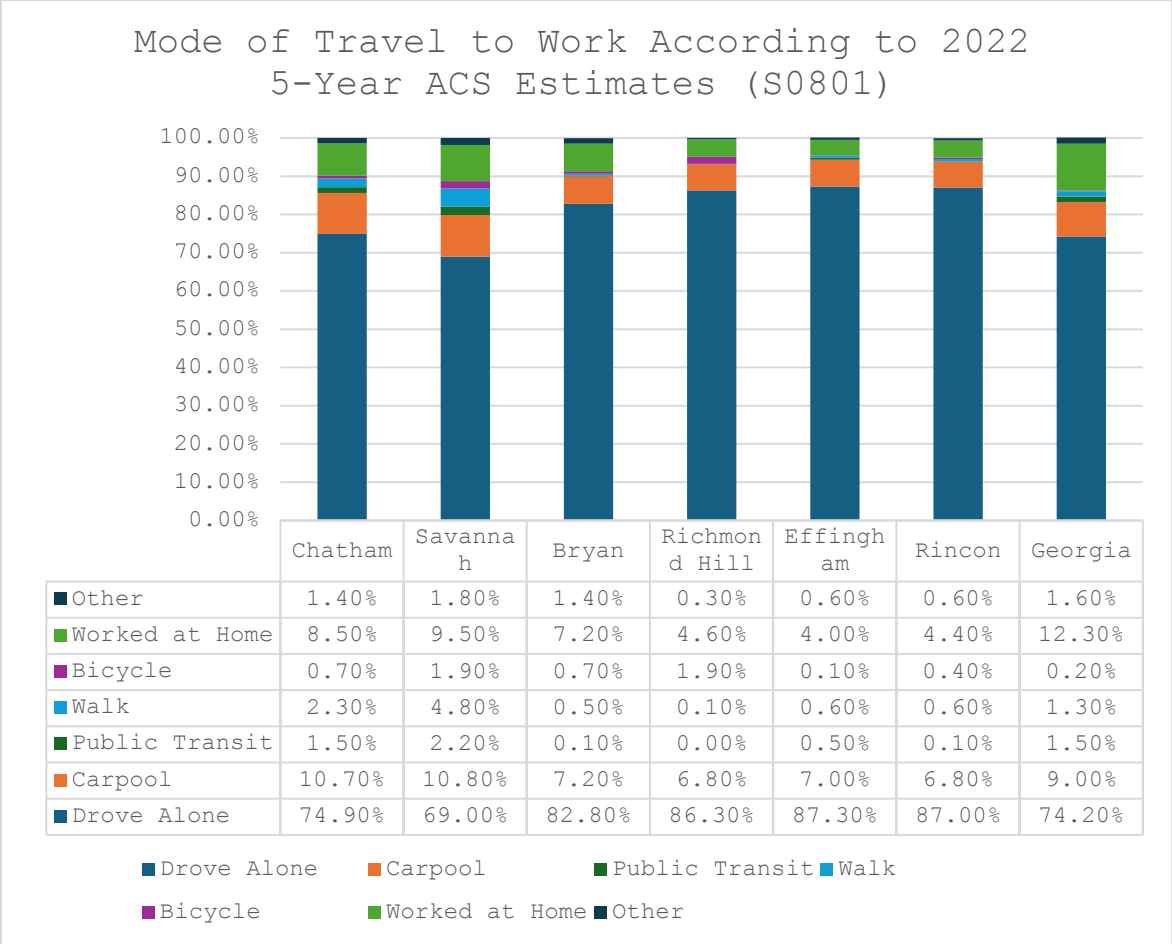


Figure 5.2 – Savannah-Chatham County: Travel to Work in the CORE MPO Region

Transportation Planning Regional Planning

The Coastal Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (CORE MPO) is a regional transportation policy making and planning body with representatives of elected and appointed officials from Chatham County and its municipalities, including the City of Savannah, Bryan County and Richmond Hill, Effingham County and its municipalities, as well as modal representatives and executives from local, state and federal agencies.

CORE MPO updated its Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) boundary (Exhibit 5.1) in February 2024 which was subsequently approved by the Governor of Georgia. In concerted effort with the MPA update, CORE MPO updated its committee structure. CORE MPO is comprised of an executive policy board known as the CORE MPO Board and four advisory committees

- The Technical Coordinating committee (TCC),
- The Economic Development and Freight Advisory Committee (EDFAC),
- The newly established Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), and

- The Community Opportunities and Public Involvement Committee (COPIC) which was restructured from the previous Citizens Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation.

CORE MPO follows the 3-C transportation planning process: comprehensive, continuing, and cooperative. Through this planning process the MPO coordinates regional policies, corridor studies, and plans and programs such as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

Local Planning

Besides participating in the regional transportation planning process through CORE MPO, Chatham County, the City of Savannah, and other MPO planning partners have their own transportation planning process focusing on specific areas and/or corridors, resulting in study recommendations and/or Capital Improvement Programs (CIPs).

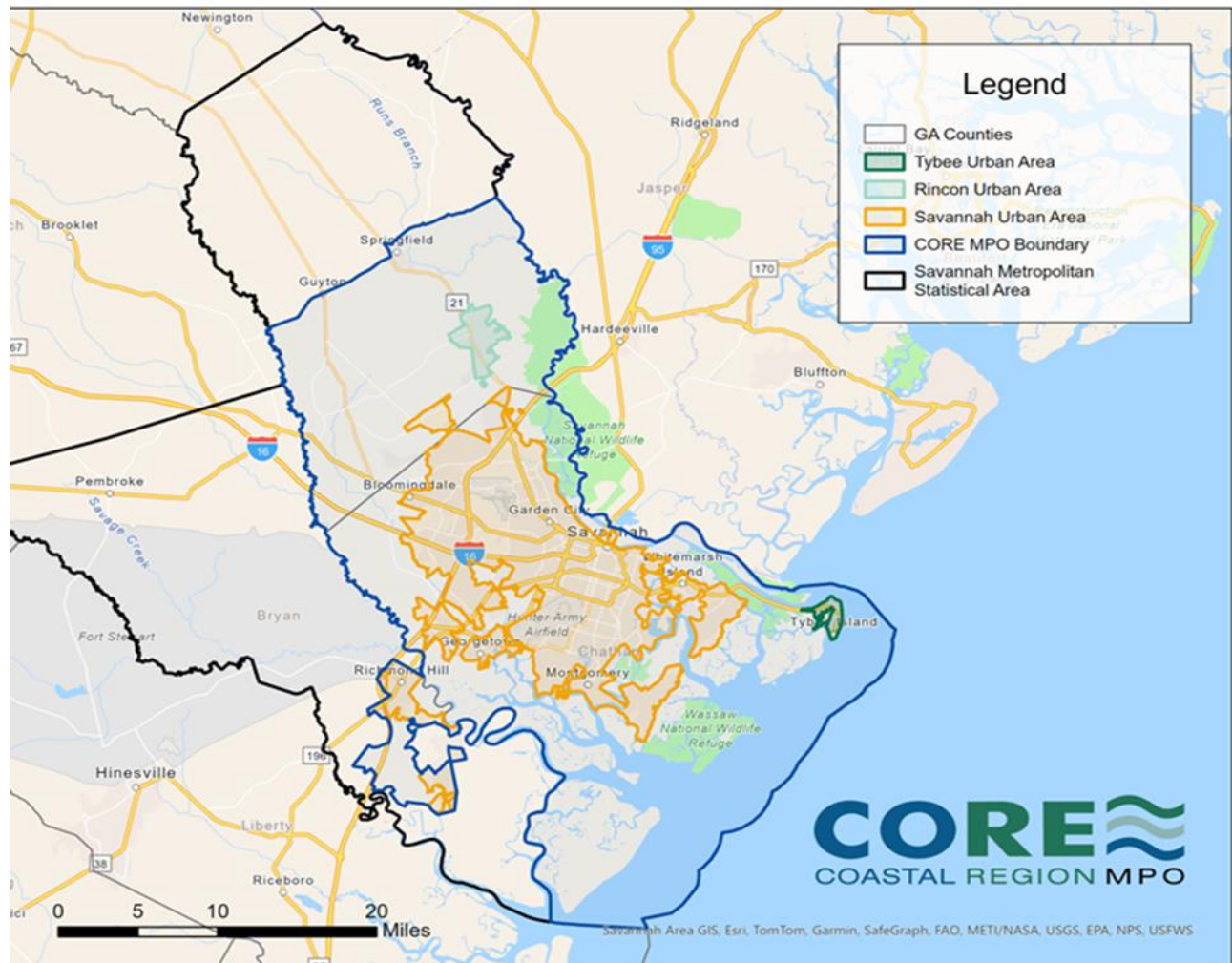


Exhibit 5.1 - CORE MPO Metropolitan Planning Area Boundary 2024

Transportation Planning Updates

Since the adoption of the 2040 Plan in October 2021, various transportation plans and studies have been conducted in the region. Figure 5.3 lists those that impact Chatham County and Savannah.

Transportation Plans and Studies 2021 – 2025		
Transportation Plans and Studies	Sponsor	Impact Areas
SR 21 Access Study – Completion in March 2022	CORE MPO, Garden City	Garden City, Chatham County
SR 307 Corridor Study – Completion in March 2022	CORE MPO, Chatham County	Chatham County, Garden City, Savannah
Coastal Empire Transportation Study – Completion in February 2023	Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)	Bryan, Chatham, Effingham and Bullock Counties and their municipalities
Master Transit Plan – Completion in July 2023	Chatham Area Transit	Chatham County, Savannah, Garden City, Port Wentworth
Comprehensive Operational Analysis and Transit Development Plan – Completion in September 2023	Chatham Area Transit	Chatham County, Savannah, Garden City, Port Wentworth
Bus Stop Inventory Study	Chatham Area Transit	Chatham County, Savannah, Garden City, Port Wentworth
US 80 Corridor Study Phase I – Completion in October 2023	Pooler, CORE MPO	Chatham County, Savannah, Garden City, Pooler, Bloomingdale
Regional Freight Transportation Plan – Completion in October 2023	CORE MPO	Bryan, Chatham, Effingham Counties and their municipalities
Flooding Dynamic Modeling Tools for Optimized Planning of CORE MPO Transportation Infrastructure Systems Phase I – Completion in October 2023	CORE MPO	Chatham County and its municipalities, Richmond Hill, portion of Effingham County
FY 2024 – 2027 Transportation Improvement Program – Adoption in November 2023	CORE MPO	CORE MPO Metropolitan Planning Area
Congestion Management Process – Completion in June 2024	CORE MPO	Bryan, Chatham, Effingham Counties and their municipalities
2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan – Adoption in August 2024	CORE MPO	CORE MPO Metropolitan Planning Area
Regional Transit Development Plan (TDP) for the Coastal Georgia Region – Completion in 2024	GDOT, Coastal Regional Commission (CRC)	10 coastal counties in Georgia
Chatham County Safe Streets for All Safety Action Plan – Completion in January 2025	Chatham County	Chatham County
President Street Grade Crossing Elimination Study – Completion in March 2025	Chatham County, CORE MPO	Chatham County, Savannah
SR 25/US 17 Corridor Study – Completion in May 2025	Chatham County, CORE MPO	Chatham County, Savannah, Garden City
Chatham Multimodal Community Improvement Project (Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant) – ongoing	Chatham County	Chatham County, Savannah, Garden City, Port Wentworth, GPA, CSX, Norfolk Southern
Call for Projects for Surface Transportation	CORE MPO, GDOT	CORE MPO Metropolitan

Transportation Plans and Studies 2021 – 2025		
Transportation Plans and Studies	Sponsor	Impact Areas
Block Group (STBG), Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) and Transportation Alternatives (TA) Funds – October 2025		Planning Area
Chatham Cnty SPLOST 8 – passed in November 2025	Chatham County and its municipalities	Chatham County and its municipalities
SR 204 Access Study – Completion in early 2026	Chatham County, CORE MPO	Chatham County, Savannah
Non-Motorized Transportation Plan Update – Adoption in June 2026	CORE MPO	CORE MPO Metropolitan Planning Area
I-16 Interchange Modification Report (IMR) Update – Completion in 2026	GDOT, City of Savannah	Savannah
FY 2027 – 2030 Transportation Improvement Program – Adoption in 2026	CORE MPO	CORE MPO Metropolitan Planning Area
Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Study – to be completed by April 2027	CORE MPO	CORE MPO Metropolitan Planning Area
Flooding Dynamic Modeling Tools for Optimized Planning of CORE MPO Transportation Infrastructure Systems Phase II – to be completed by April 2027	CORE MPO	CORE MPO Metropolitan Planning Area
SS4A 37th Street Corridor Improvements – to be underway	City of Savannah	Savannah
Savannah MOVES – ongoing	City of Savannah	Savannah
Atlanta – Savannah Intercity Passenger Rail Project – ongoing	GDOT	CORE MPO Metropolitan Planning Area
Southeast Georgia Commuter Feasibility Study – Completion in 2026	GDOT	Multiple counties in Southeast Georgia

Figure 5.3 – Savannah-Chatham County: Transportation Plans and Studies Since October 2021

Metropolitan Transportation Plan

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is a multimodal plan based on the socio-economic development of the CORE MPO region and is intended to provide efficient transportation services to all residents in this area. Its multimodal approach incorporates highway development, transit service, bike/pedestrian improvements, and other related transportation investments.

The MTP identifies the vision, goals and objectives, strategies and projects that promote mobility for both people and goods. It is updated every five years, based on review, revision, and recalibration of the travel demand model with updated demographic and socioeconomic characteristics as well as incorporating results of new or ongoing studies and any changes to federal regulations and guidance.

The 2045 MTP (Mobility 2045) was in place when the 2040 Plan was adopted in October 2021. Since then, CORE MPO has adopted a new MTP – Moving Forward Together 2050. The 2050 MTP, inclusive of its amendments and addenda, is the most up to date and comprehensive plan governing regional transportation issues in Chatham County and the City of Savannah, found at: <https://www.thempc.org/Core/Mtp2050#gsc.tab=0>.

Moving Forward Together 2050

The Moving Forward Together 2050 MPT was adopted in August 2024. The updated plan emphasizes a multi-modal performance-based approach to transportation planning to meet the travel demands over the next 26 years, while taking into consideration the region's goals and financial capacity. CORE MPO is committed to investing in the regional transportation network to address the growth of the area while enhancing mobility for people and goods and ensuring a sustainable future. This commitment is incorporated into the 2050 MTP through a diverse and wide-ranging process, including an assessment of transportation needs in coordination with the future regional growth and anticipated future trends, as well as giving more emphasis on resiliency and equity of the transportation system.

2050 MTP Goals

The overall goal of the 2050 MTP is to continue moving the regional transportation planning process beyond the singular focus of moving motor vehicles and consider transportation issues from a comprehensive perspective that incorporates community values, needs, land use, modal alternatives, system resiliency and equity. The goals and objectives (Figure 5.4) are targeted to ensure that the transportation system helps the CORE MPO region attain its overall vision for the future. Through public involvement, stakeholders and citizens helped identify and refine these goals, which provide the framework for the provision of a safe, secure, and efficient multimodal transportation network that meets the mobility needs of both people and freight.


 Moving Forward Together 2050 Goals
Safety & Security: Provide a safe and secure transportation system for all users
Performance and Reliability: Enhance transportation system efficiency and freight movement
Access & Connectivity: Enhance mobility by improving access to opportunities and multimodal options
Stewardship: Strategically maintain and improve the transportation system through coordination, economic competitiveness, and resource management
System & Environmental Preservation: Maintain and preserve the transportation system and natural environment

Figure 5.4 – Savannah-Chatham County: 2050 MTP Goals

2050 MTP Investments and Performance

The 2050 MTP provides a financially balanced list of projects where the aggregate project costs must not exceed the \$2.179 billion anticipated funding for the 26-year planning period. Federal funds provide the largest funding share, followed by State funds, primarily sourced from Georgia's motor fuel tax funds. Transportation funds are also generated by local sources, including: local government general funds; Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST); transit sales tax; transit fare box receipts; and transit district tax. An estimated \$1.86 billion is

available in highway funds for specific project improvements and revenue set-asides for four category projects: Maintenance; Operational Improvements; Transit Set Aside; and Non-Motorized Set Aside. An additional \$315 million is allocated to transit funds over the life of the plan.

Specifically, 93.2% of project funds are allocated for highway safety and 30.7% for transit safety, aligning with the Vision Zero goals. Focused 2050 MTP investments also address freight (78.6%), congestion management (93.7%), and pavement and bridges (32.1%) safety. ITS, maintenance, electric charging projects, transit and non-motorized projects all help to improve air quality (43.0%). In addition to enhancing transit safety, the FTA and FHWA sourced transit improvements foster achievement of transit asset management goals (14.5%).

Projects identified as “needs” but not included in the 2050 MTP are incorporated into the Vision Plan as an unfunded project list. Subsequent plan updates will utilize the Vision Plan for these projects to include when funds become available.

Transportation Improvement Program

To implement the highest priority MTP projects, a subset, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is developed, serving as the MPO’s short-range programming document, covering a four-year planning period. It lists the multi-modal projects to be funded with federal revenues and regionally significant projects. Development phases (preliminary engineering (PE), right-of-way (ROW), utility relocation (UTL), and construction (CST)), funding sources and implementation schedules are established and documented.

When the 2040 Plan was adopted, the FY 2021–2024 TIP was in place, superseded by the FY 2024–2027 TIP adopted in November 2023, followed by the FY 2027–2030 TIP, adopted in 2026, which will serve as a baseline for transportation implementation strategies. Through TIP programming, various MTP projects have been implemented within Chatham County and Savannah since 2021, either under construction or are completed.

TIP Projects Completed and Under Construction 2026	
PI# 0012757, I-16 from I-95 to I-516 (including PI# 0012758, I-95/I-16 Interchange Reconstruction)	PI# 0006328, Brampton Road Connector from Foundation Drive to SR 21/SR25/US80
PI# 0013727, I-16 @ SR 307 (Diverging Diamond Interchange)	PI# 0013741, SR 25/US 17 @ Savannah River in Port Wentworth
PI# 0013742, SR 25/US 17 @ Middle River in Port Wentworth	PI# 0006700, Effingham Pkwy from CR 156/Blue Jay/Effingham to SR 30/Chatham
PI# 521855, SR 26 from I-516 TO CS 188/Victory Drive	PI# 0015306, Truman Linear Park Trail – Phase II-B
PI# 0010028, CS 1097/DeLesseps/LaRoche Avee from Waters Ave to Skidaway Road	Various operational and maintenance lump sum projects

Figure 5.5 – Savannah-Chatham County: TIP Projects Completed and Under Construction 2026

The TIP information can be found on the CORE MPO website at: <https://www.thempc.org/Core/Tip#gsc.tab=0>.

The MTP projects in the pipeline to be programmed in the TIP for implementation include:

Transportation Improvement Plan Pipeline Projects	
PI# 0008358, I-516 @ CS / 1503 / DeRenne Avenue (DeRenne Blvd Option)	PI# 0008359, East DeRenne from SR 204 to Truman Pkwy (East DeRenne Avenue Improvements)
PI# 0017411, I-95 from Florida State Line to South Carolina State Line-ITS EXP	PI# 0010236, SR 21 from CS 346/Mildred St. to SR 204 (West DeRenne Avenue Improvements)
PI# 0017183, SR 404 Spur/US 17 @ Savannah River Crossing (ROW phase only)	PI# 0015704, SR 404 Spur/US 17 @ Back River
PI# 0017414, SR 26/US 80 @ Bull River	PI# 0017415, SR 26/US 80 @ Lazaretto Creek
PI#0017515, I-16 @ SR 17 (I-16 Interchange at Little NeckRd.	PI# 0020351, I-16 from W Gwinnett St. to Chatham Pkwy – NEVI Charging Station
PI#0017271, I-95 at SR2 /Augusta Rd Diverging Diamond Interchange Improvements	PI# 0020172, SR 21 Widening from SR 30 in Chatham County to 9th Street in Effingham County
PI# 0020173, Connector from SR 17 to SR 30 (Benton Blvd Area)	PI# 0020173, Connector from SR 17 to SR 30 (Benton Blvd Area)
PI# 0018402, I-95 at Airways Avenue	PI# 0017975, Chevis Road Improvements
PI# 0017976, Garrard Avenue Improvements	PI# 001901, Green Island Road Path
SR 204 at Pine Grove Safety and Operational Improvements	President Street / Truman Parkway Interchange Bridge and Ramp Reconstruction
Various operational and maintenance lump sum projects	

Figure 5.6 – Savannah-Chatham County: TIP Pipeline Projects

Local Projects

Besides MTP and TIP, Chatham County and Savannah program and implement smaller transportation improvement projects with Operation & Maintenance (O & M) funds and/or Special Purpose Local Optional Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds. These projects are normally included in the SPLOST lists which are voted on in the referendum every six years and/or the Capital Improvement Programs (CIPs) which are multi-year strategic documents outlining the infrastructure projects (including transportation improvement projects), detailing their costs, timelines, locations, and funding sources over a 5-year period. More information on the local transportation projects can be found on the websites of Chatham County and City of Savannah.

Transportation improvement projects completed with local funds since October 2021 include:

Local Transportation Projects Implementation Status	
Transportation Improvement Projects	Jurisdiction
Quacco Road Widening Project from US 17 to I-95 – under construction	Chatham County
John Carter Rd at Little Neck Road Signal Install – completed	Chatham County
U.S. 80 Sidewalks from Johnny Mercer Blvd to Whitemarsh Village Way – completed	Chatham County
Removal of debris on streets from Hurricane Helene – completed	Chatham County
Countywide Street Maintenance – ongoing	Chatham County
Construction of sidewalks and bike lanes in West Savannah on Gwinnett Street, near the Enmarket Arena – completed	Savannah

Local Transportation Projects Implementation Status	
Transportation Improvement Projects	Jurisdiction
Relocation of Traffic Control Center and Install New Equipment – completed	Savannah
Riverwalk Extension at Marriot – completed	Savannah
West River Street Improvements – completed	Savannah
Broughton Street Streetscape Phase I between MLK Blvd and Drayton St – completed	Savannah
Removal of debris on streets from Hurricane Helene and Signal Repairs after the storm	Savannah
Citywide Sidewalk Repairs and New Sidewalk Installations – ongoing	Savannah
Citywide Street Paving & Pavement Rehab/Resurfacing – ongoing	Savannah
Citywide Traffic Safety & Calming – ongoing	Savannah
Resurfacing Benton Blvd from Highlands to City limits at Pooler- ongoing	Savannah
River Street Ramps Reconstruction	Savannah
Street Lighting Upgrade from Bay St to Victory Dr – ongoing	Savannah
Eisenhower Drive Inter-Connect between White Bluff and Harry Truman Pkwy (traffic signal upgrade) – started in late 2025	Savannah
Windsor & Largo Traffic Circle – ongoing	Savannah

Figure 5.7 – Savannah-Chatham County: Local Transportation Projects Implementation Status

Chatham County and the City of Savannah have programmed the following transportation improvement projects for implementation in the coming years.

Local Transportation Projects Programming	
Transportation Improvement Projects	Jurisdiction
Little Neck Road Reconstruction	Chatham County
Skidaway Road Improvements at Ferguson Avenue	Chatham County
Johnny Mercer at Walthour Intersection Improvement	Chatham County
Johnny Mercer Blvd Pedestrian Improvements	Chatham County
President Street at Pennsylvania Signal Improvement	Chatham County
Walthour Road Slope Stabilization	Chatham County
Quacco Road Improvements (SPLSOT 8)	Chatham County
Little Neck Road Improvements (SPLOST 8)	Chatham County
Bush Road Improvements (SPLOST 8)	Chatham County, Savannah
John Carter Road Improvements (SPLOST 8)	Chatham County
Old River Road Improvements (SPLOST 8)	Chatham County, Effingham County
SR25/Ogeechee Road Improvements (SPLOST 8)	Chatham County
Sidewalks and Trails (SPLOST 8)	Chatham County
Safe Streets for All Improvements (SPLOST 8)	Chatham County
Street Resurfacing (SPLOST 8)	Chatham County
Noise Wall along Truman Parkway (SPLOST)	Chatham County, Savannah
Burnside Causeway (SPLOST 8)	Chatham County
Middleground Road - Tide to Town Segment	Savannah
37th Street Signal Improvement	Savannah

Local Transportation Projects Programming	
Installation of a traffic signal at Waters Avenue & Cornell Street	Savannah
Traffic Signal Installation-Abercorn & 52nd	Savannah
Chatham/Veterans Parkway Traffic Signal	Savannah
New Hampstead Traffic Signal	Savannah
Traffic & Sign Hutchinson Island	Savannah
Louisville/MLK Intersection Improvement (signal upgrade)	Savannah
Widening of Stiles Ave. between the railroad tracks and Louisville Road	Savannah
New Hampstead Palms RG Signal	Savannah
Install a traffic signal at White Bluff Road & Fairmont	Savannah
Arena - Cohen Street Extension	Savannah
Benton Blvd/Highlands Blvd Improvements (SPLOST 8)	Savannah
MLK Flyover Removal (SPLOST 8)	Savannah
Ogeechee Road Bridge (SW) (SPLOST 8)	Savannah
Street Paving and Street Rehab (SPLOST 8)	Savannah
Traffic Calming/Vision Zero (SPLOST 8)	Savannah
Skidaway Road Improvements (SPLOST 8)	Savannah
Sidewalk Replacement and New Installation (SPLOST 8)	Savannah
Protected Bike Lanes (SPLOST 8)	Savannah

Figure 5.8 – Savannah-Chatham County: Local Transportation Projects Programming

Coastal Regional Commission (CRC)

In 2024, CRC and GDOT completed the Regional Transit Development Plan (TDP) for the Coastal Georgia Region. The plan is a guide for CRC and its 10 member counties, along with their implementation partners, to advance a regional transit system that aligns with community based regional transit vision and goals. The plan provides robust documentation of regional mobility conditions and contributing context and identities next steps to advance specific transit service recommendations. Where relevant, the plan identifies alternative service options that advance long-term transit goals but require further regional consideration. The overarching goal of the Regional TDP is to facilitate public transit accessibility to all community members in the region with particular focus on residents who are transit dependent.

Road Network

Highway Functional Classification

There are approximately 2,940 miles of public roadways in the Savannah SMA region divided into various functional classifications, described in Figure 5.9. Roughly 52% of these roadways (1,534 miles) are located in Chatham County.

Public Roadway Classifications		
Designation	%	Description
Local	72.3%	Smaller roadways not intended for use in long-distance travel, except at the origin or destination end of a trip
Collector (Minor and Major)	7.7%	Primarily facilitate intra-county travel and funnel traffic from local roads to the arterial network
Minor Arterials	9.3%	Function to distribute traffic to smaller geographic areas.
Principal Arterials	6.4%	Provide for travel over multiple counties at relatively high speeds
Interstate Highway	2.8%	Long distance high speed travel
Freeway/Expressway	1.6%	Long distance high speed travel

Figure 5.9 – Savannah-Chatham County: Public Roadway Classifications

The highway functional classification (FC) is updated every 10 years with the decennial census, remaining largely consistent. In November 2024, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Georgia Division approved the following revisions to the FC in Chatham County and Savannah.

- Benton Boulevard: Local to Minor Arterial
- Highlands Boulevard: Local to Major Collector
- Rowland Avenue: Local to Minor Collector
- Shell Road: Local to Minor Collector
- Sunset Boulevard: Local to Minor Collector
- Pine Meadow Drive: Local to Major Collector

Various interstate and principal arterials are included in the Highway Freight Network, including the National Highway Freight Network, National Highway System (NHS) Intermodal Connectors, and the Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET).

Bridges

In relation to the waterways and topography, there are 311 bridges and 96 box culverts in the CORE MPO region. Over 82% of the region’s 311 bridges are in good condition. Bridge ID #5100540 (Houlihan Bridge carrying SR 25 over the Savannah River) and Bridge #5100550 carrying SR 25 over the Middle River are in the process of being replaced and improved. Bridge ID #5100540 will be raised to clear 65 feet above the Savannah River.

Freight mobility may be impacted if a facility does not have sufficient vertical clearance (generally 26.5 feet), resulting in diversion to less efficient routes. Regionally, 104 bridges cross over roadways in addition to other features such as railroads or water bodies. Of the 9 bridges not meeting the current standard for minimum vertical clearance, 7 are located in Savannah.

Posted bridges with a weight limit below the standard truck axle distribution weight present a challenge to efficient freight movement. Heavier trucks must detour around the bridge or reduce its payload, resulting in more trucks for the same haul. Of the 9 posted bridges in the region, 2 are in Savannah.

Pavement Conditions

Roadway pavement conditions can impact the cost and safety of passenger and freight travel, causing wear and tear on vehicles and damaging the transported goods, as well as impacting travel time-based performance measures.

Pavement conditions are sorted into three categories: good, fair and poor. About 84% of the CORE MPO region's roadway network are rated good to fair condition. Poor pavements are largely concentrated in more highly urbanized Savannah as well as corridors throughout the region, particularly those with heavy freight traffic volumes, including SR 21 near the Port.

Intermodal Transportation

Intermodal describes the mass transportation of freight or human passengers, usually over long distances, via more than one mode of transportation.

Port of Savannah

The Port of Savannah and the Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) continue to be a major transportation hub and economic engine for both the CORE MPO region and the State of Georgia. The total annual economic impact on Georgia's economy is \$84 billion, supporting more than 369,000 jobs and approximately \$20.4 billion in personal income annually.

From 2021 to 2025, GPA handled between 4.9M to 5.9M 20-foot equivalent container units (TEUs), serving 1,669 container ships in 2025, moving an average of 1,878 containers on and off each vessel. In 2025, the Port of Savannah handled a record 545,214 containers by rail, the fifth straight year over half a million and saw averages of 14,000-16,000 truck moves daily. The newly completed Savannah Harbor Expansion Project allows newer large freighters to navigate the river with greater flexibility, supporting jobs and commerce throughout the nation.

The Port is comprised of two deep water terminals. The Garden City Terminal handles container traffic and both Norfolk Southern (NS) and CSX Transportation operate at the Mason Mega Rail Terminal. The Ocean Terminal has on-dock rail access via NS and CSX and handles breakbulk, roll-on/roll-off, and container traffic. This facility is being converted to primarily handle containers. Several projects in the pipeline include:

- Ocean Terminal @ CS 2356/Louisville Road & @ SR 25/US 17 Ramp,
- SR 404 Spur/US 17 @ Savannah River Crossing, and
- Port of Savannah Renewable Fuel Project.

Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport

The Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport (SAV), the second busiest in Georgia, is a commercial and military-use airport owned by the City of Savannah and managed by the Savannah Airport Commission. Directly accessible to I-95 between Savannah and Pooler, 8 miles from the City, SAV serves as the chief commercial airport for Savannah, the Coastal Empire region of southeast Georgia and the Lowcountry of South Carolina. Hilton Head, South Carolina resorts accounts for 40% of total Airport passenger traffic.

SAV Improvement Projects 2021-2026	
Completed Projects	Current Projects - 2026
Security Checkpoint Expansion	Fuel Storage Facility
	Air Cargo Facility
Construct Auxiliary Parking	Terminal Concourse Expansion
Demo Quail Run Lodge	Taxiway G & Bridge
	Demo Air Cargo Phase 1B.

Figure 5.10 – Savannah-Chatham County: SAV Improvement Projects 2021-2026

SAV is currently served by eight passenger carriers and serves as the world headquarters for Gulfstream Aerospace. The Georgia Air National Guard's 165th Airlift Wing is also based at SAV. The only regional public airport handling cargo, it accommodates five dedicated cargo carriers, with 138,000 square feet of public and private on-site air cargo warehouse space in two structures. In 2024, SAV handled 2,063,282 enplanements, 2,071,099 deplanements, and 13,514.60 tons of air cargo. Cargo handling facilities are sited along Bob Harmon Road, accessed by SR 307/Dean Forest Road. As air cargo is typically interchanged with highway freight, SAV impacts these and surrounding roadways by generating truck traffic to and from its air cargo facilities.

Hunter Army Airfield (HAAF)

HAAF, a sub-installation to nearby Fort Stewart is Chatham County's other major airport facility, providing operational support to the Army's 3rd Infantry Division as well as numerous other non-divisional and tenant units. Fort Stewart and HAAF together generate more than \$1 billion annually for the regional economy, with more than 19,500 military personnel stationed at the two bases and more than 3,700 civilian jobs.

Freight Rail Service

Within the CORE MPO region, 278.9 miles of freight network exist. Two Class I railroads, Norfolk Southern (NS) and CSX Transportation, carry long-distance freight. Seven Class III railroads provide direct, last-mile connections to key destinations in the freight network, including ports, industrial facilities, and warehousing and distribution centers. The major commodities transported by these integrated rail systems are pulp and paper, furniture, fixtures, tobacco products, rubber and plastics, leather, clay, concrete, glass or stone products, fabricated metal products, non-electrical and electrical machinery, and scrap metals.

Freight Rail Terminals

There are two Intermodal rail terminals (Mason Mega Rail Terminal and CSX Savannah Yard) in the CORE MPO region, both in Chatham County, that accommodate the transfer of shipping containers between rail and other modes, including cargo ships and tractor trailers. In addition, 9 rail bulk, roll-on roll-off facilities and breakbulk terminals are located in Chatham County.

Freight Intensive Land Use

Freight intensive land uses, typically warehouses and distribution centers, are generally concentrated along the Savannah River and I-95 north of Louisville Road. Recently, freight generating developments are being constructed in the County along the I-16 corridor to the west and along the I-95 corridor south near the Bryan County border. Over 47,000 acres of County land (14% of the total), is zoned for freight-generating uses.

Provision of truck parking facilities is a critical consideration for freight development activity, the majority of which are sited in adjacent counties. Of the total 22 truck parking facilities in the CORE MPO region, three commercial parking facilities are located in Savannah and a public parking facility in unincorporated Chatham County.

Railroad Crossings

Rail crossings can be at-grade or grade separated. There are 192 public at-grade rail crossings in the CORE MPO region. Of the top 10 busiest public at-grade rail crossings, six are located in Chatham County. Crossing 641179A in the CSX transportation network on Telfair Road near the I-16/I-516 interchange in the City of Savannah, adjacent to a concentration of freight-intensive land uses, is busiest.

Grade separation refers to a crossing in which the roadway and rail are at different elevations. At-grade rail crossings represent points where the highway and rail systems interact and have the potential for conflict, posing safety hazards.

Chatham County secured a Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant in 2023 and is conducting the Multimodal Community Improvement Project in coordination with Savannah, Garden City, Port Wentworth, GPA, CSX, and Norfolk Southern. The findings from this study will be incorporated into the next Freight Plan update.

Passenger Services

Passenger Rail

Amtrak Silver Service provides intercity passenger rail service to Savannah with direct service between Miami and New York, daily connections to the national Amtrak network, and connecting bus service to other regional destinations. The train station is located at 2611 Seaboard Coastline Drive. GDOT is currently conducting the Atlanta – Savannah Intercity Passenger Rail Project to explore new passenger rail options.

Passenger Bus

Greyhound Bus Line offers intercity bus service between Savannah and other cities within the United States. The terminal is located at the Intermodal Transit Center at 610 Oglethorpe Avenue in Savannah. There are over 30 departures daily at this station. This station also serves as a transit center for Chatham Area Transit.

Non-Motorized Transportation

While the automobile is the primary mode of transportation in the CORE MPO region, bicycling and walking are important modes. Regional participants have a strong commitment to the provision of safe and connected facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Since October 2021, various planning efforts have been undertaken regarding non-motorized transportation.

- CORE MPO updated the Non-Motorized Transportation Plan. The Plan identified needed improvements for the non-motorized modes; identified areas for amenities to help create a human-scale environment that encourages use of physically active modes; and prioritized improvements and identified funding opportunities.
- CORE MPO is conducting the Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Study with completion slated in March 2027. The study will: create a bike and pedestrian facility inventory; conduct a comprehensive regional non-motorized needs assessment; and provide recommendations for improvements that can be incorporated into the Non-Motorized Transportation Plan and local plans for implementation.
- The Savannah MOVES Study conducted by the City of Savannah will develop a multi-modal operational analysis and make recommendations for improvements.
- Non federally funded projects included improvements to the network from the 2014/2020 Non-Motorized Transportation Plan, Tide to Town, and City and County Capital Improvement Programs.

Transit Systems

Chatham Area Transit Authority (CAT)

CAT is the agency responsible for the provision of transit services to the Savannah area, specifically the City of Savannah, the unincorporated Chatham County, and portions of Garden City and Port Wentworth, providing a combination of bus and ferry service.

CAT Services

CAT's public transportation services include three types of service.

- Sixteen "fixed" bus routes serving major corridors and neighborhoods in Savannah and parts of Chatham County and two downtown "DOT" shuttles offering zero fare transportation in downtown Savannah, the Victorian District south to Victory Drive, the Historic Carver Village and Cloverdale neighborhoods.
- CAT Mobility provides transportation for people with disabilities. People can use this service to travel anywhere in Chatham County.
- Savannah Belles Ferry System connects Savannah's River Street with the Savannah International Trade and Convention Center and Hutchinson Island.

Since October 2021, CAT has added four new fixed-route minibuses that operate on Routes 6 Cross-town, 11 Candler, and 12 Henry, along with four new paratransit cutaway buses to improve reliability for riders. All new vehicles are ADA-accessible and equipped with audio and visual announcements and bike racks. Additional upgrades included lighting improvements at CAT facilities, ongoing renovations at the CAT Intermodal System, more operators to improve schedule reliability, and new technology that allows riders to track buses and ferries in real time.

In April 2024, CAT launched a new SMART Microtransit Pilot Program. The ADA accessible CAT SMART service which includes mobility pick up and drop off is operational in Zone 1: East Savannah. CAT expects to expand services to other zones

CAT Ridership Update

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on transit ridership, with all modes showing a sharp decline in ridership in Spring 2020 through 2021. There has been an upward trend following the pandemic although the current annual ridership has not reached the pre-pandemic 2019 level, as presented in Figure 5.11.

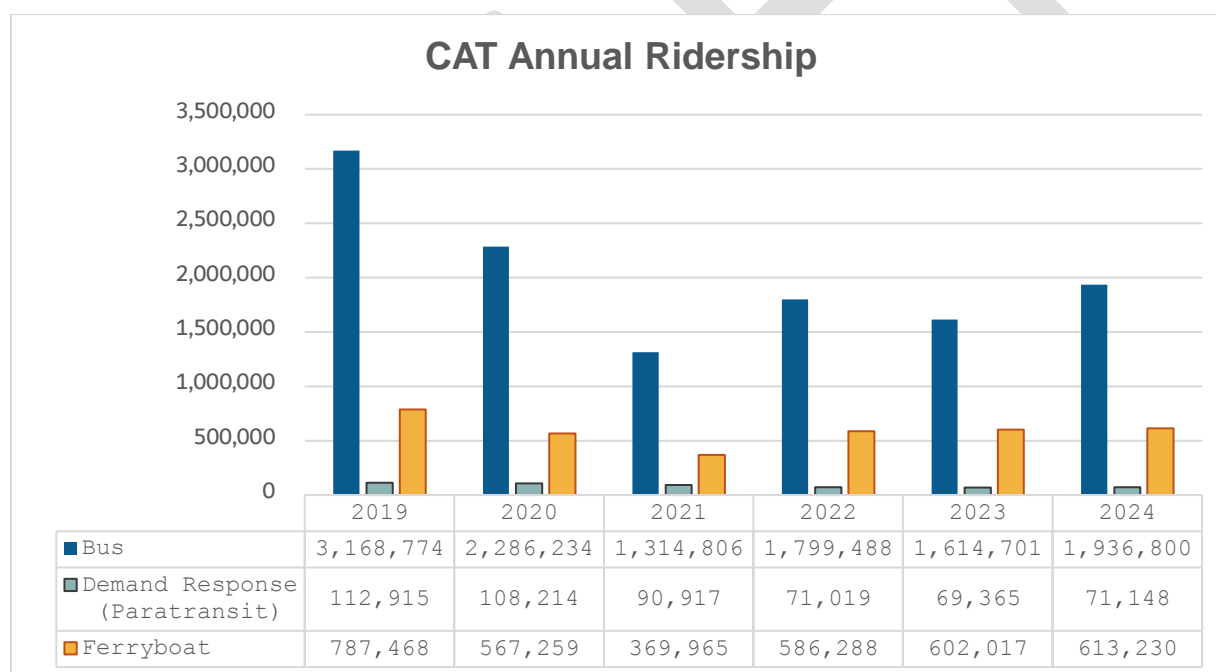


Figure 5.11 – Savannah-Chatham County: CAT Annual Ridership By All Modes

Since the pandemic, CAT has been challenged by an ongoing and persistent shortage of drivers, impacting the quality and reliability of service (route adjustments, reduction of operation hours, increased headways, etc.). In response to these issues, in October 2022, CAT reduced all services to match workforce capability, although they have been working diligently to attract, hire and train drivers expeditiously, adding services as drivers onboard the workforce. Not considering the impacts from COVID and the driver shortage, the data show that the highest ridership on the fixed routes occurs on the following routes:

- North-south routes between downtown, the Oglethorpe Mall area, and the Georgia Southern University (GSU) Armstrong Campus;
- Near hospitals, universities and malls;
- Augusta Road as far as Brampton Road;
- Skidaway Road and Pennsylvania Avenue from DeRenne to E. President Street; and
- Savannah’s DOT Forsyth Shuttle.

The Savannah Belles Ferry service is funded by the Savannah Trade Center. The ferry ridership is heavily based on Convention Center events and tourism. Ridership typically begins to pick up in March with the St. Patrick’s Day events and continues strong through August, slowing down after Labor Day.

Average Annual Passengers Per Hour By Route						
Route/Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
3 WEST CHATHAM	14.8	13.7	9.4	7.6	8.0	12.8
3B AUGUSTA AVENUE	23.3	20.6	14.4	12.4	16.2	22.5
4 BARNARD	10.8	9.5	6.9	5.7	6.6	8.5
6 CROSSTOWN	9.1	8.2	5.9	5.6	6.7	8.9
10 EAST SAVANNAH	17.1	17.0	11.4	8.6	11.1	16.3
11 CANDLER	6.5	6.1	3.2	3.5	60.2	4.2
12 HENRY	N/A	7.9	5.7	4.8	5.4	8.7
14 ABERCORN	22.8	20.1	13.5	12.1	16.1	23.3
17 SILK HOPE	17.2	16.2	13.0	9.3	10.5	16.5
20 SKIDAWAY/ COFFEE BLUFF	6.5	4.7	2.0	1.6	1.6	N/A
25 WESTLAKE APARTMENTS/MLK	N/A	14.9	10.7	8.0	11.7	17.1
27 WATERS	18.9	16.4	11.7	10.5	14.0	20.0
28 WATERS	20.5	18.8	13.1	10.8	12.5	17.3
29 WEST GWINNETT	13.8	12.8	8.0	7.1	8.0	11.2
31 SKIDAWAY/SANDFLY	19.4	18.0	12.2	10.4	13.9	18.9

Figure 5.12 – Savannah-Chatham County: Average Annual Passengers Per Hour Per Route

CAT Planning and Programming

CAT continues to evaluate system coverage and operations, analyzing analyze ridership to ensure an efficient and reliable transit system is in place for the community. Since October 2021, CAT has completed various planning efforts, including the following.

- Master Transit Plan – Outlines a strategic plan for the long range future of mobility and positions CAT to respond to opportunities created through local and regional growth, new transportation technologies, and lessons learned about travel needs and patterns.
- Comprehensive Operational Analysis and Transit Development Plan - Provides an analysis of current services and a guide for improvements over the next 5 years. The

recommended changes are primarily focused on service changes to the fixed routes and the introduction of new complimentary micro-transit services to best respond to growing and changing customer needs.

- Bus Stop Inventory Study – Assess the 1,000+ bus stops using a GIS database for location and condition, focusing on safety, lighting, accessibility (ADA), and amenities like benches.

CAT has identified the following improvements to provide more efficient and accommodating services and to meet the future needs of the growing community.

CAT Improvement Projects	
Short Term (TIP Years)	Long Term
Transit ITS	Vehicle Replacement/Expansion - Fixed Route
Preventative Maintenance	Vehicle Replacement – Paratransit
Facility Enhancements and Rehabilitation	Intelligent Transit System (ITS)
Vehicle Replacement/Purchase	Upgraded Farebox and Payment System
Ferry Boat Rehab, Purchase and Construction	Electric Vehicle Infrastructure
Paratransit Maintenance Facility	Passenger Amenities
Bus Stop Improvement Program	Facility Improvement Project – ITC
Gillig Zero Emission Buses (35-ft)	Facility Improvement Project – Gwinnett
Infrastructure & Depot Charging	Vanpool Capital
	Park & Ride Capital
	Facility Construction - Ferry Maintenance Facility
	Facility Construction - Ferry Dock
	Ferry Boat Construction

Figure 5.13 – Savannah-Chatham County: CAT Improvement Short and Long Term Projects

Coastal Regional Coaches

The Coastal Regional Commission (CRC) operates the Coastal Regional Coaches, part of the regional rural public transit program that provides general public transit service in the ten coastal Georgia region. This demand-response, advance reservation service is available to anyone, for any purpose, and to any destination in the coastal region. The CRC service must have either origin or destination outside of the Savannah Urbanized Area (UZA) and it supplements the predominantly Savannah UZA CAT service.

Transportation Technology

Innovations in transportation technology are often born out of three necessities: efficiency, ease, and safety. Chatham County is positioning itself to be at the forefront of this technology.

Traffic Operations

Transportation improvements that focus on operations and technology can maintain and even restore the performance of the existing transportation system before extra capacity is needed. The goal is to maximize performance of the existing transportation facilities. Operational improvement projects may enable transportation agencies to “stretch” their funding to benefit more areas and customers, resulting in: improved quality of life; smoother and more reliable traffic flow; improved safety; reduced congestion; less wasted fuel; cleaner air; increased economic vitality; and more efficient use of resources.

Traditionally, congestion issues caused by physical constraints were primarily addressed by funding major capital projects, such as adding lanes or building new interchanges and roads. In recent years, transportation agencies have faced increased urbanization and a growing demand for travel with less funding and more physical constraints. Building our way out of congestion is no longer a viable approach. Issues include:

- Limited funds – The primary source of federal transportation funding for the U.S. highway system is the federal gas tax, which has not changed since 1993. Since that time, the financial constraints for public agencies have increased.
- Inflation – The cost to build roads and bridges has increased.
- Fuel efficiency – Vehicles today can travel farther without refills, decreasing revenue. The growing use of electric and plug-in hybrid cars has also reduced fuel purchases.
- Advances in Technology – Transportation agencies can leverage technology to develop solutions to address congestion issues. However, given the advancement in consumer technologies, privately owned mobility services (Uber, Lyft, etc.), and more widespread availability of information, the traveling public expects that the products they use and the technologies they encounter will be “smart” and will ultimately improve their travel experience. They also expect accurate and reliable information. Technology will likely have an even greater impact on the transportation network in the future with automation, connectivity, and big data.

Traffic Control Center of City of Savannah

The City of Savannah operates a Traffic Control Center (TCC) that is active primarily from 7:30 am to 6 pm and 24 hours during major events such as the St Patricks’ Day Parade. When they relocated in 2023, new monitors, fiber installation extensions, consulting and software were installed, preparing for connection to the GDOT system to provide a more regional operation.

The City of Savannah currently has access to more than 315 cameras that can be monitored and provide recordings to review incidents. The City has access to the 77 GDOT CCTV cameras and are in the process of integrating the TCC into the broader statewide system. The TCC would serve as a regional traffic management center supporting ITS infrastructure and operational improvements throughout the region.

GDOT SigOps

The City of Savannah and Chatham County benefit from a regional traffic operations program sponsored by GDOT which has morphed into SigOps as of 2026, working closely with state and local traffic engineers to optimize traffic signals across the state. SigOps focuses on two primary areas: Signal Optimization and Signal Operations.

- **Traffic Signal Optimization:** Adjusts timing and technology for smoother traffic flow, reducing congestion and emissions.
- **Transit Signal Priority (TSP):** Works with CAT, allowing buses to communicate with signals for priority, improving on-time performance.
- **Connected Vehicle (V2X) Technology:** Deploys roadside units (RSUs) for communication between vehicles and infrastructure, enhancing TSP and future applications.
- **Remote Management:** Monitors and manages signals across the state from GDOT's central Traffic Management Center (TMC).
- **Performance Monitoring:** Uses real-time data and automated measures to assess signal performance and identify issues quickly.

GDOT DMS

Dynamic message signs (DMS) can be used for many applications in traffic management, public safety, and evacuation. Together with CCTV cameras, DMS are important for mitigating unanticipated disruptions to the system, allowing GDOT to convey timely information on travel conditions to the traveling public. There are 9 DMS deployed throughout the CORE MPO region, eight of which are in Chatham County.

Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) or Ride-hailing/Ride Share

Ride-hailing services use apps and websites to connect passengers with drivers who provide rides in their personal vehicles. Companies such as Uber and Lyft expand transportation choices, increase carpooling, reduce vehicle mile travels and car ownership. However, ride shares may compete with public transit provision and exacerbate inequitable service.

Bike and Scooter Share

Bike and scooter share systems offer fleets of bicycles and scooters for short term rental within a defined service area. Currently the only service in the CORE MPO region is offered to SCAD students. This industry sector is now primarily privately operated. While vendors may be exploring opportunities in Savannah, particularly the historic downtown and some college campuses, in 2018 the Savannah City Council approved an ordinance prohibiting any shared mobility device from being placed in the public right-of-way, on public property or offered for use anywhere in the City, based on experiences in other jurisdictions. The ordinance is intended to be a short-term response, allowing City Staff and the community to work together to develop a long-term solution.

SCAD currently operates its own separate transit system, the Bee Line, for enrolled students and staff, in addition to bike share and car share programs for students.

TRANSPORTATION GOALS

The following Transportation goals and objectives developed for the 2040 Plan will be carried forward to the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update.

Goal 1 - Support safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation designs and improvements that enhance neighborhood connectivity for all modes of travel including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists.

Investing in transportation improvements that encourage connectivity and multi-modal travel can significantly improve the lives of residents. Making it easier to reach nearby destinations and encouraging alternative modes of transportation reduces the negative environmental and health impacts associated with increased motor vehicle use and the dangers associated with conflicts between motorists and pedestrians/cyclists. Additionally, creating safe, connected transportation networks provides opportunities for residents to exercise, potentially improving their overall health.

Objectives:

- Minimize frequency and severity of vehicular accidents
- Minimize conflicts and increase safety for non-motorized users
- Promote projects that aid in hurricane evacuation
- Implement green infrastructure to reduce the region's stormwater impacts from a changing climate
- Eliminate at-grade railroad crossings

GOAL 2 - Improve accessibility to employment centers, institutions, commercial corridors, and recreational facilities equitably through multi-modal connections, bikeways, trails and greenways.

Accessibility and connectivity are key components to creating a successful, equitable community for all residents. For those who are unable to drive or do not have access to a vehicle, including low-income residents, individuals with disabilities, and older adults, travel to jobs, needs, and services is often a challenge. Such barriers to job and educational opportunities, healthcare services, and healthy food options exacerbate existing inequalities. The ability to reach everyday destinations safely, reliably, and conveniently through multi-modal connections can significantly improve the overall economic, health, and social well-being of all residents, particularly those with limited resources and limited mobility.

Objectives:

- Provide local connections by clustering bus stops, bike infrastructure, placemaking and wayfinding devices in strategic locations along commercial corridors
- Advocate for more frequent and reliable transit service to accommodate additional ridership in more locations
- Promote transportation projects around existing and emerging employment centers, institutions, commercial corridors, and recreational facilities

- Promote and prioritize greenway corridors, trails, and other non–motorized transportation projects

GOAL 3 - Maintain and preserve transportation infrastructure in a manner that protects unique regional characteristics, quality of life, and the environment

Providing a transportation network that efficiently moves people and products from one location to another is vital to the prosperity of a community; efficiency should not be the sole consideration, however, when designing and locating transportation elements. The placement and design of transportation infrastructure can significantly impact the surrounding environment and community if the unique characteristics of the area are not considered in the planning process. Savannah and Chatham County are renowned for their historic charm and natural beauty. Protecting the distinctive attributes that distinguish the area from the rest of the country should be equal in priority to cost and efficiency in the decision-making process. Creating a balance between form and function, the natural and built environment, and vehicle and human needs should be the goal in all transportation design.

Objectives:

- Enforce Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) approach to help develop transportation projects that serve all users and are compatible with the surroundings
- Monitor vulnerable infrastructure through visual and other inspection methods
- Protect wetlands, historic resources, neighborhoods, recreational facilities and other important resources
- Support infill development along existing infrastructure
- Supporting "Eco-armoring" or utilizing creative methods of protection

GOAL 4 - Maintain and enhance transportation infrastructure that supports and enables local, regional and global economic vitality and competitiveness, productivity and efficiency.

The ability to transport people and products efficiently makes modern civilization possible. A strong network of transportation infrastructure fosters long term economic growth by making the transportation system more efficient and reliable and can expand economic opportunities beyond local borders, making the region more attractive to businesses and industries that serve global customers. With a transportation network that covers land, air and sea, Savannah and Chatham County have long served as the regional center for Coastal Georgia and the Lowcountry of South Carolina. To continue the role as regional hub, maintenance and enhancement of existing transportation infrastructure to meet future demands will be key.

Objectives:

- Develop an intermodal transportation system that sustains economic activity by linking trucking facilities, rail terminals, airports, and seaports with limited access roads

- Encourage the development of a regional multi-modal transportation system at identified and emerging growth center areas
- Promote projects that provide the maximum travel benefit per cost
- Minimize work trip congestion

LINKS

Chatham County SPLOST website - <https://splost.chathamcountyga.gov/>

City of Savannah SPLOST website - <https://www.savannahga.gov/2568/Your-SPLOST-Penny-at-Work>

City of Savannah CIP website - <https://www.savannahga.gov/3635/Capital-Projects-Semi-Annual-Reports>

GPA, SAV, Freight Rail System, Freight Intensive Land Use, Truck Parking Inventory, and Railroad Crossings - <https://www.thempc.org/Core/Fp#gsc.tab=0>.

Savannah and portions of SR 307/Bourne Avenue.

More information on the Highway Functional Classification, Bridges and Pavement Conditions in the CORE MPO region can be found in the CORE MPO Regional Freight Transportation Plan at <https://www.thempc.org/Core/Fp#gsc.tab=0>.

The study information can be found at <https://atlsavpassrail-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>.

More information on the plan can be found at <https://regionaltdp-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/pages/crc>.

CHAPTER 6
HOUSING ELEMENT

DRAFT

Housing Element

Introduction

The Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan provides an updated inventory, analysis, and assessment of the region's housing stock and the key issues shaping housing access, affordability, and choice in both unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah. This chapter identifies major housing challenges, evaluates future needs, and outlines strategies to guide housing development as the community continues to grow and change. The overarching goal is to ensure that every resident, regardless of age, income, or household type, has access to safe, stable, and attainable housing in a healthy, resilient environment.

Population and employment trends, particularly rapid job growth tied to the Hyundai Metaplant, logistics expansion at the Port of Savannah, and continued in-migration are increasing pressure on the local housing market. Savannah's growing student population, rising number of single-person and small households, and a rapidly aging demographic further shape demand for different housing types. In addition to population expansion, increasing rental rates and inflated listing prices of available for-sale inventory, combined with relatively stagnant incomes in comparison to rising housing costs, has resulted in a disparity. While the vacancy rates reflect a high demand market, certain sectors of the population experience a significant housing cost burden. These dynamics underscore the need for a more flexible, diversified housing supply that includes multi-family options, missing-middle housing, workforce housing, adaptive reuse of non-traditional housing structures, and accessible units for older adults.

The State of Housing

Housing Types – Chatham County

Savannah and Chatham County possess a uniquely diverse housing landscape shaped by the region's history, culture, and coastal geography. The area includes historic 18th- and 19th-century homes, traditional "streetcar" neighborhoods, modest postwar subdivisions, rural homesteads, multifamily communities, senior housing, and newer coastal and marsh-view developments. These options range from restored urban rowhouses and walkable mixed-use neighborhoods to beachfront cottages and master-planned communities in West Chatham. Over time, this diversity has become both an asset and a challenge: while the region offers a wide range of living environments, many households now struggle to find housing that is affordable, appropriately sized, and located near jobs, schools, and services.

Housing Structure and Form

Housing in Unincorporated Chatham County is predominantly low-density single-family configurations. Approximately 79% of housing units are single-family homes, (of which 6.0% are attached single-family) reflecting a suburban and rural neighborhood development pattern, and legacy workforce residential neighborhoods on the periphery of Savannah's urban core. Almost 40% of the respondents to the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update survey indicated interest in expanding the supply of townhomes, which currently is a popular housing design for infill lot consolidations and is a more naturally affordable homeowner option for new construction,

although only a small proportion of total housing stock. Multifamily housing with 10 or more units per complex represents less than one-tenth of the housing stock, with duplexes and smaller multiplexes combined accounting for 8.2% of the inventory. Mobile homes remain a modest but important component in lower-density areas due to more natural affordability, although 50% of respondents to the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update survey indicated that this was a housing type that the County did not need to add to the current inventory.

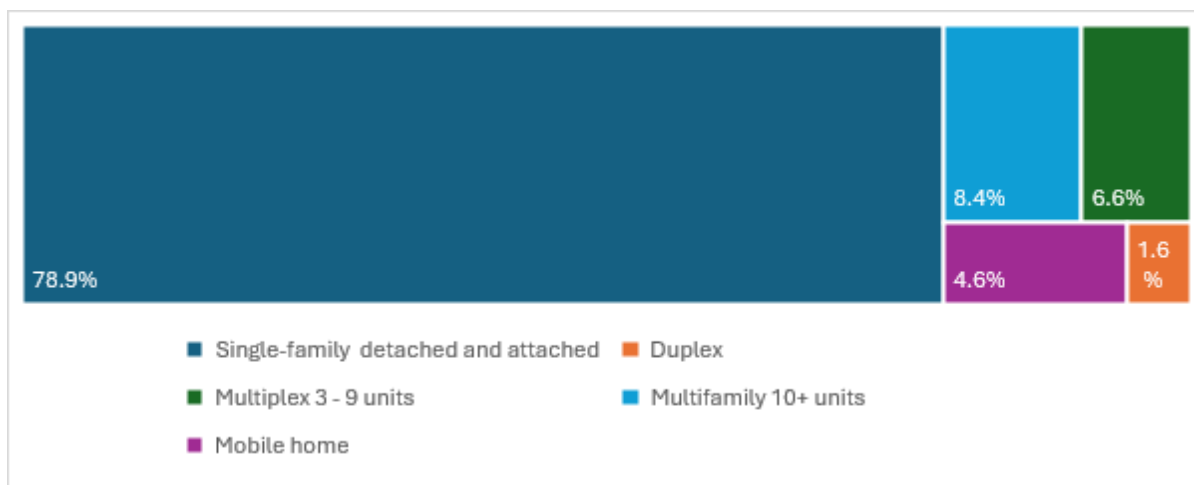


Figure 6.1 – Unincorporated Chatham County: Housing Types

Small-scale multifamily housing such as duplexes and three- to four-unit structures account for a limited share of units countywide, indicating fewer naturally occurring “missing middle” housing options. Over 40% of respondents support more duplex style units, which are a flexible dwelling type that can blend seamlessly into single family detached neighborhoods. Additionally, 50% of the respondents indicated increased demand for accessory dwelling units (ADUs), both an historic dwelling type and an option to intensify use of single-family properties. Expanding housing choice and affordability will likely depend on regulatory adjustments, infill strategies, promotion of mixed-use projects and targeted incentives in addition to naturally occurring densification where it can be supported by infrastructure.

Regulatory Context and Infrastructure Constraints

Chatham County’s zoning ordinance permits a wide range of residential forms, defined essentially by infrastructure availability. Large minimum lot sizes, substantial setbacks, and height limits reinforce low-density residential patterns across much of the county. Density allowances and permitted housing types vary by zoning district and are closely tied to the availability of centralized water and sewer service, as much of the unincorporated county relies on septic systems or limited utility capacity. Higher-density housing, typically multifamily developments and attached housing forms are generally feasible only in areas presently served by centralized utilities or where logical and sequential extensions are supported. Preservation of natural resources and consideration of flood damage and stormwater management remains an overarching consideration in approval of rezoning requests to higher densities. Accessory and supplemental housing options such as garage apartments (ADUs) and caretaker’s quarters are

permitted but subject to lot size thresholds and placement restrictions that limit their broader application as an affordability strategy.

The predominance of detached housing, particularly newer projects, reflects deliberate policy choices to align development intensity with environmental protection, public health, and service capacity. The MPC has been reviewing zoning requests to allow for greater density products such as townhomes and apartments in targeted activity node areas, which previously had been regulated by lower density zoning. Addressing future housing affordability and workforce needs will require coordinated planning that links zoning flexibility with targeted infrastructure investment, enabling greater housing diversity in appropriate locations, discussed further in the Land Use Element, while maintaining consistency with growth management, protection of natural resources, and resilience objectives.

Housing Types - City of Savannah

Housing Structure and Form

The City of Savannah exhibits a more urban and diverse housing structure than Chatham County overall. While single-family homes remain the largest category, they represent a smaller share of total housing units. Savannah contains a significantly higher proportion of small-scale multifamily buildings, duplexes and three- to four-unit structures reflecting historic development patterns that support smaller lots, compact neighborhoods, mixed residential forms and centralized water and sewer infrastructure. This built form accommodates ADUs and other missing-middle housing forms through zoning and policy updates without altering neighborhood character, which is a housing design that Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update survey respondents highly support.

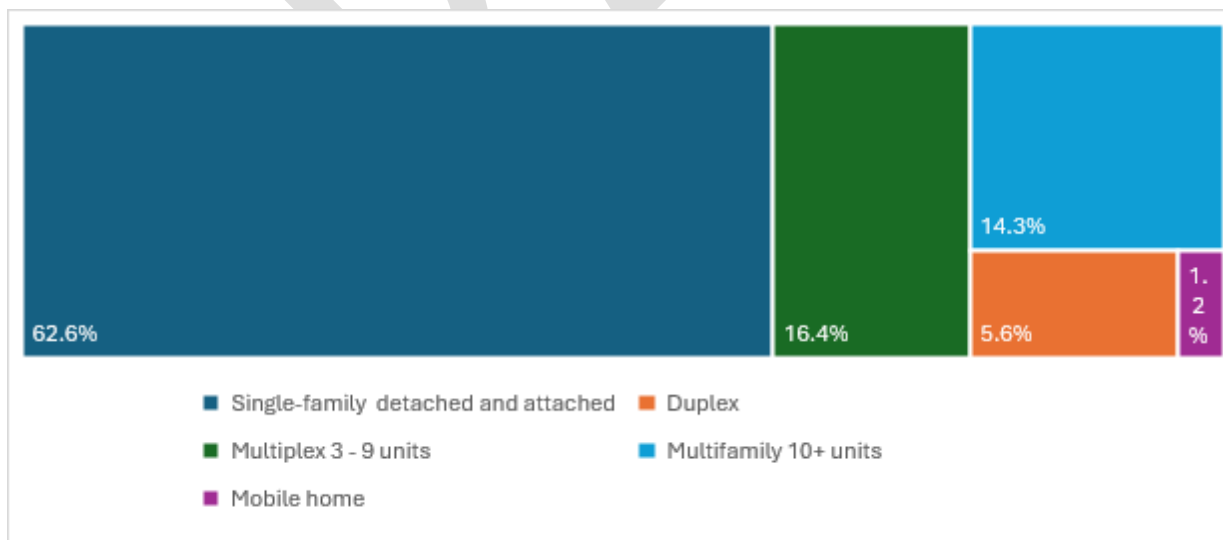


Figure 6.2 – Savannah: Number of Units in Structure

Higher residential density multifamily buildings also play a central role in Savannah’s housing stock, providing a substantial share of the city’s rental housing, aligning with Savannah’s infill-focused growth strategy and emphasis on walkability, transit access, and neighborhood-scale density.

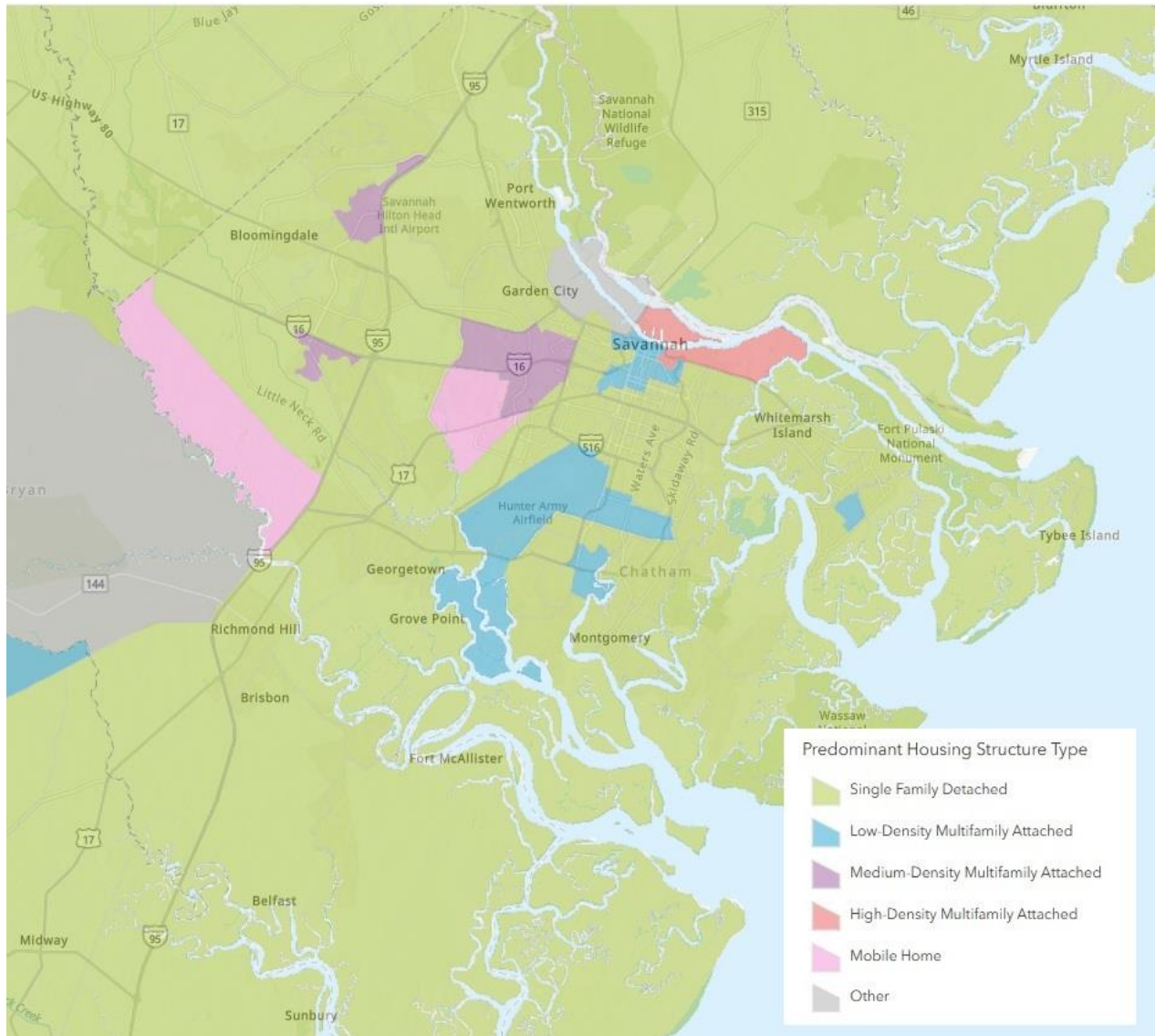


Exhibit 6.1 – Savannah-Chatham County: Predominant Housing Types

Regulatory Context and Housing Flexibility

Savannah’s zoning ordinance is closely aligned with its historic housing fabric and supports a wide range of housing types, including accessory dwelling units (ADU) and mixed-use residential forms. ADUs are explicitly defined and permitted, subject to size, height, and placement standards designed to maintain compatibility with principal dwellings, many of which are older homes on smaller lots. In 2023, the City of Savannah amended its code to make it easier to add carriage houses and ADUs, including changing lot size criteria from 200% to 125% of the primary structure. Upper-story residential units above ground-floor commercial uses are also allowed in mixed-use districts, reinforcing adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

The City of Savannah, overwhelmingly supported by the public, amended the Zoning Ordinance in 2025 to facilitate the provision of more diverse housing typologies, with significant modifications aimed at reducing barriers to increase development of more economically attainable housing near the city center. An Affordable Housing Overlay District, covering over 400 acres, was introduced that allows for increased density, including duplexes, triplexes, and quadplexes, more naturally affordable and diverse “missing middle” housing forms, in historically single-family neighborhoods. The amendments also feature density bonuses such as reduced lot sizes and setbacks in association with provision of affordable units (defined as no more than 30% of a household’s gross income). The potential for increased density and affordability maximizes the high walkability and transit accessibility of these neighborhoods, and attention will be directed through the approval process that the design of new projects respects the character of the existing neighborhood fabric. It is anticipated that additional neighborhoods will be incorporated into the Overlay District in the future.

The Affordable Housing Overlay zoning changes more expressly target the Victorian and Thomas Square/Metropolitan districts, and a 22-acre portion of the Live Oak neighborhood.

Specialized and group living arrangements such as senior housing, single room occupancy units, shelters, and recovery facilities are incorporated into the zoning ordinance through tailored standards related to management, separation, and buffering. Collectively, these regulatory provisions support housing diversity, infill opportunities, adaptive reuse, and incremental density while maintaining neighborhood character. They position Savannah to address affordability, aging-in-place, and housing stability challenges through flexible use of its existing and future housing stock.

Age of Housing

While newer construction generally implies lower immediate rehabilitation needs, it also may correlate with higher housing costs and increased reliance on automobile-oriented development patterns. Older housing is present in some established communities and mobile home neighborhoods, in which reinvestment and maintenance remain important. Overall, rehabilitation needs in Unincorporated Chatham County are more spatially dispersed and less concentrated than in Savannah, shifting the County’s housing challenge toward managing growth, infrastructure demand, and long-term affordability rather than large-scale housing preservation.

Age & Condition of Housing Stock – Unincorporated Chatham County

Housing stock is predominantly newer countywide, with the largest share of units constructed between 1990 and 2009, followed closely by housing built between 1980 and 1999, reflecting continued outward growth, greenfield development, and subdivision-based residential expansion in unincorporated areas. The relative youth of the housing stock decreases the prevalence of age-related deficiencies, although almost 23% of the stock are approaching major rehabilitation age, which might include outdated plumbing, faulty electrical systems, and some structural deterioration. Units built between 1970 and 1989 indicate a high potential for requiring infrastructure, electrical and HVAC retrofits. Although a smaller proportion of housing stock, in units constructed prior to 1960, more significant renovation and preservation conditions exist in

localized areas. It should be kept in mind that a portion of the older housing stock within the overall county has been annexed into jurisdictions, contributing to the lower presence of units requiring potential housing preservation, reinvestment, and code-compliant rehabilitation.

Year Housing Structure Was Built						
Year Built	Planning Label	Rationale	Unincorporated Chatham County		Savannah	
			%	Approx. Units	%	Approx. Units
Built 2020 or later	Recent construction	Captures post-pandemic production	1.4%	580	1.9%	1,290
Built 2010–2019	Post-recession recovery	Smaller but distinct cohort	11.1%	4,530	13.0%	8,857
Built 2000–2009	Growth-era housing	Major suburban expansion	21.7%	8,825	9.6%	6,512
Built 1990–1999	Mature suburban stock	Approaching major rehab age	22.6%	9,190	5.6%	3,809
Built 1980–1989	Aging suburban stock	Energy and system upgrades needed	19.0%	7,734	10.8%	7,377
Built 1970–1979	Pre-modern energy codes	High retrofit potential	13.0%	5,311	10.7%	7,311
Built 1960–1969	Early suburbanization	Aging infrastructure	3.8%	1,535	10.9%	7,434
Built 1950–1959	Postwar housing	Smaller units, maintenance-heavy	4.4%	1,796	14.2%	9,689
Built 1940–1949	WWII-era housing	Often historic or near-historic	1.0%	413	7.1%	4,830
Built 1939 or earlier	Historic housing stock	Preservation + rehab priority	2.0%	817	16.2%	11,065
Total			100%	40,735	100%	68,174

Source: ACS 2024 5-Year Estimates

Figure 6.3 – Savannah-Chatham County: Year Housing Structure was Built

Age & Condition of Housing Stock - Savannah

In contrast, the City of Savannah’s housing stock is significantly older and more widely distributed across the decades with a notable concentration of units built before 1940 and mid-20th century. Almost 50% of the City’s housing stock was constructed before 1970, reflecting Savannah’s early urban development and historic settlement patterns. Older housing stock contributes to the City’s architectural character and historic neighborhoods, but it also increases maintenance demands and long-term operating costs in certain neighborhoods, particularly where lower-income households and renters are more prevalent. These conditions underscore the importance of housing preservation, reinvestment, and code-compliant rehabilitation as core components of Savannah’s housing strategy, alongside new construction and infill.

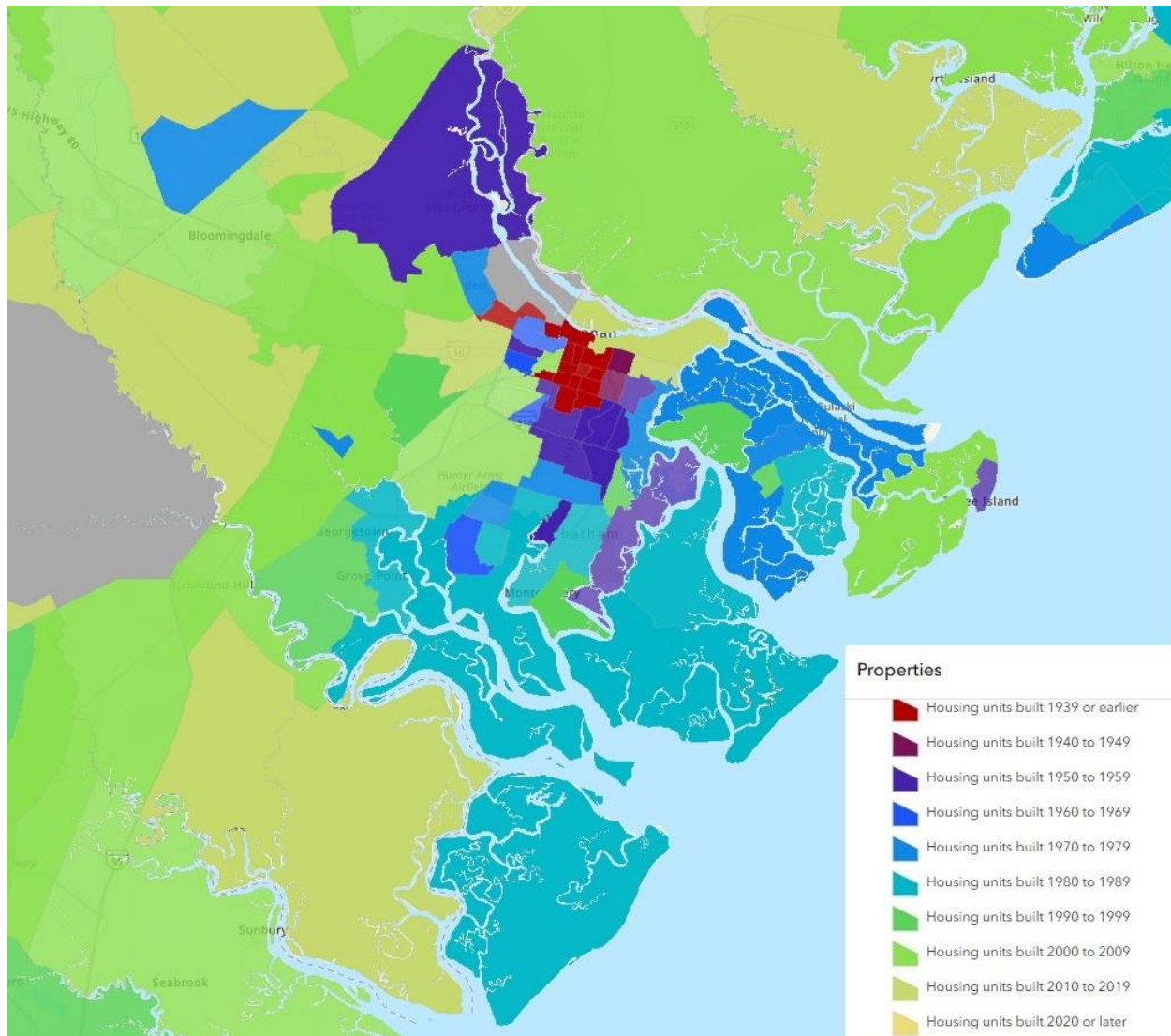


Exhibit 6.2 – Savannah-Chatham County: Age of Housing

Planning Value and Implications

The contrast in housing age between the County and the City of Savannah has important planning implications. Savannah’s concentration of older housing stock corresponds with higher rehabilitation needs, greater infrastructure and energy-efficiency challenges, and increased vulnerability to affordability pressures, particularly in historic neighborhoods where preservation requirements intersect with limited household incomes. These conditions underscore the need for continued targeted housing rehabilitation programs, coordinated preservation and resilience strategies, and policies that support reinvestment without displacement. In less densely developed areas, planning priorities may focus more on infrastructure capacity, maintenance of newer housing stock, and ensuring long-term affordability as these units age. Together, these patterns support differentiated housing strategies that respond to the distinct age, condition, and reinvestment needs of each jurisdiction rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Housing Infrastructure and Basic Services

Heating fuel statistics show a continued shift toward electric systems in both Savannah and Chatham County, with a modest decline in utility gas use. This reflects ongoing modernization of housing systems, particularly in newer construction and rehabilitated units. A slightly higher incidence of sources other than gas or electricity are found in Savannah, likely associated with an older dwelling. While electrification supports long-term climate and resilience goals, Savannah’s older housing stock faces higher retrofit and upgrade costs, indicating a need for geographically targeted energy-efficiency and electrification programs.

Housing quality indicators related to plumbing show low rates of units lacking complete plumbing systems, although rates in the Unincorporated County are slightly higher, potentially due to lack of infrastructure, inhabited trailers, garage conversions, or unpermitted ADUs. These conditions signal the continued importance of housing rehabilitation efforts, code enforcement paired with assistance, and programs that prevent deterioration and displacement in aging neighborhoods.

Access to telephone service has improved countywide, although Savannah maintains higher rates of households without service. As communication access becomes increasingly essential, these gaps highlight broader affordability and service challenges. However, 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimate data indicates that roughly 95% of residents countywide has either one or more sources of communication: desktop or laptop, smartphone, tablet, or other computer type. As shown in Figure 6.4, in Unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah, about 11% and 7% of residents, respectively, depend solely on smartphone service, with no other source of communication available. Housing policies should continue to support infrastructure and digital access improvements, particularly in affordable and rehabilitated housing.

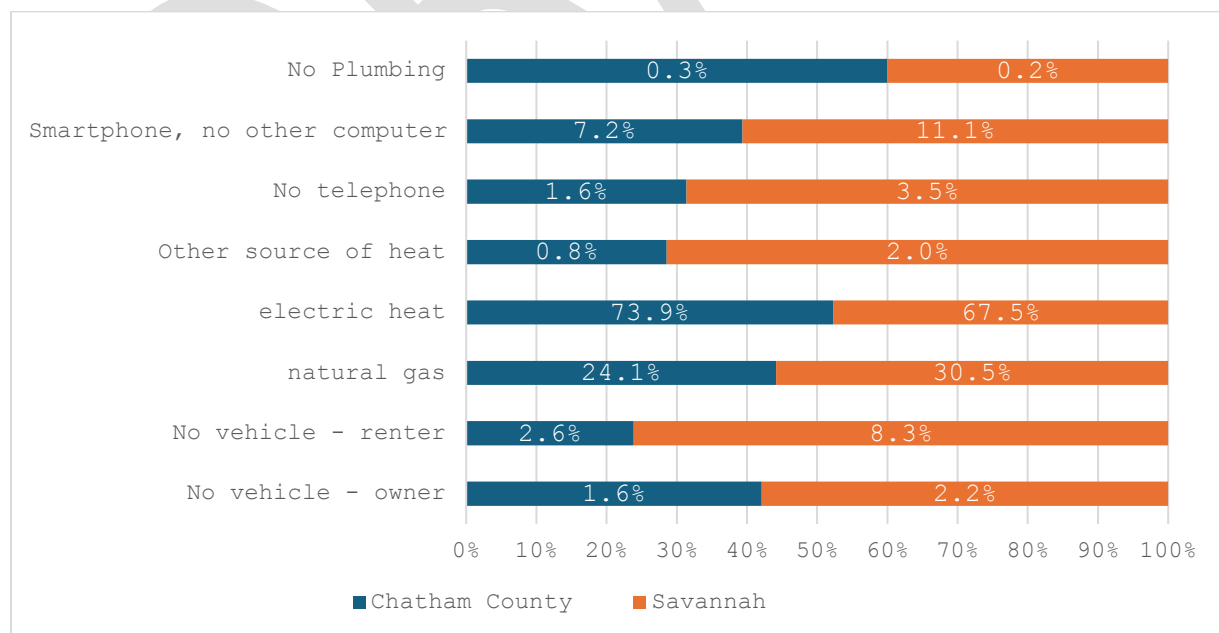


Figure 6.4 – Unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah: Basic Services

Housing Statistics

Household Composition

Household composition varies significantly between Unincorporated Chatham County (total County households minus incorporated and census designated place households) and the City of Savannah. Over one-half of households in the Unincorporated County are married couples, followed by householders living alone. Single parent households and non-family units, such as roommates or unmarried partners, comprise just over 20% of total households combined. In contrast, in Savannah, non-family households comprised of persons living alone predominate, reflecting the presence of students, young professionals, retirees, tourism and a transient workforce associated with manufacturing, logistics, and healthcare employees that often reside alone. Married couple families comprise almost 30% of total households, significantly lower than in the Unincorporated Area, followed by almost one-quarter of households consisting of single parents with no spouse. Data supports the finding that single parent households, typically with children, often face notable economic housing challenges due to a single income.

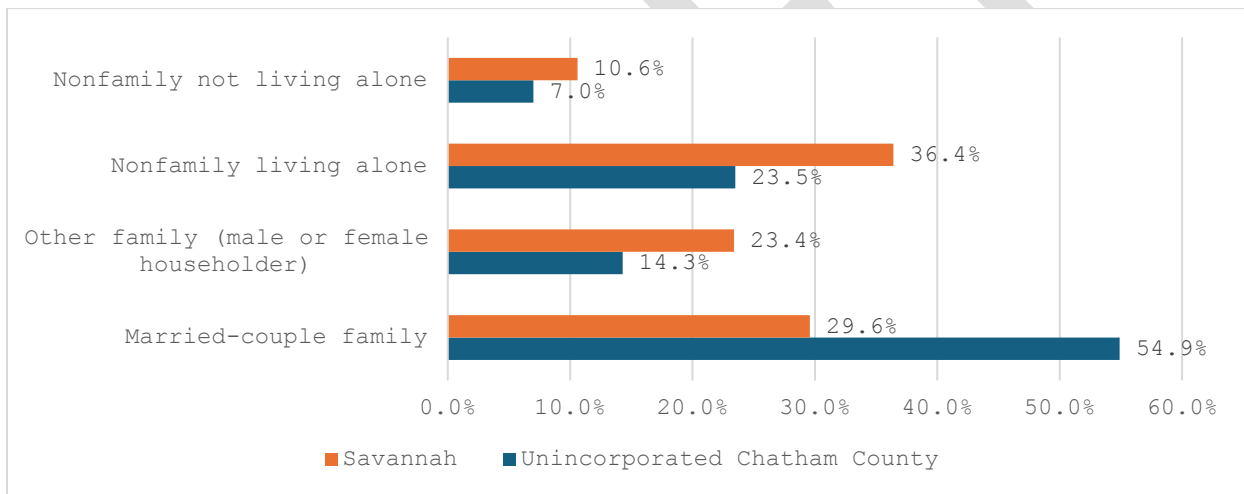


Figure 6.5 – Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah: Household Composition

Household composition in Unincorporated Chatham County has remained fairly stable over the Comprehensive Plan 2040 period, with nonfamily households representing a growing share, and single-person households declining. Formation of married couple households, which predominated in the County in 2021, had declined and was almost equivalent to non-family households in 2024. In Savannah, non-family households predominated in 2021 and have continued as such, increasing to almost 50% of total households, with corresponding drops in married couple and other household type formation. Housing production, particularly in Unincorporated County and smaller incorporated jurisdictions remains dominated by larger single-family units, furthering the inconsistency between housing supply and household needs.

HUD Consolidated Housing Affordability Strategy Income Categories

The Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) provides custom tabulations of 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimate data to identify the extent of housing problems and needs, particularly for low-income households, often used as a benchmark for local jurisdictions to plan for and distribute HUD funds. The CHAS highlights housing cost burdens, overcrowding, and physical problems encountered by households, which, in combination, can identify disadvantaged populations at risk of homelessness or in need of housing assistance. A general overview of income distribution in the overall county and Savannah shows the divergence in income between owner and renter households, with over 20% of renters Countywide falling into the extremely low-income category, whereas the majority of homeowners earn above the Median Family Income, which was \$71,424 in Chatham County and \$57,137 in Savannah in 2022.

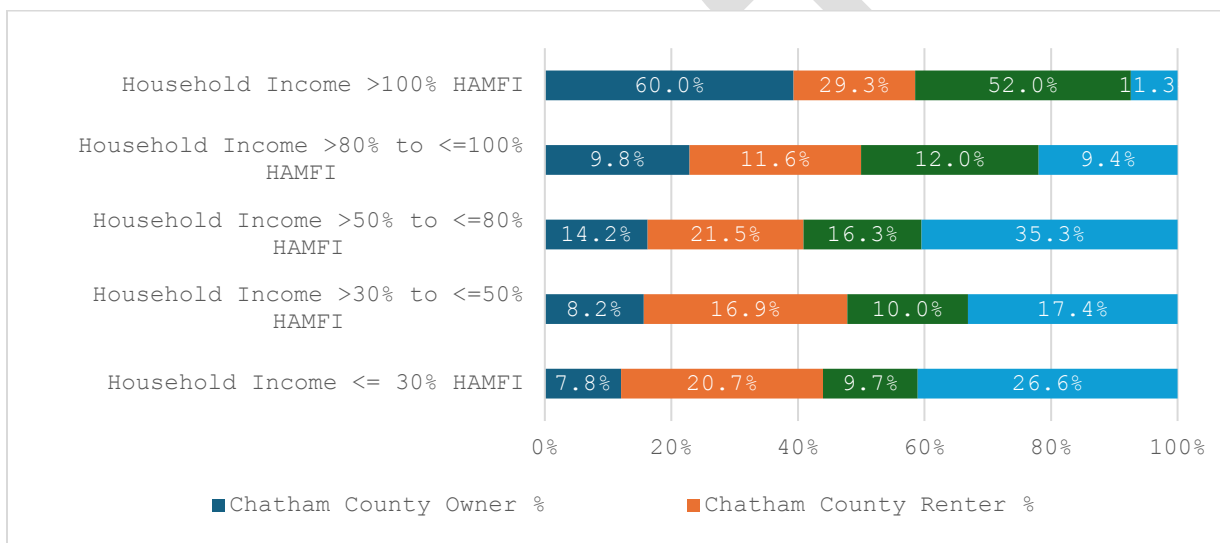


Figure 6.6 – Savannah-Chatham County: CHAS Household Income Categories by Tenure Type

Housing Type and Occupancy Trends

2024 ACS 5-Year Estimate structure-type and occupancy data show a predominance of owner-occupied housing units (roughly 73%) in the Unincorporated County. In contrast, owner-occupied units in Savannah comprise less than half of the housing stock. A slightly higher proportion of owner-occupied units in Savannah are single-family detached and attached unit types, likely townhomes or rowhomes, compared to the unincorporated areas. Mobile homes contribute just 2.7% of homeownership stock countywide, with 52% of this stock within Unincorporated County and 14.9% in Savannah. Despite survey responses indicating that this type of dwelling is not preferred, they are a naturally occurring less costly ownership option, and 4% of owner-occupied units in the Unincorporated County are mobilehomes. However, two-thirds of the mobile homes were built prior to 2000, suggesting that on-going maintenance and condition may be a current, or pending issue.

Over time, both jurisdictions have experienced gradual declines in owner occupancy and corresponding increases in renter occupancy. The trend is more pronounced within Savannah due to a larger stock of multi-family and attached housing product types, rising cost of home ownership, investors acquiring lower market priced single-family stock for conversion to rentals, and transiency of employment opportunities. In Unincorporated County, the majority of rentals are single-family units, although almost one-third of rental stock in Savannah are detached units. Savannah has a larger proportion of renter households in small multi-family complexes, duplexes, and townhome stock. Large multi-family developments are equally represented.

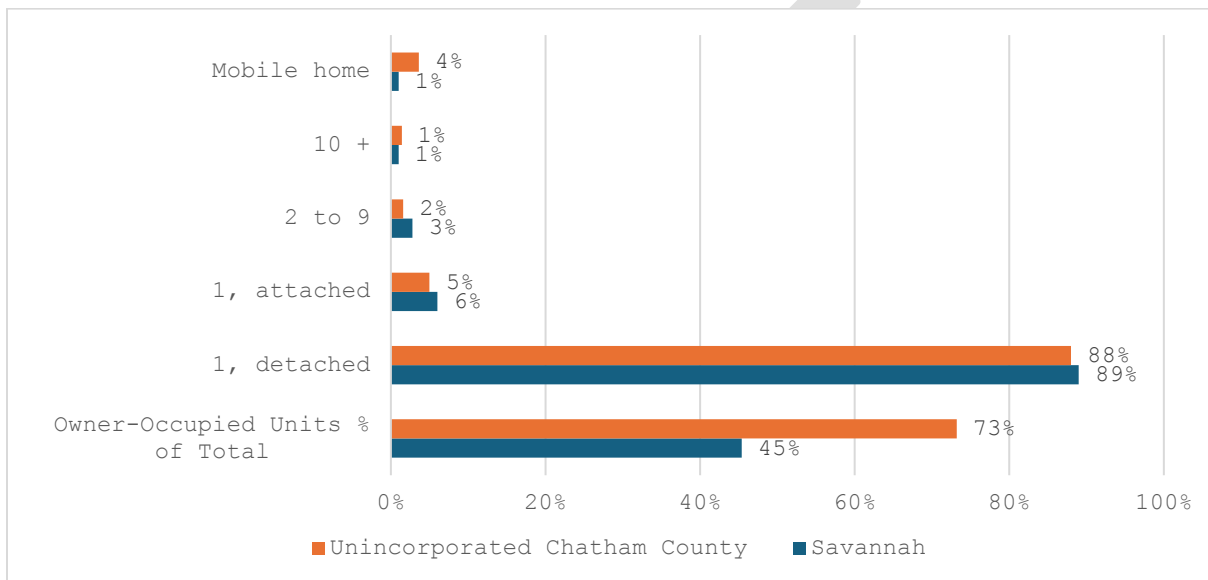


Figure 6.7 – Savannah-Chatham County: Owner-Occupied Structures by Unit Type 2024

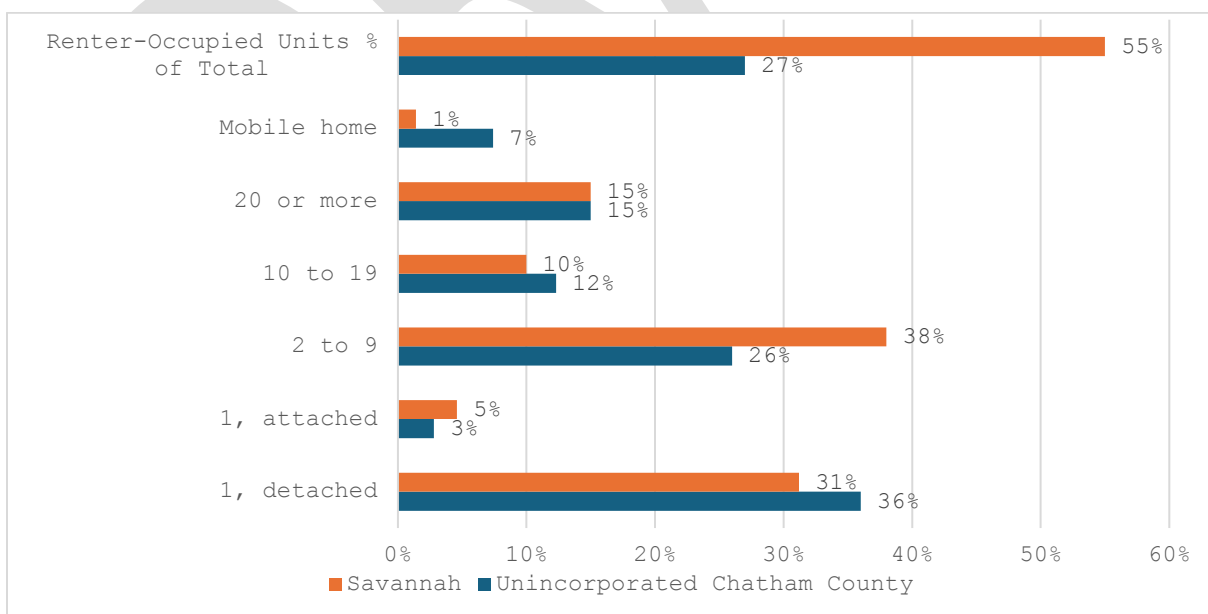


Figure 6.8 – Savannah-Chatham County: Renter Occupied Units by Unit Type 2024

Vacancy Patterns

Between 2021 and 2024, the total number of housing units grew by approximately 3.8% in Chatham County overall. While the Unincorporated County lost some dwelling units during the time period to annexation in incorporated jurisdictions, more restrictive zoning regulations prioritizing lower density development, infrastructure constraints, and high construction costs, new growth was heavily focused in the western unincorporated area, replacing the units lost to annexation. In Savannah, the number of dwelling units increased over the time period by 3.4%, due to on-going infill and redevelopment, and annexation of land into the City. An upsurge in new residential construction in 2025 is anticipated to add a sizeable number of apartment deliveries to the housing stock in Savannah, many of which fall into the affordability range.

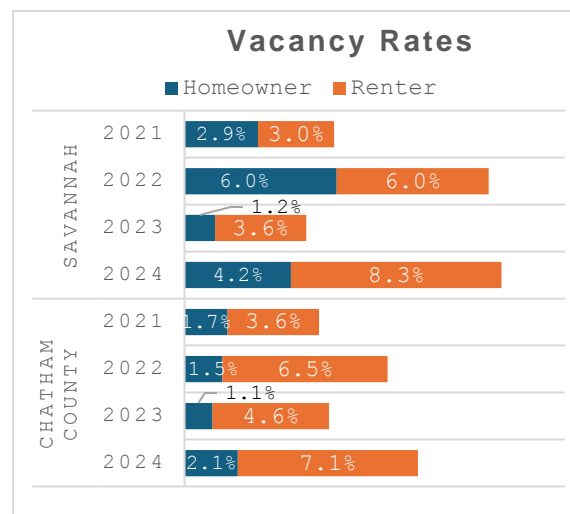
Number of Housing Units by Occupancy Status								
	Unincorporated Chatham County				Savannah			
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total	40,801	40,531	40,084	40,735	65,923	67,223	68,153	68,174
Occupied	90.7%	91.0%	91.1%	91.2%	85.2%	85.8%	86.0%	85.4%
Vacant	9.3%	9.0%	8.9%	8.8%	14.8%	14.2%	14.0%	14.6%

Source: 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Figure 6.9 – Savannah-Unincorporated Chatham County: Occupancy Status

As shown in Figure 6.9, vacancy rates remained relatively stable between 2021 and 2024 in both jurisdictions, with a slight reduction of vacancies in Unincorporated County in 2024 compared to Savannah. The vacancy rate in the Unincorporated County has decreased over the time period, while it has remained fairly stable in Savannah overall, with a dip in vacant units following the pandemic, likely due to students returning on-site campuses and the resurgence of leisure-oriented travel.

Overall, vacancy rates in Chatham County are higher than statewide averages between 6% in 2021 to 8.3% in 2024. It appears that high vacancies may reflect market conditions rather than actual surplus, suggesting ongoing affordability challenges. High turnover and limited financial accessibility despite growing demand from nonfamily and single-person households, as well as student populations, who are typically seasonal and transient, have been incrementally adding to the higher incidence of vacancies in the City. Vacancy rates differed by occupancy tenure over the 2040 Plan period, with rental vacancies presenting at two to three times the ownership unit rate, escalating to a high in 2024. Tenants have become more price-sensitive and potentially seek smaller or more affordable alternatives, and properties may take longer to fill if not priced



competitively. Delivery of a significant number of new rental units in Savannah in 2025 contributes to intensification of on-going competition in the rental market, particularly for rent assisted units.

As shown in Figure 6.10, single-family detached units constitute almost 50% of the vacant units in both jurisdictions in 2024, suggesting that high purchase and asking rental prices may be economically unfeasible for a significant portion of the population. Missing middle and smaller multifamily housing types, in comparison to their proportional representation in the total housing stock, reflect notable vacancies, as do mobile homes, which comprise a minimal resource despite their affordability role. Overall, post-2020 occupancy data indicate a constrained housing market, supporting the need for zoning and housing reforms that better align housing supply with current household demand, supporting more flexible housing products such as tiny homes, cluster courtyard, multiplex and mixed-use.

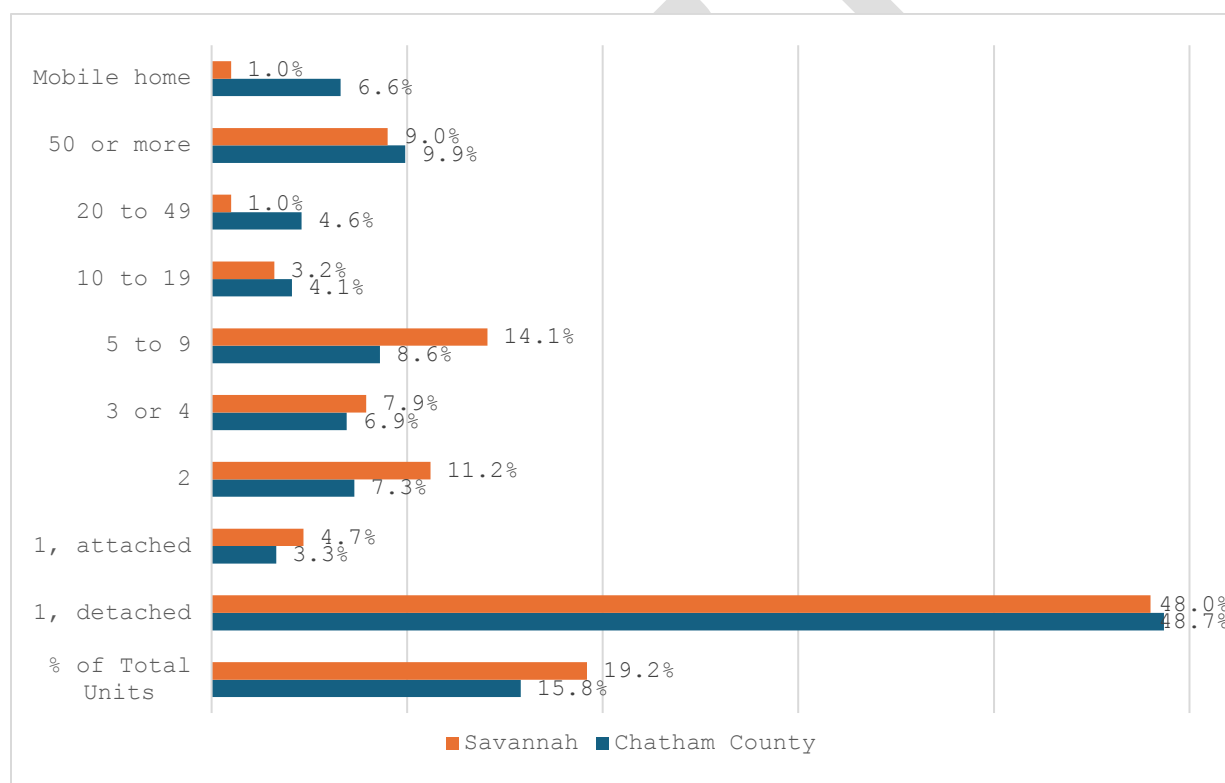


Figure 6.10 – Savannah-Unincorporated Chatham County: Vacancy by Unit Type

Housing Values

Both Unincorporated Chatham County and the City of Savannah experienced a clear upward shift in owner-occupied home values during the Plan 2040 time period, confirming a sustained upward trend in local housing market prices, limiting the availability of entry-level ownership opportunities. Despite the rising market valuations, over 85% of respondents to the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update survey indicated that the same amount or more single-family homes were desired, over 70% indicated the same for duplexes and 65% for townhomes, although the survey did not specify in what price categories these units should be produced.

Unincorporated Chatham County

In Unincorporated Chatham County, lower-priced homes have become increasingly scarce. Homes valued below \$100,000 declined from 8.4% of the housing stock in 2021 to 6.0% by 2024, compared to 9.7% of units in incorporated jurisdictions at this price point. During the same period, inventory between \$100,000 - \$200,000 declined from 23.7% to 11.6% in 2024, compared to 22.1% of the stock in the remainder of the county. The share of units in the \$300,000–\$499,999 category grew to 31.1% in 2024 from 21.5%; and 33% of units cost more than \$500,000, an increase from 23% in 2021, and quite higher than in the incorporated portions of the county, at 2.8% of 2024 ownership housing stock.

Home Values in Unincorporated Chatham County								
	2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Number of units	% of stock	Number of units	% of stock	Number of units	% of stock	Number of units	% of stock
Less than \$50,000	1,102	4.2%	1,137	4.2%	1,932	7.2%	1,226	4.5%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	1,109	4.2%	654	2.4%	608	2.3%	394	1.5%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	2,485	9.4%	1,300	4.9%	1,214	4.6%	864	3.2%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	3,782	14.3%	3,192	11.9%	2,466	9.2%	2,290	8.4%
\$200,000 - \$249,999	2,402	10.9%	2,711	10.1%	1,839	6.9%	2,398	8.8%
\$250,000 - \$299,999	3,272	12.4	3,261	12.2%	2,940	11.0%	2,502	9.2%
\$300,000 - \$499,999	5,703	21.5%	7,324	27.4%	7,704	28.9%	8,444	31.1%
\$500,000- \$999,999	5,011	18.9%	5733	21.4%	6,091	22.8%	7,050	25.9%
\$1,000,000 or more	1,107	4.2%	1,475	5.5%	1,893	7.1%	1,470	7.2%
Total	26,473	100%	26,792	100%	26,662	100%	27,187	100%
Source: 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates								

Figure 6.11 – Unincorporated Chatham County: Home Values

Savannah

Savannah shows a similar trend, with growth in the \$300,000–\$499,999 range from roughly 15% to 30% of the inventory, and the proportion of homes over \$500,000 doubling. Conversely, the stock of homes valued below \$200,000 decreased from approximately 50% of the inventory to less than 25%. The proportion of homes in the \$200,000-\$299,000 range remained essentially the same. Median home values increased significantly in both jurisdictions, confirming sustained price escalation rather than short-term fluctuation, indicating that homeownership is becoming increasingly inaccessible to moderate-income households, particularly first-time buyers, and even more so out of reach for lower-income households.

As of December 2025, according to realtor.com the median home price countywide was \$395,000, active listings increased by 33.3% over 2024, and days on the market increased 19.7% from 2024. While rising home values contribute to increased household wealth and reinvestment in certain neighborhoods, they also exacerbate affordability challenges.

Home Values in Savannah								
	2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Number of units	% of stock	Number of units	% of stock	Number of units	% of stock	Number of units	% of stock
Less than \$50,000	1,441	5.1%	1,358	4.9%	1,361	5.2%	888	3.4%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	3,121	11.1%	1,711	6.2%	1,358	5.2%	1,085	4.2%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	4,664	16.6%	2,091	7.5%	1,300	4.9%	1,602	6.1%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	5,087	18.1%	3,702	13.3%	2,306	8.8%	2,607	10.0%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	7,176	25.6%	9,359	33.6%	7,326	27.8%	6,738	25.8%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	4,227	15.1%	6,324	22.7%	8,606	32.7%	8,976	34.4%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	1,972	7.0%	2,219	8.0%	3,072	11.7%	3,171	12.2%
\$1,000,000 or more	395	14.1%	1,066	3.8%	1,012	3.8%	1,032	4.0%

Source: 2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates Comparison Table

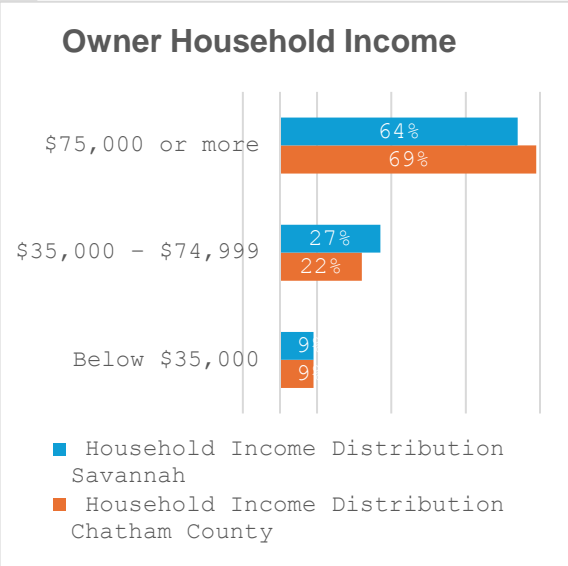
Figure 6.12 – Savannah: Home Values

Homeowner Costs

ACS data show a clear age-based tenure division in both jurisdictions. Owner-occupied households are disproportionately older, with the majority of homeowners age 45 and over, reflecting long-term tenure, accumulated equity, and greater housing stability. The potential for home ownership in both Unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah is strongly skewed toward higher-income households. The median household income of homeowners in Chatham County overall and Savannah is approximately \$101,460 and \$79,904 respectively.

In both jurisdictions, approximately two-thirds of owner-occupied units carry a mortgage. About one-third are owned free and clear, although there still are expenses associated with homeownership, including taxes, maintenance and insurance, that may impact a homeowner’s ability to afford a particular dwelling.

The City of Savannah offers a higher proportion of dwellings with mortgage costs below \$1,000 per month than Unincorporated Chatham County, at 14.0% and 5.6% of households with mortgages, respectively. The relatively small proportion of units overall at this cost point reflects a limited availability of homeownership opportunities affordable to lower-income households, discussed in further detail in the Cost Burden analysis. Of particular note, roughly 86% of households without mortgages incur



monthly costs below \$1,000 per month in Savannah, compared to 73% in Unincorporated County, potentially reflecting the city’s wealth of older working class neighborhood housing stock, long term homeowners aging in place, and units near the end of their mortgage life cycle.

Across both jurisdictions, approximately 46% of owner-occupied households with mortgages pay between \$1,000 to \$1,999 per month. At the upper end, almost 29% of homeowners with mortgages pay above \$2,000 per month in Savannah, and close to 50% in Unincorporated County, reflecting a larger proportion of housing stock nearing the termination of the mortgage term, rising home values, insurance premiums, and recent price escalation of new stock and resales. In particular, larger lot sizes accommodate larger detached units in the unincorporated area, which command higher prices than the smaller or attached, historic, and more dense housing in urban Savannah. This suburban lifestyle has been attracting a high volume of retirees, military families, and new residents moving from more expensive states, who are seeking newer, larger homes, thus driving up the average sales price and resulting mortgage payments. As well, a large percentage of residential subdivisions in the Unincorporated County include community amenities which are included in HOA fees, which are bundled into the overall monthly housing cost, pushing these properties into higher-end mortgage brackets.

Monthly Homeowner Costs – Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah		
Monthly Costs With a Mortgage	Unincorporated Chatham County	Savannah
Total Units	17,175	16,568
Up to \$499	0.8%	1.1%
\$500 to \$999	4.8%	12.9%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	22.4%	30.8%
\$1,500 to \$1,999	22.7%	26.4%
\$2,000 to \$2,499	14.6%	12.1%
\$2,500 to \$2,999	9.7%	8.3%
Above \$3,000	25.2%	8.4%
Monthly Costs Without a Mortgage	Unincorporated Chatham County	Savannah
Total Units	10,012	9,824
Up to \$499	25.2%	36.9%
\$500 to \$999	47.6%	48.8%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	14.9%	10.5%
Above \$1,500	12.3%	3.8%
Source: 2024 ACS 5-Year Estimate		

Figure 6.13 – Savannah-Unincorporated Chatham County: Monthly Homeowner Costs

Homeowner Affordability

The availability and affordability of housing countywide is connected to nearly every other element of the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update. Rising housing costs are outpacing increases in household income and many residents are left unable to afford a home, given a 30% housing costs to gross income ratio typically used to determine qualification for a home purchase.

Homeowner Affordability – Unincorporated Chatham County					
Monthly Mortgage Payment	Home Price Range	% of Units	Required Monthly Income	Required Annual Income	Income - % of Households
\$499	Below \$80,000	6.1%	\$1,667	Below \$19,999	13.0%
\$500 - \$999	\$80,000- \$149,999	7.5%	\$1,668 - \$3,333	\$20,000 - \$39,999	15.9%
\$1,000 - \$1,499	\$150,000- \$199,999	12.6%	\$4,999	\$40,000 - \$59,999	15.3%
\$1,500 - \$1,999	\$200,000- \$249,999	14.2%	\$5,000 - \$6,665	\$60,000 - \$79,999	13.3%
\$2,000 - \$2,499	\$250,000- \$349,999	19.9%	\$6,666 - \$8,333	\$80,000 - \$100,000	12.7%
\$2,500 - \$3,999	\$350,000 to \$499,999	19.6%	\$8,333 - \$13,332	\$100,000 - \$159,999	18.4%
\$4,000+	\$500,000+	22.1%	\$13,333+	\$160,000+	11.3%

Source: 2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Figure 6.14 - Unincorporated Chatham County: Homeowner Affordability

Figure 6.14 presents a summary of the average home price range associated with a particular monthly payment, the monthly and annual income required, the proportion of units available within that home price range, and the distribution of homeowner households within each required income category. These calculations are generalized: they assume a 5% down payment on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage at 6.5% interest, with 1.2% annual property taxes, \$1,800 (average) annual homeowners insurance, 1.0% Private Mortgage Insurance, and a 36% debt-to-income ratio, and have been rounded to correspond to an ACS reported category.

Based on this data, it is clear that housing affordability disproportionately impacts lower income residents, as does the availability of affordable homes. Coupled together, the shortage of affordable and available housing is a particularly acute issue for the lowest income families in our community. Almost 30% of the households countywide have incomes below \$40,000, although less than 14% of the housing stock falls within the price range affordable to these households. There also appears to be a shortfall of housing stock affordable to households in the \$40,000 to \$60,000 income range. Conversely, there is a sizeable stock of dwellings available in the upper price ranges which exceeds the proportion of households with incomes high enough to afford them.

Homeowner Cost Burden

Cost-burdened families are those “who pay more than 30% of their income for housing” and “may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care.” Severe cost burden is defined as paying more than 50% of one’s income on household costs. While a small proportion of homeowners may choose to pay a higher percentage of income on housing, cost burden is a often a significant concern for homeowners.

The majority of owner-occupied households are not cost burdened, indicating relative affordability and stability for higher-income households and long-tenured owners, particularly those without a mortgage. For households with mortgages, monthly owner costs have been shifting upward, with a declining share paying under \$1,000 per month and growing shares in the \$1,000–\$2,000+, and above \$3,000 range. Almost 20% of homeowners with a mortgage in both jurisdictions are cost burdened, and an additional average of 9% experience an extreme cost burden.

Even among households without a mortgage, a notable share still experience a cost burden due to taxes, insurance, utilities, and maintenance. Slightly more homeowners without a mortgage in Savannah area are cost burdened compared to the Unincorporated County, with similar rates of extremely cost burdened households. Lower- and moderate-income homeowner households carrying a mortgage may be more vulnerable to rising operating costs, as owner affordability challenges are increasingly driven by operating and carrying costs rather than acquisition costs alone. This underscores the importance of property tax relief, homestead protections, and rehabilitation and energy-efficiency programs to support long-term housing stability for existing homeowners.

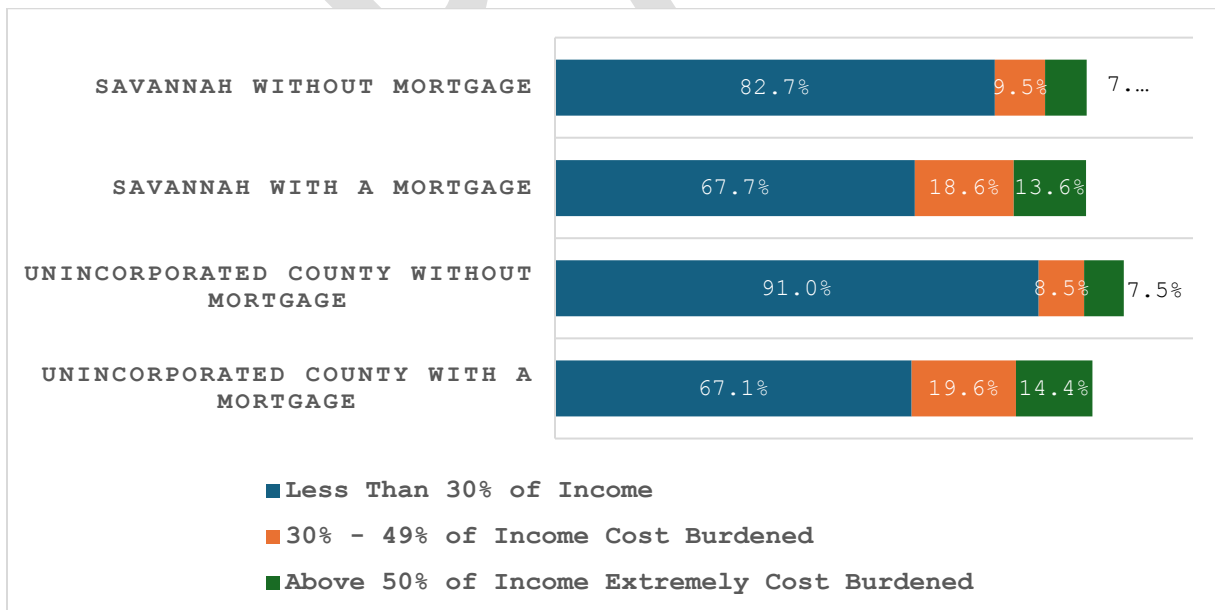
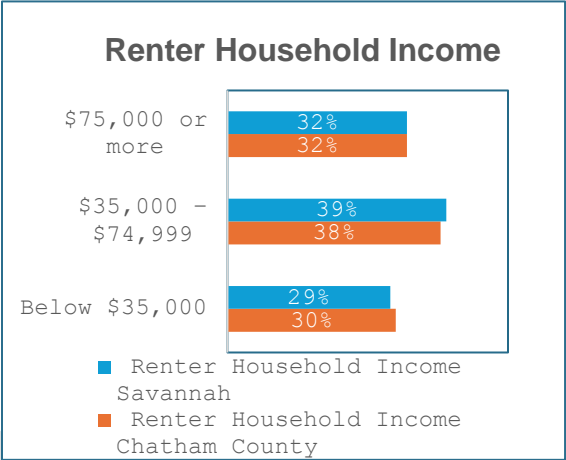


Figure 6.15 – Savannah-Unincorporated Chatham County: Owner Cost Burden

Renter Households

Renter-occupied households tend to be younger, hold a higher potential for mobility which aligns with a transient worker population often affiliated with the service, logistics and manufacturing industries prevalent in the region, and have smaller household formations, increasing exposure to housing cost increases and displacement risk.

Renter-occupied households experience significantly higher affordability pressure than homeowners in both jurisdictions. Median renter household income is approximately \$52,388 in Chatham County and \$42,343 in Savannah, which combined with escalating rents contributes to affordability challenges. Roughly 30% of renter households earn below \$35,000, similarly 32% of households countywide had incomes over \$75,000, with the remainder in between.



Gross cash rent increased in both Savannah and Unincorporated Chatham County, with a marked shift away from units renting below \$1,000 per month and toward higher rent categories. There is a definite distinction between rent structure and jurisdictions, although in both rentals below \$500 per month comprise a limited portion of the rental stock. Total cash rentals under \$1,000 are more than double in Savannah compared to Unincorporated County. In contrast, rents falling between \$1,000 and \$1,999 constitute almost 72% of cash rental stock in the Unincorporated County, compared to 55% in Savannah, although numerically units in this payment category in Savannah exceeds Unincorporated Chatham County. Higher-cost rentals above \$2,000 per month are increasingly common, particularly in areas experiencing redevelopment, in-migration, new rental inventory, and competition from higher-income households. A greater proportion of households paying rents in the high tiers over \$2,000 monthly reside in Unincorporated County, potentially reflecting rentals of larger single-family homes or new complexes asking for market rate rents.

2024 Monthly Rent Costs – Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah		
Monthly Cash Rent	Unincorporated Chatham County	Savannah
Total	9,389	30,476
Up to \$499	4.1%	8.2%
\$500 to \$999	11.4%	28.6%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	46.0%	34.4%
\$1,500 to \$1,999	25.8%	21.0%
\$2,000 to \$2,499	8.0%	5.2%
Above \$2,500	4.7%	2.6%
Source: ACS 2024 5-Year Estimate		

Figure 6.16 – Savannah-Unincorporated Chatham County: Monthly Rental Costs

Fair Market Rent (FMR)

Fair Market Rent is used primarily to determine the payment standard for Housing Choice Vouchers. These are gross rent estimates, inclusive of utilities, based on 40th percentile rents for standards market rate rental housing units, by number of bedrooms. Based on HUD 2024 FMRs, over 37% of the rentals in Savannah fall within the FMR for a studio unit, and about 70% fall within the FMR for a two-bedroom unit, with one-bedroom units potentially falling in the 50% range. This distribution is diminished in the County, with over 17% of rentals falling within the studio rate, and less than 61% meet the two-bedroom FMR.

2024 FMR	
\$1,191	studio
\$1,287	1 bd
\$1,445	2 bd
\$1,967	3 bd
\$2,306	4 bd

Renter Occupied Household Cost Burden

In both jurisdictions, roughly 70% of renter households pay 30% or more of income toward housing, with many exceeding the 50% severe cost-burden threshold. Affordability stress is not limited to the lowest-income renters alone. Data indicates that lower-income renters are extremely cost burdened, while moderate-income renters in the \$35,000 to \$74,999 range also experience elevated levels of cost burden.

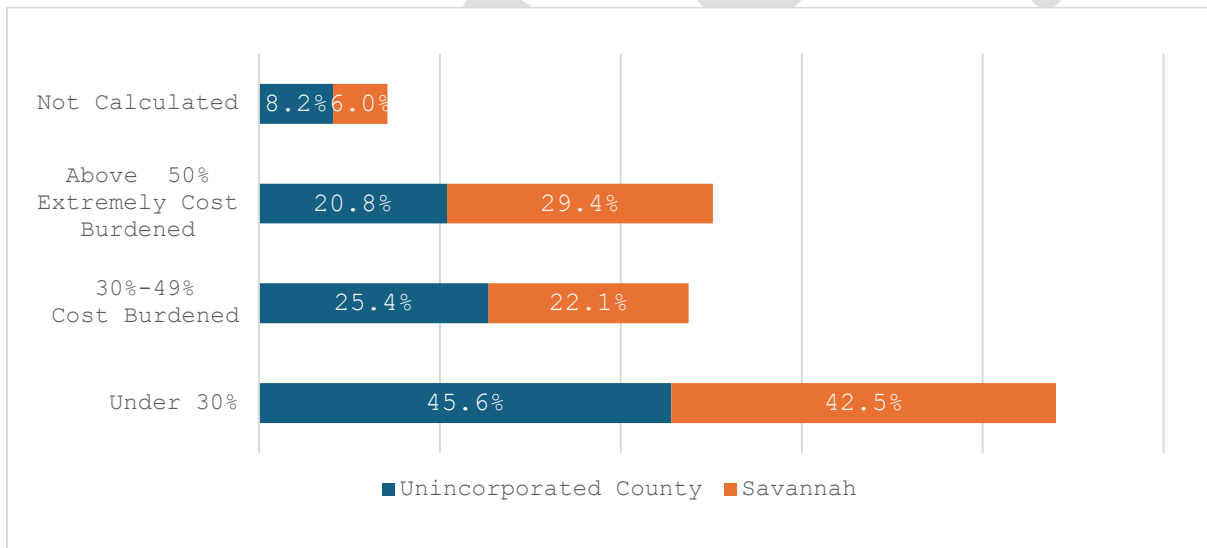


Figure 6.17 - Unincorporated Chatham County & Savannah: Renter Cost Burden

Unlike owner households, renters lack insulation from market volatility and are more directly exposed to rent increases, insurance pass-throughs, and competition from higher-income households and short-term rental pressures. From a planning standpoint, renter affordability represents the most acute housing stability challenge facing both jurisdictions. Addressing this issue requires expanding the supply of income-restricted and missing-middle rental housing, strengthening tenant protections, and aligning land use policy with transit access and employment centers to reduce combined housing and transportation costs.

Rent burden remains significant: between 46% and 51% of renter households in the Unincorporated County and City of Savannah respectively spend over 30% of household

income on rent. The distribution of households considered cost burdened differs by jurisdiction however. Over 25% of households in the Unincorporated County spend between 30% and 49% of income for a rental unit, compared to 22% of households in Savannah. Proportions are reversed for the households considered severely cost-burdened. Over 29% of households in Savannah pay more than half of their income to a place to live, whereas roughly 21% of households in the Unincorporated County are severely cost burdened.

The rise in housing costs often outpaces income, particularly for service-level professionals, which is a profession more heavily concentrated in Savannah, leading to more cost-burdened households within the city limits compared to the broader county. In addition to a greater renter resident base in Savannah, the median income in the City is lower than in the Unincorporated County, and a significant portion of Savannah residents live below the poverty line, almost double the number countywide, making them more susceptible to becoming cost-burdened by rising rents.

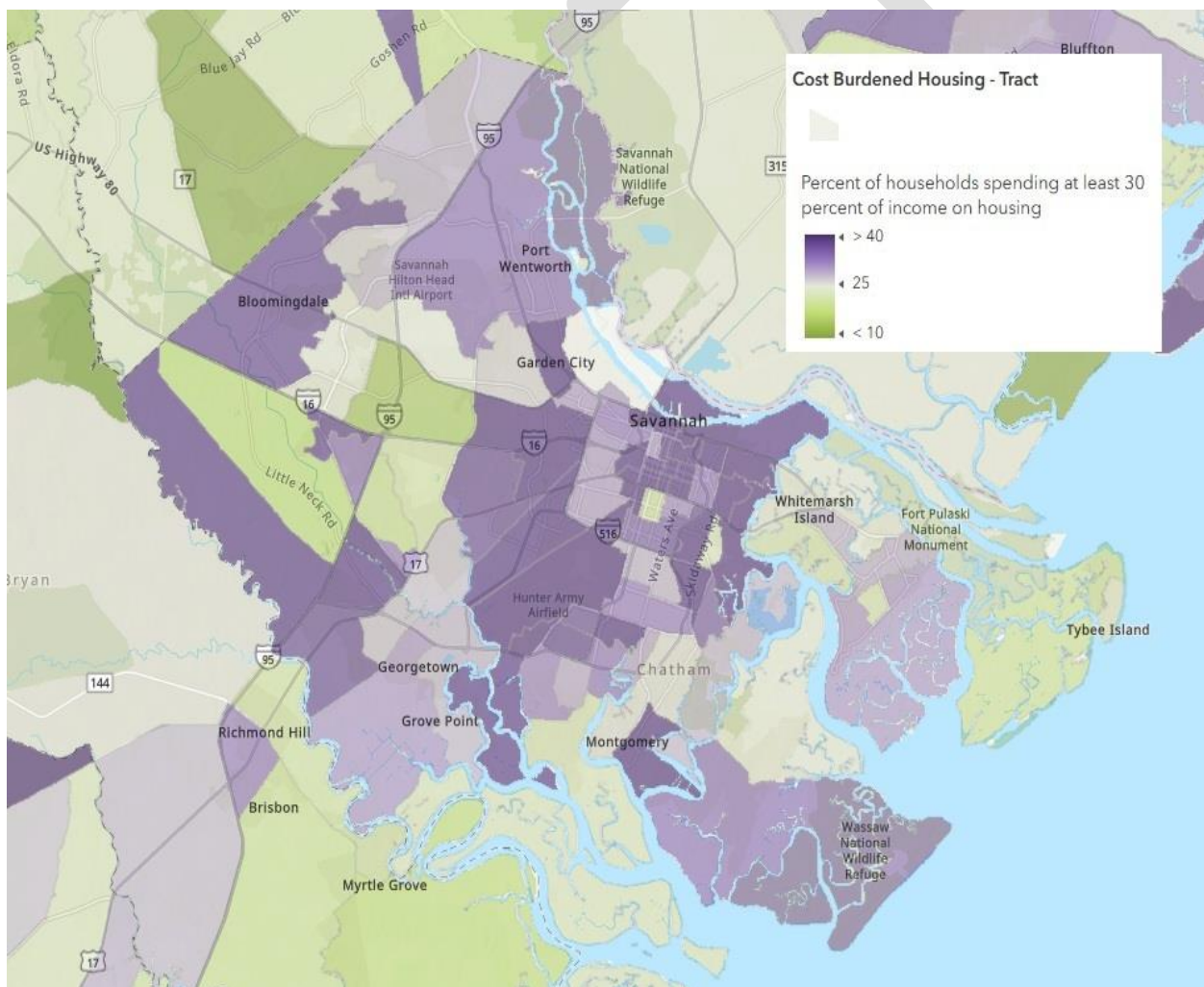


Exhibit 6.3 – Savannah-Chatham County: Cost Burden

Implications of Cost Burden

Collectively, these data show that housing affordability pressures are structural and affect both renters and homeowners. Rising home values, increasing ownership costs, and high rent burdens indicate that current market conditions are not aligned with housing need. Cost burdens among mortgage-free households further highlight the growing impact of other factors on home ownership.

The CHAS evaluates households experiencing "1 of 4 housing problems" This means the home is inadequate, overcrowded, or unaffordable. It indicates the household has at least one of these issues: incomplete kitchen (lacking a sink, stove, or refrigerator); incomplete plumbing (lacking hot and cold piped water, a flush toilet, or a bathtub/shower); more than 1 person per room; or cost burden. It also reports households experiencing "1 in 4 severe housing problems", in which the cost burden exceeds 50% of monthly income, and/or overcrowding occurs at a rate of 1.5 persons per room.

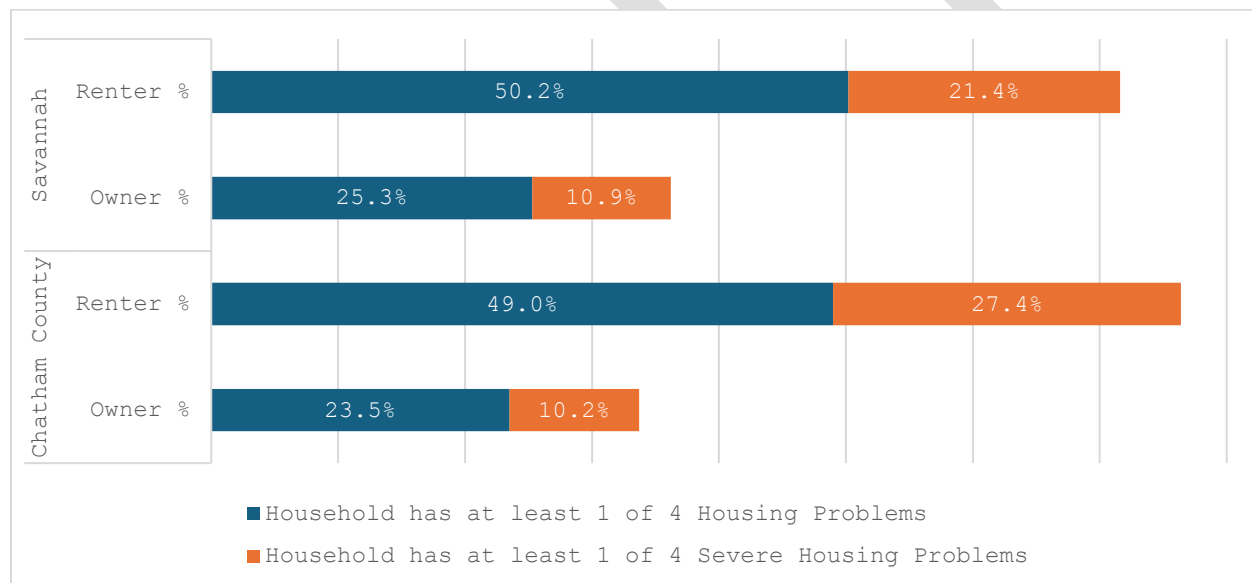


Figure 6.18 – Savannah-Chatham County: CHAS Housing Problems and Severe Housing Problems

The CHAS also cross tabulates households by income category and housing problems to provide a more in-depth account of populations at risk of displacement. One-half of renters in both Chatham County and Savannah experience one or more housing problems. Of those households experiencing problems, approximately one-third fall in the extremely low income category, almost 30% are classified as very low income, and low-income households comprise roughly one-quarter. In Chatham County, almost 12% of renters in the moderate and higher income categories also experience a housing problem. The incidence of housing problems among homeowners is less pronounced than in the renter community, with close to 25% in both the County and Savannah. Chatham County has a slightly lower incidence of homeowners in the lower income categories experiencing problems than Savannah, at 68.3% and 78.8%

respectively, although this is a significant indicator of homeowners requiring some form of assistance. It is noteworthy that over 20% of homeowners in the County with incomes above the MFI also face one or more housing problems, potentially a result of recent rising home prices, or in some cases extending outside of the 30% threshold voluntarily.

CHAS Income Category by Housing Problems				
Income by Housing Problems	Household has at least 1 of 4 Housing Problems		Household has none of 4 Housing Problems OR cost burden not available no other problems	
Renters				
	Chatham County	Savannah	Chatham County	Savannah
Household Income <= 30% HAMFI	32.1%	40.2%	9.8%	12.9%
Household Income >30% to <=50% HAMFI	29.4%	28.8%	4.9%	6.0%
Household Income >50% to <=80% HAMFI	27.0%	23.8%	16.2%	19.2%
Household Income >80% to <=100% HAMFI	5.9%	2.8%	17.1%	16.0%
Household Income >100% HAMFI	5.6%	4.4%	52.0%	45.9%
Total	49.0%	50.3%	51.0%	49.7%
Homeowners				
Household Income <= 30% HAMFI	25.0%	26.9%	2.5%	3.8%
Household Income >30% to <=50% HAMFI	19.7%	23.0%	4.6%	5.6%
Household Income >50% to <=80% HAMFI	23.6%	28.9%	18.5%	12.0%
Household Income >80% to <=100% HAMFI	10.8%	10.4%	12.8%	12.6%
Household Income >100% HAMFI	20.8%	10.8%	72.0%	66.0%
Total	23.5%	25.3%	76.5%	74.7%
Source: 2025 CHAS Affordability Dataset (ACS 2022 5-Year Estimates)				

Figure 6.19 – CHAS Income Category and Housing Problems by Occupancy Type

From a planning perspective, these conditions support policies that expand lower-cost housing through missing-middle and smaller-scale development, increase the production and preservation of affordable rentals, pair homeownership with cost-stabilization tools such as tax relief and rehabilitation assistance, and treat housing affordability as a system-wide issue rather than one limited to low-income renters to ensure that future housing supply aligns with local income levels rather than exclusively higher-end market demand.

Public Housing

Public Housing Stock and Major Developments

Between 2020 and 2025, public housing in Savannah and Chatham County was primarily managed by the Housing Authority of Savannah (HAS), which oversees roughly 2,000 public housing units and administers countywide rental assistance. Much of the public housing stock dates to the mid-20th century. As with much housing stock built over 30 years ago, these complexes are exhibiting physical obsolescence, deferred maintenance, and outdated site design that no longer aligns with modern housing standards or neighborhood integration goals.

In response, HAS is taking action to rectify these conditions and has identified major legacy developments, including Fred Wessels Homes, Edgar C. Blackshear Homes, Herbert Kayton Homes, and Yamacraw Village, as priorities for reinvestment or replacement due to age, condition, and long-term capital needs. These legacy developments collectively house several hundred low-income households and represent a significant share of the region's deeply affordable housing supply. To implement the above priorities, HAS is actively redeveloping public housing into mixed-income communities, with key projects including the new Ashley Midtown (formerly Garden Homes), the East Savannah Gateway revitalization, and a planned 86-unit senior housing project on the former Blackshear site. These initiatives emphasize modern, energy-efficient, and mixed-income, or senior-specific, residential units.

Redevelopment, Demolition, and Repositioning Efforts

To preserve affordability while addressing deterioration, HAS implemented HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program, converting public housing units to project-based Section 8 to leverage private financing and tax credits for rehabilitation. Redevelopments at Fred Wessels Homes and Kayton Homes improved unit quality, energy efficiency, and site design without reducing assisted units, while Yamacraw Village was approved for demolition due to severe structural constraints, with affected households assisted through tenant-based vouchers. While not an HAS initiated project, Savannah Gardens is a 44-acre mixed-use development project, transforming formerly blighted property known as Strathmore Estates into 500 multi- and single-family housing units, retail and public space through public-private partnership within a designated Enterprise Zone. The project is considered an EarthCraft Coastal Community, ensuring sustainable development and energy efficiency. These actions reflect a broader shift toward mixed-finance and mixed-income housing models consistent with federal best practices.

Waitlists and Resident Demand

Demand for subsidized housing far exceeded supply between 2020 and 2025, with HAS waitlists frequently closed and more than 9,000 households seeking assistance. Long wait times and limited turnover reduced the system's ability to respond to rising rents and displacement pressures, underscoring the need to preserve existing assisted units while expanding the inventory of affordable housing options with both traditional and innovative approaches. Landlord participation is a key component of increasing subsidized housing inventory; therefore facilitation of outreach and rental property owner education is crucial to expanding the base of

available units over and above publicly subsidized complexes.

Housing Choice Voucher and Supportive Housing Programs

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV - Section 8) program functions as the primary housing assistance mechanism for low-income households across Savannah and Chatham County. This federal program helps low-income families, elderly, and disabled individuals pay for safe, private-market housing. Participants locate the housing, whereby HAS pays a subsidy directly to the landlord for rent, typically covering the difference between 30% of the household's income and the unit rental cost. Thousands of households relied on vouchers to access private-market housing, though utilization was constrained by limited landlord participation, rising rents, and competition from higher-income renters and short-term rentals. Consideration of potential actions that can be taken by the County and City include incentivizing rental property owners to accept HCVs through such measures as:

- One-time financial bonuses,
- Damage mitigation funds – reimbursement of damages exceeding security deposit
- Assistance in providing “rent gap” funds for voucher properties while in the permit process system waiting for final inspections and certificate of occupancy issuance
- Energy efficiency supplement bonuses
- Streamlined inspection turnaround and simplified paperwork/forms

Marketing and outreach is also incredibly important in expanding the supply of HCV accepting properties. This includes building relationships with property owners, allocating staff to address concerns and act as a point of contact for issues, presence at real estate functions and actively educating landlords on the benefits of the HCV program, highlighting reduced vacancies and timely payments of the subsidy portion.

Homelessness

Homelessness in Savannah and Chatham County increased between 2021 and 2023 as local HUD-required Point-in-Time data, driven in part by improved outreach and counting methods that more accurately captured unsheltered individuals, as well as the impacts of COVID 19 on employment. The counts showed signs of stabilization and a roughly 20% decline between 2023 and 2024. Despite this recent improvement, overall homelessness levels remain higher than pre-pandemic conditions, with a persistent share of the population experiencing chronic homelessness tied to behavioral health needs, disability, and long-term housing instability. Throughout this period, emergency shelters and permanent supportive housing have operated near full capacity, underscoring continued unmet demand. Regional response efforts, coordinated through the Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless and local governments, have increasingly emphasized Housing First strategies, rapid rehousing, supportive services, and cross-system coordination to address the structural drivers of homelessness, particularly rising housing costs relative to incomes. The Housing Savannah Action Plan has made available new housing resources and improved nearly 3,000 homes since 2022, supported by the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund. Much of the program focuses on provision of housing for residents experiencing, at risk of, or transitioning out of homelessness. Recent significant

projects are the recently completed 39-unit Dundee Cottages and an apartment complex on Martin Luther King Blvd. slated for opening in 2026.

Recent public safety changes throughout the County, aimed at responding to mental health and homelessness incidents, are reducing unhoused persons by shifting from earlier criminalization approaches to a "service-first" model that pairs a specialized law enforcement team (Behavioral Health Unit) with social services, resulting in direct connections to housing, shelter, and care. The City of Savannah has revised its approach to homeless encampments. The H.O.P.E. Unit (Homeless Outreach, Patrol and Enforcement) division was launched by the Savannah Police Department (SPD) in July 2024. This unit prioritizes outreach, aiming to connect individuals with resources rather than immediately criminalizing them. The unit patrols to address quality-of-life issues, including closing illegal camps, while offering services and transportation to shelters during these processes. An encampment management policy has been established which requires staff to engage with individuals at least twice to connect them with shelters, rehabilitation programs, or job training before clearing a site. This method ensures services are provided during the closure process.

In part a response to residents and visitors expressing concerns about the unhoused population in the City, the "Urban Camping" Ordinance was adopted in 2025. While it prohibits camping in public spaces, the ordinance is used as a tool to initiate contact. As of October 2025, of the individuals cited, a significant portion were in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and received support, including bus tickets to confirmed housing.

Housing Strategies and Implementation Efforts 2020 - 2025

Chatham County Housing Strategies and Implementation Efforts

Chatham County advanced a coordinated set of planning studies, housing programs, zoning reforms, and resilience measures to address rising housing costs, workforce demand, and growth pressures across unincorporated areas and emerging corridors. These efforts reflect a shift from reactive housing responses toward long-range planning, regulatory modernization, and cross-sector collaboration.

Strategic Planning and Policy Frameworks

Between 2020 and 2025, Chatham County strengthened its long-range housing and growth framework through updates to Plan 2040, the Vision 2035 Strategic Plan, and coordinated regional studies. These efforts refined land use standards and character areas while explicitly linking housing quality, environmental conditions, and public health outcomes through the Chatham Community Blueprint. Regional workforce and housing analyses tied to major economic drivers, including the Hyundai Metasite emphasized the need to align housing supply, infrastructure investment, and transportation planning at a regional scale. The 2024 Georgia Tech Housing Study highlighted gaps in childcare and social infrastructure associated with rapid housing growth, underscoring constraints on workforce participation, clarifying the need for supportive and wrap-around housing programs.

Affordable and Workforce Housing Programs

To expand affordable and workforce housing opportunities, Chatham County pursued a combination of federal funding, partnerships, and program development. The County advanced an application for HUD's Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Housing (PRO) grant to identify and remove regulatory barriers to housing production, while deploying American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds through Coastal Empire Habitat for Humanity to support new residential construction. County leadership also explored employee homebuyer assistance models that combine housing counseling with down payment support and evaluated infill development strategies such as tiny homes and prefabricated housing to introduce modest density within established neighborhoods.

Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stability

Housing instability and homelessness were addressed through both short-term relief and long-term system reform. In 2025, the County adopted a Five-Year Strategic Plan to End Homelessness, centered on a Housing First approach and enhanced coordination through the Interagency Council on Homelessness. During and after the pandemic, Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) programs played a critical role in preventing displacement, while initiatives such as Bridges to Stability and the Familiar Faces Project targeted households experiencing compounded housing, health, and justice system challenges.

Zoning, Land Use, and Regulatory Reforms

Regulatory actions supported increased housing flexibility and long-term stability. Zoning text amendments clarified and expanded standards for accessory dwellings, senior cottage

developments, and small-scale infill housing while maintaining neighborhood compatibility. The County also initiated evaluation of inclusionary zoning as a potential affordability tool and addressed long-standing non-conforming land uses through targeted rezonings to promote more predictable development patterns.

Environmental Resilience and Housing Protection

Parallel investments in environmental and regulatory resilience strengthened housing protection countywide. Updates to the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance imposed higher development standards in flood-prone areas to reduce risk and long-term insurance costs. Amendments to septic system regulations aligned health and engineering standards in vulnerable areas, while expanded staffing for short-term vacation rental enforcement helped protect residential neighborhoods from infrastructure strain and land use conflicts.

City of Savannah Housing Strategies and Implementation Efforts

The City of Savannah implemented a coordinated set of housing strategies that combine long-range planning, direct financial intervention, regulatory reform, and targeted redevelopment. These efforts respond to persistent affordability gaps, racial and economic disparities, rising construction costs, and displacement pressure identified through multiple planning initiatives.

Strategic Plans and Policy Frameworks

The Housing Savannah Action Plan (2021) emerged from a 40-member task force convened in 2020 and serves as a community-driven roadmap rather than a single-agency program. The plan set a long-term goal to improve, preserve, or create 15,000 affordable housing units by 2032 for households earning up to 80% of area median income. Achieving this target would require an estimated \$1.5 billion in combined public, private, and philanthropic investment to advance narrowing of Savannah's affordability gap relative to local incomes.

Comprehensive Plan 2040 reinforced these goals by prioritizing infill development and corridor-focused growth along multimodal transportation routes. The Plan linked housing density directly to transit viability and includes objectives to streamline permitting and reduce infill and redevelopment projects fees, carrying these forward in the Comprehensive Plan 2024 Update.

Equity considerations were elevated through the REAL Task Force, which documented significant racial disparities in mortgage lending and population displacement patterns, particularly in neighborhoods south of Forsyth Park. These findings framed housing affordability as both an economic and civil rights issue. Complementing this work, the Savannah GPS Strategic Plan established Equitable Community Development as a core municipal priority, with explicit goals to reduce displacement and improve housing access.

Programs and Financial Tools

Savannah expanded its housing finance capacity through the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund, a revolving loan fund designed to leverage local dollars into significantly larger pools of outside investment. By 2020, private contributions exceeded \$100,000 annually, with long-term plans to scale local investment to \$12.5 million per year, potentially leveraging \$87.5 million annually in additional funding.

The 1K-in-10 Abandoned Property Acquisition and Redevelopment Initiative, funded by \$10 million in SPLOST VII, targets the acquisition and reuse of 1,000 blighted properties over a decade. Early analysis identified 2,591 blighted properties, most of them vacant lots, concentrated within central Savannah. Properties are assembled through negotiation and tax processes, with eminent domain used sparingly to resolve title barriers before transfer to the Land Bank Authority.

Homeownership assistance programs continued to expand during this period. The DreamMaker Program supported first-time buyers with average household incomes around \$47,500, providing modest down payment assistance that leveraged substantial private mortgage financing. The Employer Assisted Home Purchase Program, operated through Savannah Affordable Housing Fund, further strengthened workforce housing by partnering with major employers, enabling dozens of employees to achieve homeownership.

To address escalating construction costs, the City and Community Housing Services Agency (CHSA) Development explored modular housing as a cost-containment strategy, piloting factory-built homes with the goal of reducing per-unit costs by up to 20% while supporting workforce training.

Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stability

The City of Savannah has strengthened its homelessness response since 2020 by shifting from short-term sheltering toward a Housing First and supportive housing framework that emphasizes permanent housing, service coordination, and prevention. Key initiatives include investment in Dundee Cottages and Cottages at Dundee to provide permanent supportive housing for individuals and families exiting homelessness, funding for medical recovery housing for medically fragile residents, and continued coordination with partners such as the Chatham-Savannah Authority for the Homeless and Step Up Savannah. Pandemic-era emergency rental assistance programs helped prevent displacement for thousands of households, while redevelopment efforts such as Savannah Gardens stabilized deeply affordable housing stock and reduced homelessness risk. Collectively, these actions reflect a systems-based approach that recognizes homelessness as a product of housing affordability constraints, health needs, and limited supply, reinforcing the importance of supportive housing and prevention as core components of the City's housing strategy.

Zoning and Regulatory Reform

Savannah's zoning reforms played a critical role in enabling housing production. The adoption of the New Zoning Ordinance (NewZO) in 2019 reduced minimum lot sizes, legalized mixed-use development by right in commercial districts, accommodated ADUs and aligned zoning standards with historic urban development patterns, reducing reliance on variances.

In March 2025 the City adopted the Affordable Housing Overlay District (AHOD), which allows increased density and reduced lot requirements for affordable housing projects in targeted neighborhoods. Additional measures, including a Rental Density Bonus Program, support missing-middle housing types such as duplexes and quadplexes. To mitigate loss of long-term housing, the City implemented a Short-Term Vacation Rental (STVP) Overlay, capping STVR use to preserve residential availability.

In 2025, the City of Savannah adopted a zoning text amendment to expand and modernize regulations for accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as a strategy to increase small-scale housing options within established neighborhoods. The amendment revised development standards related to lot area, setbacks, height, building coverage, and design compatibility, reducing the need for variances and streamlining approvals. By lowering regulatory barriers, the City aims to support missing-middle housing, enable intergenerational living, provide supplemental rental income for homeowners, and modestly expand housing supply without altering neighborhood character.

Major Redevelopment and Housing Projects

Savannah paired policy reforms with large-scale projects. The Savannah Gardens redevelopment replaced a severely under-occupied public housing site with a mixed-tenure community of 625 dwellings, now operating at near-full occupancy. Smaller but targeted initiatives include the Dundee Cottages supportive housing project for individuals experiencing homelessness, LIHTC-supported senior housing at the former fairgrounds site, deed-restricted affordable housing at 1700 Drayton Street, and dedicated medical recovery housing for medically fragile unhoused residents.

Transportation and Housing Relationship

Housing Affordability and Total Cost of Living

Housing affordability in Savannah and Chatham County is increasingly shaped by the combined cost of housing and transportation. While housing is traditionally considered affordable when costs remain below 30% of household income, this measure alone does not capture the full financial burden faced by households. In lower-cost, outlying areas of Chatham County, savings on rent or mortgages are often offset by higher transportation expenses, including fuel, vehicle maintenance, insurance, and longer commute times. As a result, households may experience overall cost burdens comparable to or greater than those living in higher cost but better connected urban neighborhoods.

Workforce Access and Economic Competitiveness

Access to affordable housing near employment centers is a critical factor in workforce recruitment and retention. Regional workforce studies have identified limited public transportation options and a shortage of affordable housing near major job centers as key barriers to meeting labor demand, particularly for large industrial and logistics employers. In both Savannah and Chatham County, entry- and mid-level workers face challenges reaching employment locations without reliable transit, reinforcing the connection between housing location, transportation access, and regional economic competitiveness.

Development Patterns and Infrastructure Pressure

Development patterns directly influence transportation demand and infrastructure performance. Low-density, auto-oriented growth patterns prevalent in unincorporated Chatham County increase automobile dependence and vehicle miles traveled, placing strain on roadway networks and contributing to congestion in rapidly growing corridors such as Ogeechee Road

and West Chatham. In contrast, compact development and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) models aim to reduce travel distances by locating housing, jobs, and services within walkable areas or near transit hubs. These approaches support more efficient infrastructure use and reduce long-term public costs.

Integrated Planning and Policy Frameworks

Savannah and Chatham County have advanced planning frameworks that explicitly link land use, housing, and transportation. Savannah's Comprehensive Plan 2040 adopted a "Strong Corridors" growth strategy that prioritizes reinvestment and mixed-use development along existing multimodal routes to support transit viability and reduce sprawl. Growth centers and corridor planning tools emphasize placing housing within walking distance of transit and services. Countywide plans similarly recognize that residential density directly affects the feasibility of transit investments and advocate aligning housing approvals with transportation capacity and infrastructure planning. These initiatives will be carried forward into the Comprehensive Plan 2024 Update.

Zoning, Regulatory Reforms, and Incentives

Regulatory reforms have been used to reduce housing costs and strengthen the housing-transportation connection. Savannah's New Zoning Ordinance reduced off-street parking requirements, lowering construction costs and encouraging alternative transportation modes. The Affordable Housing Overlay District allows increased density and reduced lot sizes in transit-accessible areas to support affordable housing development. Both jurisdictions have explored density bonuses and streamlined approvals for projects located near transit, employment centers, and essential services, reinforcing the principle that housing location is a core affordability factor.

Transit Coordination and Connectivity Investments

Coordination between housing and transit providers has played an increasing role in project review and funding decisions. Local plans encourage alignment between Chatham Area Transit routes and affordable housing developments, including Low-Income Housing Tax Credit communities and supportive housing sites. Investments in non-motorized infrastructure, such as the Tide to Town trail network and sidewalk improvements, aim to improve access between neighborhoods, schools, healthcare facilities, and employment centers. These efforts recognize that reducing transportation barriers is essential to improving housing stability, particularly for low-income households, seniors, and persons with special needs.

Housing Placement and Equity Considerations

Both Savannah and Chatham County have established goals to prioritize affordable and supportive housing in locations with reliable transit access and proximity to employment and services. For seniors, persons with disabilities, and households transitioning out of homelessness, housing placement in walkable, transit-served areas reduces long-term living costs and supports independence. These strategies reflect an understanding that transportation access is a critical component of equitable housing policy and long-term community resilience.

Regional Consistency of Planning for Housing

Efforts to improve housing in the Savannah–Chatham region are driven by coordinated intergovernmental planning, shared regulatory frameworks, and regional infrastructure and workforce strategies responding to rapid economic growth. Local governments, regional agencies, housing authorities, and nonprofit partners collaborate to align land use, infrastructure, transportation, and housing investment across jurisdictional boundaries, recognizing that housing affordability, workforce stability, and homelessness are regional challenges that require unified solutions.

Key Regional and Intergovernmental Housing Efforts

Strategic and Regional Planning

- Plan 2040 Comprehensive Plan: Jointly adopted by the City of Savannah and Chatham County to ensure consistent land use, housing, and growth policies across municipal boundaries.
- Chatham Community Blueprint: A long-range strategy developed with public, nonprofit, and private partners to address housing disparities and economic segregation through 2035.
- Coastal Regional Plan & CRC CEDS: Regional frameworks encouraging zoning reform, attainable housing, and coordinated redevelopment across coastal counties.
- Housing Savannah Action Plan (2021): A 10-year strategy targeting housing stability for 15,000 households by 2032, dependent on sustained City–County collaboration and investment.

Workforce and Economic Growth Coordination

- Savannah Harbor–Interstate 16 Joint Development Authority (JDA): Regional collaboration across four counties to address housing needs linked to major employers, including the Hyundai Metaplant.
- Future Impact Simulation (FIS) Model: Used to project household growth across county lines, identifying the need for coordinated regional housing responses.
- Military Housing Partnerships: Coordination with the U.S. Army to address off-base housing needs for personnel stationed at Hunter Army Airfield.

Infrastructure and Regulatory Alignment

- State Infrastructure Investment: A major state-funded expansion of regional water and wastewater systems to support housing density and growth capacity.
- Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC): A shared planning agency ensuring consistent land use tools, including the Future Land Use Map and Character Area Map.
- Transit-Oriented Development Coordination: Alignment of housing density with transportation planning through CORE MPO and corridor-based growth strategies.

Property Acquisition and Development Tools

- Chatham County / City of Savannah Land Bank Authority: Acquisition and redevelopment of vacant and tax-delinquent properties for affordable housing.
- Urban Enterprise and Incentive Strategies: Exploration of tax relief, density incentives, and impact-fee reforms to support affordable housing production.

Homelessness and Supportive Housing Coordination

- Chatham–Savannah Authority for the Homeless (CSAH): Countywide lead agency for the HUD Continuum of Care, coordinating homelessness services and funding.
- Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH): City–County governance structure guiding a unified Five-Year Strategic Plan to End Homelessness.
- Shared Encampment Policies: Coordinated approaches adopted by both jurisdictions to ensure consistent service delivery and outreach.

Funding, Grants, and Partnerships

- Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC): Coordination with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to leverage local funds into large-scale affordable housing investment.
- Savannah Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF): Local match and leverage tool supporting homeownership and rental development.
- CRC Grant Administration: Regional support for HUD and DCA grants, including PRO Housing and other federal funding programs.
- Public–Private and Nonprofit Partnerships: Collaboration with Habitat for Humanity, workforce agencies, and service providers to expand housing supply and stability.

Planning for Improving Housing

When household trends, housing stock characteristics, affordability indicators, and policy actions in the City of Savannah and Chatham County are evaluated together, the data point to a housing imbalance, not a short-term market disruption. Housing pressures in the region are driven by sustained affordability gaps, a mismatch between household composition and housing supply, infrastructure and land constraints, and rising non-housing costs such as insurance and transportation.

Economic conditions between 2020 and 2025 intensified these pressures. Housing prices and rents increased sharply while wage growth lagged, particularly for renters and entry-level workers. Median home values rose substantially in both jurisdictions, and rental costs shifted decisively toward higher price brackets. By the mid-2020s, more than half of renter households and nearly one-quarter of homeowners were cost burdened. For extremely low-income renters, the region continues to face a severe supply gap, with far fewer affordable and available units than households in need.

Household composition trends further underscore the mismatch between demand and supply. Nonfamily, single-person, and senior households now represent a large and growing share of households, especially within Savannah. However, multifamily and missing-middle housing production has not yet met changing demographic needs, highlighting continuation of code revisions to accommodate more creative housing formation and incentivizing development.

Vacancy patterns reinforce that the housing gap is not a surplus housing problem. Multifamily and small-scale structures account for a disproportionate share of vacant units, reflecting higher turnover, affordability stress, and competition from short-term rentals and speculative uses. At the same time, rising vacancy rates have not translated into improved affordability, demonstrating that vacancy alone does not equate to accessibility.

From a land use and infrastructure perspective, Chatham County is approaching functional build-out in several growth areas. New residential development has increasingly concentrated along corridors such as Ogeechee Road and Chatham Parkway, where infrastructure capacity, zoning transitions, and community compatibility present ongoing challenges. Countywide, allowable density is closely tied to water and sewer availability, reinforcing low-density development patterns in unserved areas. In Savannah, aging infrastructure and an older housing stock elevate rehabilitation needs and operating costs, particularly for lower-income and renter households.

Both jurisdictions have responded by shifting toward intentional housing policy intervention, including zoning reform, missing-middle strategies, public housing reinvestment, homelessness prevention, and regional coordination. These actions reflect a recognition that market forces alone are insufficient to correct current conditions. Housing affordability in Savannah and Chatham County is now a system-wide planning issue, intersecting with transportation, infrastructure, public health, climate resilience, and economic competitiveness.

From a planning perspective, the alignment of demographic trends, affordability data, vacancy patterns, and policy responses confirms the need for deliberate, coordinated housing strategies. Future housing success will depend on expanding housing types at lower price points, aligning density with infrastructure and transit, preserving existing affordable units, and managing growth at a regional scale. Without sustained policy intervention, rising costs, land constraints, and demographic change will continue to limit housing access and stability across both jurisdictions.

Climate-related issues represent a growing and material threat to housing affordability and feasibility in Savannah and Chatham County. Floodplain regulations, elevated base flood elevation requirements, marsh and riparian buffers, and rising insurance costs are increasing the cost of constructing, rehabilitating, and maintaining housing, particularly in older and lower-income neighborhoods. These factors also constrain where housing can be built by reducing developable land and limiting achievable density, just as the County approaches build-out. Climate impacts disproportionately affect naturally affordable housing and accelerate displacement by raising operating costs beyond what many households can absorb. From a planning perspective, climate change is not only an environmental concern but a structural housing challenge that must be addressed through coordinated land use, infrastructure investment, and resilience-focused housing policy.

Housing SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Strong recognition at both City and County levels that housing affordability is a structural challenge
- Active housing policy tools, including zoning reform, overlays, land banking, and ADU expansion
- Significant public investment through SPLOST, HUD programs, Emergency Rental Assistance, and state funding
- Increasing coordination between housing, transportation, homelessness, and infrastructure planning
- Established regional institutions supporting collaboration (MPC, CSAH, CORE MPO, Land Bank Authority)

Weaknesses

- Housing stock dominated by single-family detached units, especially countywide
- Severe and persistent affordability gaps for renters and first-time buyers
- Limited supply of missing-middle and small-scale multifamily housing
- High turnover and instability in rental housing
- Vacancy does not translate into affordability due to price, speculation, or short-term-rental use
- Infrastructure constraints (water, sewer, aging systems, transportation facilities) limit where density can occur

Opportunities

- Expansion of missing-middle housing in built-out and transit-served areas
- Strategic infill and redevelopment of vacant, underutilized, and publicly controlled sites
- Stronger alignment of housing with transit, services, and employment centers
- Preservation and rehabilitation of older housing stock to maintain affordability
- Regional coordination as land availability tightens and growth pressures increase
- Leveraging state and federal programs (LIHTC, PRO Housing, infrastructure grants)

Threats

- Continued displacement driven by rapid price appreciation and rent escalation
- Loss of affordable units to redevelopment and short-term rentals
- Rising insurance, construction, and climate-resilience costs, particularly in coastal and older housing areas
- Competition between residential, industrial, and logistics land uses
- Population and employment growth outpacing housing supply as build-out approaches
- Climate-related regulations, rising insurance costs, and flood risk are increasing housing development and operating costs while further constraining buildable land, intensifying affordability pressures and displacement risk.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1- Improve neighborhood stability where all residents, regardless of income, can occupy, maintain, and improve their homes without undue financial hardship

Dilapidated and abandoned properties, structures, and lots negatively impact neighborhoods and residents including quality of life, marketability and property values. They encourage disinvestment and criminal behavior that can lead to gentrification. Existing homeowners and other property owners are unable to secure financing to improve property. The conditions help strip value and generational wealth from existing property owners who maintain their property in good condition. They make attracting new homebuyers, renters, and investment difficult. Modest and low incomes of some homeowners and renters add to the difficulty of maintaining and improving property. Many elderly homeowners living on fixed incomes find it difficult to afford home improvement loans. Many renters with low income find it difficult to afford rents that are required to cover the debt service associated with renovated or new rental housing. These challenges are sometimes compounded as neighborhood marketability and values begin to increase— leading to gentrification. Striking a delicate balance that results in socio-economic diversity, rather than wholesale gentrification, could be beneficial to existing neighborhood property owners and residents as well as new members of the neighborhood.

Objectives:

- Maintain, improve, construct, and development quality affordable housing in existing neighborhoods
- Enforce housing and property maintenance codes
- Renovate or redevelopment blighted, abandoned, properties with new affordable housing
- Provide affordable home repair, construction, development, and purchase options
- Prevent wholesale gentrification as neighborhood conditions and marketability improve

Goal 2 - Increase supportive housing for special needs populations, such as individuals who are homeless, mentally ill, disabled, and residents in drug recovery

Shelter is a basic human need, but for too many it is not a need that it is being met. For those in the most vulnerable communities such as people with drug addiction, mental illness, chronic health conditions, or disabilities, having a safe, stable home is fundamental to ensuring adequate treatment and recovery. In many instances these individuals are also struggling with long-term poverty and may experience periods of homelessness, interrupting treatment and constraining recovery efforts creating a vicious cycle that causes them to spiral further into poverty and poor health. Providing supportive housing for special needs populations is a key component to breaking the cycle, reducing incarcerations and the use of emergency services by vulnerable individuals, and assisting in their becoming active members of the community.

Objectives:

- Support local, state and federal policy and legislation benefitting those with special housing needs including those that help prevent housing discrimination
- Significantly increase and expand local investments in the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund and additional leveraged investments for the retention, improvement, construction, and development of affordable housing for special needs populations and that help prevent housing discrimination
- Increase partnerships and capacity of those needed to produce and maintain affordable housing for special needs populations

Goal 3 - Increase affordable housing stock

The cost of housing has increased disproportionately to wages, resulting in a lack of affordable housing options for renters and potential homeowners alike. The absence of sufficient affordable housing impacts the entire community, not only those struggling to find housing or to pay for their current housing. Insufficient affordable housing affects employers in recruiting and retaining employees, impacts the economy through a decrease in discretionary spending, increases social costs associated with evictions and public assistance, reduces the health of citizens who cannot afford to access preventative health services, and overall, decreases the quality of life of many in the community. Working to increase the supply of quality housing that is affordable to all persons, but especially to those with modest and low incomes, is critical. The Housing Savannah Task Force estimates that in 2021, Savannah households most likely in need of quality housing they can afford are those making less than \$50,000 annually. Too often, affordable housing is associated with only the very lowest income members of a community.

Objectives:

- Develop public policy/legislation, ordinances, zoning and subdivision regulations, building designs, and construction methods/materials that help reduce housing costs without sacrificing quality and that facilitate increasing affordable housing availability
- Acquire property necessary to provide additional affordable housing in existing neighborhoods, near public transportation, and near employment centers, and to help limit gentrification
- Significantly increase and expand local investments in the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund and additional leveraged investments for the retention, improvement, construction, and development of affordable housing for the homeless, renters, homeowners, and homebuyers
- Sustain and increase participation in the 9% and 4% low-income housing tax credit program (LIHTC), and in the issuance of Housing Authority of Savannah bonds, for the renovation and/ or development of affordable rental housing
- Increase partnerships and capacity of those needed to produce and maintain additional affordable housing

Goal 4 - Decrease homelessness (Homeless describes a person lacking a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence).

Poverty, unemployment, mental health issues, and lack of affordable housing are common causes of homelessness. Once homeless, factors such as the lack of access to proper healthcare, sanitation, jobs, and educational opportunities can make it difficult to overcome homelessness. With assistance, however, many homeless persons can become active members of their communities again. Implementing prevention programs aimed at providing affordable housing, improving access to proper mental health and healthcare services, reducing criminalization practices and providing financial safety nets for those without one are key to efficiently and effectively decreasing homelessness. Interventions to prevent homelessness are more cost effective than addressing issues after someone is already homeless.

Objectives:

- Support local, state and federal policy and legislation benefitting the homeless and those in need of transitional housing
- Provide eviction and foreclosure prevention assistance to those in danger of losing their home and becoming homeless
- Develop new and innovative approaches and models for housing the homeless and those in transition out of homelessness
- Significantly increase and expand local investments in the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund and additional leveraged investments for the retention, improvement, construction, and development of affordable housing for the homeless and those in need of transitional housing
- Increase partnerships and capacity of those needed to produce and maintain affordable housing for the homeless and those in need of transitional housing

CHAPTER 7
NATURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

DRAFT

Savannah and Unincorporated Chatham County are defined by one of the most distinctive coastal landscapes in the Southeast, a place where people have long been drawn to live near tidal rivers, marshes, and oak-lined shores. These natural systems shape the region's identity and provide essential benefits such as flood protection, clean water, habitat, and recreation. As the population grows and development expands, the balance between community needs and environmental stewardship becomes increasingly important. With thoughtful planning and a shared commitment to protecting natural resources, Chatham County and its jurisdictions can remain a healthy, resilient, and beautiful place for generations to come.

Introduction

Chatham County contains exceptional natural resources vitally important to the quality of life, resilience, health, and economy of the region. The County therefore has an interest in promoting, developing, sustaining, and protecting its natural resources for current residents and future generations.

This chapter of The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update includes an existing conditions assessment of specific natural resources and natural resource issues found in Chatham County as well as specific goals and objectives for the management and protection of these resources for the next 20 years.

Coastal Resources

Georgia's coastal marshlands and beaches are seen as one of the State's greatest resources and a defining characteristic feature of Chatham County. The beaches draw new residents and tourists to the area, while the marshlands are an essential ecosystem for many plant and animal species, protecting coastal residents from much of the impacts of storms and higher than normal tides. The landscape along the Georgia coast is also dotted with marsh hammocks - back barrier islands or small upland areas surrounded by tidal waters and marshes that provide a haven for wildlife.

As the state's coastal population grows and development pressures threaten Georgia's coastal resources, public policies protecting and conserving coastal lands need to be implemented. The preservation of the region's coastal resources through land-use regulations and land acquisition programs is essential to the resiliency of the community, the local economy, and the quality of life for its residents.

Water Resources

Water Supply Watersheds

Chatham County is located within the Atlantic Coast Flatwoods section of the State within both the Savannah and Ogeechee River Basins and more specifically within the boundaries of the Lower Savannah, Lower Ogeechee, and Ogeechee Coastal Watersheds.

The Ogeechee River Basin headwaters is in mid to southeastern Georgia and is flanked by the Altamaha and Oconee River Basins to the west and the Savannah River Basin to the east. The headwaters are in the southeastern edge of the Piedmont province and the basin continues southeastward to the Atlantic Ocean. The river basin is located entirely in the State of Georgia

and drains approximately 5,540 square miles and plays a significant role in forming Wassaw, Ossabaw, Saint Catherine's, Black Beard and Sapelo islands off the coast of Chatham County.

The Savannah River Basin is a 10,577 square mile watershed whose headwaters originate in the Blue Ridge Province of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. The Savannah River forms the boundary between South Carolina and Georgia as it flows southeast to the Atlantic Ocean at Savannah. The Savannah River is the most extensively used surface water source in the Savannah River Basin.

Public Water Supply Sources

The groundwater resources of Coastal Georgia, specifically the Floridan Aquifer system, are recognized as some of the most productive in North America. This particular system underlies an area of about 100,000 square miles in southern Alabama, southeastern Georgia, southern South Carolina, and all of Florida. The depth below the ground surface to reach the top of the Floridan Aquifer increases from less than 150 feet in coastal South Carolina to more than 1,400 feet in Glynn and Camden counties, Georgia.

The majority of households in the City of Savannah and Unincorporated Chatham County are served by municipal or community water systems that rely primarily on withdrawals from the Floridan Aquifer. Access to centralized water infrastructure is nearly universal across the region. According to the 2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Chatham County contains 140,781 housing units, of which 139,008 units (approximately 98.7%) have complete plumbing facilities, defined as hot and cold running water, a flush toilet, and a bathtub or shower. Within the City of Savannah, approximately 98.7% have complete plumbing, with only a small share of units lacking full facilities. These data confirm that municipal and community water systems serve the vast majority of households throughout Savannah and Chatham County, and that reliance on private wells is limited and increasingly uncommon as utility service areas expand and redevelopment occurs.

Public Water Supply Issues and Long-Range Management

Groundwater pumping in the Savannah region and surrounding coastal areas has altered groundwater levels, changed recharge and discharge patterns, and shifted the direction of groundwater flow within the Floridan Aquifer system. These changes increase vulnerability to saltwater intrusion, particularly along the Savannah - Hilton Head interface. As population growth and economic development increase water demand, managing withdrawals from the Floridan Aquifer remains critical to protecting the region's primary drinking water source.

Efforts to reduce reliance on the aquifer began in 1995 with adoption of the Chatham County Comprehensive Water Supply Management Plan. This plan represented a coordinated effort among municipalities, major domestic water suppliers, and industrial users to lower groundwater withdrawals. In 1997, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) capped additional pumping from the Floridan Aquifer and required a 10-million-gallon reduction in withdrawals by 2005. The Sound Science Initiative was completed in 2010. This study confirmed patterns of lateral and vertical saltwater migration and led to a multi-step, science-based approach for managing groundwater withdrawals along the Georgia coast.

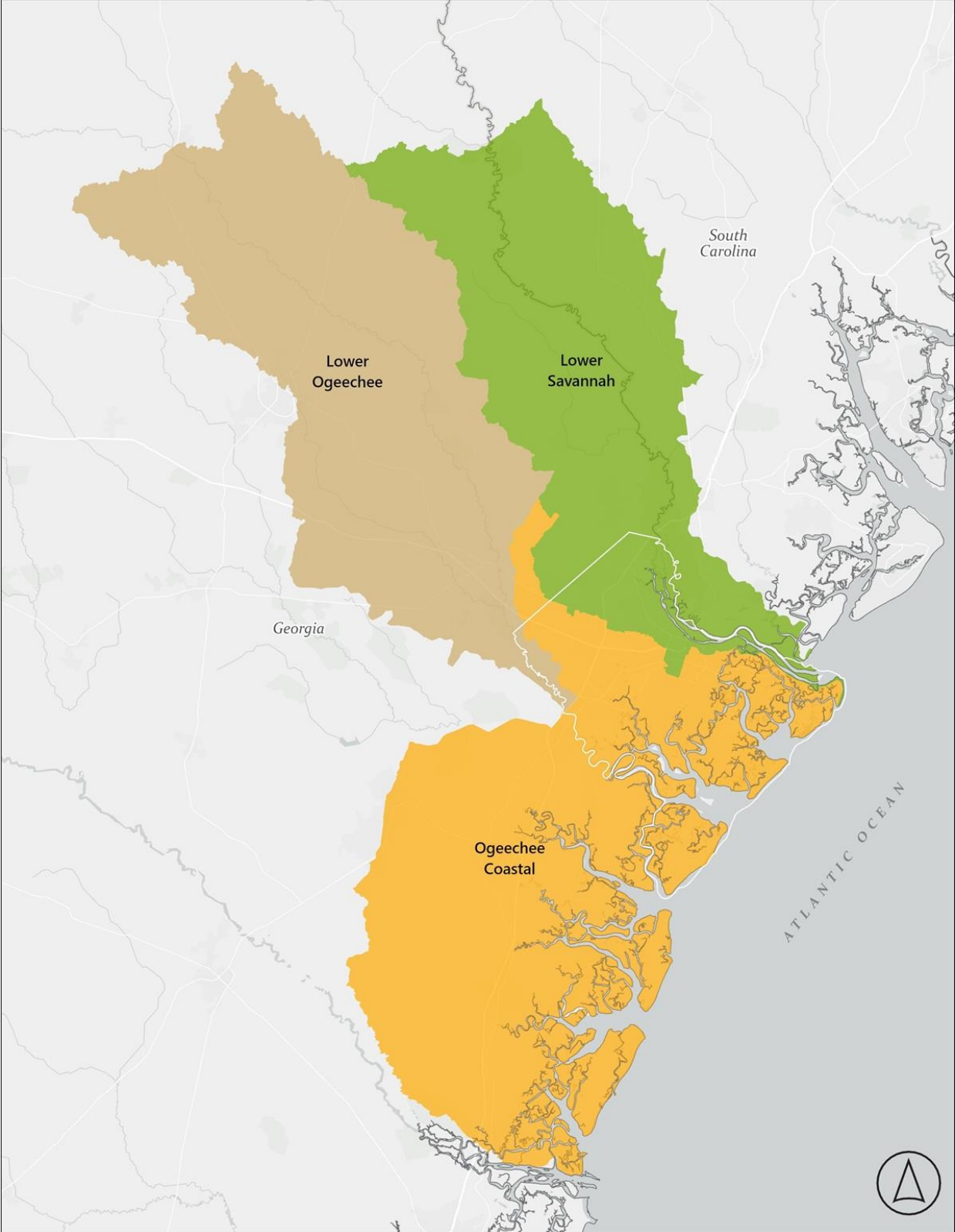


Exhibit 7.1 - Georgia Watersheds

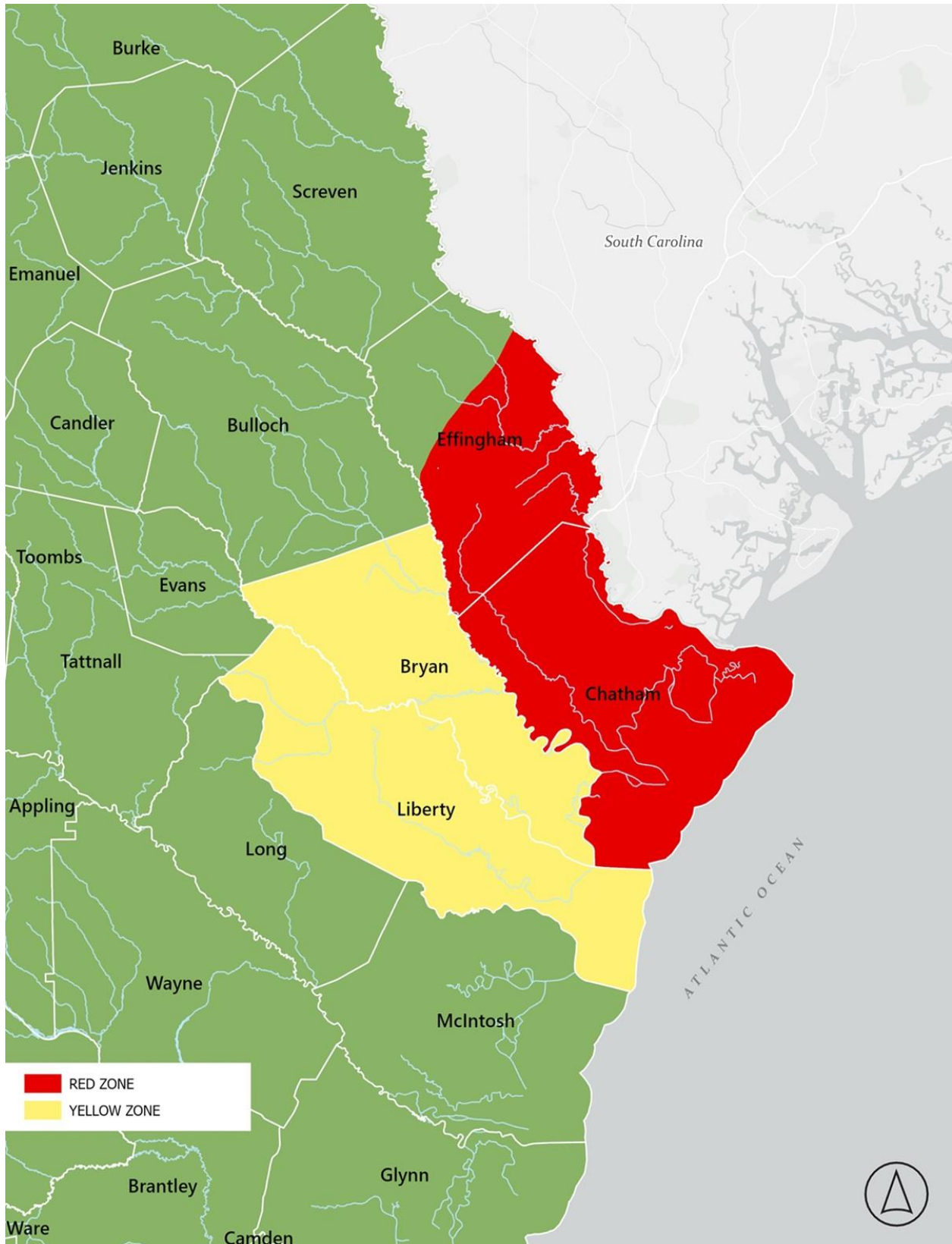


Exhibit 7.2 – Red Zone: Chatham and Effingham Counties

Chatham and Effingham Counties were later designated as part of the “Red Zone,” where EPD significantly reduced groundwater withdrawal permits to slow the advance of saltwater intrusion. Additional regulatory limits were imposed in 2015. These required most Red Zone permittees to reduce withdrawal limits by roughly 22% by 2025. Local governments and water providers have made measurable progress through conservation and system optimization. However, full compliance with the final 2025 reduction target has not yet been documented in publicly available reports. Municipal and county systems continue coordinating long-term water supply planning, evaluating alternative sources, and exploring regional partnerships to reduce reliance on the Upper Floridan Aquifer.

New industrial development has introduced additional complexity to regional groundwater management. The Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America (HMGMA) near the Red and Yellow Zone boundary is expected to require withdrawals between 4 to 6.6 million gallons of water per day for operations. While regulatory evaluations have concluded that projected pumping will have only minor long-term effects on drinking water supplies, monitoring wells in coastal areas already show localized cones of depression associated with historic industrial pumpage. These depressions can alter groundwater flow gradients and increase the potential for saltwater migration. The recent closure of major industrial users such as International Paper has reduced overall groundwater stress, but the addition of new high-demand facilities may offset some of those gains.

Because groundwater withdrawals in one part of the region influence aquifer conditions throughout the basin, the impacts of industrial, municipal, and agricultural pumping must continue to be addressed on a regional basis. Long-term monitoring, strict enforcement of withdrawal limits, and careful review of new industrial water demands remain essential to protecting the aquifer. Continued coordination among local governments, utilities, EPD, and regional stakeholders will be required to ensure that the Floridan Aquifer remains a viable and resilient water supply for households, industry, and ecological systems.

Groundwater Recharge Areas & Pollution Susceptibility

Groundwater recharge area is the land where the water that eventually seeps down into an aquifer first enters the ground. Groundwater can move readily through soils and rocks that are porous, such as sand, gravel, sandstone, or limestone. However, soils and rocks classified as non-porous, such as clay, shale, or granite, will hinder water movements. The principal aquifer recharge zone for the Floridan Aquifer system is located approximately 100 miles northwest of the City of Savannah where the upper boundary of the aquifer’s confining layer outcrops at the surface near the Fall Line separating the Piedmont province from the Coastal Plain. Soils vary, consisting of nearly level, moderately well-drained to poorly drained soils with a loamy surface layer and firm clay or loamy subsoil. Smaller areas of groundwater recharge are specifically located in the Miocene/Pliocene-Recent unconfined aquifer system within Chatham County. These local recharge areas are generally located on Wilmington Island, Skidaway Island and along the Abercorn Street corridor in Savannah.

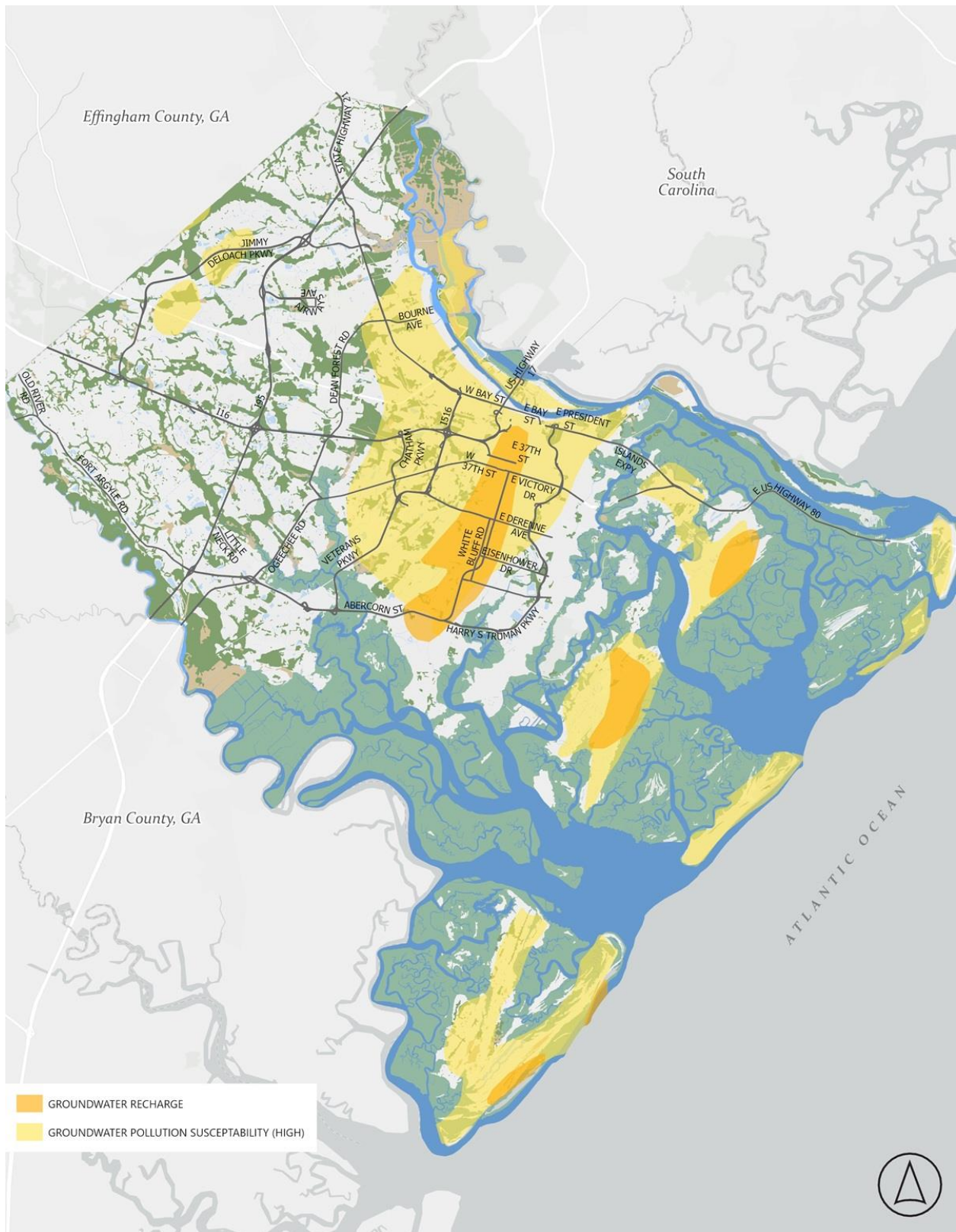


Exhibit 7.3 – Groundwater Recharge and Pollution Susceptibility Areas

If hazardous or toxic substances pollute the water that seeps into the ground in a recharge area, these pollutants are likely to be carried into the aquifer and contaminate the groundwater, ultimately affecting the drinking water source. Once polluted, it is almost impossible for a groundwater source to be cleaned up. For this reason, local wellhead protection ordinances have been passed and each local jurisdiction in Chatham County routinely performs inspections of community wells to prevent wellhead contamination and to address any stormwater pollutants that have the potential to impact groundwater quality through the wellhead.

In Chatham County and Savannah, the protection of groundwater recharge areas is also overseen by restricting land uses that generate, use, or store pollutants within groundwater recharge areas and by establishing minimum sizes for lots within groundwater recharge areas that are served by on-site sewage management systems. Prior to the issuance of a building permit or a demolition permit, the Zoning Administrator assesses whether the proposed activity is located within a groundwater recharge area as identified by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR). All lands identified as groundwater recharge areas are subject to restrictive development standards.

Specific areas within Chatham County have also been deemed to have a higher pollution susceptibility. Careful consideration should be taken within these areas when deciding on land uses and new development to protect the area's groundwater system.

Impaired Waterbodies

Under related environmental protection measures, section 303(d) of the 1972 Clean Water Act mandates that all states develop lists of impaired waters within their jurisdiction. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Environmental Protection Division has a complete "303(d) list" for the State of Georgia and Chatham County. Currently, there are a number of impaired waterways within Chatham County that are currently being monitored and investigated for measures to improve the water quality. The current list can also be found on [EPD's website](#).

Wetlands

Over the past several decades, wetlands in Georgia, particularly freshwater wetlands on the Coastal Plain, have been altered or converted to other uses as a result of development pressures, population growth, and changing land use demands. This loss has reduced natural flood storage capacity and contributed to increased flooding frequency and severity. The impacts extend beyond ecological degradation, affecting infrastructure, property, and quality of life as floodwaters have fewer natural areas in which to disperse.

In response to these challenges, wetland protection in Savannah and Chatham County is implemented through a coordinated framework of federal, state, and local regulations applied during development review and permitting. Projects that contain or are adjacent to wetlands are required to identify and delineate wetlands using accepted federal methodologies prepared by qualified professionals, with review coordinated through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Georgia Environmental Protection Division. Local regulations require wetlands and associated buffers to be preserved to the greatest extent practicable, and construction activities within wetlands and required buffers are generally restricted except where authorized through applicable permits.

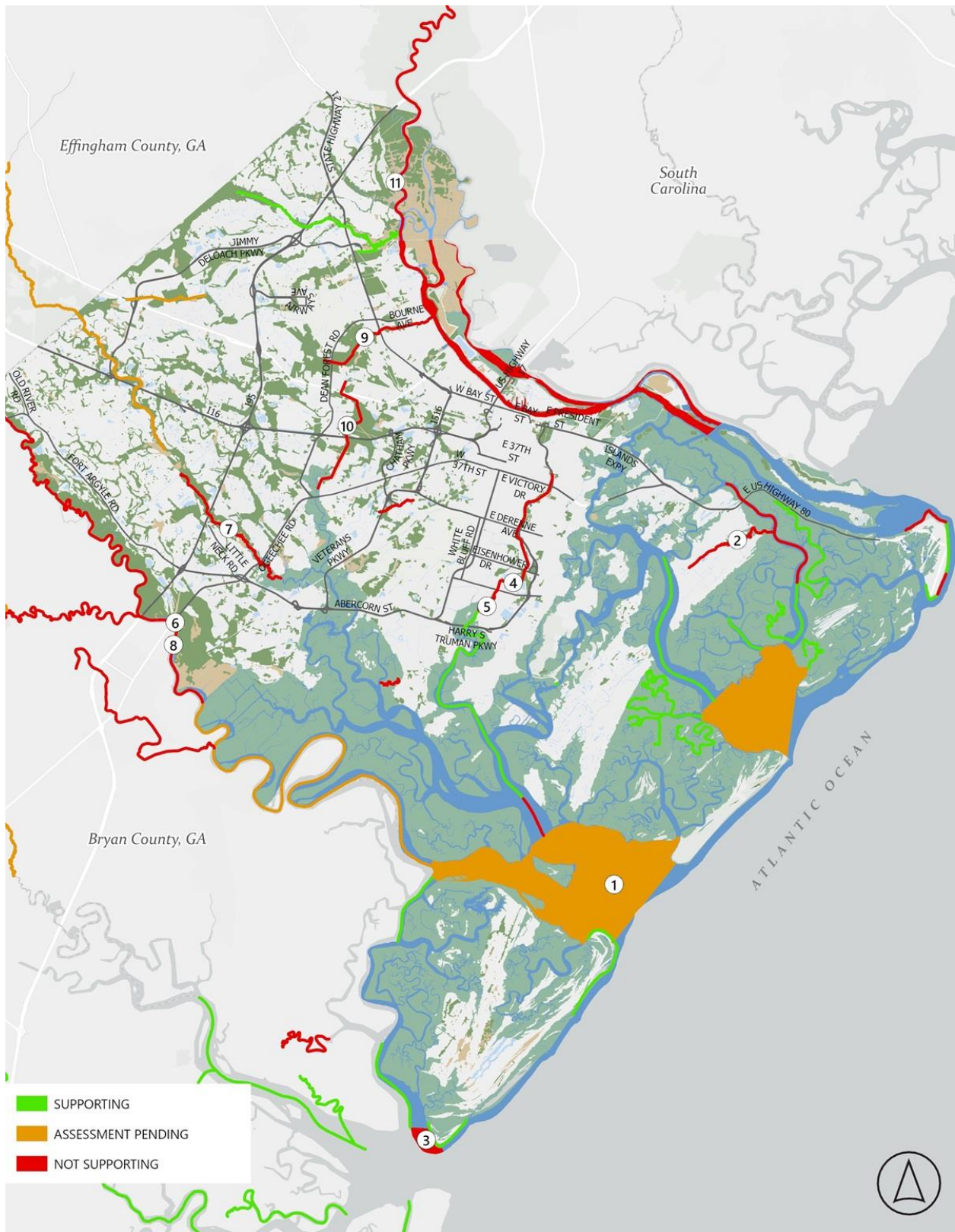


Exhibit 7.4 – Savannah-Chatham County: Impaired Waterbodies

Impaired Waters 305(b)/303(d) List (2024)			
No.	Impaired Water Body	No.	Impaired Water Body
1	Little Ogeechee River	9	Tributary to Salt Creek (GAR030602040213)
2	Ogeechee River	10	Pipemakers Canal
3	Tributary to Hoover Creek (GAR030602040211)	11	Little Ogeechee River (aka Green Island Sound)
4	Savannah River / Front River / Harbor	12	Bull River
5	Betz Creek	13	Tybee Island - Polk Street Beach (End of Beach to Jetty)
6	Casey Canal	14	Tybee Island - Strand Beach at Pier
7	Hayners Creek (known upstream as Casey Canal)	15	St. Catherine's Sound
8	Salt Creek	Source: (2020 GA Biota Impaired Waters with 1 Mile Buffer	

Figure 7.1 – Savannah-Chatham County: Impaired Waters 305(b)/303(d) List (2024)

Stormwater management ordinances adopted by the City of Savannah and Chatham County further support wetland conservation by requiring new development and redevelopment to manage runoff in a manner that minimizes non-point source pollution, protects natural drainage features, and reduces downstream flooding impacts. During site plan review, wetland delineations, buffer requirements, construction constraints, and stormwater controls are evaluated alongside erosion and sediment control standards. Best management practices, including vegetated buffers, bio-retention areas, constructed wetlands, and detention facilities are required or encouraged to treat runoff and reduce pollutant loads. Together, these regulatory and incentive-based approaches reinforce wetland preservation as both an environmental resource and a functional component of the region's stormwater infrastructure, supporting long term water quality, flood resilience, and ecosystem health.

Stormwater management ordinances such as those implemented by all of the jurisdictions within Chatham County can be used to protect wetlands as a means of reducing non-point source pollutants and to create artificial wetlands for the treatment of surface runoff. In addition, pollution controls may be used to prohibit discharges into area wetlands.

[NOAA Coastal Change Analysis Program](#) land cover data indicate that Chatham County experienced substantial land cover change between 1996 and 2021, driven largely by continued development and urbanization. During this period, high intensity developed land, (resulting in significant impervious surface coverage, often greater than 50%, and high-density structures, including commercial, industrial, and multi-family residential developments) increased by approximately 15.1 square miles and low intensity developed land (such as small commercial and office, single family/ low density residential, and parks) increased by about 10.3 square miles, reflecting ongoing conversion of natural and rural lands to residential, commercial, and infrastructure uses.

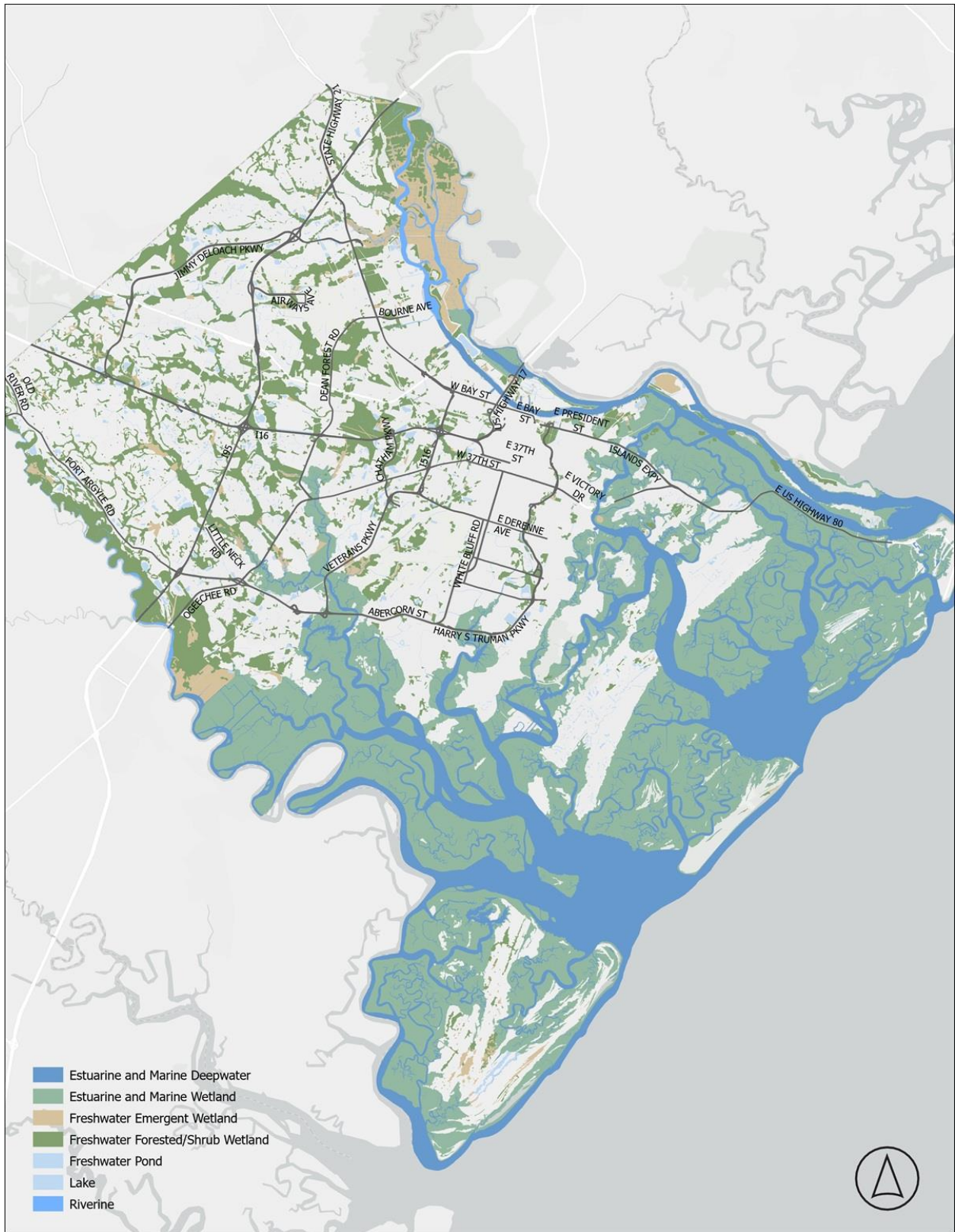
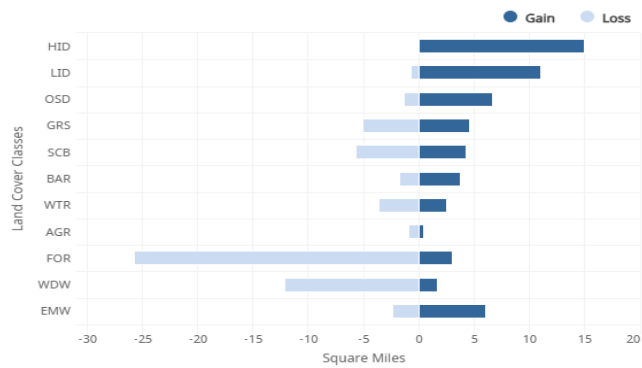


Exhibit 7.5 – Savannah-Chatham County Wetlands



Concurrently, forested and wetland systems have experienced notable losses and shifts. Forest land declined by approximately 22.6 square miles, while woody wetlands decreased by roughly 10.4 square miles, reducing the landscape’s capacity for flood storage, habitat support, and ecosystem resilience. Emergent wetlands increased by approximately 3.6 square miles,

representing a modest gain that likely reflects changes in hydrology, restoration activity, and coastal processes rather than a net expansion of wetland resources. Together, these trends highlight a shift in land cover composition and underscore the importance of continued wetland protection, forest conservation, and integrated land use and stormwater planning to balance growth with long term environmental sustainability.

Distribution of Change (Losses and Gains) By Land Cover						
Land Cover Class	1996 Area (sq. mi.)	Area Lost (sq. mi.)	Area Gained (sq. mi.)	2021 Area (sq. mi.)	Net Change (sq. mi.)	Percent Change
HID (High Intensity Developed)	19.15	0	15.06	34.21	15.06	78.7%
LID (Low Intensity Developed)	38.14	-0.73	11.01	48.42	10.28	26.9%
OSD (Open Space Developed)	22.31	-1.33	6.71	27.68	5.38	24.1%
GRS (Grassland / Herbaceous)	8.36	-5.05	4.57	7.88	-0.48	-5.8%
AGR (Agriculture)	3.54	-0.94	0.49	3.09	-0.45	-12.8%
FOR (Forest)	89.97	-25.7	3.1	67.37	-22.6	-25.1%
SCB (Scrub / Shrub)	8.76	-5.64	4.33	7.45	-1.31	-14.9%
WDW (Woody Wetlands)	78.04	-12.13	1.7	67.6	-10.44	-13.4%
EMW (Emergent Wetlands)	155.91	-2.4	6.05	159.55	3.64	2.3%
BAR (Barren Land)	9.09	-1.68	3.75	11.16	2.07	22.8%
WTR (Open Water)	199.03	-3.64	2.5	197.88	-1.14	-0.6%

Source: NOAA Coastal Change Analysis Program

Figure 7.2 - Distribution of Change (Losses and Gains) By Land Cover

Protected Rivers and Corridors

The State of Georgia requires every community to identify and put mechanisms in place to protect specific critical resources such as mountains, rivers, and river corridors that flank major rivers. The coastal region does not contain any protected statewide mountain areas; however, the coast’s beautiful rivers and corridors are not only critical ecosystems, but they are paramount to the community’s future growth and sustainability.

These river corridors are of vital importance since they help preserve those qualities that make a river suitable as a habitat for wildlife, a site for recreation, and a source for clean drinking water. River corridors also allow the free movement of wildlife from area to area within the State, help control erosion and river sedimentation, and help absorb floodwaters during natural events, and allow the natural migration of floodwaters due to sea level rise.

In an effort to protect the Savannah River corridor, Savannah and Chatham County adopted the Georgia Coastal Regional Commission's (CRC) 2003 Regional River Corridor Protection Plan for the Savannah River. The maintenance of a 100-foot natural vegetative buffer, often referred to as a "riparian buffer", on both sides of the river is part of the Plan. Similarly, under the State of Georgia Erosion and Sedimentation Act, a requirement is in place that land-disturbing activities shall not be conducted within 25 feet of the banks of any State waters.

Riparian buffers are of particular importance to the overall protection of water quality and habitat within the Lowcountry and coastal areas of Georgia. Scientific research has found many reasons for riparian buffers, including:

- To reduce the volume and velocity of stormwater runoff in order to protect the hydrological profiles of the surrounding waterways;
- To reduce the sediment and pollutants going into the open water;
- To provide upland wildlife habitat areas;
- To help maintain the in-stream temperatures provided by the shade within the tree canopy of the buffer system;
- Buffering adjacent neighborhoods, and
- Enhancing community appearance.

Floodplains

Floodplains are flat or lowland tracts of land adjacent to lakes, wetlands, and rivers that are typically covered by water during a flood. The ability of the floodplain to carry and store floodwaters should be preserved in order to protect human life and property from flood damage. However, undeveloped floodplains also provide many other natural and economic resource benefits. Floodplains often contain wetlands and other areas vital to a diverse and healthy ecosystem. By making wise land use decisions in the development and management of floodplains, beneficial functions are protected and negative impacts to the quality of the environment are reduced. Both the City of Savannah and Chatham County have updated their Floodplain Protection Ordinances to begin addressing sea level rise and the natural migration of waters along the coast. However more attention must be given, and measures must be enacted in the near future to allow for further protection of the coastal community from rising waters due to changes in the environment.

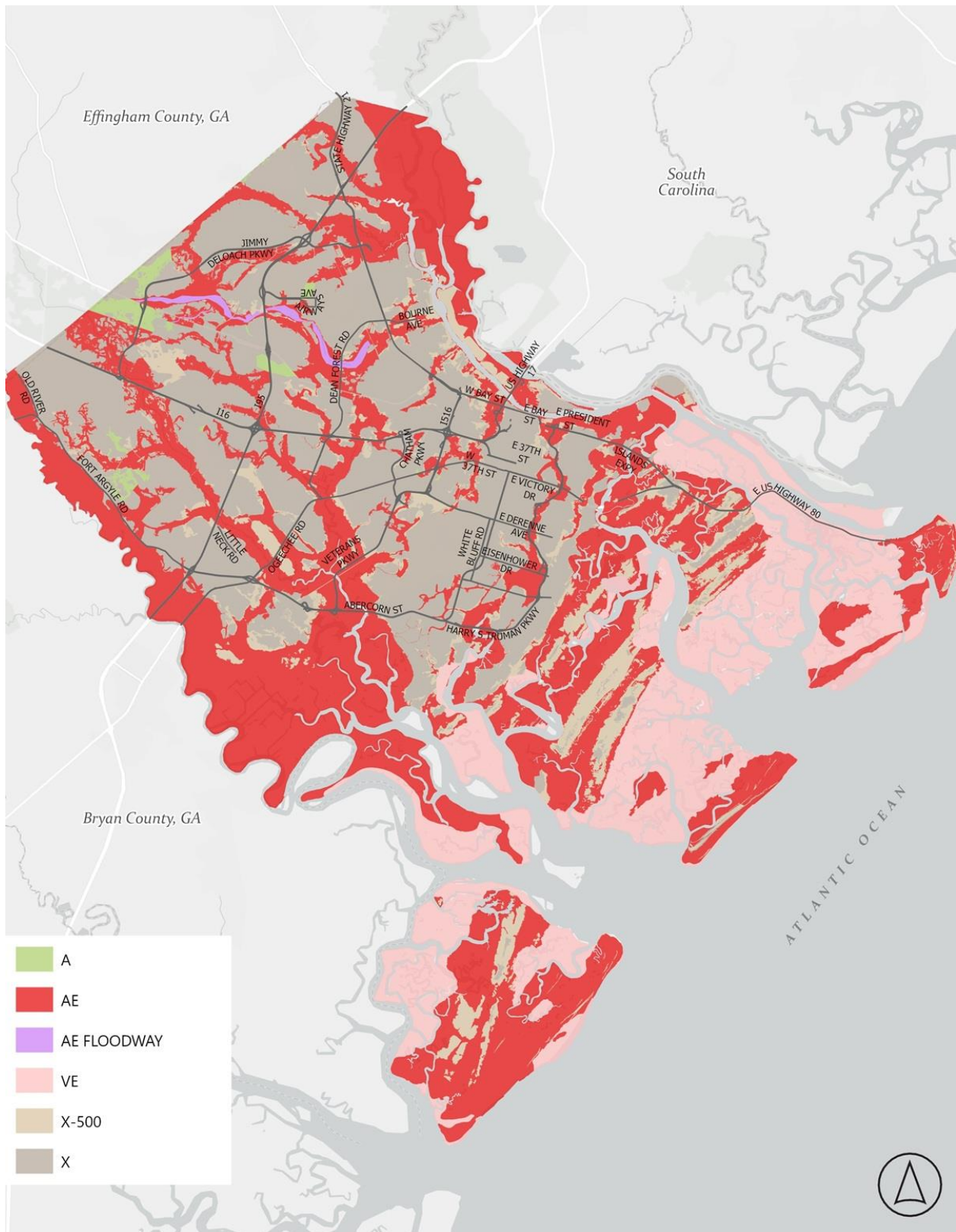


Exhibit 7.6 – Savannah-Chatham County Flood Zones

Geology and Soil Types

All of Chatham County, Georgia, is labeled as the Atlantic Coast Flatwoods area of Georgia. The Atlantic Coast Flatwoods area occurs along the seaward portion of Georgia and is characterized by nearly level topography and poorly drained soils that are underlain by marine sands, loams, and/or clays. A series of marine terraces, roughly paralleling the coast, extends inward from sea level to an elevation of approximately 100 feet. The lower lying flat terraces do not have well-defined drainage systems, and runoff moves slowly into slow-moving canals, streams, rivers, and finally into the ocean. The overall elevation in this region ranges from sea level to about 80 feet.

The County's soils tend to predominantly fall into the D-type category of soils, with shallow water tables, thus, making infiltration difficult. Group D soils are clay loam, silty clay loam, sandy clay, silty clay, or clay. This Hydrologic Soil Group has the highest runoff potential. They have very low infiltration rates when thoroughly wetted and consist chiefly of: Clay soils with a high swelling potential,

- Soils with a permanent high-water table,
- Soils with a claypan or clay layer at or near the surface and
- Shallow soils over nearly impervious material.

The average soil rating, as measured by the National Commodity Crop Productivity (NCCPI) is 47.

Coastal Resource Management

Stormwater Management

Stormwater runoff is generated from rain that flows over land or impervious surfaces, such as paved streets, parking lots, and building rooftops, and does not soak into the ground. The runoff picks up pollutants like trash, chemicals, oils, dirt, and sediment that can harm our rivers, streams, lakes, and coastal waters. To protect these resources, communities, construction companies, industries, and others, use stormwater controls, known as Best Management Practices (BMPs). BMPs filter out pollutants and/or prevent pollution by controlling it at its source.

The State and Local National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) stormwater programs regulate stormwater discharges through municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s). Depending on population size, operators of the MS4s are required to obtain an NPDES permit before they can discharge stormwater. This permitting mechanism is designed to prevent stormwater runoff from washing harmful pollutants into local surface waters. ([NPDES Stormwater Program | US EPA](#))

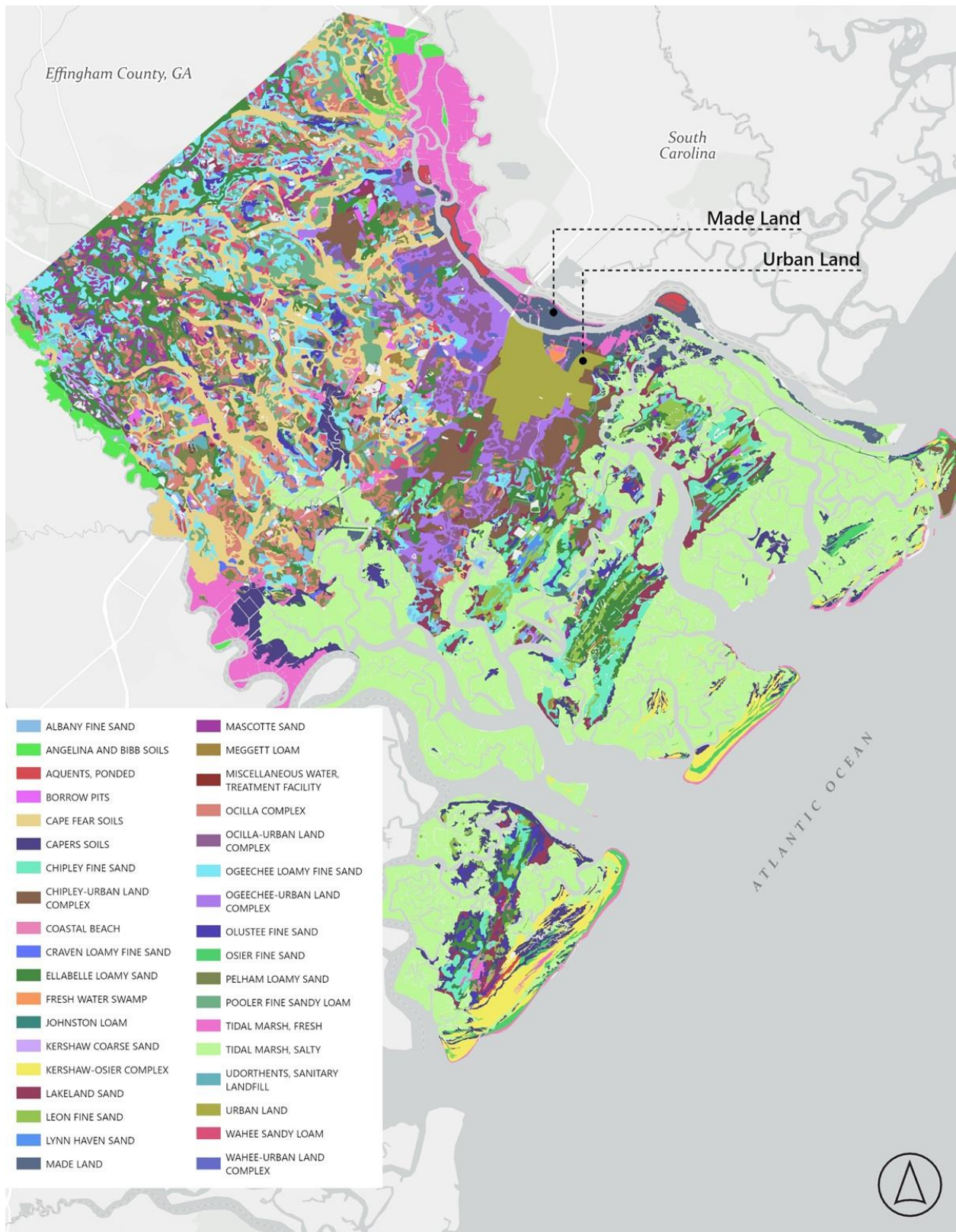


Exhibit 7.7 – Savannah-Chatham County Soils Classifications

Stormwater Management Programs (SWMPs) have been adopted by the City of Savannah and Chatham County in compliance with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) administered by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA EPD). Both jurisdictions operate municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s) regulated under Phase I Medium MS4 permits issued by GA EPD (City of Savannah Permit No. GAS000205; Chatham County Permit No. GAS000206). These permits authorize stormwater discharges and require the implementation of comprehensive stormwater management programs, including routine water quality monitoring, pollutant load assessment, identification and elimination of illicit discharges, staff training, preparation of annual reports, and public education and outreach initiatives designed to reduce stormwater pollution and protect receiving waters.

All of the jurisdictions within Chatham County have adopted the Coastal Stormwater Supplement to the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual (CSS). The CSS is a tool intended to provide Georgia's coastal communities with comprehensive guidance on an integrated, green infrastructure-based approach to natural resources protection, stormwater management, and site design.

As water flows across municipal boundaries and stormwater management efforts, or lack thereof, impact neighboring jurisdictions, it is suggested that the County and its' municipalities should work towards addressing stormwater issues in a regional manner to ensure that efforts being made are as efficient and effective as possible, such as the creation of a Regional Stormwater Committee or Commission.

Statistically, most stream quality indicators decline when watershed impervious cover exceeds 10%, with severe degradation expected beyond 25%. In Chatham County, the majority of growth is targeted within western areas of the County. It is likely that future stream health indicators (e.g., biological health, streambank stability) will be impacted in watersheds that have a substantial amount of land development. Several of these watersheds may transition over to an Impacted category. As a result, these impacted watersheds are excellent target areas for advanced stormwater management, riparian buffer management, and development principles that protect water quality, such as low-impact development.

Major Park, Recreation and Conservation Areas

The natural and scenic amenities of Chatham County offer many recreational and cultural opportunities. Due to the annual reduction of open space resulting from development in Chatham County, it is imperative to explore all available means for land conservation. Land acquisition programs such as the Chatham County Resource Protection Commission should be funded and utilized in conjunction with stringently enforced land use regulations to ensure the open space needs of the region will continue to be met.

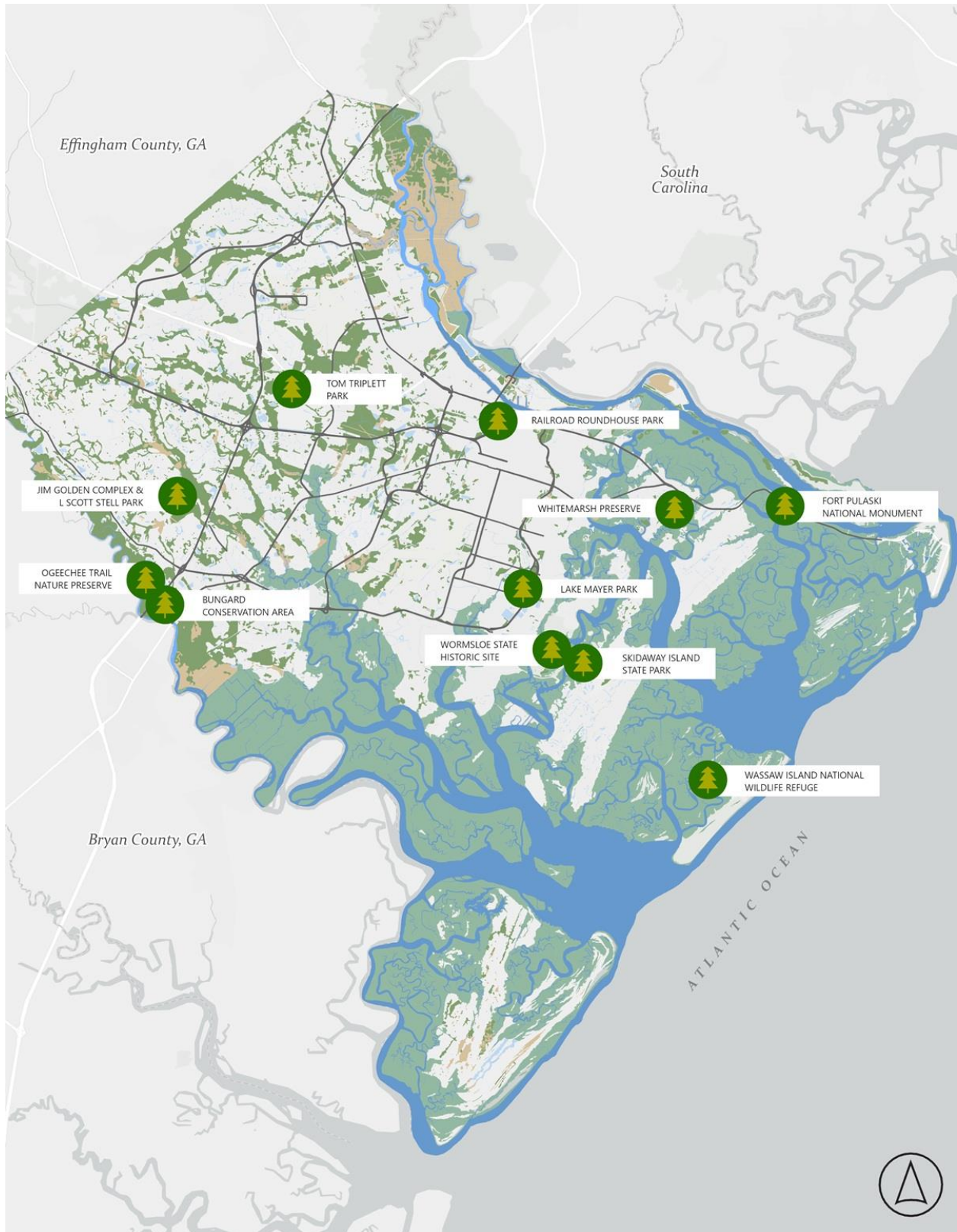


Exhibit 7.8 - Chatham County Parks, Recreation, and Conservation Areas

In addition to providing an adequate quantity (acres) and type (ballfields, wildlife habitat) of open space, it is important to endeavor to ensure equity to all residents. The objective is for residents to have access to a variety of parks, recreation, and open space within close proximity to their residence, typically targeted within one-half to one mile walking distance. The County and City are working to incorporate trails, bikeways, pedestrian paths as well as other non-vehicular paths into such areas to provide access for those without personal transportation, with the added benefit of simultaneously reducing vehicle trips.

“Open space” references an area that is valued for active and passive recreation and protection of the natural resources (including natural processes and wildlife) and which provides public benefit, and which is part of one or more of the following categories: developmentally difficult lands, natural resource areas, commercially used natural resources areas, natural amenity areas, recreational areas and urban form areas”.

Under the “open space” definition, there are five subjects under Federal jurisdiction and five subjects under State jurisdiction within Chatham County that fall within this title of conservation/recreation areas. Additionally, there are a number of recreational and conservation areas within Chatham County that are not under State or Federal jurisdiction. Some of the conservation and recreational areas within Chatham County include the following sites:

Chatham County Conservation and Recreation Resources		
Federal	State	Local/NGO
Fort Pulaski National Monument	Little Tybee/Cabbage Island	Oatland Island Education Center
Tybee National Wildlife Refuge	Skidaway Island State Park	Savannah Ogeechee Canal Trail
Savannah Coastal National Wildlife Refuge	Ossabaw Island Wildlife Management Area	L. Scott Stell Community Park/ The Jim Golden Complex
Wassaw Island National Wildlife Refuge	University of Georgia Marine Extension Center	Lower Ogeechee Conservation Corridor
Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway	Wormsloe Historic Site	Lake Mayer
		King’s Ferry Park
		Tom Triplett Park
		McQueen’s Island Trail
		Whitemarsh Preserve
		Pennyworth Island
		Bacon Park

Figure 7.3 – Chatham County Conservation and Recreation Resources

Prime Agricultural and Forest Land

The loss of agricultural and forest land is a nationwide trend driven by ongoing development pressure, as land once used for farming or forestry is converted to residential and commercial uses. This conversion has significant environmental impacts, including increased impervious surfaces that contribute to flooding and nonpoint source pollution, reduced air quality due to the

loss of tree cover, and higher energy consumption associated with transporting food over longer distances. As agricultural land declines, communities also become more dependent on external food sources, reducing local food security and resilience.

In Chatham County, agricultural activity has shifted in both scale and structure over the past decade. According to the [2022 U.S. Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture](#), the number of farms declined to 41 from 67 in 2017. However, total land acreage in farms increased to 7,742 acres, resulting in an average farm size of 189 acres, reflecting consolidation of operations rather than growth in farm numbers. Despite this shift, small and specialty operations remain important, with approximately 61% of farms under 50 acres, and 17% selling directly to consumers. These trends highlight agriculture’s continuing role in supporting local food systems, preserving open space, and maintaining rural character, even as development and land use change place increasing pressure on remaining agricultural lands.

In addition, while not designated agricultural land, there are a multitude of community gardens throughout Chatham County that contribute to the objective of supporting local, healthy food systems.

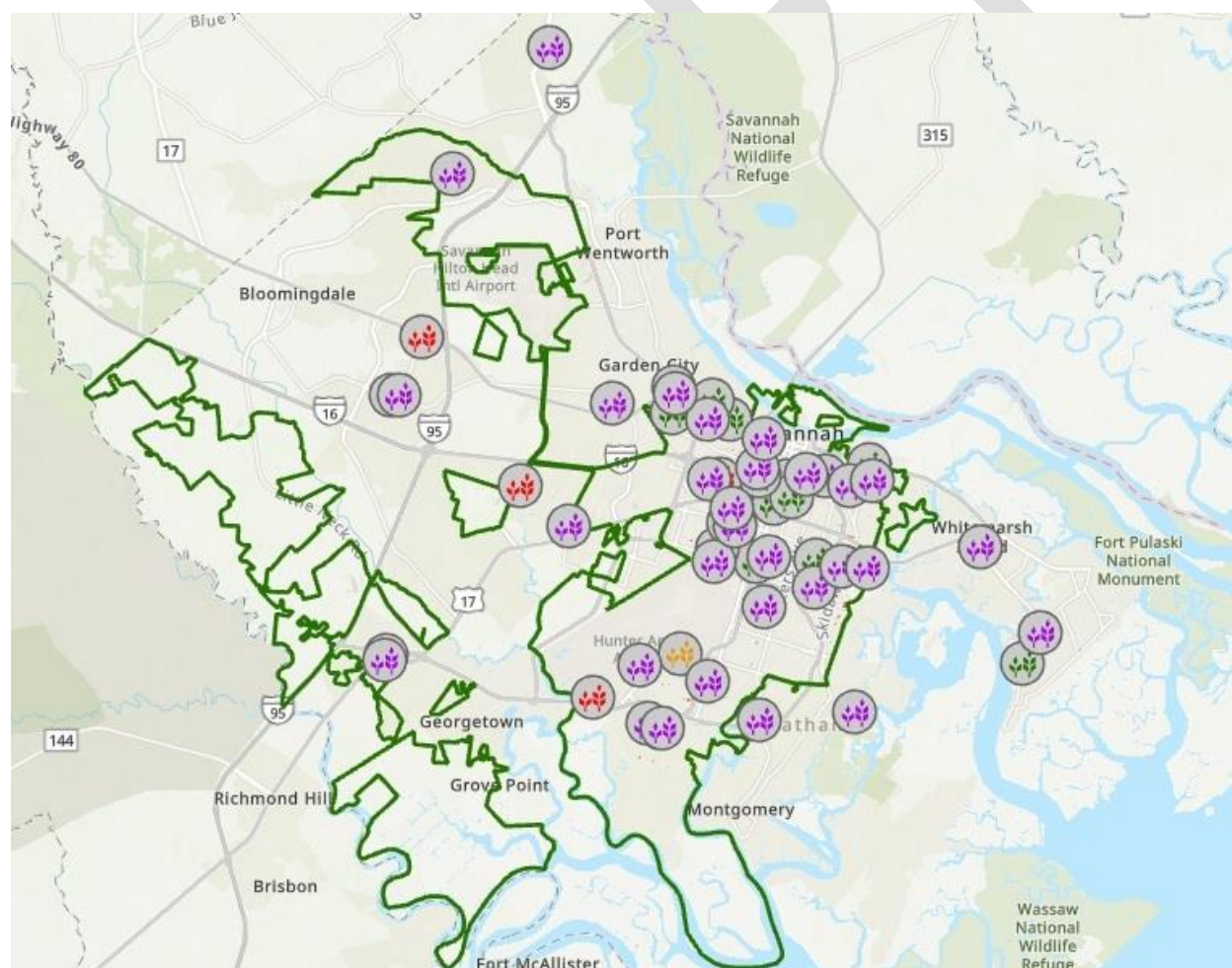


Exhibit 7.9 – Savannah-Chatham County: Community Gardens

Tree Canopy

The Savannah Tree Foundation’s 2020 Tree Canopy Assessment remains the most comprehensive locally focused evaluation of tree canopy conditions in Chatham County. The assessment used high-resolution aerial imagery to document changes in vegetation cover between 2014 and 2020 and identified countywide trends in tree canopy gain and loss across incorporated and unincorporated jurisdictions. The study reported a 1.2% reduction in tree canopy, with the most significant clear cutting occurring on development sites and commercial timber fields.

More recent modeled estimates from the U.S. Forest Service i-Tree Landscape tool and the National Land Cover Database suggest that tree canopy coverage in Chatham County has remained under continued pressure from development since 2020, particularly in rapidly growing industrial and logistics corridors. These datasets provide regional-scale estimates and support the need for updated local canopy assessments to better track changes in canopy quality, distribution, and long-term resilience.

While overall vegetation cover increased in several jurisdictions during the study period, the assessment found that gains were often associated with younger or lower-quality vegetation rather than mature tree canopy. The loss of large, established trees was most evident in areas experiencing rapid development, particularly large-scale industrial and infrastructure projects. The assessment also highlighted the impacts of inconsistent or unenforced tree protection ordinances, demonstrating that canopy gains do not necessarily equate to preservation of the ecological benefits provided by mature trees.

Tree Canopy Change Over Time (2014–2020)				
Municipality	2014 % Vegetation	2020 % Vegetation	% Change	Estimated Acreage Change
Unincorporated Chatham County	25%	32%	7%	14,655
Savannah	39%	49%	10%	7,137
Garden City	53%	66%	13%	1,207
Pooler	62%	63%	1%	204
Bloomingtondale	83%	83%	0%	-5
Tybee Island	7%	15%	8%	168
Thunderbolt	17%	31%	14%	146
Port Wentworth	66%	73%	8%	812
Vernonburg	73%	83%	10%	26
Countywide Average	34%	41%	7%	23,757

Source: Savannah Tree Foundation, 2020 Tree Canopy Assessment

Figure 7.4 – Chatham County: Tree Canopy Change Over Time (2014 – 2020)

Tree canopies can greatly assist in lowering the temperatures and overall “heat stress” in communities dealing with known heat island effects. Sustained regional growth and industrial expansion will continue to drive the reduction in tree canopy with fewer trees being replanted versus what is being removed during construction.

Aging Tree Canopy

Chatham County is dealing with an aging tree canopy, particularly in downtown Savannah. The majority of Savannah’s downtown tree canopy was planted in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Most urban planted live oaks are anticipated to live an average of 150 years, which indicates they will be aging out by roughly 2040. To ensure that a consistent tree cover continually remains intact, each jurisdiction will need to ensure that funds are programmed, trees are systematically replanted, and strict protection and planting ordinances are in place. Major factors in canopy reduction are increased occurrences of pests and disease alongside climate change.

Solid Waste Management

Historically the method for handling solid waste in Chatham County has been primarily through the disposal of solid waste in area landfills. This arrangement has been satisfactory from the standpoint of the landfill operators and their customers who enjoy the benefits of the profits generated (operators) and the relatively inexpensive disposal fees (customers). However, because of the high land costs in Chatham County, it is unlikely that land will be available to construct new landfills in the County when the landfills in the County reach capacity, at which time the residents of the County will be required to pay the additional transportation costs to new landfills in other counties. In addition, it is likely that the surrounding counties will demand a premium to accept waste generated outside of their area.

The City of Savannah successfully started a curbside single-stream recycling program in 2008 and the County had drop-off facilities/transfer stations prior to 2008. Both recycling programs are popular with residents and have proven to be successful in removing materials from the waste stream prior to disposal in area landfills. However, the cheaper cost of certain raw materials in comparison to the cost incurred to recycle that material continues to be a challenge in making recycling even more successful. In addition, recent years have seen adjustments in the recycling industry due to global market changes, leaving some materials unable to be recycled at all. Education campaigns should be adjusted to emphasize the need to reduce consumption and reuse materials where possible.

Solid Waste Landfill Facilities							
Facility	Facility Type	Avg. Daily Tons	Net Volume Annual	Rate of Fill yd3/day	Years to Capacity	Estimated Fill Date	Operating Days per Year
Savannah - Dean Forest Rd (SL)	MSWL	276	109,415	329	3	6/1/2024	333
Superior Landfill & Recycling Center Site 2 MSWL	MSWL	2,463	766,270	2,737	9	10/9/2030	280

Source: Georgia Environmental Protection Department
MSWL = Municipal Solid Waste Landfill

Figure 7.5 – Solid Waste Landfill Facilities

Preserving the capacity of the landfills through reduction of the waste stream by reduction of

waste generated, recycling, composting, and mulching of yard waste should be a priority of the County. The City of Savannah is currently planning for expansion of its Dean Forest Landfill. However, as shown by the number of operating years remaining for each of the two area landfills, and because the management of solid waste requires a long-term perspective, a regional outlook and discussion on solid waste management is warranted.

Renewable Energy

Continued reliance on fossil fuels contributes to air pollution and climate-related risks. Renewable energy is essential to improving environmental quality, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and strengthening long-term resilience in coastal Georgia. The State has made significant recent progress in clean energy production, including expanded solar capacity and new nuclear generation, helping reduce emissions while supporting public health and local clean-energy transitions.

The State has rapidly expanded low-carbon energy through large-scale solar development and the completion of new nuclear generation at Plant Vogtle, which together provide significant emissions-free electricity and strengthen grid reliability. At the same time, the State has become a major hub for electric vehicle and battery manufacturing, with billions in investment and tens of thousands of jobs that support cleaner transportation and long-term economic growth, including major facilities near Savannah.

Chatham County and the City of Savannah have taken significant steps to expand renewable energy adoption in alignment with statewide clean energy progress. In 2020, Savannah adopted a 100 percent Clean Energy Resolution committing the community to transition all electricity to renewable sources by 2035 and all remaining energy uses, including transportation and heating, by 2050. This policy establishes a foundation for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality, and strengthening resilience to climate-related impacts. Implementation is underway through investments in solar and energy efficiency on municipal facilities, including a second phase of solar installations completed in 2025 expanding on-site generation at public buildings.

Solar Energy

Chatham County has pursued complementary actions through its first municipal solar program launched in 2023. Solar energy systems were installed at four County facilities under a long-term procurement agreement that required no upfront capital investment and provides stable energy costs. These installations now supply more than 15% of electricity demand at the participating facilities while reducing operational emissions and utility expenses. The program also supports workforce development through solar training opportunities for local residents, and clean energy goals are integrated into the County's broader resilience planning efforts established in 2022.

Renewable Energy at Port of Savannah

Momentum is also building in other local sectors. The Georgia Ports Authority has undertaken significant initiatives to electrify and modernize operations at the Port of Savannah in support of air quality improvement and climate goals. These efforts include a \$170 million investment to replace diesel-powered equipment with 55 hybrid-electric rubber-tired gantry cranes, which are expected to reduce crane-related emissions by approximately 50% and avoid nearly 7,000 metric

tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually once fully deployed. Additional measures, such as truck idle-reduction programs, cleaner fuels, and equipment electrification, help reduce diesel emissions in surrounding communities and demonstrate how major public infrastructure operators can advance low-emission transportation and freight operations.

Electric Vehicles

Clean energy and transportation electrification are advancing together in Savannah and Chatham County, supporting both environmental quality and economic resilience. As of early 2024, Georgia had approximately 1,859 electric vehicle charging stations, with continued expansion supported by public and private investment. The State has allocated \$3.3 million in FY2024 specifically for EV charging deployment, alongside federal incentives such as the Inflation Reduction Act tax credit of up to \$7,500 for new EV purchases and a Georgia income tax credit covering 10% of the cost of EV charging equipment for businesses. These investments are accelerating EV adoption, reducing transportation-related emissions, and supporting local fleet electrification efforts by the City of Savannah and Chatham County, including the transition of municipal vehicles and planning for electric transit.

Priorities for Continued Clean Energy Progress - Savannah & Chatham County	
Priority Area	Focus and Key Actions
Clean-Energy Workforce Development and Job Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand solar, energy efficiency, and EV workforce training programs • Partner with technical colleges and state workforce initiatives • Support apprenticeships and industry-aligned training for clean-tech jobs
Energy Efficiency Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase residential and commercial energy-efficiency retrofits • Promote weatherization, HVAC upgrades, and efficient appliances • Leverage federal and state incentives to expand access, including for low-income households.
Solar Installations and Community Solar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamline permitting for rooftop solar installations • Explore community solar models for residents without suitable rooftops • Conduct education and outreach to reduce adoption barriers
Energy Storage and Grid Resilience Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade substations, transmission systems, and smart grid technologies • Expand battery storage at utility, community, and household scales • Evaluate solar-plus-storage and microgrids at critical facilities
Electric Vehicle Adoption and Fleet Electrification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition municipal fleets to electric vehicles as replacements occur • Expand public EV charging infrastructure • Encourage private fleet electrification and alternative mobility options

Figure 7.6 - Continued Clean Energy Progress Priorities

The Savannah region is also benefiting directly from the growth of EV manufacturing and supply chains. The Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant under construction near Savannah represents one of the largest EV production investments in the United States, with planned capacity of up to 500,000 vehicles per year and an investment exceeding \$7 billion, including associated battery manufacturing. Hyundai suppliers have committed more than \$1.8 billion statewide, with a

significant share located in the Savannah area. In Chatham County, supplier PHA is investing over \$67 million in an EV components facility that will create approximately 400 jobs, supporting the Metaplant's operations. Together with state investments of \$19.5 million in EV workforce training and recruitment programs, these developments demonstrate how renewable energy, electrification, and industrial growth are jointly shaping Savannah and Chatham County's economic future while reducing emissions and improving air quality.

Climate Resiliency and Preparedness

Natural Disasters and Climate Challenges

Hurricanes

Hurricane season runs from June 1 through November 30, with peak storm formation occurring early to mid-September. In recent decades the Southeast coast has experienced shifts in storm behavior. Warmer ocean temperatures, higher sea levels, and changing atmospheric patterns have increased the potential for more intense storms and more damaging coastal flooding. NOAA reports indicate that Atlantic hurricane seasons are becoming more variable, with a greater likelihood of extremely active years. Peer-reviewed studies show that the proportion of Atlantic hurricanes reaching major intensity has increased since the 1980s. Research published in 2024 and 2025 projects that storms affecting the Southeast United States may intensify more quickly and maintain stronger winds because of warmer sea-surface temperatures.

The six coastal Georgia counties at highest risk of storm-surge evacuation are Bryan, Camden, Chatham, Glynn, Liberty, and McIntosh. Coastal population growth and increased development have expanded the number of people and structures located within storm-surge zones. Evacuation and sheltering logistics have become more challenging as large numbers of residents, tourists, and evacuees from neighboring states travel inland during storm events.

Sea-level rise is already affecting coastal Georgia. Long-term tide-gauge records at Fort Pulaski show a steady rise in mean sea level, which raises the baseline elevation for tides and storm surge. Peer-reviewed studies confirm that this higher baseline results in more frequent high-tide flooding and increases the destructive potential of surge, even from moderate storms. Analyses of storm magnitude along the U.S. East Coast through 2022 show significant increases in storm energy at many locations. These trends make low-lying marsh edges, tidal creek systems, neighborhoods built on historical estuarine fill, and waterfront areas in Chatham County more vulnerable than in previous decades.

Chatham County has experienced several damaging storms in recent years. Hurricane Matthew in 2016 produced strong winds, extensive tree damage, and major coastal flooding despite remaining offshore. Hurricane Irma in 2017 caused severe surge flooding that inundated roads and damaged structures along rivers and marshes. Hurricane Michael in 2018 brought heavy rainfall and tropical-storm-force winds across Georgia. Hurricane Dorian in 2019 passed offshore as a major hurricane but generated significant tidal flooding and erosion.

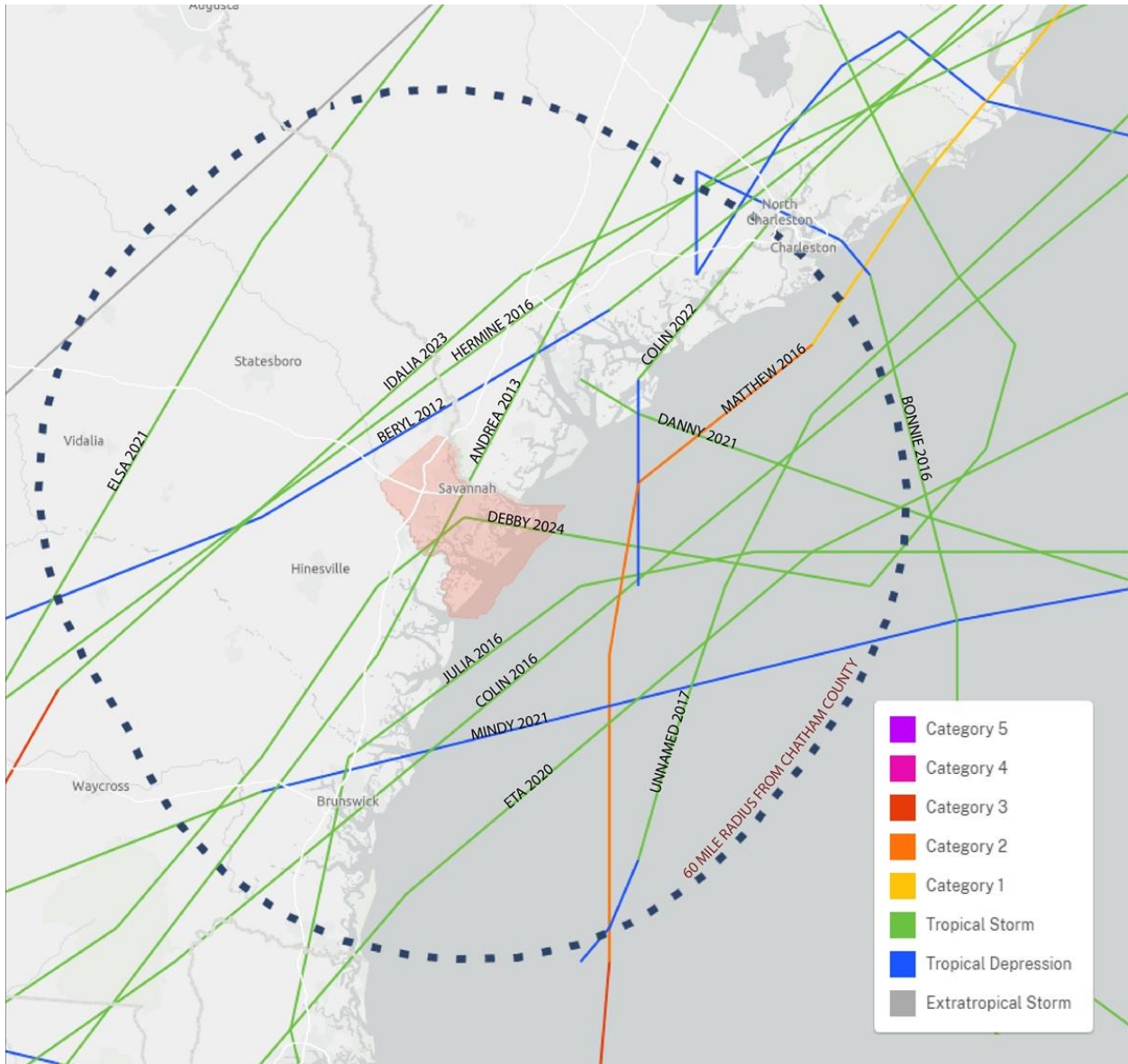


Exhibit 7.10 – Historical Hurricane Tracks (noaa.gov)

More recently, Hurricane Idalia in 2023 produced storm surge, roadway flooding, and wind impacts in coastal Georgia. Hurricane Helene in 2024 caused widespread heavy rainfall, strong wind gusts, and notable flooding across southeast Georgia, demonstrating that storms making landfall outside the state can still generate significant local impacts.

Forecasting improvements have reduced storm-related fatalities, but economic losses have increased because development has expanded into flood-prone areas. Peer-reviewed studies of coastal settlement patterns show that much of the nation’s coastal growth continues to occur in areas most at risk from sea-level rise and storm surge. Locally, this trend reinforces the importance of strong land-use regulations, floodplain management, and disaster-resilient construction.

Given these evolving hazards, Chatham County and the City of Savannah must continue integrating updated climate science, sea-level projections, and storm-surge modeling into planning and policies. Future development should consider projected sea-level rise, compound flooding from tide and rainfall interactions, and the increasing likelihood of more intense storms. Preserving natural floodplains, improving drainage infrastructure, elevating critical facilities, and directing growth away from the most vulnerable areas are essential steps to protect residents, natural resources, infrastructure, and community character.

Sea Level Rise

Concerns of sea level rise and the negative impacts associated with it are resulting in many coastal communities considering implementing measures to reduce risks to private property owners and public investments. It is important to identify what areas are at risk and gauge the level of risk, or severity of impacts, for each area to determine the most appropriate means to protect it. Land use regulations, land purchase/buyout programs and policies that do not allow for the investment of public funds for infrastructure or other development in areas at risk for flooding due to sea level rise reduce the number of vulnerable structures and infrastructure, while efforts such as the elevation of existing roads or lift stations mitigate the impacts on existing investments. It is more costly to mitigate than to prevent development in areas that are at a higher risk. All future capital improvement projects should include an assessment of potential sea-level rise impacts through the expected life cycle design of the projects.

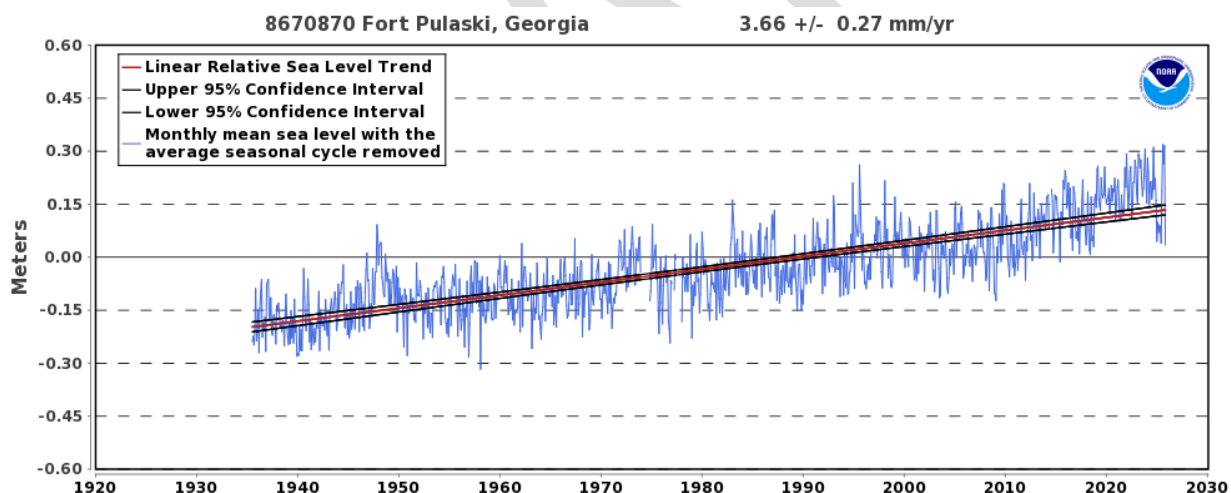


Figure 7.7 – Relative Sea Level Trend – 8670870 Fort Pulaski, GA

In an effort to have the information necessary for making decisions about future needs and infrastructure investments, Chatham County and the City of Savannah collaborated to assess the vulnerability of the region’s stormwater management system to future changes due to sea level rise. The Stormwater System Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment and Coastal Watershed Management Plan (CWMP) was completed in 2020 and provides actionable information for Chatham County, the City of Savannah, and other jurisdictions to use in developing plans and implementing appropriate capital improvement projects that can increase the resilience of the regional stormwater system to future conditions.

Between 2016 and 2020, coastal resilience planning in Savannah and Chatham County shifted from localized adaptation efforts to regionwide, data-driven infrastructure assessments. Early work, including the 2016 Tybee Island Sea Level Rise Adaptation Plan, established a proactive, scenario-based approach to managing rising seas, flooding, and infrastructure vulnerability, particularly for barrier island communities. Subsequent regional studies, such as the 2019 Savannah River Watershed Coastal Resilience Assessment, expanded this lens to the watershed scale, identifying priority areas where wetlands, marshes, and open space could buffer storm surge and flooding while supporting ecosystem health. These efforts emphasized nature-based solutions, marsh migration corridors, and strategic conservation as essential complements to engineered infrastructure.

From 2020 through 2024, planning efforts increasingly focused on system-level vulnerabilities and implementation. The 2020 Stormwater System Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment provided detailed analysis of stormwater infrastructure exposure under present and future tidal conditions, demonstrating that a growing share of drainage assets already experience tidal interference and will face regular inundation under projected sea level rise. This technical foundation was reinforced by the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan, Plan 2040, and subsequent MPC flood modeling studies, which highlighted compound flooding risks affecting both stormwater and transportation systems. The most recent Floodplain Management Plan update in 2024 integrates these findings into enforceable policies and capital priorities, emphasizing floodplain protection, infrastructure upgrades, equitable investment, and long-term adaptation, forming a coordinated body of work guiding Savannah and the County toward resilient land use, infrastructure planning, and watershed management in the face of accelerating coastal change.

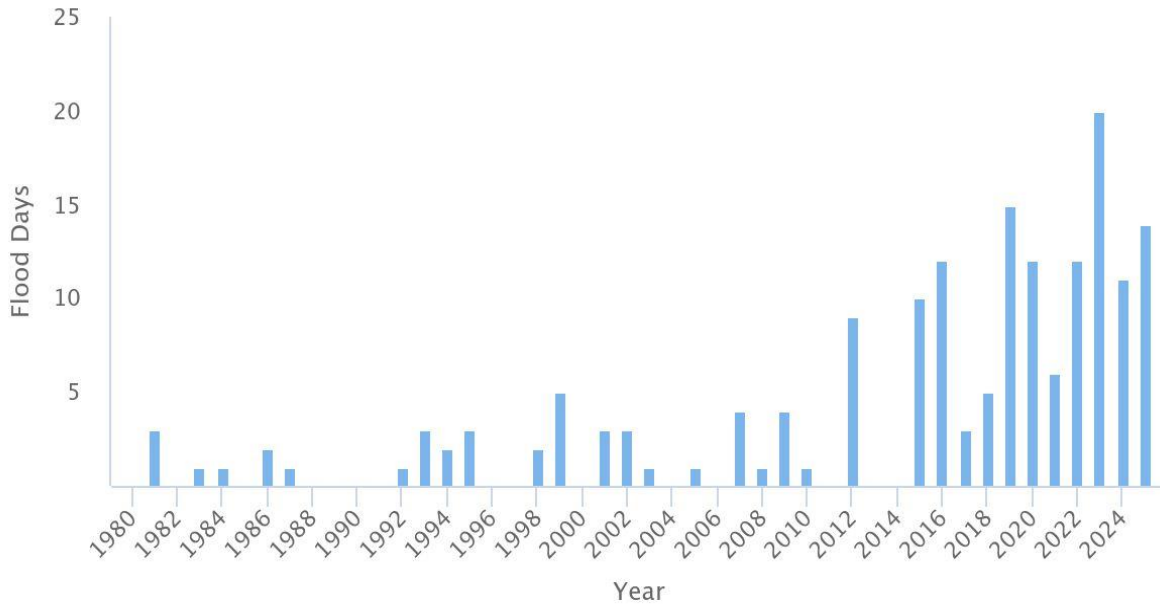
Flood Inundation

Tidal Flooding

High-tide flooding at Fort Pulaski has increased significantly over the last four decades, reflecting the accelerating impacts of sea level rise on coastal Georgia. From 1980 through the early 2000s, high-tide flooding was infrequent, typically limited to zero to five days per year and often associated with storm events. Since approximately 2012, the data show a clear shift toward more frequent and persistent flooding, with many recent years experiencing 10 to more than 20 flood days annually. This trend corresponds with the observed relative sea level rise rate at Fort Pulaski of 3.6–3.7 millimeters per year and indicates a transition from occasional nuisance flooding to chronic high-tide flooding occurring even in the absence of rainfall.

Seasonal patterns in the data show that high-tide flooding is most prevalent during the fall months, with secondary peaks in summer, while winter and spring experience fewer flood days. This seasonal concentration reflects higher astronomical tides and elevated baseline sea levels later in the year and has important implications for infrastructure planning and operations. Repeated tidal flooding increases stress on stormwater systems by causing tidal backflow through drainage networks, accelerating wear on pumps, and contributing to roadway and access disruptions in low-lying areas. Together, these trends confirm that sea level rise is already affecting daily conditions in Chatham County and underscore the need for near-term adaptation measures, such as tide gates, pump upgrades, and revised design standards alongside longer-term resilience planning.

**1980-2026 Annual Flood Days at 8670870, Fort Pulaski GA
Threshold: 1.94 feet above MHHW**



NOAA/NOS/Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services

Figure 7.9 - Annual Days at Fort Pulaski-Pluvial/Fluvial Floods 1980-2026

Flooding in Chatham County is driven not only by tidal influences, but also by rainfall-based pluvial and fluvial flooding, as documented in FEMA Flood Insurance Studies, the Chatham County Flood Mitigation Plan, the City of Savannah Flood Hazard Mitigation Plan, and the Savannah Repetitive Loss Area Analysis. These sources consistently identify intense rainfall, flat topography, poorly draining soils, high groundwater tables, and limited stormwater system capacity as primary contributors to inland flooding. Large portions of the County lie at low elevations, where heavy rain can overwhelm drainage systems even outside FEMA-mapped floodplains. Inland waterways such as the Little Ogeechee River, Vernon River tributaries, and numerous canals and ditches experience flooding driven primarily by rainfall and riverine flow rather than tides, affecting residential neighborhoods, roadways, and critical infrastructure.

In response, Chatham County and the City of Savannah have developed a robust framework of planning, technical studies, and implementation efforts focused on non-tidal flooding. Countywide and city mitigation plans establish a mix of structural and policy-based actions, including drainage upgrades, property acquisition, ordinance updates, and public education, while FEMA flood mapping provides the regulatory basis for floodplain management. These efforts are supported by detailed modeling and prioritization tools developed through MPC and CORE MPO flood studies, as well as ongoing stormwater capital improvement programs, green infrastructure initiatives, and enhanced floodplain management standards. Together, these coordinated actions address the

The Savannah Repetitive Loss Area Analysis confirms recurring rainfall-related flood losses in inland neighborhoods, particularly older areas with undersized infrastructure and rapidly developing areas with increased impervious surfaces.

growing risks posed by increasingly frequent and intense rainfall events and underscore the need for continued investment in stormwater systems, land-use controls, and targeted mitigation across both urban and unincorporated areas of Chatham County.

Climate Change and Vulnerability Index

Climate change affects the Chatham County region through a range of interconnected impacts, including rising temperatures, more frequent extreme heat events, changes in precipitation patterns, warmer ocean waters that intensify hurricanes, beach erosion, saltwater intrusion into freshwater systems, infrastructure damage, and increased flooding associated with sea level rise and recurrent “sunny day” tidal flooding. These impacts threaten public safety, strain infrastructure, degrade natural systems, and diminish quality of life while increasing long-term public and private costs. According to the Georgia Climate Project, up to 178,787 people in Georgia could be at risk from sea level rise by 2100, and a three-foot rise in sea level could result in the loss of approximately 36 square miles of salt marsh statewide.

Changes occurring along Georgia’s coast are expected to significantly modify ecosystems and redistribute species, affecting services that support wildlife habitat, recreation, seafood production, water quality, erosion control, flood mitigation, and carbon sequestration. These impacts carry substantial economic consequences, including increased public expenditures for mitigation and infrastructure protection and potential losses to coastal-dependent industries such as fishing, tourism, and agriculture. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated mitigation and adaptation strategies, including land use and development practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, preserve natural systems, and prepare infrastructure and communities for unavoidable climate impacts through long-range planning and multi-jurisdictional cooperation.

The U.S. Climate Vulnerability Index indicates that climate risk in Chatham County is widespread and not limited to coastal or tidal exposure. Most census tracts rank in the upper national percentiles for climate impacts and extreme events, reflecting heightened exposure to intense rainfall, flooding, heat, and storm-related disruptions across both inland and coastal areas. The Extreme Events indicator shows particularly high vulnerability in western, southern, and low-lying inland portions of the county, reinforcing local and regional findings that pluvial and fluvial flooding driven by short-duration, high-intensity rainfall poses a significant countywide risk. These patterns align with documented issues related to flat topography, poorly draining soils, high groundwater tables, and limited stormwater capacity, which allow heavy rainfall to overwhelm drainage systems well beyond FEMA-mapped coastal floodplains.

The Index further demonstrates that physical climate hazards intersect with elevated health, social, and economic vulnerability, compounding overall risk. The Health indicator shows consistently high vulnerability across much of Chatham County, indicating that flooding, extreme heat, and storm-related service disruptions are likely to exacerbate existing public health challenges, including increased exposure to mold, waterborne contaminants, and interruptions to healthcare access.

When rainfall-driven flooding disrupts homes, roads, utilities, or employment access, these communities face greater difficulty recovering, increasing the risk of prolonged displacement, economic loss, and long-term neighborhood disinvestment. The spatial overlap of high hazard exposure and high underlying vulnerability underscores the need for equity-focused flood mitigation and resilience strategies that prioritize stormwater upgrades, transportation reliability, green infrastructure, and supportive policies in communities facing both the greatest physical flooding risk and the lowest capacity to absorb and recover from climate impacts.

The Community Baseline and Social & Economic indicators reveal pronounced inequities in adaptive capacity, particularly in inland and western Savannah, Garden City, Port Wentworth, and parts of unincorporated Chatham County. These areas are characterized by lower household incomes, higher housing cost burdens, limited transportation access, and greater concentrations of renters, seniors, and medically vulnerable populations.

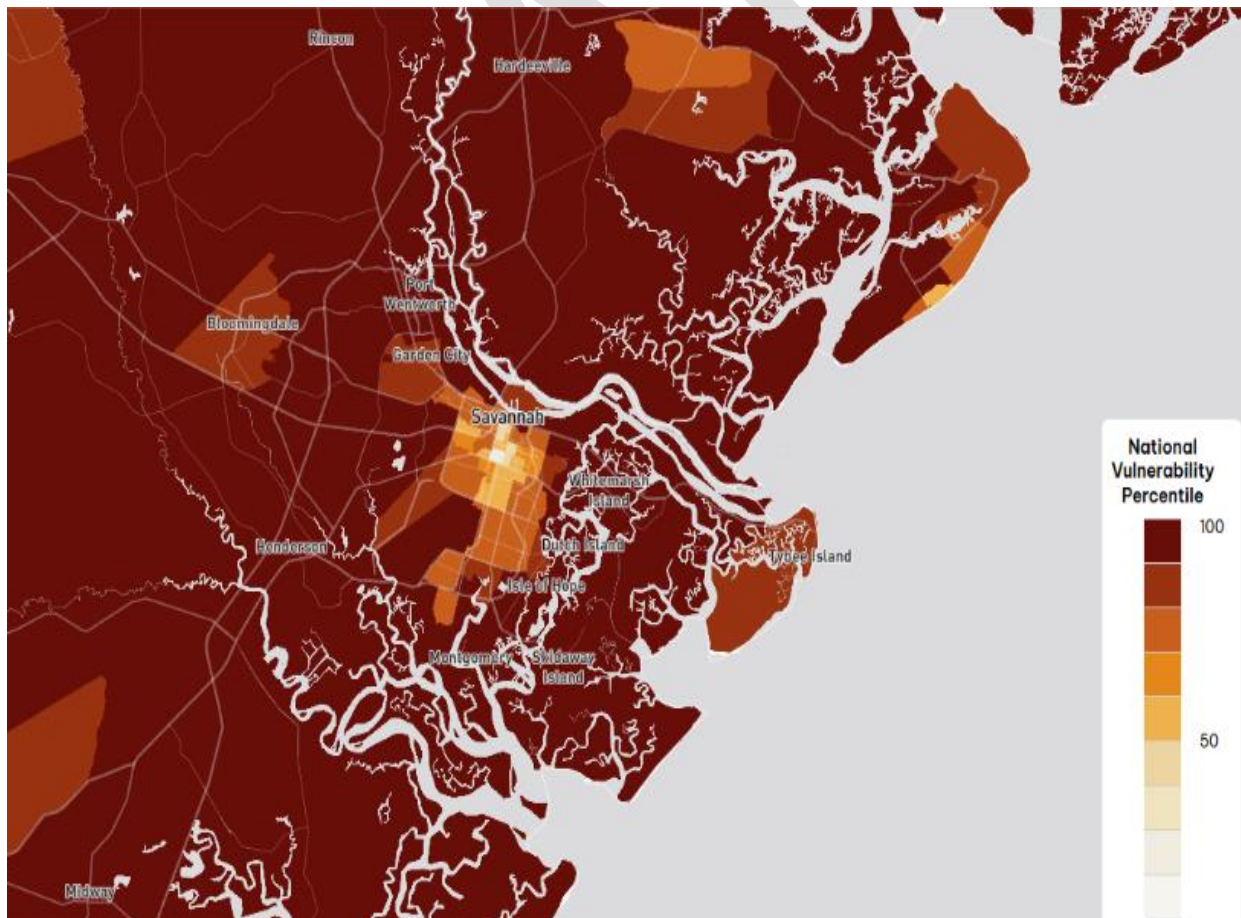


Exhibit 7.11 - Climate Impacts

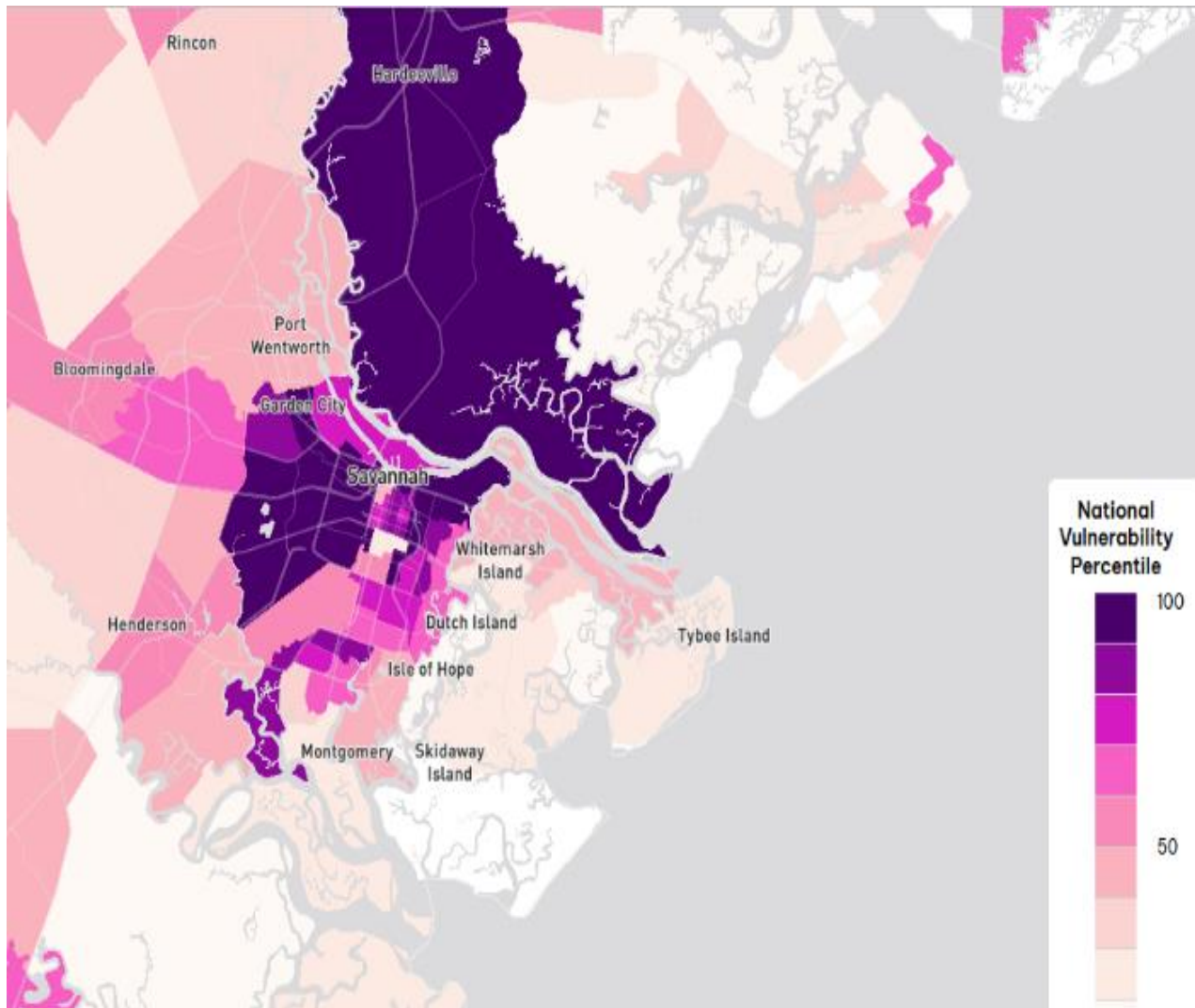


Exhibit 7.12 – Community Baseline

Climate and Resilience Challenges

The implementation of smart strategies can help our community adapt to these changes as well as other challenges that could arise regardless of climate change. Main challenges facing Chatham County include:

Infrastructure Vulnerability and Public Health Risks

Chatham County's infrastructure and public health systems face increasing stress from rising temperatures, more frequent extreme heat events, heavier rainfall, and recurrent flooding. Roads, drainage systems, utilities, and public facilities are increasingly exposed to climate-related damage, while heat exposure and vector-borne disease present growing risks to residents, particularly children, seniors, and outdoor workers.

Increasing Flood Risk in Coastal and Low-lying Areas

Sea level rise, intensified rainfall, and tidal flooding are increasing flood frequency and severity across coastal and inland low-lying areas of Chatham County. These conditions threaten homes, businesses, transportation corridors, cultural resources, and critical infrastructure, with projections indicating that some areas may experience regular high-tide flooding without significant adaptation measures.

Transformation and Loss of Natural Ecosystems

Climate change is altering Chatham County's natural systems, including wetlands, forests, estuaries, and coastal habitats. Rising temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns, stronger storms, and sea level rise are expected to redistribute species and reduce the capacity of ecosystems to provide flood storage, water quality protection, habitat, and other essential services that support community resilience.

Key Challenges

Although adaptation and resilience strategies can help reduce climate-related impacts, communities already facing social, health, and economic stressors will remain more vulnerable and less able to respond effectively. In Chatham County, rising temperatures, increasing heat-related health risks, and recurrent drought are expected to place growing pressure on public health systems, water resources, ecosystems, and energy infrastructure as climate conditions change. These interacting stressors highlight the need for coordinated planning and targeted investment to address both climate impacts and underlying vulnerabilities across the county.

Economic Impacts and Workforce Vulnerability

Key regional industries such as manufacturing, tourism, fishing, shrimping, and agriculture are increasingly exposed to climate-related risks. Extreme heat, flooding, and changing coastal conditions threaten labor productivity, disrupt supply chains, and place pressure on small businesses and labor-intensive occupations, compounding existing economic vulnerabilities.

Equity, Health, and Community Resilience Challenges

Climate impacts are not experienced equally across Chatham County. Low-income households, rural communities, seniors, and residents with limited access to healthcare face greater exposure to heat, flooding, and economic disruption while having fewer resources to adapt. Without targeted interventions, climate change risks widening existing social and health disparities.

Water Resource and Saltwater Intrusion Risks

Sea level rise and changing hydrologic conditions increase the risk of saltwater intrusion into freshwater systems and place additional strain on regional water resources. Drought, rising demand from population growth, and ecosystem needs create long-term challenges for maintaining reliable water supplies for residents, industry, and natural systems.

Planning Capacity, Insurance, and Implementation Constraints

Local governments face growing challenges related to flood insurance affordability, evolving regulatory requirements, and the need to integrate future climate conditions into planning and investment decisions. Limited data, funding, and technical capacity complicate efforts to proactively address climate risks, while rising insurance costs and repeated losses threaten housing stability and redevelopment in vulnerable areas.

Community resiliency includes implementing safeguards so that all members of the community are better prepared for events, such as a hurricane, pandemic, or infrastructure failure, ensuring the fastest recovery feasible. Community resiliency also protects against more common occurrences such as sea level rise, sunny day flooding, and severe economic inequities. Building a strong network focused on addressing equity gaps and elevating vulnerable populations is necessary in creating a truly resilient community.

Coastal Empire Resilience Network

The Metropolitan Planning Commission began work in 2020 to expand earlier efforts addressing sea level rise impacts along Chatham County's coast by partnering with the City of Savannah, the University of Georgia, Georgia Sea Grant, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Coastal Resources Division, and other stakeholders to establish the Coastal Empire Resilience Network (CERN). Since its formation, CERN has evolved from a planning concept into an active regional collaboration, establishing a formal governance structure, convening public, nonprofit, and academic partners, and supporting coordinated resilience initiatives across coastal Georgia. CERN engages regional community partners, municipal staff, and policymakers to align strategies that address the physical, economic, and social challenges associated with climate change and other hazards, with a focus on capacity building, data sharing, education, and the integration of equity and environmental justice into regional resilience efforts.

Smart Growth Policies

Smart growth policies contribute to both mitigating and adapting to climate change as well as natural disasters, economic changes, and other challenges that could arise regardless of climate change. Mitigation strategies for climate change reduce greenhouse gas emissions from development, and adaptation strategies make communities more resilient to the effects of a changing climate. Smart growth strategies also bring environmental benefits and provide economic advantages to local governments and the private sector. Additional benefits include energy and transportation cost reduction, particularly important for low-income residents, and help protect human health.

Mitigation

Communities can reduce greenhouse gas emissions from development and redevelopment by implementing the following land planning concepts and standards:

- Build compactly and use energy-efficient, green building techniques, which reduce emissions from both electricity generation and transportation.
- Reuse existing infrastructure and buildings to take advantage of previous investments and the energy already used to build them.

- Put homes, jobs, stores, parks, schools, and other destinations close to each other so that people can easily walk, bike, use public transit, or drive shorter distances.
- Preserve green space, which can sequester CO₂, by conserving ecologically valuable land and promoting development in previously developed areas, which helps reduce pressure to build on undeveloped land.
- Determine which areas are both well-connected to existing development and less vulnerable to current and projected climate change impacts such as sea level rise and higher storm surges, and riverine flooding, and encourage growth in these areas.
- Discourage building in areas that are currently or are projected to be more vulnerable to climate change-related impacts. Making it easier to build in safer areas can help relieve pressure to develop in more vulnerable areas.
- Preserve large, contiguous areas of open space to better protect ecosystems that might be under pressure from the changing climate. Open space preserved along water bodies can also absorb flood waters and reduce flooding in developed areas.
- Coordinate land use and transportation infrastructure decisions, and incorporate climate change projections into these decisions.
- Encourage water- and energy-efficient buildings and land use patterns so that communities can continue to thrive if energy prices rise. This strategy can also help communities and their residents better cope with drought and extreme heat.
- Upgrade stormwater systems to better manage heavier storm flows and use green infrastructure to reduce the amount of runoff from paved surfaces.
- Encourage green roofs, parks, street trees, and other elements that can reduce ambient air temperatures and filter pollutants from stormwater runoff and the air.
- Design buildings with adaptation and resilience in mind.

Communities that recognize the long-term challenges associated with climate change and take proactive steps to adapt will be much better prepared to retain population while moving residents away from danger.

Environmental Planning Criteria, Planning Issues, and Opportunities

It has been previously discussed that Chatham County and its municipalities have adopted environmental planning criteria to protect water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, and river corridors, as required by state law. These criteria are implemented through zoning, development standards, and management practices and are increasingly informed by flood mitigation, stormwater, and climate resilience studies documenting rising rainfall intensity, inland flooding, and compound climate risks.

Water Supply Watersheds and Groundwater Protection

Criteria for water supply watersheds safeguard public health by protecting surface drinking water sources through stream buffers, impervious surface limits, and approved management practices. Reservoir protection measures are coordinated with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Groundwater recharge areas are protected through zoning controls, Wellhead Protection Ordinances, and restrictions on septic systems, hazardous materials, and stormwater infiltration. These protections are increasingly coordinated with floodplain management and drainage standards, recognizing the role of high groundwater tables and saturated soils during heavy rainfall events.

Wetlands and River Corridor Protection

Wetlands Protection Ordinances adopted by the County and its municipalities coordinate federal permitting with local development review to ensure wetland impacts are evaluated prior to land disturbance. Vegetated buffers along rivers and streams are maintained to protect floodplain function and reduce development impacts, with standards addressing septic systems, crossings, hazardous materials, landfill operations, and construction activities.

Growth Management and Natural Resource Conservation

Planning issues related to environmental protection are closely tied to growth patterns and land use decisions. Coastal and marsh-adjacent areas, including barrier islands and southeastern Chatham County, contain sensitive wetlands, hammocks, and back-barrier systems that require continued enforcement of buffers, setbacks, and development standards. Long-term protection of high-value natural resources should be pursued through zoning, conservation easements, acquisitions (including SPLOST-funded opportunities), and partnerships. Rapid growth in western Chatham County presents additional risks, requiring targeted conservation strategies and stronger site-level stormwater controls.

Stormwater, Flooding, and Climate Resilience

Stormwater capacity, land use decisions, and transportation planning to address non-tidal and compound flooding risks should be an integrated countywide approach. Continued implementation of stormwater Best Management Practices, including Low Impact Development strategies, is essential. Shared design standards, evaluation of stormwater utility models, and aligned capital investments present key opportunities to improve system performance. As well,

planning and regulatory updates are needed to ensure that building standards, zoning, stormwater and drainage infrastructure design systems account for long-term climate conditions.

Public Infrastructure, Equity, and Preparedness

Environmental challenges intersect with infrastructure resilience and social equity. Neighborhoods with aging infrastructure, limited tree canopy, and historic disinvestment experience higher heat exposure and recurring inland flooding, with reduced capacity to recover from climate impacts. Future policies should prioritize equitable distribution of stormwater investments, tree canopy expansion, green space, and flood mitigation measures to address both physical risk and underlying vulnerability.

Chatham County’s Disaster Recovery Plan and Hazard Mitigation Plan provide the framework for preparedness, response, and long-term resilience. Continued coordination is needed to align infrastructure planning, growth decisions, and emergency preparedness for roads, utilities, housing, and critical facilities.

Integration with Regional Planning and Ongoing Studies

Environmental planning criteria are implemented in coordination with the Regional Water Plan, stormwater programs, FEMA Flood Insurance Studies, and flood mitigation planning. These criteria are intended to be periodically reviewed and updated as new modeling, climate data, and technical studies become available.

The Coastal Incentive Grant (CIG) project currently underway provides a critical opportunity to translate updated flood risk, marsh migration, and climate resilience analysis into long-range planning. While the project timeline has been extended due to recent furloughs, its findings will directly inform updates to the Future Land Use Map and related policy language, strengthening alignment between environmental protection, flood mitigation, and future development decisions.

Needs & Opportunities Summary

Issue Area	Key Conditions & Challenges	Opportunities / Strategic Actions
Countywide Flooding Across Multiple Watersheds	Rainfall-driven (pluvial and fluvial) flooding affects multiple inland basins (Casey Canal, Springfield Canal, Bilbo Basin, Placentia Canal, and other low-lying drainage areas). Flat topography, high groundwater tables, aging infrastructure, and limited stormwater capacity contribute to flooding beyond tidal zones.	Advance basin-specific stormwater and drainage capital projects; integrate green infrastructure; prioritize investments using updated modeling and equity-based criteria.
Sea-Level Rise and Drainage System Constraints	Sea-level rise reduces gravity drainage efficiency and exacerbates inland flooding during heavy rainfall, increasing compound flooding risk even away from the coast.	Incorporate sea-level rise and compound flooding projections into zoning, land development regulations, and infrastructure design standards.
Storm Surge and Coastal Infrastructure	Storm surge threatens coastal and marsh-adjacent areas, including evacuation routes, utilities, and critical facilities;	Strengthen surge modeling integration in land use and transportation planning;

Issue Area	Key Conditions & Challenges	Opportunities / Strategic Actions
Risk	interactions with rainfall and drainage systems create broader systemwide risk.	coordinate coastal resilience strategies with inland stormwater management.
Sedimentation and Reduced Conveyance Capacity	Sedimentation in canals, ditches, and tidal creeks reduces stormwater conveyance, increases localized flooding, and degrades water quality and habitat.	Expand maintenance and dredging cycles; enforce erosion and sediment control standards; restore riparian buffers to improve system performance.
Urban Water Quality Impairments	Fecal coliform, nutrient loading, low dissolved oxygen, and legacy contaminants persist in inland waterways, particularly following storm events that mobilize runoff.	Enhance monitoring; strengthen sewer and septic oversight; reduce pollutant sources through stormwater retrofits and watershed-based planning.
Groundwater Protection and Saltwater Intrusion	The Floridan Aquifer remains vulnerable to saltwater intrusion and contamination, especially in western Chatham recharge areas affected by septic systems and stormwater.	Protect recharge zones through land use controls; expand sewer service where feasible; strengthen groundwater protection policies.
Habitat Fragmentation in Growth Areas	Rapid development in western and inland Chatham County continues to fragment wetlands, tree canopy, and ecological corridors that provide flood attenuation and climate resilience.	Identify and protect priority conservation corridors; require low-impact development practices in growth areas.
Urban Heat and Impervious Surface Expansion	Loss of tree canopy and increasing impervious cover intensify urban heat, particularly in historically underserved neighborhoods that also face flooding risks.	Expand tree canopy and green space; integrate heat-mitigation strategies into redevelopment standards and capital projects.
Environmental Justice and Climate Vulnerability	Social and economic vulnerability often overlaps with areas experiencing frequent flooding, heat exposure, and infrastructure deficiencies.	Apply equity-based prioritization to flood mitigation, stormwater, and transportation investments to address compounding risks.
Solid Waste, Illegal Dumping, and Drainage Obstruction	Illegal dumping and unmanaged waste in ditches, canals, and wooded areas obstruct drainage and worsen flooding and water quality issues.	Strengthen enforcement; expand disposal access; implement targeted community outreach to reduce dumping and protect drainage systems.

Figure 7.10 – Needs and Opportunities Summary

Goals and Policies

Goal 1 - Protect the public health, safety, and welfare of residents from flood hazards.

Protecting all residents from flood hazards is a vital step in creating a more resilient and equitable community. The low-lying elevation of the region has left many residents and properties vulnerable to the threats of flood hazards, with the frequency, quantity and financial impacts of flood waters increasing with the addition of impervious surfaces associated with development and the rise in sea levels due to climate change. Historically, the negative impacts of flooding have been disproportionately felt by low-income and minority communities that were developed on the lowest lying lands in the area. As sea levels rise and changes in climate bring increases in precipitation and in the frequency and intensity of storms, the flooding that has plagued low-lying areas will continue to be a chronic issue impacting more residents and properties.

Objectives:

- Work at a regional level to address and mitigate impacts of flooding and sea level rise
- Implement policies and standards to prevent future development and infrastructure in areas susceptible to flooding
- Prioritize conservation of undeveloped lands and dedication of open space to reduce impervious surfaces in the region

Goal 2 - Improve public education and outreach efforts related to water, flooding, and hazards.

Public education and outreach efforts can be a key to the success of public programs put in place to protect residents and property from the impacts of flooding and hazard related issues, as well as programs to protect the water quality of the region. Such efforts help garner support for these programs and generate understanding of the benefits to the community. They can also be effective in teaching residents how to comply with any associated regulations. Public education can create a partnership between the government and residents in furthering the goals of public programs. Education can empower residents to be good stewards of the community and educate others on the importance of the programs, as well as publicly supporting or advocating for policies and regulations associated with efforts.

Objectives:

- Create a series of training programs to educate the public on water, flooding, and hazard related issues impacting the community.
- Develop partnerships with schools, churches, and other civic organizations to broaden public education and outreach efforts.

Goal 3 - Implement plans, policies, and property protection to reduce potential

damages from climate change.

Environmental conditions are continuously changing, and it is imperative that local plans, policies, and regulations are cognizant of and evolve with the changes as needed. As science, technology and building standards improve or real-world conditions and future projections change, the guiding documents of the community should also progress in order to best protect residents and property from potential damages and mitigate other negative impacts. Efforts to proactively prevent potential damages to future public and private investments must be of paramount importance in the development of plans, policies, and regulations. Growth and new development should be directed away from current or future high-risk areas and encouraged in more appropriate areas.

Objectives:

- Evaluate existing plans, policies, and regulations to ensure that they are utilizing the most up to date data and projections and are consistent with current best practices.
- Routinely monitor new technologies and practices for areas of improvement in existing guiding documents.
- Identify areas most at risk of potential damages and implement policies and standards that prevent private or public investments in such areas.

Goal 4 - Conserve and protect potable water sources to ensure adequate drinking water supplies for existing and future residents.

Water is a finite resource and although water covers approximately 70% of the earth's surface, the majority of that is saltwater. Freshwater is far less abundant and is a precious resource because water suitable for drinking is a basic necessity for survival. It is essential to preserve and protect any potable water sources from overuse, pollutants, and saltwater intrusion. The Floridan Aquifer system is the coastal area's groundwater source of drinking water. If hazardous or toxic substances pollute the water that seeps into the ground, it is possible that those pollutants can contaminate the groundwater and render it useless. Extracting too much water from the aquifer can result in saltwater intrusion, reducing the amount of potable water for future use.

Objectives:

- Address drinking water source protection and conservation efforts regionally.
- Explore and prioritize land conservation efforts that preserve and protect potable water sources.
- Evaluate existing policies, plans, and regulations to ensure that they are consistent with best management practices in regards to water usage and the protection of water sources during site development.

Goal 5 - Preserve and enhance scenic views.

Chatham County and Savannah are known for their natural beauty and scenic views. They improve the quality of life of residents that are lucky enough to enjoy them as a part of their daily lives and draw tourists who dream of moss-covered trees and Spartina filled marshes to the area. Development pressures have resulted in the loss of some of these cherished views, diminishing the aesthetic pleasures for all that live and visit the area. Without adequate land use and buffer controls, the likelihood of these scenic areas to be impacted will increase and long-term loss will occur.

Objectives:

- Create criteria for what constitutes a scenic viewshed worthy of preservation and/or enhancement– Identify scenic viewsheds to be protected.
- Partner with nonprofits and other agencies to identify funding sources and other methods to preserve/enhance identified viewsheds.
- Review existing ordinances and policies for amendments to better protect viewsheds.
- Include viewshed analysis in the development process for developments that may negatively impact identified viewsheds.

Goal 6 - Conserve existing tree canopy and require planting of additional native trees during the development process to mitigate negative impacts of stormwater runoff, heat islands, reduced air quality, and loss of tree species from rising ambient temperatures.

Trees and their canopy play an important role in the quality of life and protection of natural resources in the region. Over 90% of respondents to the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update survey felt that development should protect important environmental features including tree canopy, wetlands and waterways. In addition to the aesthetic qualities of trees, they play an active role in reducing temperatures by providing shade, improving air quality through filtering out pollutants, and alleviating the impacts of stormwater runoff by capturing rainfall and allowing for better infiltration of water into the ground. The loss of existing tree canopy during the development process negatively impacts the community in a variety of ways. Protecting and preserving existing tree canopy during the development process, as well as into the future, is vital. When not possible it is critical to require the planting of native trees as replacements for those lost.

Objectives:

- Inventory existing tree canopy in each jurisdiction and establish programs to ensure a minimum tree canopy is maintained countywide.
- Engage with property owners to educate on the importance of trees to the community and their role as private property owners to protect the region's tree canopy.

Goal 7 - Improve the ability of our community to adapt to changing natural and built environments.

A resilient community has strategies in place to respond, adapt, and prosper in the face of changing conditions. It is important for a community to be able to withstand disruptions created by not only natural disasters and the changing climate but also due to shifts in demographics, changes in the economy, and impacts to its infrastructure. Increasing the communities' ability to adapt and be more resilient benefits all residents by improving the quality of life, allowing for healthy growth, providing durable systems, and conserving resources for current and future generations.

Objectives:

- Review development regulations, policies, plans and incentive programs to identify means to better prepare for potential events that will create disruptions and develop measures that allow for action in the face of uncertainty or unexpected events.
- Enact policies and regulations that will reduce impacts of human activities that intensify climate changes.
- Identify strategies and create networks to provide support and safety nets for the most vulnerable residents in the community that have the fewest resources to adapt and be resilient in the face of disruptions.

Goal 8 - Manage the impacts of climate change as it relates to land use and development through mitigation and adaptation measures.

Climate change is the long-term change in average weather patterns and it has a broad range of observed effects. Coastal Georgia is facing many of the impacts of climate change. Sea levels are rising, weather patterns are less predictable, storms are increasing in frequency and intensity, temperatures are rising, drought conditions are lasting longer, air quality is declining, transmitted mosquito-borne disease rates are increasing, and natural ecosystems are being destroyed. In addition to environmental impacts, climate change has financial and societal costs, and those in poverty suffer the harshest consequences with the least ability to cope. Land use and development decisions can significantly impact climate change, either by exacerbating conditions or providing proactive measures to prevent further impacts and mitigate existing conditions. Almost 90% of respondents to the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update survey noted the importance of reducing excessive heat in neighborhoods through shade, vegetation and cooling measures and also indicated support for encouraging environmentally friendly building practices and materials in new development. Now is the time to implement solutions to address the changing climate.

Objectives:

- Coordinate land use and transportation infrastructure decisions, and incorporate climate change projections into these decisions.
- Review and amend policies and regulations as necessary to remove barriers to mixed uses within close proximity of each other in order to reduce vehicle trips.
- Evaluate existing policies, plans, and regulations to ensure that they are consistent with best management practices in regard to smart growth, energy efficiency, and reduction of emissions.

Goal 9 - Plan for the mitigation and redevelopment of brownfields for productive uses.

Over 80% of the respondents to the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update survey indicated that future growth should focus on improving and reusing existing developed areas before expanding outward. Brownfields are an untapped resource. They are properties, once developed, that now sit vacant and often are considered blighted or contaminated. Cleaning up and redeveloping brownfield sites promotes community revitalization, creates employment opportunities, increases tax revenue, potentially reduces community exposure to hazardous contaminants, and alleviates pressure to develop green spaces. The mitigation and redevelopment of brownfields for productive uses is the epitome of Smart Growth.

Objectives:

- Identify all potential brownfields and their potential contaminants.
- Explore grants and other funding sources to assist in the cleanup and/or redevelopment of brownfield sites.
- Review and amend policies and regulations as necessary to remove barriers to the redevelopment of brownfields and identify means to incentivize their redevelopment.

Goal 10 - Proactively manage stormwater runoff.

Stormwater runoff is when rain cannot infiltrate the ground because of impervious surfaces and instead flows into storm drains and nearby water ways. In times of heavy rainfall, stormwater can be a nuisance, causing flooding resulting in property damage. It can also carry pollutants into nearby water bodies, degrading the water quality for humans and other species. Proactively managing stormwater runoff protects the environment, financial investments of the community (private and public), quality of life of residents, and public health.

Objectives:

- Address stormwater runoff management efforts regionally.
- Evaluate existing policies, plans, and regulations to ensure that they encourage low impact development principles and are consistent with best management practices in regards to stormwater runoff.
- Review and amend policies and regulations as necessary to remove barriers to innovative and creative solutions to manage stormwater runoff.
- Identify funding sources and other mechanisms to conserve properties in open space as part of the community stormwater management system.

Goal 11 - Implement a municipal clean energy action plan.

The use of fossil fuels creates pollution that puts the community's health at risk, exacerbates the negative impacts of climate change, and reduces the resiliency of the community by diverting limited resources from investing in efforts to create a more resilient community instead to combating the increasing dangers of climate change. Proactively making the shift from fossil fuels

to clean energy now, rather than waiting until they eventually run out, protects the environment and the community, and encourages the creation of new jobs and innovation. Implementing a municipal clean energy action plan is an important step in working towards a healthier, safer future for all residents.

Objectives:

- Adopt the Chatham County Clean Energy Plan
- Establish a Clean Energy Action Plan committee
- Identify community partners and state agencies to participate in the process
- Develop an energy vision
- Assess the current energy profile
- Develop energy goals and strategies
- Identify and prioritize actions
- Identify funding sources to implement the plan
- Develop a blueprint for implementation

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CHAPTER 8
QUALITY OF LIFE ELEMENT

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Quality of Life Element

Introduction

Chatham County and Savannah seek to provide an excellent quality of life for its citizens. To maintain such a high level, the County and City have a responsibility to promote and support programs and regulations that positively impact the quality of life of their residents. The citizens of this community can only achieve a superior quality of life when a safe, active, and healthy environment exists. This element includes an inventory and assessment of the following quality of life aspects: Historic and Cultural Resources, Education, Health, Public Safety, and Broadband.

Relevant Documents and Plans

REAL Task Force

The Racial Equity and Leadership (REAL) Savannah Task Force is an advisory group formed in 2020 to address structural racial inequities in Savannah. The task force is led by Savannah's former mayor, Dr. Otis Samuel Johnson, and had a mandate from Savannah's current mayor, Van Johnson II, to complete an action plan that the City government can resource and help implement. The REAL Task Force is made up of multiple committees tackling different issue areas. Phase I was completed in 2022 with publication of the *Seeing Savannah Through a Racial Equity Lens* report. Data resources, analysis, conclusions and recommendations derived from the report and its updates are integrated into the Quality-of-Life Element where applicable. Phase Two of REAL taskforce's mission is underway to implement the recommendations made by the six committees outlined in the report.

Coastal Indicators Coalition Chatham Community Blueprint

In 2014 Chatham County engaged the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition ("CGIC") to lead the development of the Chatham Community Blueprint. The Blueprint is a long-term plan for the region supplementing the Comprehensive Plan and facilitating collaboration with public sector entities, non-profit groups, and private industry to accomplish the goals in both the Blueprint and the Comprehensive Plan, as they are interrelated. It serves as the foundation to strategically move Chatham County and its jurisdictions towards the accomplishment of specified goals by 2035 in four key theme areas: Economy, Education, Health and Quality of Life. By focusing on the community's interests and concerns, the Chatham Community Blueprint serves as a catalyst for improvement and is incorporated into the Quality-of-Life Element where applicable.

Vision 2033 Strategic Plan

As the City of Savannah nears its 300th founding anniversary, it is poised for unprecedented growth opportunities over the next decade. Vision 2033 is a strategic planning effort between the City of Savannah, Chatham County, Savannah Economic Development Authority, and community partners to facilitate and fund a regional community and smart, sustainable growth management guide for the future of Savannah and Chatham County through 2033, aiming to unify regional planning between city, county, and private partners to address growth. Vision 2033 will focus collectively on: infrastructure, housing, transportation, education, healthcare, land use policy, stormwater management/resiliency/environmental protection, downtown expansion, and economic development. The 2033 Strategic Initiative will be fact driven, based on an inclusive community engagement program to accomplish a written plan with clearly identified goals and future measures of achievement. Initiatives drawn from the individual state mandated comprehensive plans for jurisdictions, the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update, Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition – Chatham Community Blueprint, and the Mayor of Savannah’s Task Forces. In response to the importance of the Savannah-Hilton Head Airport in the strategic future of the region, one section of the Initiative will center on the Airport, and its connectivity to the community and region to ensure adequate and efficient landside access is maintained as the vicinity around the Airport develops, in alignment with the Airport Master Plan 2025 Update.

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Historic And Cultural Resources

Introduction

Savannah and Chatham County showcase centuries of growth and change, treasured parks, and squares, valued and varied culture, and historic architecture. Historic preservation, synonymous for many with quality of life, is a valuable planning tool that is used to protect the community's historic, cultural, and archaeological resources. The preservation of these resources ensures that the history of Savannah and Chatham County is retained and honored while planning for its future. Historic preservation is one of the primary issues identified in the Community Participation program for both the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update and the Savannah GPS.

Establishing historic districts is one of the main ways to engage in historic preservation. Savannah and Chatham County have dozens of both locally and federally recognized districts. National Register historic districts are recognized by the Federal government and qualify property owners for significant tax incentives but provide little protection of the actual resources.

Local historic districts are established by ordinance and include specific design standards which ensure that rehabilitation of historic structures and new development is consistent with the historic character of the district by requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness review process.

It is important to note that historic preservation is not only a mechanism for protecting historic assets and ensuring compatible new development, but for affecting social, demographic, and economic change in our communities. The Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update seeks to provide guidelines and recommendations for expanding the toolbox of historic preservation to encourage healthy communities, present more comprehensive and inclusive histories, and increase equity and resiliency through the preservation of historic and cultural resources in our community.



Beginnings of Historic Preservation in Savannah

Historic preservation in Savannah had its official beginning in 1955, when the Historic Savannah Foundation was established. Spurred by the proposed demolition of the Isaiah Davenport House,

an 1820's brick home on Columbia Square, a group of seven local women came together to save the home. The women went on to save other local buildings and founded the Historic Savannah Foundation. In September 2025, a monument to "The Seven Ladies" was dedicated in Columbia Square, facing the Davenport House.

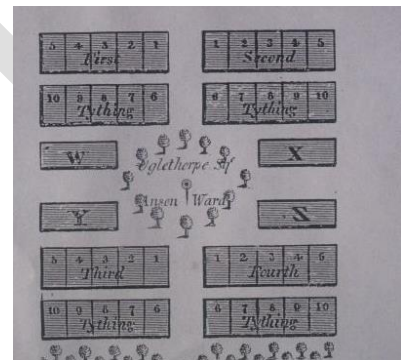
Following the loss of many significant buildings, such as the 1901 Grand Union Station and the City Market building in Ellis Square, the public began to recognize the importance of preserving architecturally and culturally significant buildings and sites. Historic preservation in Savannah and Chatham County, as it did around the country, became a priority.

The legacy of the Oglethorpe Plan in Savannah is evident in its unique layout and architectural diversity. In 1966, this legacy paved the way for downtown Savannah to be designated as a National Historic Landmark. By 1973, a historic zoning ordinance was adopted by the Savannah City Council; resulting in identification and protection of thousands of resources all over the city. Other neighborhoods sought designation leading to 16 historic districts in Savannah, six historic districts in Chatham County, and numerous registered historic places and individual properties throughout the City and County today. There are also five conservation districts, with more communities requesting that status in the interest of providing demolition review and preventing the subdivision or recombination of lots that are part of their historic development patterns.

What is the Oglethorpe Plan?

The nucleus of the Oglethorpe Plan, created by James Edward Oglethorpe, is the ward. Each ward centers on a square of greenspace and is part of a larger integrated regional land system that originally expanded out to include five-acre garden plots and forty-five-acre farms; these were intended for each of the new members of the Georgia colony.

The plan informed the architecture and development patterns in the region for decades, with a dense urban pattern of townhouses and carriage houses in the original town and a more suburban pattern as development extends into former farm lots.



Heritage Tourism

Exploration of Savannah and Chatham County reveals centuries of history and culture encased in diverse architectural styles, historic sites, and design patterns. As defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, heritage tourism is traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. This includes visits to cultural, historic, and natural resources.

Heritage Tourism and Economic Vitality

Historic places and landmarks are a huge draw for those who come to visit Savannah and Chatham County, with historic places making up 32% of visitors' activities of special interest in

2019. The rich history of Savannah and Chatham County not only provides for a varied and engaging experience for visitors but is essential to the economic development and wellbeing of the region. Between 2016 and 2019, visitors to Savannah contributed a total of \$11.8 billion to the local economy. By 2024, Savannah's visitor economy reached a record \$4.1 billion in visitor spending, reflecting an annual increase of 4.5%. Early 2025 data indicates continued growth.

Expanding Heritage Tourism in Chatham County

Heritage tourism in the City of Savannah provides visitors with a chance to learn more about the history of the area, while providing economic benefits to the community. Expanding upon the strategies that have contributed to Savannah's robust tourism program into Chatham County, such as promoting and identifying heritage sites, is key to bringing the economic benefits of tourism to the County, as well as ensuring that visitors receive a full history of the area.

Historic Districts

Certified Local Government

When a community becomes a Certified Local Government (CLG), they become active in the Federal Historic Preservation Program and agree to follow required Federal and State requirements. CLG status gives governments access to funding, technical assistance, and other preservation resources. In 2022, Chatham County was reinstated as a Certified Local Government after the status lapsed in 2019.

Local Historic District

As designated by the Mayor and Aldermen, local historic districts provide a procedure to protect, enhance, perpetuate, and use buildings, structures, sites, objects, or a combination thereof that have pre-historic, historic, architectural, or cultural significance.

City of Savannah Conservation Overlay District

A Conservation Overlay District establishes a process and standards to evaluate the demolition of contributing buildings in order to ensure historic buildings are preserved and the character of the district is maintained.

Archaeological Resources

As of 2004, 1,054 archaeological resources have been identified in Chatham County. While many sites in Savannah and Chatham County have been identified and researched, many others go undetected. Archaeological sites, like historic buildings, are considered cultural resources if they meet eligibility requirements set forth in the National Historic Preservation Act.

Archaeology Ordinance

In 2019, the City of Savannah adopted an archaeology ordinance that requires survey, evaluation, and mitigation of potential archaeological resources for City projects/land over 1,500 square feet. However, programs and policy to support, strengthen, and promote the further surveyance of archaeological resources and sites within the larger Chatham County area is vital to continuing to uncover the important history that archaeological resources contain.

Definition | Archaeology

The science that studies human cultures through the recovery, documentation and analysis of material remains and environmental data, including architecture, artifacts, bio-facts, human remains and landscapes.

Additionally, the City and the County should work to adopt an archaeology ordinance which employs an archaeology team at the County and/or City level and expands its purview to private property in addition to public property. This has yet to be actualized.

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the United States federal government's official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects deemed worthy of preservation for their historical significance, as shown by Figure 8.1 and on Exhibit 8.1.

National Register, Local Historic and Conservation Districts – City of Savannah			
Name	Date Listed	Area Acres	Contributing Resources
Savannah National Historic Landmark District*	1966	528.5	1296 (2002 Survey Update)
Savannah Victorian Historic District*	1974/82	185.2	628 (2016 Survey Update)
Central of Georgia Railroad: Savannah Shops and Terminal Facilities National Historic Landmark District*	1976/ 78	41.3	16 (1978 Survey)
Laurel Grove South Cemetery	1978	38.8	Unknown (No Survey)
Laurel Grove North Cemetery	1983	51.5	Unknown (No Survey)
Ardsley Park-Chatham Crescent Historic District**	1985	391.9	1056 (1985 Survey)
Thomas Square-Streetcar Historic District*	1997	322.9	1,114 (1997 Survey)
Cuyler-Brownville Historic District*	1998	184.9	678 (2020 Survey Update)
Daffin Park-Parkside Place Historic District**	1999	161.7	269 (1999 Survey)
Gordonston Historic District	2001	86.2	128 (2001 Survey)
Bonaventure Cemetery	2001	145.3	134 (2000 Survey)
Eastside Historic District	2002	156.7	459 (2002 Survey)
Fairway Oaks-Greenview Historic District	2009	111.8	207 (2009 Survey)
Kensington Park-Groveland Historic District**	2014	234.8	390 (2014 Survey)
Pine Gardens Historic District	2014	128.3	516 (2014 Survey)
Ardmore Conservation District** (not NR listed)	2018	117.5	Unknown (no survey)
Carver Village Historic District**	2019	108	625 (2014 Survey)
Savannah Powder Magazine***	2025	15.01	1 (no survey)

National Register, Local Historic and Conservation Districts – City of Savannah			
Total contributing resources	--	3,010.3	7,517
* = Local Overlay District ** = Local Conservation District ***= Locally designated site			

Figure 8.1 – Savannah: National Register, Local Historic and Conservation Districts

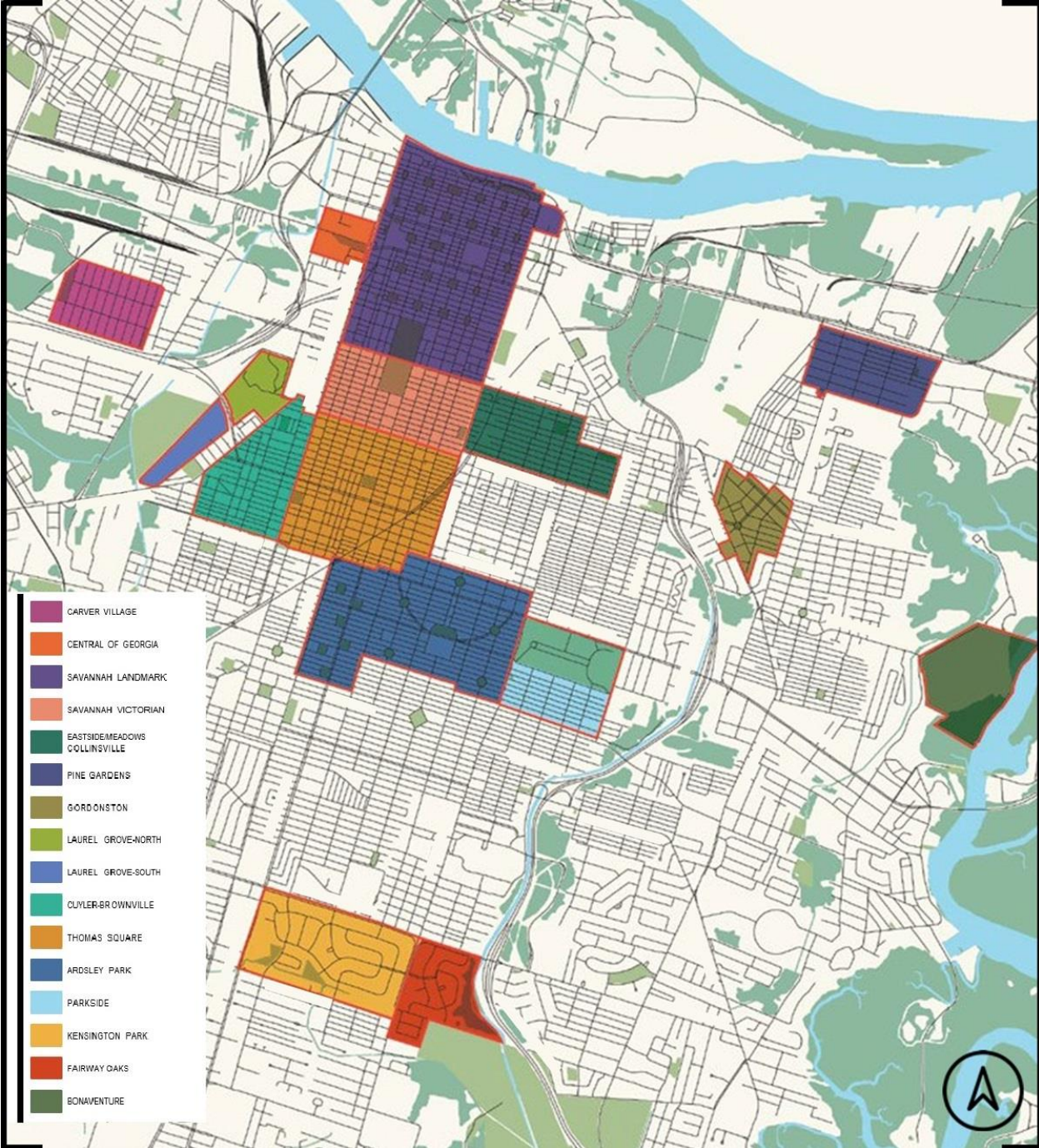


Exhibit 8.1 – Savannah: Historic Districts: National Register of Historic Places

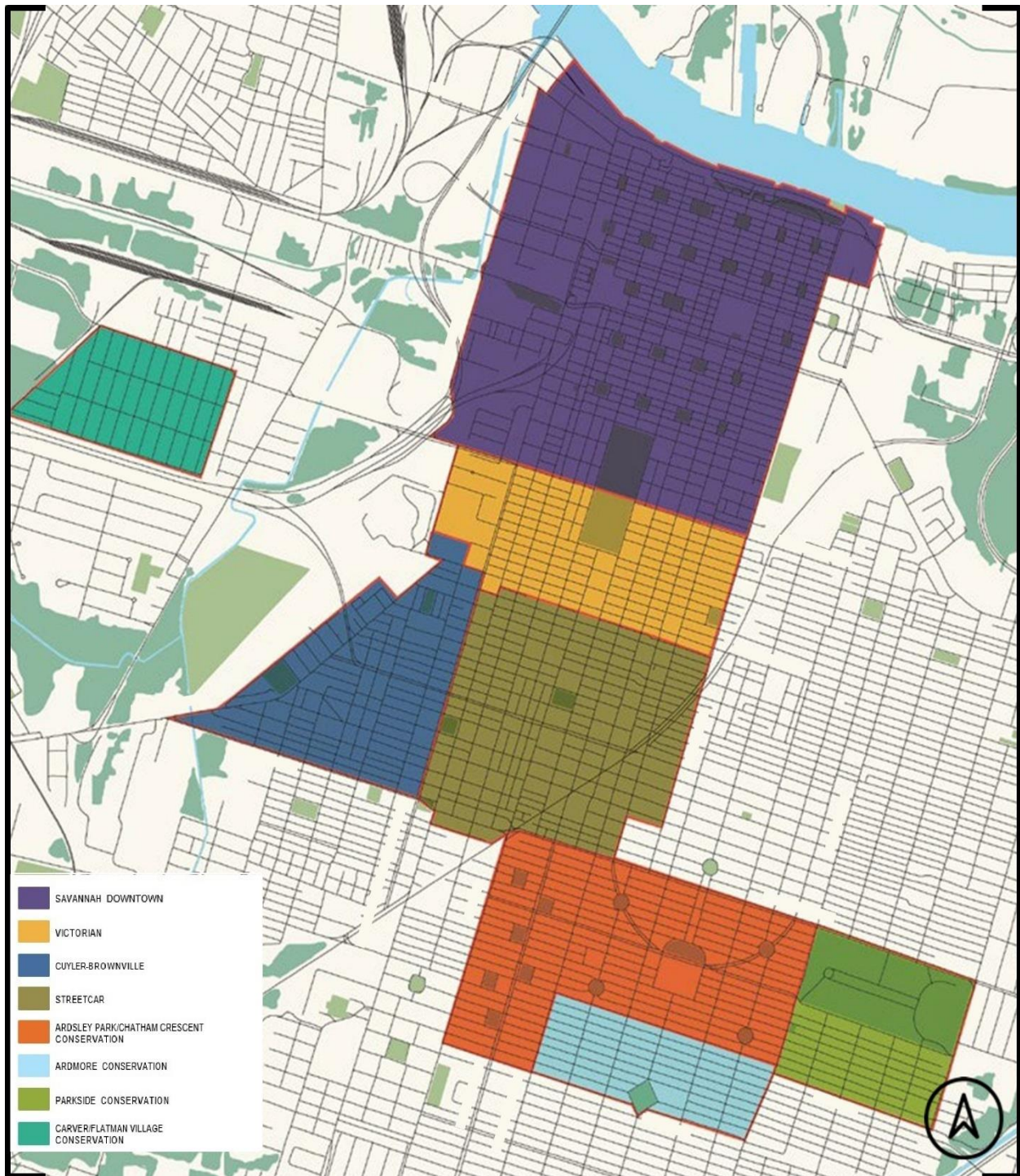


Exhibit 8.2 – Savannah: Local and Conservation Districts

Individual Properties: National Register of Historic Places – City of Savannah		
Name	Date Listed	Address
Savannah Water Works Pump House	2021	1204 West Gwinnett Street
Springfield Terrace School	2021	707 Hastings Street
Atlantic Greyhound Bus Terminal	2016	109 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Central of Georgia Depot and Trainshed	1976	Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. and Liberty Street
Central of Georgia Railway Company Shop Property	1970	Between West Jones Street and Louisville Road
Charity Hospital	1985	644 West 34 th Street
CSS Georgia (ironclad)	1987	Address Restricted
Isaiah Davenport House	1972	324 East State Street
Drayton Arms Apartments	2013	102 East Liberty Street
Drouillard-Maupas House	1991	2422 Abercorn Street
Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse	1974	125 Bull Street
First Bryan Baptist Church	1978	575 West Bryan Street
Green-Meldrim House	1974	14 West Macon Street
Hill Hall at Savannah State University	1981	3219 College Street
W.B. Hodgson Hall (Georgia Historical Society)	1977	501 Whitaker Street
Juliette Gordon Low “Historic District”	1965/1966	10 East Oglethorpe Avenue, 330 Drayton Street, 329 Abercorn Street
Massie Common School House	1977	207 E. Gordon St.
Owens-Thomas House	1976	124 Abercorn St.
Savannah Pharmacy and Fonvielle Office Building (now demolished)	2013	914-918 MLK, Jr. Blvd.
Savannah Powder Magazine	2025	4131 Ogeechee Rd.
William Scarbrough House	1970	41 MLK, Jr. Blvd.
Slotin Building	1983	101 MLK, Jr. Blvd.
St. Philip AME Church	1984	613 MLK, Jr. Blvd.
Oliver Sturges House	1971	27 Abercorn St.
Telfair Academy	1976	121 Barnard St.
Two Pierpoint Circle	1990	2 Pierpoint Circle
U.S. Customhouse	1974	1-3 East Bay St.

Figure 8.2 – Savannah: Individual Properties (NRHP)

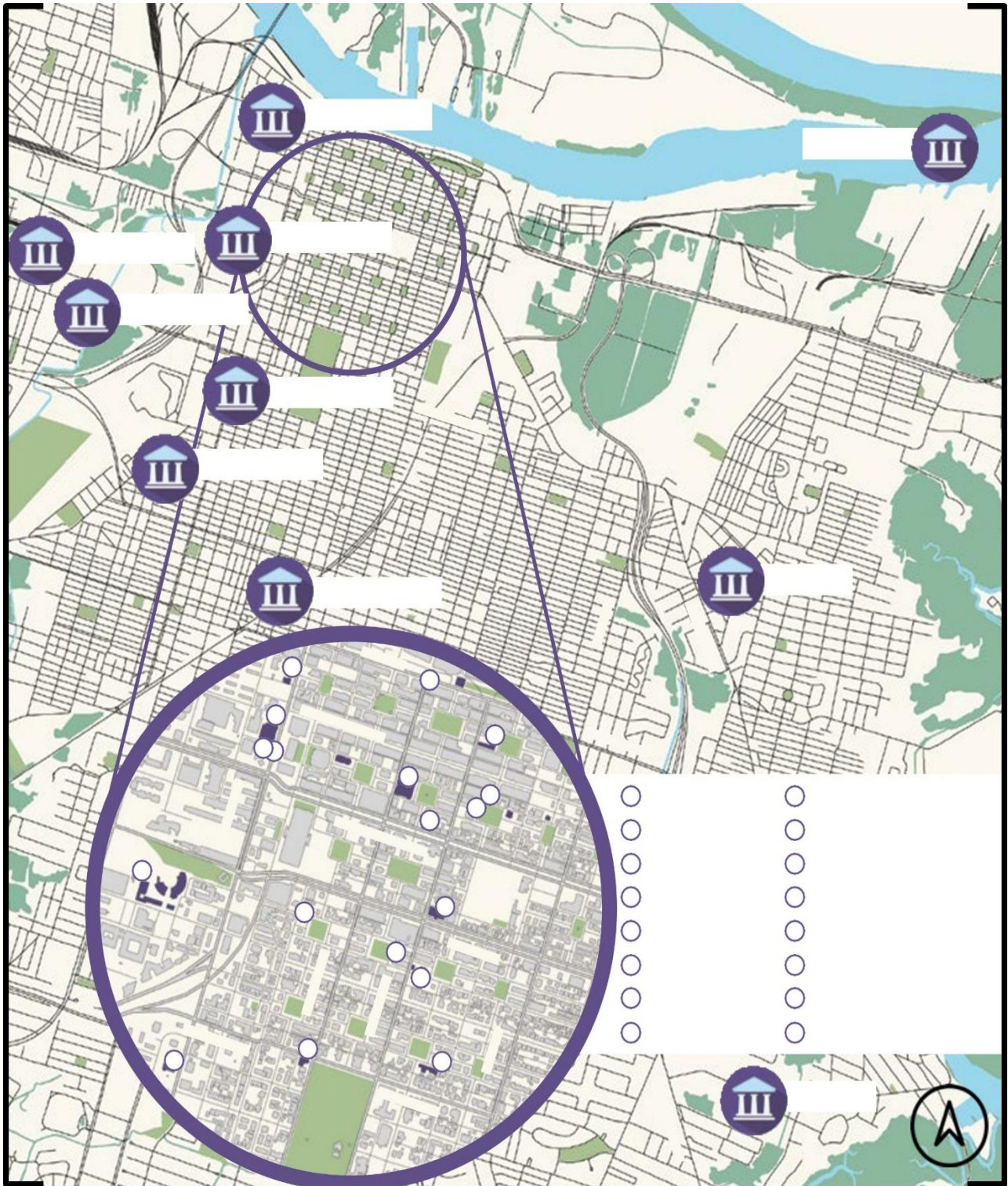


Exhibit 8.3 – Savannah: Individual Properties (NRHP)

Historic Districts: NRHP - Unincorporated Chatham County			
Name	Date Listed	Area (In Acres)	Contributing Resources
Fort Pulaski National Monument	1966	571.9	7 (1996 Survey)
Wormsloe Plantation	1973	1315.1	Unknown (No Survey)
Bethesda Home for Boys	1973	652.2	19 (1973 Survey)
Isle of Hope Historic District	1984	91.5	Unknown (No Survey)
Ossabaw Island	1996	29,284.5	227 (1996 Survey)
Savannah and Ogeechee Canal	1997	199.7	18 (1997 Survey)
Total	--	32,114.9	271 contributing resources

Figure 8.3 – Unincorporated Chatham County: Historic District (NRHP)

Individual Properties: NRHP – Unincorporated Chatham County		
Name	Date Listed	Address
Maridon (AKA: Eureka Club-Farr’s Point)	2002	2326 East Boulevard
Fort James Jackson	1970	1 Fort Jackson Road
Lebanon Plantation	1979	5745 Ogeechee Road
New Ogeechee Missionary Baptist Church	2001	751 Chevis Road
Wild Heron Plantation	1977	2148 Grove Point Road

Figure 8.4 – Unincorporated Chatham County: Individual Properties (NRHP)

Historic Districts: Local – Unincorporated Chatham County			
Name	Date Listed	Area (in acres)	Contributing Resources
Pinpoint Historic District	2007	1,024	15
Pennyworth Island Historic District	2011	169.66	1
Total	--	1,193.66	16 contributing resources

Figure 8.5 – Unincorporated Chatham County: Historic District (Local)

Individual Properties: Local – Unincorporated Chatham County		
Name	Date Listed	Address
New Ogeechee Missionary Baptist Church	2007	751 Chevis Road
Maridon (AKA: Eureka Club-Farr’s Point)	2007	2326 East Boulevard
Isle of Hope Missionary Baptist Church	2019	8415 Ferguson Avenue
Jacob Fox Gould House	2024	1253 Little Neck Road
Southfield Cemetery	2024	Palm Drive & Chevis Road

Figure 8.6 – Unincorporated Chatham County: Individual Properties (Local)

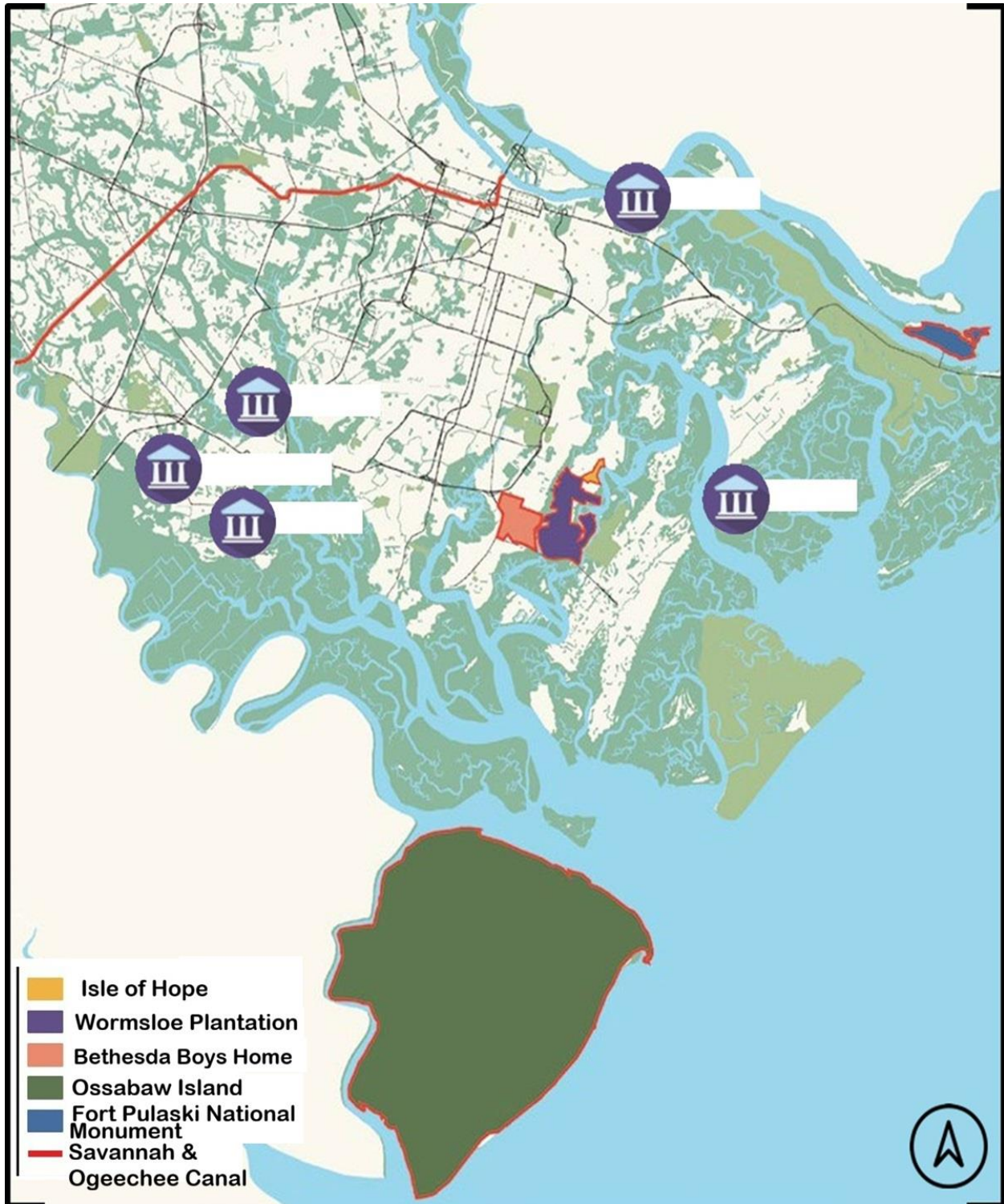


Exhibit 8.4 – Unincorporated Chatham County: Historic Districts & Individual Properties (NRHP)

Pin Point Heritage Museum

The creation of the Pin Point Heritage Museum was a community-led effort that resulted in a site that exemplifies the importance of recognizing and preserving intangible histories. The Heritage Museum is a physical space that houses the stories and customs of the Gullah/Geechee people, ensuring that their heritage remains grounded in the present. Recognizing sites throughout Chatham County with intangible cultural heritage like Pin Point requires expanding the criteria for what is considered historically significant and worth preserving.



Exhibit 8.5 – Unincorporated Chatham County: Historic District and Individual Properties (Local)

History of Pennyworth Island

Since 1911, Pennyworth Island has remained largely undisturbed and has seen no human use or occupation. Prior to that time, the island served as a rice plantation and seasonal residence for several of its prominent owners. An archaeological survey in 1994 described Pennyworth as “one of the best represented Savannah River rice plantations in historical record” (ACOE, 1994). In January of 2011, Pennyworth Island, in recognition of its archaeological and historic significance, was listed as a local historic district in Chatham County.

Endangered Places Program

Initiatives are underway to address the neglect of historic sites significant to underrepresented communities. The Historic Savannah Foundation has launched programs, such as its first "Endangered Places" list in 2025, specifically highlighting threatened, often overlooked, sites. The Endangered Places program objective is to “identify, advocate, and preserve historic sites threatened by demolition, neglect, lack of maintenance, inappropriate development, or insensitive public policy with Savannah’s city limits.” The 2025 list of properties includes:

- LePageville Memorial Cemetery
- Nicholsonboro Baptist Church
- 123 East Henry St. – Roche Walker House
- 127 East Gordon St. – John B Berry House
- 2202 Barnard St. – Station 6 Firehouse
- 124 Houston St. – Isaiah Davenport Tenement

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) people have been historically and deliberately underrepresented in historic preservation efforts. Historic preservation efforts in Savannah and Chatham County have often failed to incorporate intangible resources, such as stories, oral traditions, and performing arts, which are critical components of BIPOC and LGBTQ history. Grounding historic preservation in recognition of people and stories, in addition to buildings and architecture, builds a more inclusive practice in the identification, understanding, and protection of history and culture. The Historic Savannah Foundation has launched programs, such as its first "Endangered Places" list in 2025, specifically highlighting threatened, often overlooked, sites.

Historic & Cultural Resources Goals

Goal 1 - Continue to survey culturally, historically, and architecturally significant sites, buildings, and structures, including historically underrepresented stories, sites, and communities in Savannah and Unincorporated Chatham County.

Historic resources surveys are one of the most critical tools for historic preservation planning, as they lay the groundwork for the identification, evaluation, and registration of historically and culturally significant sites and properties. Many resources in Chatham County and Savannah have already been identified and surveyed; however, it is important to re-survey resources every 10-15 years as well and surveying previously undocumented resources as they are identified. Frequent surveys ensure the protection of resources that may have been overlooked and allows for the identification of resources that have recently gained historic significance. Special attention must be paid to those resources that are at-risk due to climate change, as well as resources of Black, Asian, Native, Latino, LGBTQ, and women's history that have been historically underrepresented in historic resources surveys. In 2021, the Savannah-Chatham County MPC conducted a significant review of the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District, producing a "2021 Revision" of the contributing resources map to update the inventory of historic buildings. This survey work supports the ongoing preservation and rehabilitation of structures within this unique 19th-century, working class, historically Black neighborhood.

In 2022, Chatham County was reinstated as a Certified Local Government after the status lapsed in 2019. There is a seven-member Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission that meets 6 times a year but there are not many requests for COAs in this area, nor are there requests for local historic site or district designations. A goal is to have more public outreach to raise awareness and allow for more historic resources in the County to obtain protected status.

In 2024, a Phase I survey was undertaken in partnership with Ethos Preservation through a Historic Preservation Fund Grant from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. This survey documented 250 resources in an area of the southwestern portion of the County and included survey updates as well as newly documented sites. The deliverables included the full survey report and an interactive story map, available on the MPC website. The goal with this project is for Phase II to expand the boundaries of the survey area in a region that is experiencing rapid development and growth.

Objectives

- Maintain Certified Local Government status in the 2026 recertification process. Continue to survey areas that have been identified as at-risk or historically underrepresented
- Establish ongoing outreach initiatives to engage with and educate the community on the importance of historic preservation efforts and the ability to obtain designated historic site or historic district status within Unincorporated Chatham County
- Survey, identify, and protect archaeological resources through legislation and other means

- Review and modify practices that impede the identification, nomination, and designation of historic places meaningful to underrepresented communities
- Develop and implement new tools for the identification of intangible resources
- Follow and expand upon the recommendations of the Savannah Civil War Memorial Task Force
- Update and expand the historic cemetery inventory to include more rural areas of Chatham County

Goal 2 - Coordinate preservation efforts with affordable housing strategies to ensure that existing affordable housing is retained, and additional affordable housing is promoted.

Historic preservation can be a powerful mechanism for affecting social, demographic, and economic change, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. In recognizing this and moving towards more equitable preservation planning, cultivating partnerships between historic preservation and affordable housing efforts and organizations in Savannah and Chatham County ensures that efforts are preserving affordable housing and promoting economic diversity. The process of updating the Programmatic Agreement between the City of Savannah, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the State Historic Preservation Office that addresses construction, repair, and rehabilitation of affordable housing with the aid of federal funds is underway as of 2026. To improve flexibility in preservation practices to retain and promote affordable housing, the City of Savannah amended the Zoning Ordinance to permit ADUs, a historically relevant accessory structure (typically a carriage house or caretaker’s house) in historic districts, with approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Objectives:

- Broaden partnerships with community planning and housing authorities in Savannah and Chatham County to combine preservation and affordable housing efforts (ongoing)
- Identify where increased flexibility in preservation practices is appropriate to retain existing affordable housing and promote additional affordable housing (ongoing)
- Promote and educate the community about Federal and state preservation tax incentives for rehabilitation (ongoing)
- Work within the new ordinance for the Affordable Housing Overlay which may intersect with the review processes for new construction within the local historic overlay districts

Goal 3 - Healthy Communities and Historic Preservation.

Older and historic places provide a host of physical and mental health benefits, including walkability and sense of place, that make them an important component of healthy communities. Health-centered preservation work is vital to increase resiliency against public health threats and to foster healthier communities overall. Historic properties in certain neighborhoods may be naturally more affordable, and efforts to preserve these resources are addressed in the Housing

Savannah Action Plan adopted in 2021. To ensure that preservation promotes community well-being, continued reevaluation of the tools and standards of historic preservation must occur, such as creating plans for safe, equitable, and accessible preservation planning efforts in the event of a public health threat like COVID-19. In December 2021, Savannah utilized its American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds primarily to address affordable housing, revenue replacement for pandemic-related losses, and community infrastructure projects, with a significant investment allocated to the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund.

Objectives:

- Identify and address potential community health threats to preservation efforts (ongoing)
- Create contingency plans to address the economic, operational, and social impacts on historic preservation associated with a community health event (goal not met- could be considered ongoing)
- Promote and support reinvestment in older and historic places as a key component of community health and resiliency (ongoing)

Goal 4 - Identify and address climate resiliency strategies and incorporate them into a climate resiliency plan for Savannah and Chatham County's historic and cultural resources.

Numerous cultural and historic resources are at risk due to climate change, whether in the form of sea level rise or increased natural disasters. Historic preservation itself, through adaptive reuse and retention of historic materials, is a critical component of sustainable growth and development. However, creating a climate resiliency and natural disaster preparedness plan for the City of Savannah and Chatham County's historic and cultural resources is vital for expanding the sustainable initiatives of historic preservation planning to prepare for the effects of climate change, as well as preventing further impacts. Public health and environmental threats to historic preservation have been addressed by the City of Savannah through targeted infrastructure upgrades, legal actions to protect both built environment and natural surroundings. Major efforts focus on water quality, environmental contamination, flood control and the resilience of historic districts against climate-related disasters. The City has secured FEMA funding (BRIC grant) specifically to reduce flood risks to the Historic Carver Village and other areas.

The MPC and CEMA Chatham County Multi-Jurisdictional Pre-Disaster Hazard Mitigation Plan includes specific goals and actions to reduce long-term risk for historic properties. It involves identifying hazards, assessing risk and vulnerability, and implementing protective measures like flood adaptation, elevating structures, or structural reinforcing while adhering to local zoning and preservation ordinances to ensure repairs and mitigations maintain the historical integrity of the resource. The Chatham County Disaster Recovery Plan Emergency Plan update in 2024 explicitly addresses the need to manage impacts on the community's "cultural, historic and environmental framework," with specific strategies developed by the Chatham Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) and the MPC.

Objectives:

- Incorporate historic and cultural resources into disaster planning strategies
- Identify and address strategies for increasing the resiliency of historic and cultural resources
- Establish a clear process for the protection and management of historic resources in the result of a natural disaster

Goal 5 - Create new and support existing heritage tourism programming in Savannah and Chatham County in order to highlight their cultural and historic heritage, promoting the preservation and public awareness of culturally and archaeologically significant sites in Savannah and Chatham County.

Heritage Tourism

In the City of Savannah, heritage tourism provides visitors with the opportunity to learn more about the history of the area while providing economic benefits to the community. While tourism is already a well-established industry in Downtown Savannah, attention must be paid in the future to balancing heritage tourism programming with the concerns and needs of the local community.

Heritage tourism refers to leisure travel that has as its primary purpose the experiencing of places and activities that represent the past. A principal concern of heritage tourism is historical authenticity and long-term sustainability of the attraction visited.
- *National Agricultural Library*

Expanding upon the strategies that have contributed to Downtown Savannah's tourism programming into Chatham County not only brings economic benefits to the County but provides visitors to the area a full and broadened history of Savannah and Chatham County. Towards this goal, monuments and markers policies of the Historic Site and Monument Master Plan and Guidelines were updated during the 2040 Plan period. The Forsyth Park Master Plan, adopted in 2022, focuses on long-term preservation, enhanced visitor amenities, and infrastructure upgrades to the historic 30-acre park. Key initiatives include protecting the landmark live oaks with upgraded walkway pavement to manage and support the tree roots, a multi-use path around the park, updated gardens, and enhanced lighting.

Objectives:

- Expand heritage tourism programming in Chatham County
- Promote the economic and place-based benefits of heritage tourism to the public via the use of social media, the MPC website and creation of informational pamphlets
- Balance the goals of heritage tourism with local concerns of rising costs for residents being priced out due to the prevalence of Short-Term Vacation Rentals (STVRs) and catering to tourists rather than residents
- Consistently expanding the historical marker program
- Private tourism companies

- Update the Historic Site and Monument Commission’s Master Plan and Guidelines and provide on-going updates to the maps and lists of the monuments, markers, and public art within the City of Savannah and Chatham County.

Archaeological and Cultural Resources

Any tract of land in Chatham County has the potential to contain cultural remains from the community’s prehistoric and historic past. Archaeological sites, just like historic buildings, are considered cultural or historic resources if they meet eligibility requirements set forth in the National Historic Preservation Act. In addition to the 2019 Archaeology Ordinance adopted by the City of Savannah, programs and policy that support further archaeological survey on private property within City limits and throughout the County are needed to identify the important history that archaeological resources contain.

Objectives:

- Support projects that educate the public about archaeology and important Savannah and Chatham County cultural sites and resources
- Develop partnerships with community groups such as the Society for Georgia Archaeology to develop an ethical process for discovery, storage, and ownership of archaeological artifacts, following the ethical standards of the Society for American Archaeology

Education

Education is a foundational component of community quality of life, workforce readiness, and long-term economic stability. Access to high-quality educational opportunities influences residential choice, supports labor force development, and shapes future civic and economic outcomes. In Savannah, Chatham County, and Garden City, educational planning intersects closely with land use decisions, transportation access, housing stability, and workforce development initiatives.

Education is a right
Education is a social contract with a community
Education is a determinant of the socioeconomic well-being of a community

K – 12 Education

Public schools throughout the entire county are managed and operated by the Savannah–Chatham County Public School System (SCCPSS). As of 2025, the school system consists of: 20 elementary schools, 9 K-8 schools, 8 middle schools, 11 high schools, 5 charter schools and specialty schools. In 2025, the school district had 38,491 students enrolled, with a 13.5:1 student to teacher ratio, which has improved over the 2040 Plan period. District enrollment has remained relatively stable in recent years, reflecting broader demographic trends such as slower household growth, declining birth rates, and increased participation in school choice options. Given current trends and projected forecasts, SCCPSS estimates enrollment will slowly decline by approximately 5% by the year 2031, resulting in between 33,600–34,000 students.

Academic Performance

Academic performance within SCCPSS is measured through Georgia’s College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI evaluates district and school performance across multiple components, including content mastery, academic progress, achievement gap closure, readiness indicators, and graduation outcomes.

According to the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, the district received a CCRPI (College and Career Ready Performance Index) score of 69.4 (D grade) from the Georgia School Grades Report issued by the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement for the 2025 school year; compared to a state score of 78.0. This is a decreased score from the 2024 grade of 75.9 (C grade), compared to overall state of 78.9 (C grade). Performance varies significantly across grade levels and schools, with specialty and magnet programs often outperforming district averages, while schools serving higher concentrations of economically disadvantaged students face ongoing challenges in content mastery and readiness indicators.

In 2025, the district performed below the state in all components within the elementary and middle grade bands but outperformed the state in high school Progress and Graduation Rate. However, 57% of SCCPSS schools met or exceeded the state in one or more components. Roughly 80% improved in at least one CCRPI component, and just over half made gains or maintained in multiple components. Although these results are promising, readiness indicators, such as accelerated enrollment, pathway completion, and college or career readiness remain a key focus area for continued improvement.

Title 1 Schools

A significant share of SCCPSS students face socioeconomic challenges. Students in economically disadvantaged households may face academic, mental, and social challenges. Thirty-eight (38) of the SCCPSS's schools (63%) are defined as Title 1 Schools, which are eligible for federally funded schoolwide programs and targeted assistance programs to improve academic achievement for all students in economic need areas. In 2025, it is estimated that 72.8% of students who attend the SCCPSS are economically disadvantaged, meaning that they either live in a family unit receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits, or have been identified as homeless, unaccompanied youth, foster, or migrant children. Additionally, 12.3% of students are English learners, and 15.0% are students with disabilities, underscoring the importance of coordinated educational, social service, and infrastructure planning to support student needs. Under Title 1, all students in the SCCPSS receive free breakfast and lunch, with no application required in the 2025-2026 school year. This universal meal service ensures all students have access to nutritious meals and operates on a completely cashless system.

Charter, Private, and Alternative Education

In addition to traditional public schools, SCCPSS authorizes and oversees multiple charter schools, which operate as tuition-free public schools with independent nonprofit governance. Charter schools contribute to programmatic diversity and parental choice while remaining subject to academic, financial, and operational accountability standards.

The region also includes a substantial number of private and parochial schools, which serve a smaller share of total enrollment but influence district enrollment patterns and facility utilization. School choice options have contributed to redistribution of enrollment rather than overall growth, reinforcing the importance of system-level planning rather than new school expansion.

SCCPSS Charter Schools		
Charter School	Educational Focus	Charter Term
Oglethorpe Charter School	Classical curriculum emphasizing literacy, history, and structured academic progression	July 2025 – June 2030
Savannah Classical Academy	Classical education model with emphasis on core academics and character education	July 2019 – June 2027
Susie King Taylor Community School	Community-centered education emphasizing leadership, civic engagement, and inclusive learning	July 2024 – June 2029
Tybee Island Maritime Academy	Maritime, coastal, and environmental studies integrated with core curriculum	July 2025 – June 2030
Coastal Empire Montessori Charter School	Montessori instructional model emphasizing self-directed learning and developmental pacing	July 2026 – June 2028

Figure 8.7 – SCCPSS Charter Schools

REAL *Seeing Savannah Through a Racial Equity Lens* 2022 Report Analysis

Data collected and evaluated by the REAL study established that in Savannah, the CCRPI outcome is delineated in great part by race, and further by the relationship between race and income. Within the SCCPSS, almost 60% of the students are children of color. More detailed standardized test results reflect, using third grade students as a benchmark, that almost three-quarters of students read at or below third grade reading level, the majority of whom are Black. It was discovered that many black-owned early childhood development service providers have not been performing at the state's standards and therefore have not qualified to secure state funding. Many of these providers disproportionately serve low-income children of color. Additionally, it was determined that many low-income families in the region do not have access to pre-K learning at all.

The REAL Education Committee suggests that the local school system needs to affirmatively target black students with resources from birth through third grade to close educational gaps beyond the third grade, and identified the following overarching goals for SCCPSS:

- Improve academic achievement for black students
- Increase their ability to navigate the K-12 public school system
- Improve their access to opportunities in higher education

The committee also identified the following factors in the school system's success:

- School readiness, including access to early childhood education, quality day care, books in the home, educational toys, etc.
- Access to high-quality and culturally relevant teaching in primary grades, measured by teacher experience; development, preparation, and retention; and curriculum quality
- Teacher bias in the classrooms
- Access to quality summer educational experiences
- Age-appropriate and equitable disciplinary practices
- Access to quality after-school programs
- Reimagined school – parent/caregiver partnerships
- Access to technology in both the school and home, forming an interrelationship with availability and constraints to broadband and WiFi services subscriptions

The committee also determined that reforming the public education funding formula is necessary over the long-term to disrupt systemic inequities. The formula is currently tied to property values, while federal, state and local housing policies have often systematically devalued properties within black communities, as is the case in several Chatham County neighborhoods. The formula dictates the per-pupil expenditure rate at the school district level. However, funding disparities are often evident between schools in different neighborhoods based on socioeconomic characteristics. Title I federal funding for "disadvantaged" schools is intended to narrow the funding gap. Challenges with sole dependence on these funds is that they are limited and their applications often stigmatize students. Thus, as a long-term goal, the committee continues to explore strategies to address this foundational inequity and its negative effects on educational opportunities for Savannah's black students with support from the County, the City of Savannah and SCCPSS.

CGIC Community Blueprint

The CGIC updated 2022 Blueprint provides promising information relevant to findings of the REAL committee discussed above. In terms of home day care center ratings, although a gap still remains, 75% of out-of-home day care centers in the County have been quality rated, an improvement over a 49% rating in 2020. The CGIC provides statistics to substantiate this finding, with a total of 60% of children under 5 participating in early childhood services programs. This figure may be elevated, as one child may be enrolled in multiple programs simultaneously. The CGIC has established Early Care and Learning Initiatives founded on the principle that by increasing access to quality-rated childcare and focusing on early literacy and language development, the region's youngest learners will receive the foundation they need to thrive. To foster early learning opportunities for children and mentoring for parents, caregivers and legal guardians, CGIC is coordinating with local and state agencies to encourage building collaborative partnerships that address early language and literacy.

“CGIC’s partner agencies are building a framework to work with early care providers, school systems, medical providers, community agencies, libraries, parent-facing organizations and parents”

One important tool to advance early language and literacy is the Early Literacy Alignment Mini Grant (ELA Mini Grant) which provides up to \$5,000 funding to Georgia public elementary schools seeking to vertically align innovative literacy practices with local childcare programs. Specifically, the grant funds strategic partnerships between early care providers and local public elementary schools as they engage in collaborative professional learning to align their literacy practices to facilitate a smooth transition for rising pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. Overall, continued progress is essential to enable young adults to become contributing community members during the early education period. This includes implementing key strategies to:

- Ensure all children are proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade.
- Increase access to affordable, quality early childhood programs.
- Improve high school graduation rates and track student content mastery for college and career readiness.

Facilities and Capital Investment

Many school facilities within the SCCPSS were constructed decades ago and require continued reinvestment to meet current educational, safety, and resilience standards. In recent years, capital investment has been driven less by enrollment growth and more by the need to modernize aging campuses, address deferred maintenance, and adapt facilities to evolving instructional and workforce preparation needs.

Over the past five years, voter-approved Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) programs have funded major renovation, replacement, and system upgrade projects throughout the district. These investments have focused on extending the useful life of existing schools while improving learning environments, operational efficiency, and campus safety. Projects have included building renovations, classroom reconfigurations, and upgrades to mechanical, electrical, plumbing, technology, and security systems, as well as phased

improvements to accessibility and building envelopes.

ESPLOST funding has also supported expanded and enhanced academic and career-focused facilities, particularly at the high school level. Investments at sites such as Windsor Forest High School, which was replaced and modernized to address long-standing facility deficiencies, and Groves High School and the GHS Industrial Academy, where career and technical education spaces have been upgraded, reflect the district's emphasis on workforce-aligned instruction in fields such as aviation, logistics, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing. At the elementary and K–8 level, improvements at schools such as Hesse K–8 demonstrate a continued focus on upgrading neighborhood schools through targeted renovations rather than expanding physical footprints.

From a comprehensive planning perspective, educational facility needs in Chatham County are defined by systematic reinvestment and modernization of existing assets, rather than the construction of new schools. Continued coordination between SCCPSS, local governments, and regional planning efforts will be essential to ensure future capital improvements support safe access, resilience objectives, workforce alignment, and efficient use of public resources.

Education Beyond K-12

Savannah and Chatham County are supported by a diverse network of higher education institutions, technical colleges, and workforce training providers that collectively serve a regional labor shed extending well beyond municipal boundaries. These institutions play a critical role in supporting employment sectors that are central to the regional economy, including logistics and distribution, advanced manufacturing, aerospace, healthcare, education, and port-related industries. Monitoring industry growth and trends in the region may assist in targeting training and local workforce support for established industries such as aerospace, manufacturing, logistics and warehousing, tourism and film production and emerging sectors in specialized fields, including software development, robotics, healthcare IT, and life sciences.

There has been slight decrease in high school graduation rates countywide over the post COVID period, from 88.8% in 2022 to 87.4% in 2025, as shown in Figure 8.7. The high school graduation rate at Beach High School increased significantly by 8.8 points during the time period, with modest gains at Garden City Groves High School, Islands High School, Savannah-Chatham E-Learning, and Savannah Arts Academy. High Schools with graduation rates at the lower range indicate a relationship between lower incomes, higher poverty rates and predominantly Black, or Black/White representation in fairly comparable proportions, suggesting that focusing additional curriculum resources may be appropriate at these locations where less advantaged student populations reside.

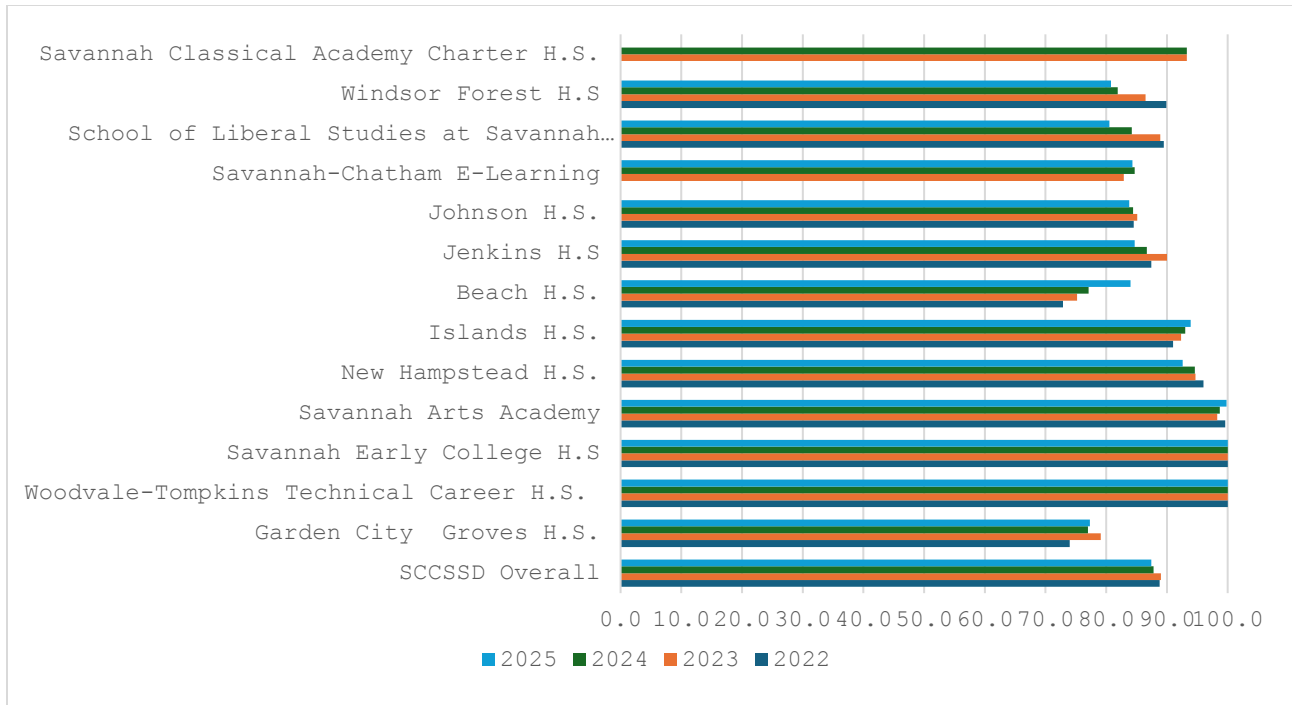


Figure 8.8 – SCCPSS High School Graduation Rates 2022-2025

The entire state of Georgia has seen an upward trend in adult education. Educational attainment in Chatham County showed an upward trend between 2020 and 2024, with roughly 38.9% of residents aged 25+ holding a bachelor’s degree or higher, exceeding the state rate during the entire period. Although the City of Savannah is slightly below the state’s rate for a bachelor’s degree or higher, it has experienced a similar increasing trend in degreed residents. There has been an approximate 3.5% increase in the rate of graduate and professional degrees awarded both countywide and within the City limits. High school graduation or higher reached approximately 91.0% Countywide, exceeding the state achievement, reflecting growth of a skilled workforce in the region.

Academic Achievement 2020-2024						
Academic Achievement	2020			2024		
	County	Savannah	State	County	Savannah	State
Less than 9th Grade	2.9%	3.2%	4.5%	3.7%	3.8%	4.2%
9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma	7.0%	8.7%	7.7%	5.3%	8.1%	6.0%
High School Graduate (GED)	24.1%	26.5%	27.5%	22.9%	24.9%	26.2%
Some College, No Degree	23.9%	26.1%	20.2%	21.6%	22.6%	18.8%
Associate's Degree	7.7%	6.4%	8.0%	7.6%	6.8%	8.4%
Bachelor's Degree	20.8%	18.4%	19.7%	22.1%	19.8%	21.5%
Graduate/Professional Degree	13.6%	10.6%	12.5%	16.8%	14.1%	14.8%
High School Graduate or Higher	90.1%	88.1%	87.9%	91.0%	88.2%	89.8%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	34.4%	29.1%	32.2%	38.9%	33.9%	36.3%

Figure 8.9 – Savannah-Chatham County: Academic Achievement: 2020-2024

Workforce Demand Characteristics

Recent workforce studies conducted for the Savannah Harbor–Interstate 16 Corridor Joint Development Authority indicate that the region is experiencing structural labor supply constraints rather than short-term workforce shortages. Unemployment rates across the regional labor shed have remained historically low, generally ranging between 1.4% and 2.9% while demand for industrial and logistics employment continues to accelerate. The studies find that approximately 84% of new hires in high-demand industries require no more than a high school diploma, highlighting the critical role of K–12 completion, career and technical education pathways, and postsecondary credentials. Industrial occupations including production workers, assemblers, logistics operators, maintenance technicians, machinists, and truck drivers are projected to account for over 80% of new labor demand through 2027, while entry-level production wages have increased by approximately 20% over a two-year period, reflecting intense competition for labor. Collectively, these trends indicate that regional workforce challenges are driven less by a lack of educational institutions and more by misalignment between educational pipelines and the scale, timing, and occupational composition of labor demand.

Role of Education and Training Institutions

Higher education institutions and technical colleges in the Savannah region provide critical training capacity, particularly in engineering, healthcare, logistics, aviation, and skilled trades. Georgia Southern University, Savannah Technical College, and other regional institutions collectively graduate thousands of students annually, including approximately 330 engineering graduates per year, yet demand for engineering, industrial maintenance, and technical supervision continues to exceed local supply.

The workforce studies emphasize that high school graduates, technical college completers, and credentialed trainees represent the most immediate and scalable solution to the region’s industrial labor gap. Without earlier exposure to career pathways and industry-aligned training, many students are unaware of local employment opportunities in manufacturing, logistics, and skilled trades.

Regional Coordination and Governance

Regional workforce development in the Savannah–Chatham County area is driven by a network of multi-county collaboratives that align government agencies, educational institutions, nonprofits, and private industry to sustain a competitive labor pool. These partnerships operate across jurisdictional boundaries to address labor shortages, improve workforce readiness, and respond to the demands of large-scale industrial and logistics growth in the Savannah metropolitan region.

A primary coordinating entity is WorkSource Coastal, which serves a ten-county workforce development area that includes Bryan, Bulloch, Camden, Chatham, Effingham, Glynn, Liberty, Long, McIntosh, and Screven counties. Funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and overseen by the Coastal Workforce Development Board (CWDB), WorkSource Coastal provides workforce training, job placement, and education services for priority populations, including veterans, youth ages 16–24, dislocated workers, and adult job

seekers. The CWDB administers the Workforce Development Area 19 Local/Regional Plan, which identifies five target industry sectors for the region: logistics and warehousing, healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality, and construction.

The Coastal Regional Commission (CRC) plays a complementary planning role as the Economic Development District for the coastal region. Through its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee, the CRC integrates workforce priorities with state and regional economic development goals and ensures consistency with workforce investment strategies. The CRC operates Coastal Regional Coaches, a rural public transit program serving multiple coastal counties, which provides essential transportation for job seekers traveling between rural communities and employment centers outside the Savannah urbanized area.

Several specialized collaboratives support sector-specific workforce development and innovation. The Savannah Logistics Technology Corridor (SLTC), approved by the Georgia Legislature in 2018, brings together business, government, and educational partners to advance logistics and manufacturing technology along the Interstate 95 and Interstate 16 corridors. Key initiatives include the development of a proposed Logistics Tech Academy and innovation incubators designed to strengthen collaboration between industry, the Savannah Advanced Manufacturing Center, and local colleges. In addition, the City of Savannah has participated in Sector Partnerships Grant initiatives that focus on understanding and responding to labor needs in high-demand industries through employer-driven strategies.

Workforce development efforts also include labor- and community-based collaboratives. The Savannah Regional Central Labor Council partners with local governments to host union job fairs and apprenticeship pipelines that connect residents to skilled trades and unionized career pathways. Programs such as Step Up Savannah, through its Chatham Apprentice Program (CAP), provide unemployed and under-employed adults with job readiness training, financial literacy, and professional networking opportunities. Other targeted programs address barriers to employment for specific populations, including at-risk youth, justice-involved individuals, and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Educational and institutional partnerships form a critical component of the regional workforce ecosystem. The Bridge to Success Student Internship Program, established through a memorandum of understanding between the City of Savannah, Savannah State University, Georgia Southern University, and Savannah Technical College, creates structured internship opportunities that connect students directly to local government and employer needs. The region also leverages a network of higher education institutions—including Savannah Technical College, Savannah State University, Georgia Southern University, and Georgia Tech–Savannah—to support workforce pipelines for major employers such as Gulfstream Aerospace, the Georgia Ports Authority, and healthcare systems. Career and Technical Agricultural Education (CTAE) programs, youth apprenticeships, and Junior Achievement initiatives further support early exposure to career pathways for middle and high school students.

Several broader regional initiatives reinforce these efforts. The Savannah Harbor–Interstate 16 Corridor Joint Development Authority (JDA) coordinates workforce planning related to large-scale industrial projects, including the Hyundai Mega site, which is projected to generate more than 11,000 jobs and place sustained pressure on the regional labor pool. In response to projected

labor supply constraints, the Savannah Economic Development Authority (SEDA) is advancing a broader multi-state regional coalition spanning portions of Georgia and South Carolina to coordinate long-term workforce development strategies. Local strategic efforts such as Vision 2033, a tricentennial initiative led by Chatham County, the City of Savannah, and SEDA, focus on preparing middle and high school students for anticipated industrial and logistics employment growth.

Despite the breadth of existing programs, both the Savannah JDA Workforce Study and the associated Workforce Development Plan conclude that the region's primary challenge is coordination rather than capacity. While educational institutions, workforce agencies, and employers are individually active and well-resourced, the absence of a centralized coordinating framework limits the collective effectiveness of these efforts. The studies recommend the establishment of a regional workforce development collaborative, led by economic development leadership and supported by education, transportation, housing, and childcare stakeholders, to better align training pipelines with infrastructure investment, land use planning, and long-term economic growth.

Secondary Education Resources

Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD)

SCAD is a private, nonprofit institution founded in 1978 in the city of Savannah. Currently the school has numerous buildings and facilities located in different areas throughout the city serving over 15,000 students. SCAD has more than 100 undergraduate and graduate degree majors and 75 minors, more than any other art and design university in the country. Degrees offered are: Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Master of Architecture, Master of Arts, Master of Fine Arts, and a Master of Urban Design. New offerings in the year 2024/25 included: a B.A. in Game Development; M.A. in Cinematography/Editing; and M.B.I. in Creative Business Leadership/Design Management/Service Design. For the 2025-26 academic year, SCAD introduced a new Bachelor of Design in Applied AI major, which is expected to be a relevant, popular program. The most highly enrolled majors in Fall 2025 were animation, fashion, film and television, and user experience (UX) design, followed by visual and performing arts, communications, and business creative fields.

Savannah State University (SSU)

Known as Georgia's oldest historically black college or university (HBCU), Savannah State was founded in 1890. This public university is located in Savannah on a 201-acre campus. The university offers 22 baccalaureate majors and degrees and four graduate degrees to its approximate 3,200 to 3,800 students annually. These majors are housed within four colleges: College of Business Administration, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, College of Science and Technology, and the College of Education. The largest proportion of African American B.A. and M.A. recipients in Marine Science graduate from the SSU program. SSU is home to the state's first Homeland Security and Emergency Management program, and at an HBCU, covering emergency management, disaster resilience, and critical infrastructure protection, which is important in Chatham County. Additionally, SSU boasts a broad athletic program which is part of SIAC, Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

Georgia Southern University (GSU)

This public university, once known as Armstrong State University, recently consolidated with Georgia Southern University based in Statesboro, to become the Armstrong Campus of Georgia Southern University. The campus is located in the southside of Savannah, is attended by nearly 6,500 students, and offers over one-hundred-and-thirty-degree programs at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. The university's Waters College of Health Professions is one of the school's premier programs, having long been the largest producer of undergraduate health professionals in Georgia. Popular majors include nursing, psychology, biology, and business administration.

Georgia Tech-Savannah

In 2003, the Georgia Institute of Technology opened its satellite branch in the city of Savannah. The campus offers courses tailored to furthering the education and skills of established professionals. Programs consist of the Georgia Film Academy, K-12 programs, Digital Media, Manufacturing, Mathematics, Computing, Business, Occupational Safety and Health, Supply Chain and Logistics, Engineering, Leadership Training, and Defense Technologies. Newly added curriculum focus on Ai applications. In addition to providing opportunities for career advancement and education for professionals, Georgia Tech-Savannah maintains numerous partnerships within the region providing training, reskilling and management assistance to tech-entrepreneurs, including providing manufacturing and logistics guidance for large corporations.

South University

South University was founded in Savannah in 1899 originally as Draughan's Practical Business College. Throughout the years the school has transformed into a larger university developing satellite locations spanning across several states as well as offering online courses, with total enrollment exceeding 10,000 students. South University offers nine programs which awards degrees at the associate, undergraduate, certificate and graduate levels in areas such as criminal justice, theology, nursing, pharmacy, public health, and more.

Savannah Technical College

Founded in 1929, this Savannah-based public technical college serves over 4,500 students and is a unit of the Technical College System of Georgia. The college offers nearly 150 credit and non-credit market driven programs designed to provide a skilled workforce to area employers. It awards certificate, diploma, and associate degrees in five academic divisions: Aviation Technology, Business and Professional Services, General Studies, Health Sciences, and Industrial Technology. The Economic Development division provides non-credit programs: high school equivalency preparation, English as a Second Language, workforce development programs for individuals, and corporate contract training. Savannah Tech has been ranked the best community/technical college for active-duty military, their spouses, and veterans for years.

Medical College of Georgia - Savannah, Georgia

Augusta University's Medical College of Georgia brought a campus to Savannah in July 2024. Students have been doing 4- to 6-week clinical rotations at St. Joseph's/Candler Health System since 2007 and a residential campus was established there, a year ahead of schedule, in 2011. In addition to growth in the sheer number of students, educational opportunities are also expanding. The campus sits on Georgia Southern University's Armstrong campus which is just down the road from St. Joseph's Hospital. That's where many students get to learn one-on-one with doctors.

Mercer School of Medicine, Savannah Campus

What began as a clinical partnership with Savannah's Memorial Health in 1996 expanded into a full campus in 2008, when Mercer University School of Medicine launched a four-year MD program at this location. The Savannah campus is based at Memorial Health University Medical Center, the region's leading teaching hospital. Programs offered: Doctor of Medicine, MD; Biomedical Sciences, PhD; Family Therapy, and MFT.

Mindfulness

A current trend across the nation that is aiding in the development of focus and improved behavior in students is mindfulness. Mindfulness is a state of being that teaches one to live in the present and how to experience enjoyment with what is going on in the current moment. This can be taught through different measures including: conscious breathing, sensory stimulation, guided imagery/meditation, and body movement.

Loop It Up Savannah is a youth arts and educational enrichment organization that brings arts-integrated learning to more than 10,000 young people across the Savannah area each year. Since its inception in 2008 as a children's knitting and crochet class at the West Broad Street YMCA, Loop It Up has grown to include a wide range of programs in partnerships with public schools, community centers, museums, and partner nonprofits with a targeted focus on Title 1 and transformation schools, as well as early learning centers that serve the same demographic. As of 2025, Loop It Up Savannah partners with at least 24 SCCPSS schools to provide "The Mindfulness Zone" which is a four layered learning program featuring trauma-informed yoga, literature, mindfulness and expressive arts. Schools involved in the program include:

- Butler, Garden City, May Howard, Pooler, White Bluff, and Windsor Forest Elementary schools.
- K-8 Schools: Godley Station, Hesse, Pulaski, and Rice Creek.
- Middle Schools: West Chatham.
- High Schools: Herschel V. Jenkins, Sol C. Johnson, and Windsor Forest.

These programs have impacted over 11,000 students through various initiatives. Originally designed for Pre-K through fifth grade students, Loop It Up Savannah received a grant from VyStar Foundation in 2024. The grant was used to develop a comprehensive age-appropriate curriculum reaching 830 middle and high school students that includes a vital training component for classroom teachers, who co-facilitate sessions alongside the Mindfulness Zone's staff.

Training for teachers covers the following fundamental subjects to ensure that mindfulness becomes an ongoing practice:

- Relationship-building and self-awareness
- Trauma-informed language and nonviolent communication
- Mindfulness skills that teachers can model for students

With the challenges and stressors many SCCPSS students may be facing stemming from their family lives at home, mindfulness can serve as a remedy teaching students to handle their lives in a healthy, constructive manner which can ultimately improve school performance. In addition to mindfulness, other coping tools, knowledge and use of language can be taught to students to help them gain a stronger sense of self and better navigate current and future life paths.

A local resource designed to assist children exposed to trauma cope with their experience is the Handle with Care program launched in 2021 by the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition and Resilient Coastal Georgia in the Savannah/Chatham County area. The program is a nationally recognized systems-change initiative devised to improve the way the community responds to children who have experienced trauma. It is implemented through a partnership between the SCCPSS and the Savannah Police Department (SPD). The purpose of the process is to notify schools when a child has been exposed to trauma involving the public safety system, allowing for trauma-sensitive support rather than punishment. Police send a "Handle with Care" notice to the school, containing only the child's name, school, and no details about the incident. School staff, typically principals, counselors, or coaches initiate a form of support, such as providing school-based mental health care.

Live Oak Public Libraries

Live Oak Public Libraries provides programs and services in Chatham, Effingham, and Liberty Counties through 16 library locations and community outreach with 12 libraries in Chatham County, eight of which are located in Savannah, one in Pooler, one in unincorporated Chatham County and two located in Garden City. By mid-2025, the Library hosted more than 650,000 visitors, checked out nearly a million items, answered almost 200,000 questions, registered more than 1.2 million computer sessions, and presented programs to about 80,000 patrons in Chatham, Effingham, and Liberty Counties.

Benefits of the Library System

Libraries are open to everyone
Libraries support lifelong learning
Libraries offer access to technology
Libraries are community spaces
Libraries are wherever you are
Libraries are community partners

The Library's mission is to provide excellent, responsive service to enrich people's lives, support lifelong learning and build and enhance communities. They are striving to educate, inform, entertain and enrich the community. Live Oak Public Libraries focus on increasing access, community engagement and organizational excellence and sustainability. The library believes that these facilities are the heart of every community and help create and sustain strong communities. The library services are designed to support early learning, literacy, educational

success, economic opportunity and quality of life. However, feedback from the community during the Library Strategic Plan process indicated that the organization can improve advertising contributions to the community.

Live Oak Public Libraries is a member of PINES (Public Information Network for Electronic Services), the statewide network of public library systems serving Georgia. PINES connects more than 300 public libraries in 54 partner library systems across 146 counties and gives library card holders access to more than 11 million books and materials plus online resources such as the GALILEO system, Georgia’s virtual library. The portal gives users access to thousands of resources such as periodicals, scholarly journals, government publications, and encyclopedias among several other resources. Additionally, The Library is always open online at www.liveoakpl.org.

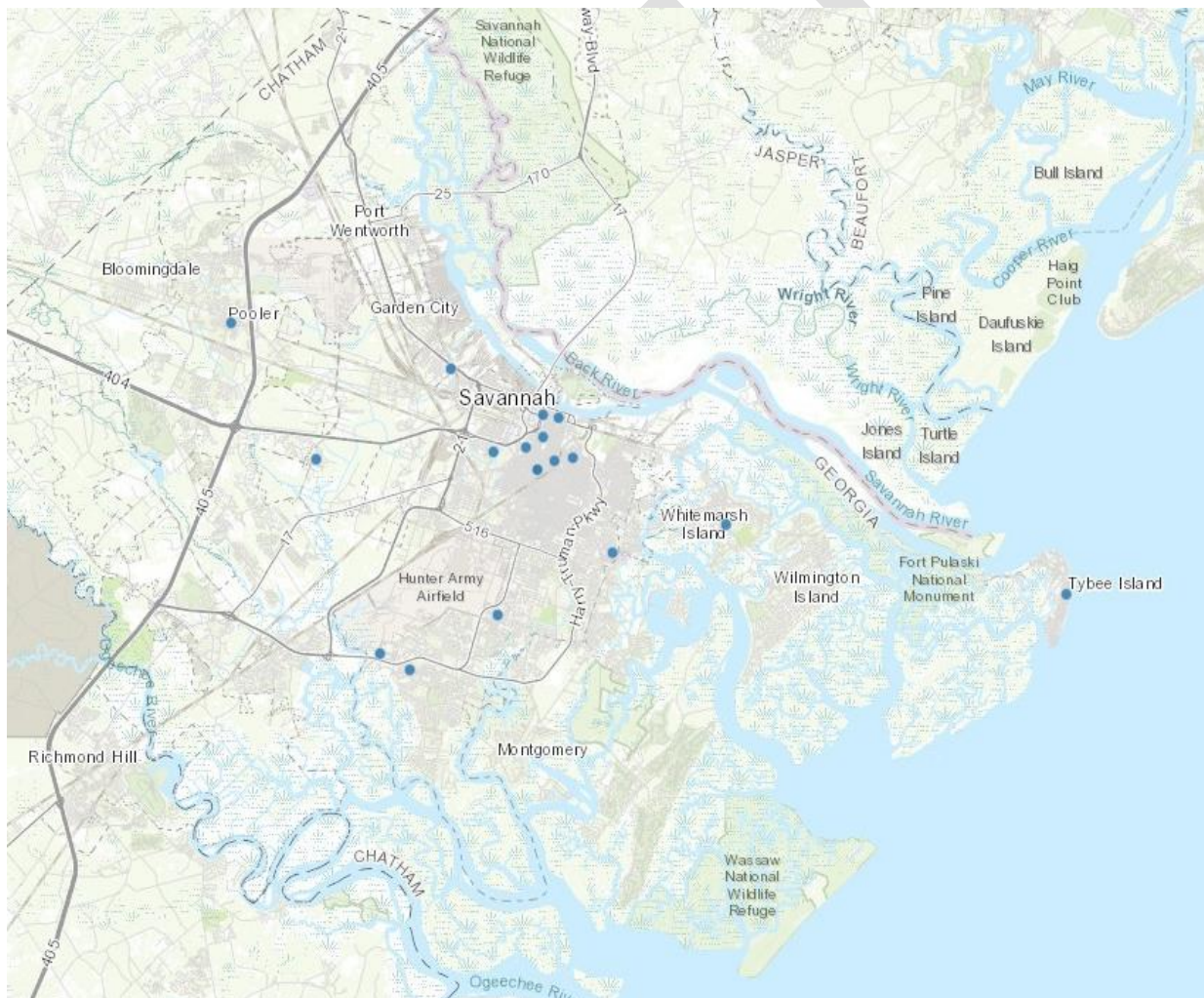


Exhibit 8.6– Live Oak Public Library Locations

Live Oak Public Library Visitors 2023-2025

Location	2023	2024	2025
Bull Street	91,415	81,009	111,913
Carnegie	14,463	20,284	2,513
Forest City	12,116	13,399	14,664
Garden City	23,152	26,440	26,311
Islands	74,300	75,085	75,330
Oglethorpe Mall	58,723	56,217	57,499
Pooler	47,415	46,609	47,426
Port City	18,399	19,918	21,767
Southwest Chatham	74,001	85,224	76,049
Tybee	19,964	19,065	22,199
WW Law	21,225	12,850	9,659
West Broad	14,357	9,710	13,697
Total	469,530	465,810	479,017
Source: Live Oak Public Library System 2025			

Figure 8.10 – Live Oak Public Library Visitors 2023 -2025

The number of visitors to the library facilities varies by location. While the locations in Tybee Island, Port City, Bull Street, and Forest City have increased slightly post COVID, the majority have either dropped in visitation or remained roughly the same. There has been a significant drop in attendance at the Carnegie (Savannah) location due to its closure for major repairs after Tropical Storm Debby, which caused severe basement flooding and erosion in August 2024. There are plans to transform it into an African American Resource Center. The facility is scheduled to reopen with ribbon cutting on February 20, 2026 as the Carnegie Library Heritage Center offering exhibitions, cultural programs, and oral histories, supported by over \$11 million in federal, state and local funding for restoration. They received a \$20,000 gift from Carnegie Corporation of New York, the foundation established by Andrew Carnegie.

The William Washington Law Library experienced declining usage due to consolidation/resource shifts within the Live Oak Public Library system, generally integrating the legal resources into other branches for a more system-wide approach. Law libraries across Georgia are seeing significant drops in physical collection sizes as professional legal research shifts toward digital databases, which reduces the need for large on-site print collections.

These changes reflect a move towards creating specialized, community-focused centers and adapting to modern library needs, leading to the repurposing or closure of traditional general-purpose branches, causing drops in their typical usage metrics. Both declines in visitation reflect system-wide changes prioritizing specialized community needs and modern library services over general stacks. Also, declines in visitation and facilities usage may be attributed in part to potential funding gaps due to proposed cuts to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Such cuts impact statewide resource-sharing networks like GALILEO and PINES, which are essential for smaller branches.

LOPL Library Computer Sessions

Location	2023	2024	2025
Bull Street	21,780	16,975	24,137
Carnegie	4,819	6,779	1,022
Forest City	12,116	3,588	6,779
Garden City	3,248	3,219	3,224
Islands	5,080	5,371	5,832
Oglethorpe Mall	14,003	12,283	13,669
Pooler	6,570	5,595	5,760
Port City	5,513	5,213	5,196
Southwest Chatham	11,703	11,868	9,578
Tybee	1,263	944	1,022
WW Law	1,817	1,846	1,868
West Broad	2,088	2,952	2,538
Total	92,023	76,633	80,625

Source: Live Oak Public Library System 2025

Figure 8.11 – Library Computer Sessions

Broadband & the Library System

The Live Oak Public Libraries system currently provides more than 460 public computers across its 16 locations. All of the public library locations in Chatham County have had fiber connections for several years, and speeds increased in July 2021 under the library system's new e-rate contract, at least doubling at all locations and extending into parking lots and outside of buildings after hours. Chromebooks and hotspots are also available for checkout.

LOPL Library Wireless Sessions			
Location	2023	2024	2025
Bull Street	148,408	177,406	342,126
Carnegie	23,633	34,038	4,888
Forest City	15,316	27,348	25,685
Garden City	15,765	26,131	64,341
Islands	32,302	51,621	150,226
Oglethorpe Mall	33,442	64,786	87,007
Pooler	24,845	72,663	40,186
Port City	24,845	38,515	37,895
Southwest Chatham	37,595	115,983	134,756
Tybee	10,965	16,413	66,138
WW Law	21,292	23,135	34,459
West Broad	10,052	16,903	23,987
Total	400,483	664,942	1,011,694

Source: Live Oak Public Library System 2025

Figure 8.12 – Wireless Internet Usage Trends

Both wired and wireless service are critical to many residents who have no internet access or

inadequate internet access. Many customers bring wireless devices such as laptops, tablets and mobile phones to use on library wireless since many cannot afford the increased costs of plans with more data.

In-person library computer sessions, where a patron utilizes the facilities' computer, appear to be decreasing overall, (over 14%), with the exception of Bull Street (9.8%), West Broad (17.7%) and Islands (12.9%) locations. In contrast, wireless sessions increased by 60.4% between 2023 and 2025. The largest growth was experienced at Bull Street, Islands, Oglethorpe Mall, Southwest Chatham, and Tybee Island. Many of the areas with significant increases are noted for being high-density, lower-income, or working-class residential areas with a high renter population, further substantiating that cost is a factor influencing internet subscription.

The Library system provides a service termed Ready Resources to assist in continuing education, professional development opportunities and assisting with job search, separated into databases by topic and supported by webinars and online courses. Categories include:

Job Readiness - job search and business database with market research, employment opportunities, and more web resources to strengthen employment skills or assist with a successful job search. Includes:

- Georgia Department of Labor job search assistance, and unemployment benefits information.
- LearningExpress Library - Online practice exams, exercises, skill-building courses, and more. Includes resources in Spanish.
- Occupational Outlook Handbook - Career information from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- Proofreading & Editing Basics- Tip guide for writing cover letters, essays, or presentations.
- Resume Builder - Templates to help create, share, and download a resume.
- Search for Jobs - Google Search provides tips and connections to job postings from across the web.
- Tutor.com – Connections to job resources, resume help, and career coaching.
- Worksource Georgia - Job and career services as well as training and education

Health & Social Services:

- 2-1-1 / United Way of the Coastal Empire - Call or click for links to emergency assistance and community resources.
- African American Health Information & Resource Center - Health services, job training, computer assistance and more.
- H.E.R.O. Database - Health Effective Resource Organizations Database connects you to vital resources.
- America's Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia - Find updates about food assistance programs on their Facebook page.
- Chatham County Hurricane Registry - Qualifying residents may apply for evacuation assistance
- Chatham County Safety Net - Connections to healthcare, insurance, and other support

resources.

- Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless - Help for homeless, housing, food assistance, and other basic needs.
- Deep Center Mutual Aid Toolkit - Listing of resources, policies, and practices to address the needs of the community.
- Financial & Legal Assistance - Links to financial and legal assistance plus other community resources.
- Find Help Georgia – links to find social services.
- Food Talk - University of Georgia Extension presents free ideas on how to keep families healthy on a budget!
- GeorgiaCares State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) - Free, unbiased Medicare counseling
- Georgia Department of Community Affairs - Links to info on support for basic needs and services.
- Georgia Department of Human Services - Resources and information about benefits.
- Georgia Department of Labor - Information about filing for unemployment, benefits, and job assistance.
- Georgia Division of Family & Children Services - Resources, information, and contact information about benefits.
- Georgia Family Connection Partnership - Resources and updates to keep Georgians safe, educated, and connected.
- Georgia Memory Net - Resources on Alzheimer's and dementia, with support from the Georgia Department of Human Services.
- Peach State Health Plan - Information and resources for affordable and reliable health care.
- Resilient Savannah Resource Guide - Local, state and federal resources, phone numbers, and website links.
- Salvation Army - Help with payments for rent, utilities, and basic needs.
- Step Up Savannah - Workforce development and financial education.
- UGA Public Service & Outreach - Resources and connections for nutrition, health, and wellness.

Early Literacy: Early literacy is a key component for reading readiness. The library offers resources to promote the development of language and early learning skill to help prepare children for success in school.

Student Success: Libraries support students inside and outside of the classroom with study tools, reference materials, and after-school programs that encourage creative and critical thinking. Provides homework help, reading resources, and skill-building for college and beyond.

- DigitalLearn.org - Learn computer basics with simple self-directed video tutorials.
- LearningExpress Library This link opens in a new window
- Practice tests, skill-building courses, and career help. Includes resources in Spanish.
- Niche Academy This link opens in a new window
- Video tutorials and training on how to use online resources.

WiFi Services:

- Charter Communications - Free Spectrum Wi-Fi internet services to households with K-12 or college students.
- Comcast Internet - Complimentary "Internet Essentials" for low-income customers for 60 days with no contract.
- Hargray - Free Internet service for households with K-12 or college students.

It's clear that the library system provides a wealth of resources for career advancement, early learning, health and social services, job readiness, and student success. However, Live Oak Library Services states one of their biggest challenges is that many people are unaware of the extensive services programs and resources that are available to them as library card holders. The Live Oak Library Services District Plan has identified the need to expand their physical footprint to align with local population growth. The Plan envisions the construction of updated and expanded library facilities to replace aging structures.

Education Goals

Goal 1 - Ensure equitable access of critical life skills including soft skills, financial, social, and conflict resolution competencies are available to parents/legal guardians and taught to all students through the use of technology, community partnerships, and counseling.

While it is extremely important for students to learn the basic fundamentals in school, it is equally important for their future success for them to learn interpersonal and life skills, how to deal with conflict resolution, effectively manage time, optimize organization, and develop abilities in both teamwork and independence. These are not skills and competencies that many parents may not have mastered, nor are they included in typical curriculums. Yet it can be a disadvantage in the workforce to lack these capabilities. Providing curriculum to teach these skills to all students as well as reaching out to parents and caregivers with instruction will allow them an easier transition into adulthood and navigate the workforce.

Objectives

- Create curriculum to provide parents and caregivers with lessons on various soft skills. Identify the most effective ways to make lessons available, combining in-person classes, online courses, webinars, etc.
- Create curriculum to educate students on soft skills necessary to be successful in life and incorporate coursework in public school requirements.
- Provide counseling for parents and students in these areas as needed

Goal 2 - Implement career track, internship, and mentorship programs between employers and students while increasing leadership development programs between community organizations, businesses, and public schools to prepare students for employment and promote upward mobility.

Real world work experiences such as internships and apprenticeships can help students learn new skills, gain confidence, enhance networking skills, expose them to professional workplaces, build their resumes for college applications and future employment, and give them insight into potential career paths.

Similarly, mentorship programs can help better prepare students for employment and promote upward mobility by providing them with a long-term support system to help guide them in their growth and development. Providing students with these types of tools can significantly improve the likelihood of future successes

Objectives

- Create intern and mentorship programs in the Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools through partnerships with community organizations, business leaders, and businesses

- Identify graduates of the Savannah-Chatham County Public School system to mentor struggling students in order to show them a path to success

Goal 3 - Plan for changing populations, capacities, and overcrowding and increase the quality of education and academic performance at SCCPSS.

A high-performing education system is a key ingredient for the future success of Savannah and Chatham County. Educational attainment unlocks future opportunities for personal and community growth for generations to come. As the population and demographics of our county change, we must make efforts to meet these challenges and ensure that every student receives a quality education. The provision of education to students is a vital function of local government and SCCPSS strives to improve the education system for all students in the County.

Objectives

- Include SCCPSS school facilities staff in the review process for multifamily and subdivision projects to ensure adequate school facilities to meet the needs of future development
- Locate schools at sites appropriate to the attendees
- Limit land use and operational conflicts between school sites and adjacent uses
- Retain the vitality of neighborhoods in proximity to new school facilities
- Promote health, safety and well-being of students in their commutes to and from school

Goal 4 - Incentivize and promote parental and caregiver involvement in schools by teaching parents and caregivers to advocate for their child(ren), facilitating better communication between parents/caregivers and school leadership, and eliminating barriers to parent/caregiver engagement.

Parental and caregiver involvement in schools can play a significant role in the success of their children's education. Studies show that parental involvement is linked to better grades and behavior in the classroom and can improve teacher morale and communication between parents and school officials. Involved parents and caregivers have a better understanding of the protocols and the organizational structure of the school system and are better equipped to advocate for their children when needed.

Unfortunately, time constraints, language barriers, and a lack of knowing how to get involved can make it difficult for parents and caregivers to actively participate in their children's education. Efforts to eliminate barriers to parental involvement in schools will benefit teachers and students alike.

Objectives

- Identify means to facilitate better communication between parents, teachers, and school leadership
- Identify barriers to parent engagement and work to eliminate them

- Consider programs to incentivize parental involvement
- Educate parents on school protocols and structures in order to make them better advocates for their children when needed

Goal 5 - Ensure families and community members have the ability to promote and reinforce literacy and numeracy instruction that takes place in a student's learning.

Learning to read is one of the most important childhood skills and can provide children with a tremendous sense of enjoyment. A wealth of research has established the importance of early literacy skills for later school readiness and long-term school success. It is critical to start early in helping children develop the skills they will need to be successful. By supporting early childhood literacy, a community can make a difference in building awareness and making connections to ensure that children can be successful in school and in life. The Live Oak Library system has adopted a priority to align their collection materials and programming with community needs to improve literacy, support literacy initiatives, and offer inclusive programming and materials resources for growing ESL populations. Ongoing measurement and a focus on outcomes will allow them to course-correct as required.

A major Workforce Initiatives Fund initiative managed by SEDA in collaboration with the United Way of the Coastal Empire and Child Care Resource and Referral of Southeast Georgia is the new Early Childhood Learning Center on the east side of Savannah, to serve children from six weeks to four years old, as well as execute funding to support capital improvements for licensed child care facilities to achieve Quality Rated Status.

Objectives

- Raise awareness of Live Oak Public Library learning resources
- Make access to reading materials fair, equitable, and easy for children and adults
- Encourage a lifelong love of reading and build literacy skills

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Overview

Community health is determined by the wellness of the residents of a particular area. It focuses on the physical, mental and social well-being of the population within individual neighborhoods, racial or culturally defined localities, and larger geographical regions. In the Savannah-Chatham County urbanized area, residents exhibit a range of attributes, which often results in underserved localities and disparities of health indicators. The approach to preventing disease and reducing health disparities includes addressing environmental, social, and economic factors at a comprehensive level. According to County Health Rankings 2024, 17% of adults in Chatham County reported that they consider themselves in fair or poor health. Several factors affect collective health status:

- Geography, physical development, and environmental conditions
- Socio-cultural factors and economic status
- Community organization underlying healthcare, education, and accessibility to resources and services
- Individual behaviors and chronic health conditions

In May 2025, the African American Mayors Association (AAMA) and the American Beverage Foundation for a Healthy America (ABFHA), in partnership with American Beverage, named Savannah as a recipient of a \$125,000 grant to advance essential programs that improve community health. A 5-year, \$3.4M CDC Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) grant was awarded in November of 2018 to Healthy Savannah and the YMCA of Coastal Georgia, to reduce health disparities among African American and Hispanic/Latino Americans in low-income Chatham County neighborhoods. A second 5-year, \$5.1M REACH grant was awarded in 2023 to continue addressing health disparities in Chatham County.

Obesity Rate

Obesity is a disease defined as abnormal or excess body fat accumulation that presents a health risk. According to the Cleveland Clinic and CDC, the benchmark for obesity is a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or higher, although more recent studies also consider other health indicators that may be present with BMIs lower than the clinical definition. This condition has been shown to lead to more chronic ailments such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, liver disease, high cholesterol and stroke, some of the leading causes of death.

Key environmental factors affecting the prevalence of obesity are those that limit the availability of healthy and sustainably-produced food at locally affordable prices, opportunities for physical activity and the absence of access to an effective health system. Obesity may also be linked to inherited, physiological and environmental factors.

In 2025, approximately 35% of the population in Georgia lived with obesity. An estimated 38.7% of adults in Savannah were obese, slightly higher than 36.1% in Chatham County overall. However, the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition reports an overall countywide obesity rate at

29.9% in 2023. The prevalence of obesity has continued to rise due to an increasing sedentary lifestyle, lack of nutritional health understanding, and oversaturation of fast-food and processed products. Disparities in rates of obesity have been shown to be associated with race and ethnicity, with the highest rates among Black/African Americans and individuals identifying as Hispanic. Obesity reportedly decreases as education levels rise and increases in response to identified food deserts. Incidence of other health indicators (data collected 2022) some of which are associated with obesity, according to Healthy People 2030 includes:

- High cholesterol – 36.7%
- High blood pressure – 36.9%
- Diabetes – 13.0%
- Pre-term births – 12.7%
- Overall cancer – 436 cases per 100,000 people

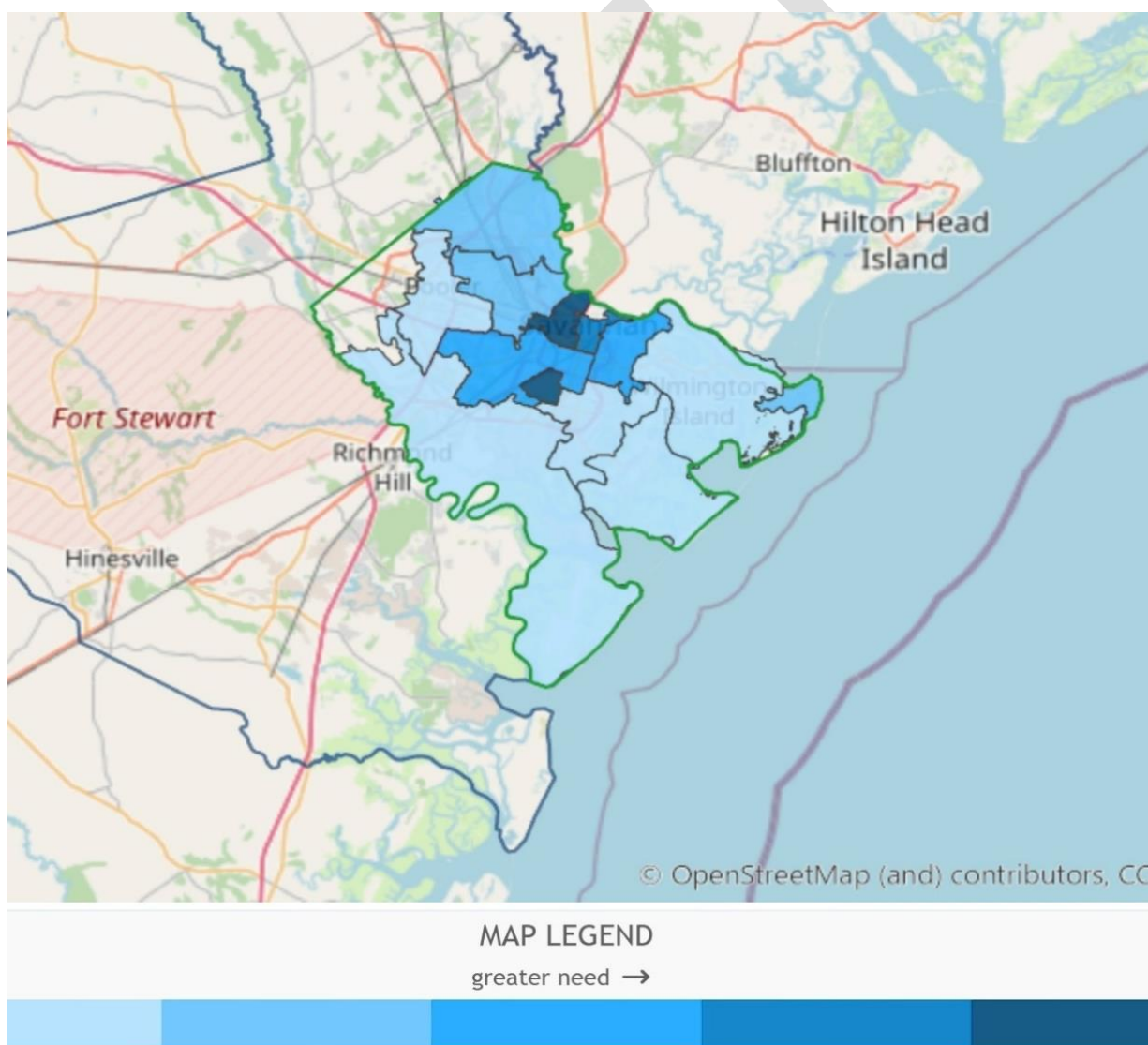


Exhibit 8.7 – Community Health Concerns

Additionally, obesity is a factor increasing healthcare costs and lost earnings. Overall, the

objective is to decrease obesity through a cohesive strategy to not only reduce socioeconomic factors contributing to the disease and improve healthy lifestyle education, but also to address land use and zoning patterns that have contributed to a proliferation of unhealthy food resources and food deserts.

Access to Healthcare Institutions

An evaluation of Savannah and Chatham County health needs was conducted in 2025 by St. Joseph's/Candler Hospital through collaborative efforts with non-profit organizations, businesses, churches, community leaders, and social service agencies. Input for the needs assessment was gathered throughout the Fall and Winter of 2024 in the form of surveys and listening sessions.

According to the assessment, access to quality healthcare is vital to overall community welfare, as regular health screenings can help diagnose health issues earlier and contribute to better outcomes. They considered three specific health care specialties: primary care physicians, mental health providers, and dentists. According to the ACS 2025, 13.4% of County residents between 25 and 65 lack health insurance coverage, while almost 96% of residents over 65 are on Medicare (18.6% of population). Portions of the county with the highest concentrations of persons without insurance are found in Garden City, Port Wentworth to the northeastern border, the environs around the Savannah-Hilton Head Island Airport, West Savannah, west Chatham County near the junction of I-95/SR 17 (Ogeechee Rd.) and Abercorn St, and East Savannah north of Thunderbolt. Analysis of the demographics in these areas indicates that persons of Hispanic heritage, Asian, and Other Races have the highest incidence of non-coverage.

Of the total covered population, 63.0% rely on private insurance, either employer based or private provider; and 36.1% rely on public health providers. Of those on public health plans, 51.6% are covered by Medicare, the remainder on Medicaid or VA insurance. More than one-half (57.8%) of those on public insurance fall below 138% of the poverty threshold, whereas approximately two-thirds of the population with private insurance are above 138% of poverty level. Clearly, there is a division between the types of insurance coverage and income.

Mental Wellness

Mental wellness is defined a positive state of thriving, beyond just the absence of illness, characterized by the ability to cope with stress, realize potential, work productively, contribute to the community, and find purpose, involving an active, ongoing process of building resilience and balance through self-care and healthy habits. Conversely, mental health disorders are defined as a wide range of conditions that affect mood, thinking, and behavior, particularly in a way that has an undesirable impact on some aspect of their life. Numerous factors contribute to mental illness such as genetics, societal influences, and physical environment.

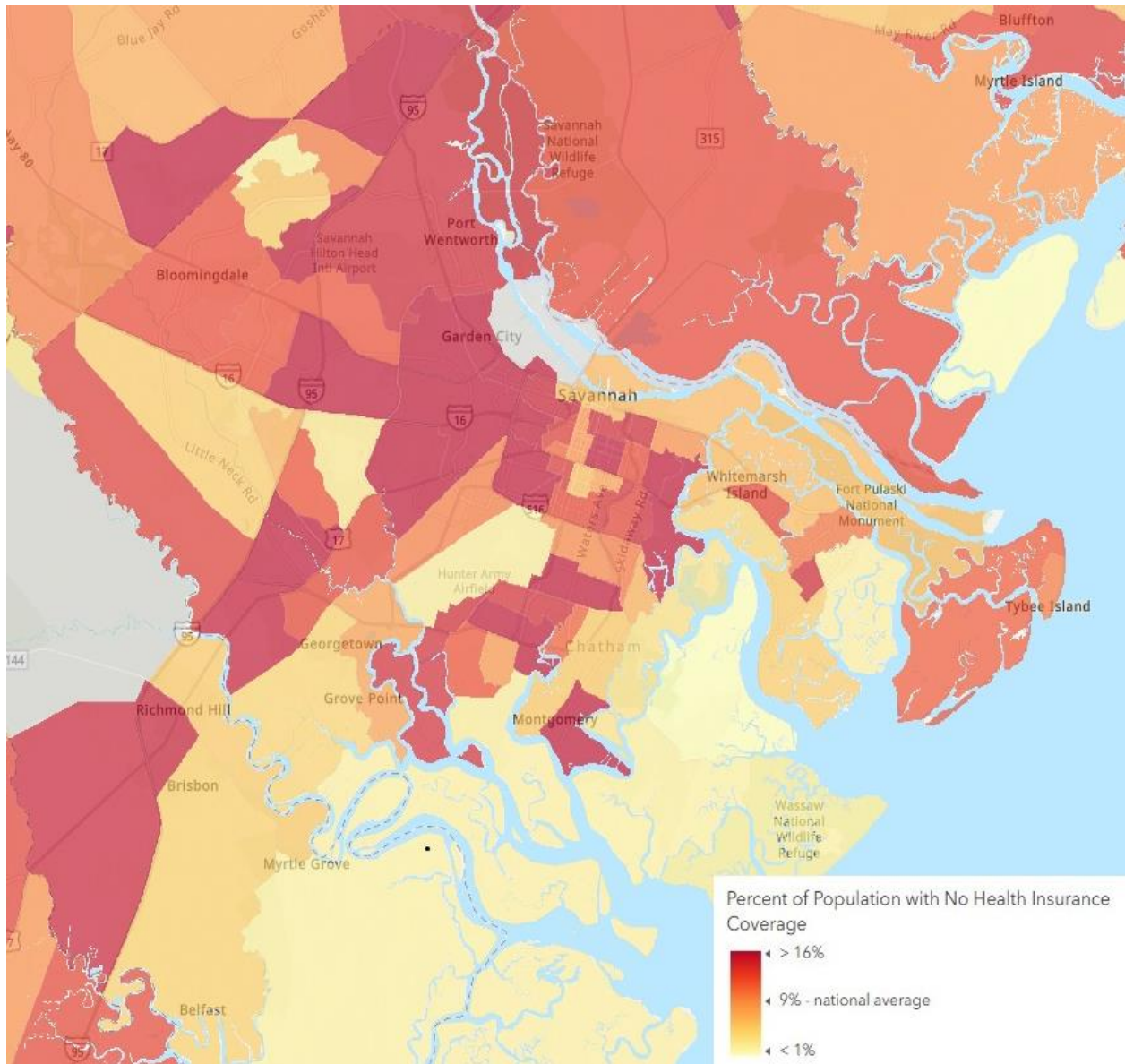


Exhibit 8.8 – Savannah-Chatham County: Health Insurance Coverage

A 2023 SAMHSA (Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration) survey revealed that within the southeastern coastal region, 23.5% of persons over 18 experienced some form of mental illness (compared to Statewide 25%), with 6.9% reporting serious mental illness (compared to Statewide 5.8%). Approximately 8.5% experienced co-occurring substance abuse disorder and mental illness, compared to 9.0% Statewide. Chatham County has been partnered with the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition (CGIC) to develop strategic pathways to address community health issues including mental health, further ensuring that communities in Chatham County foster wellness. The 2023 Blueprint status report shows the County is making strides in areas such as income, health and graduation rates, but improvement to quality-of-life issues lags somewhat behind.

Individuals suffering with a mental health condition have often been subject to confrontation by law enforcement when their condition presents a challenge, leading to arrests and abandonment at a hospital ER. This historically impacts both the individual and the law enforcement and emergency medical service workers systems.

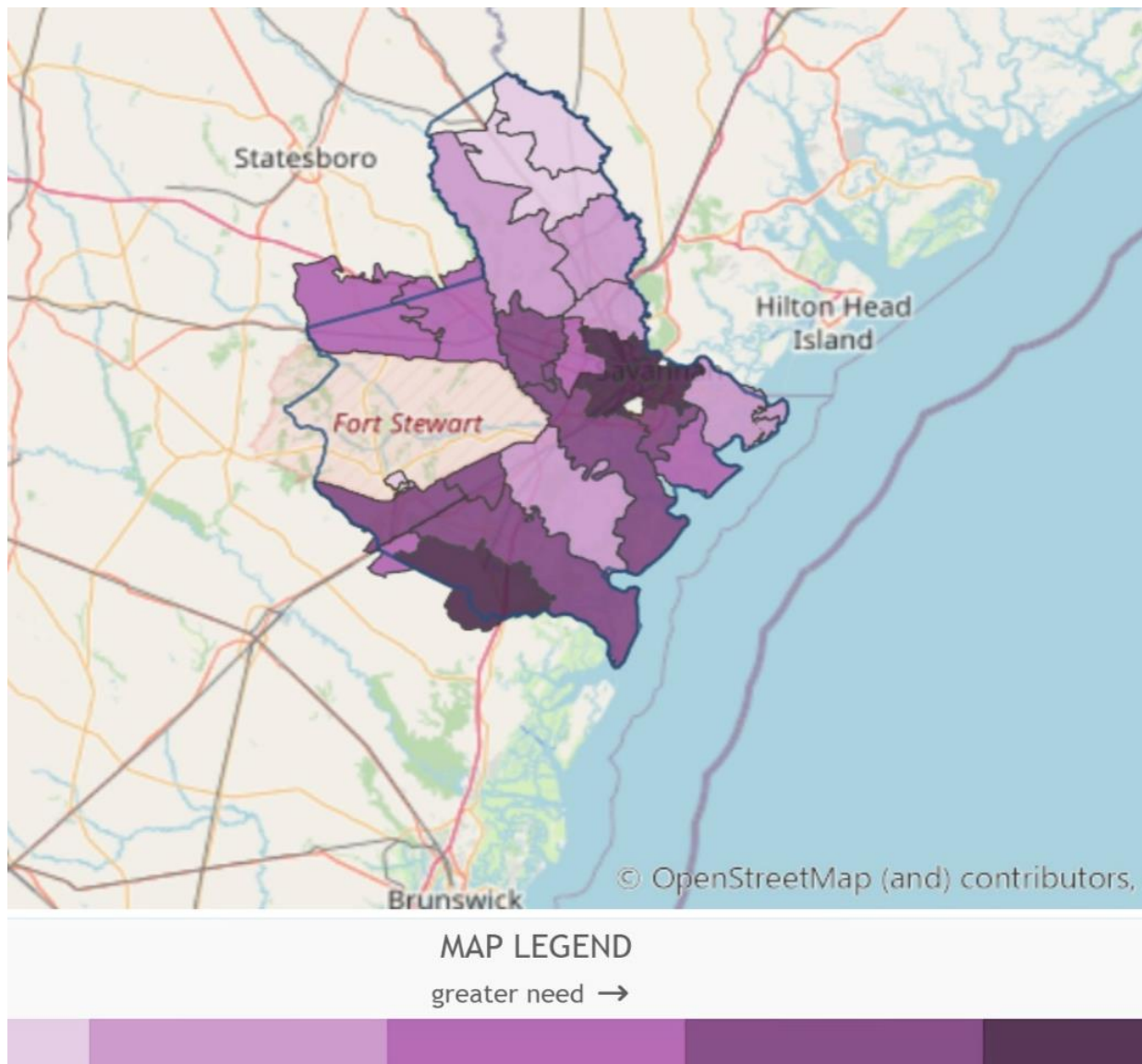


Exhibit 8.9 – Savannah-Chatham County: Mental Health Index

To address this issue, law enforcement officers in Savannah Police Department and Chatham County Sheriff's Office, receive intensive Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training. This training is designed to reduce injuries, prevent unnecessary arrests, and connect individuals in crisis with appropriate services. This National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) approved program focuses on de-escalation, recognizing mental health symptoms, and safely managing crises. The key components of the training encompass:

- Core 40-Hour CIT Training: A comprehensive 5-day course covering mental health disorders, substance abuse, developmental disabilities, and legal issues.
- De-escalation Skills: Practical, role-play scenarios that teach officers how to calm situations without using force.
- Empathy Training: Direct interaction with individuals and family members who have lived experience with mental illness.
- Local Resources: Site visits to local emergency receiving facilities and psychiatric hospitals.

Specialized Units

The Savannah Police Department (SPD) utilizes an Enhanced Crisis Intervention Team (ECIT) that includes officers trained in advanced techniques and partnerships with mental health clinicians. The goal of establishing the SPD Behavioral Health Unit (BHU) is to create an effective community intervention to reduce the use of jail for adults, young adults and juveniles who may need alternative services or may have behavioral health, substance abuse needs. The mission of SPD BHU Partnership is to promote enhanced child safety, child permanency and child and family well-being through effective interventions with families having parental substance use/abuse disorders and involvement with the justice system and child protective services.

Officers and other first responders in the BHU Team receive 24-hour specialized Enhanced Crisis Intervention training in addition to the 40-hour CIT course. The team addresses opioid and substance abuse problems through the creation of multidisciplinary teams between first responders and other victim service providers, relieving pressure on emergency medical service providers and internment facilities. To maintain partner networks, program connections, community groups, and referral sources, Service Coordination is staffed through the Savannah Police/Behavioral Health Unit with a dedicated Program Manager. Service Coordination's focus is crime and overdose reduction through the identification and engagement of individuals who are chronically arrested, and families affected by it, whose root cause of behavior is related to opioid and substance use disorders.

Additionally, the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition, in partnership with the Chatham County government, is working with law enforcement, a mental health provider and multiple agencies to establish a Community Data Platform Development HIPAA-compliant system that will allow data to be shared seamlessly across multiple systems, ensuring that stakeholders have the information they need to make informed decisions.

Food Access & Nutritional Education

Food insecurity is an economic and social indicator resulting in a direct impact on a community's overall well-being, contributing to chronic health problems and mental health issues. An area devoid of fresh, healthy foods is considered a "food desert", whereas areas that are over saturated with fast food establishments, and ready availability of processed and junk foods are described as a "food swamp". Food insecurity is also associated with socio-economic factors including income and poverty, unemployment, disability, age, and transportation alternatives.

Unemployment is a serious factor in food insecurity. When individuals struggle to find work, it puts a strain on myriad aspects of life including finances, mental wellness, safety, and food security. According to the Community Needs Assessment, 13% of Chatham County's population experienced food insecurity in 2022, a 2.5% increase from 2021.

Urbanized areas typically are dependent on the ability to purchase food sources, as food growth opportunities are typically limited to backyards, community gardens and urban farming on the periphery of more intensely developed locales. Given the County's widespread development pattern, it is evident that there is a lack of full-scale grocery stores and markets, typically measured within a mile radius, to accommodate each community. Mini-markets, convenience stores, and discount establishments such as Dollar General that sell frozen and package goods, but not fresh meats and produce, prevail in the urban landscape, and are primarily located along commercial corridors and within nodes adjacent to highway interchanges.

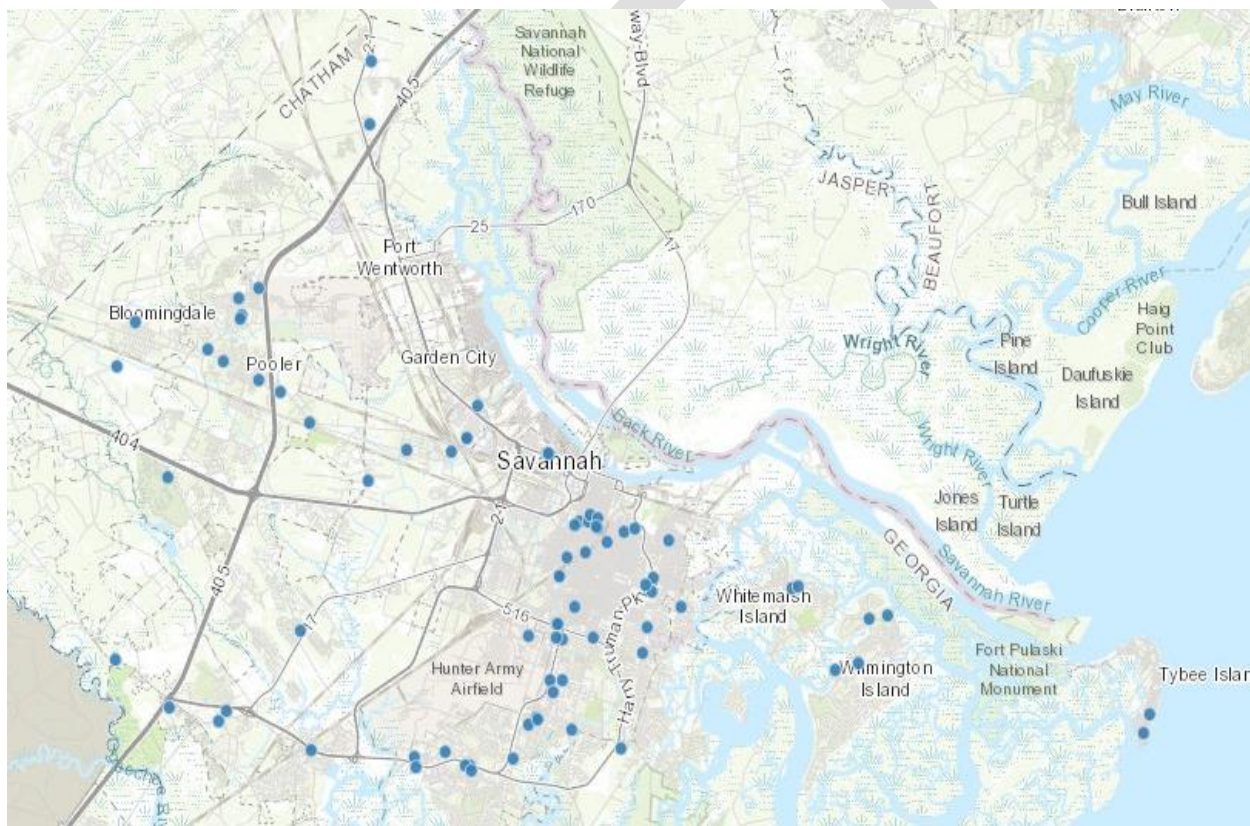


Exhibit 8.10 – Savannah-Chatham County: Grocery Stores

Exhibit 8.11 identifies the distribution of grocery stores within the County and Savannah that are within a 10-minute walk. It is evident that there are portions of the Unincorporated County, particularly in the western portions of the County, south of SR 16, and in the triangle formed between the Cities of Pooler, Garden City, and Port Wentworth, which are void of any grocery stores.

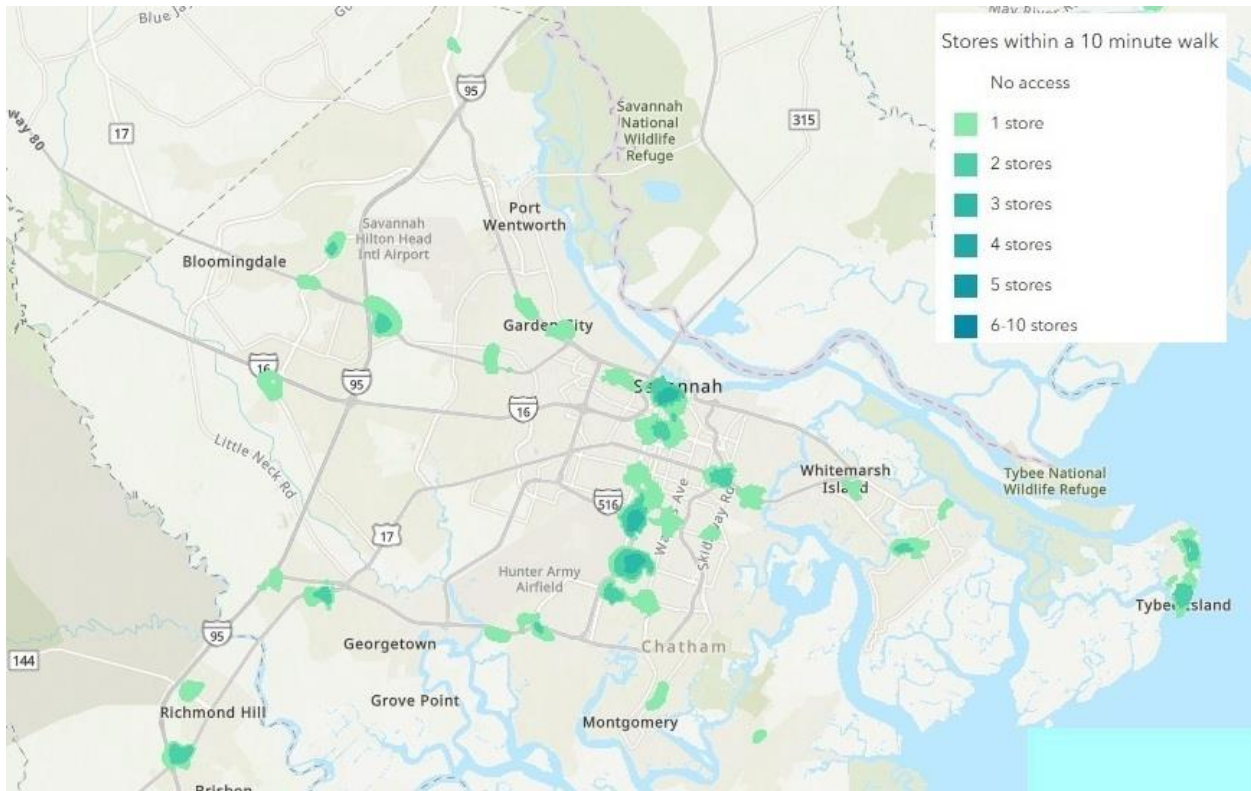


Exhibit 8.11 – Savannah-Chatham County: Distribution of Stores Within a 10-Minute Walk

Exhibit 8.12 depict low-income census tracts in Savannah and Chatham County where a significant percentage of residents are located more than a mile from a full-scale supermarket, some of which also contain a high proportion of residents with challenges accessing transportation. The majority of portions of the County experiencing food insecurity are located within Savannah, Garden City, and the surrounding adjacent unincorporated environs in tracts where generally more than 60% of the population earn less than \$75,000 annually and on average 25% of the residents are living below the poverty line.

SNAP Benefits Assistance

According to ACS 2024 data, 10.4% of households in Chatham County received SNAP benefits. Households with no residents over age 60 comprised 60.8% of recipients. Female headed householders comprised 45.5% of recipients, non-family households 34.6%, and married couple families 11.7%. The St. Joseph’s/Candler Hospital needs assessment surveyed shopping activities of SNAP recipients. The proportion of SNAP respondents increased in 2024 over prior years, although lower than 60% in 2022. The majority reported using them at large supermarkets and local grocery stores. An average of 50% ate vegetables and fruit daily, although if the products were fresh or canned is not specified, indicating a slight increase from 2022. However, almost a quarter reported challenges affording fruits and vegetables a few times a month or more and 25% reported having to cut meals a few times a month or more due to not having money for food.

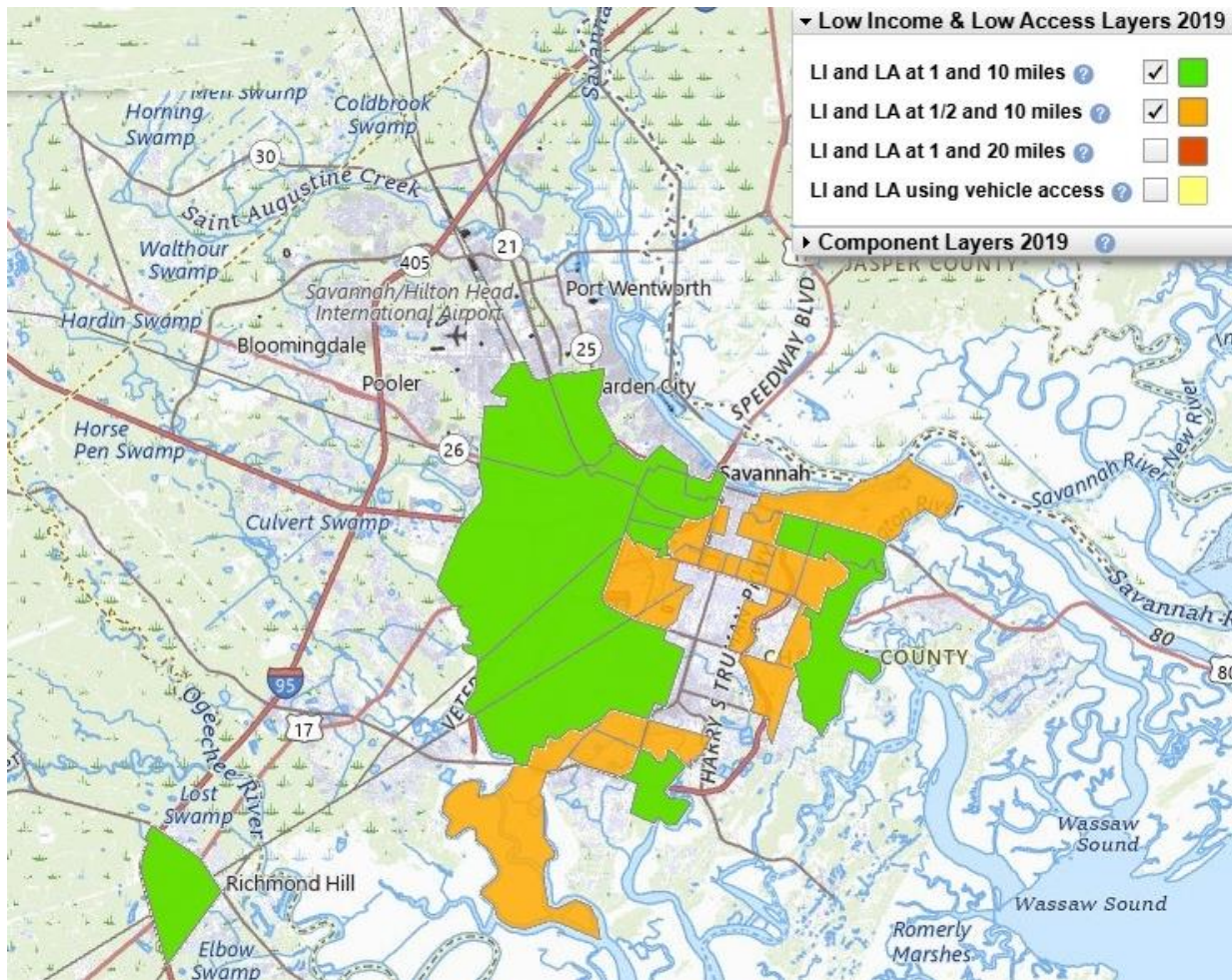


Exhibit 8.12 – Savannah-Chatham County: Food Deserts

Families who meet the income eligibility requirements or who receive SNAP benefits can apply through their children’s school to receive free meals. The federal Free Lunch Program ensures that students have access to at least one nutritious meal during the school day. Approximately 64.4% of students Countywide qualify for the FLP. Although the proportion of SNAP recipients has decreased over the Plan 2024 period, a significant segment of the population still need assistance in providing sustenance for their households. In alignment with food access, knowledge of food nutrition is just as important, and many people may not recognize the relationship between nutritional value and health conditions. Education and outreach is important to assist both the provision and quality of food resources.

Progress Toward Reduction in Food Insecurity

Over the 2040 Plan period, representatives from Healthy Savannah, a non-profit coalition launched in 2007, associated with 200 partner organizations, has been working on improving their Nutrition Program with community advocates to redesign the Savannah Chatham Food Policy Council (SCFPC). The mission of the SCFPC is to “Coordinate and communicate efforts that develop, support, and promote policies that impact equitable access, sustainable production, and widespread understanding of healthy local food.” The organization has been working with the Chatham

County Commission and Savannah City Council to amend local ordinances and development standards to facilitate or remove deterrents to equitable food access efforts; provide and use consistency for community food gardens; enact food service guidelines at schools, hospital cafeterias, catered public events; and support urban farming in lower-income communities. A recent *Retirement Living* (Flynn, Jack, November 14, 2025) study revealed that Georgia overall has the third highest poverty rate among seniors, with almost 8% of the population over 65 facing food insecurity. To address nutritionally underserved seniors in poverty in the Chatham County region, the Senior Citizens Inc. organization delivers 1,600 nutritious meals daily.

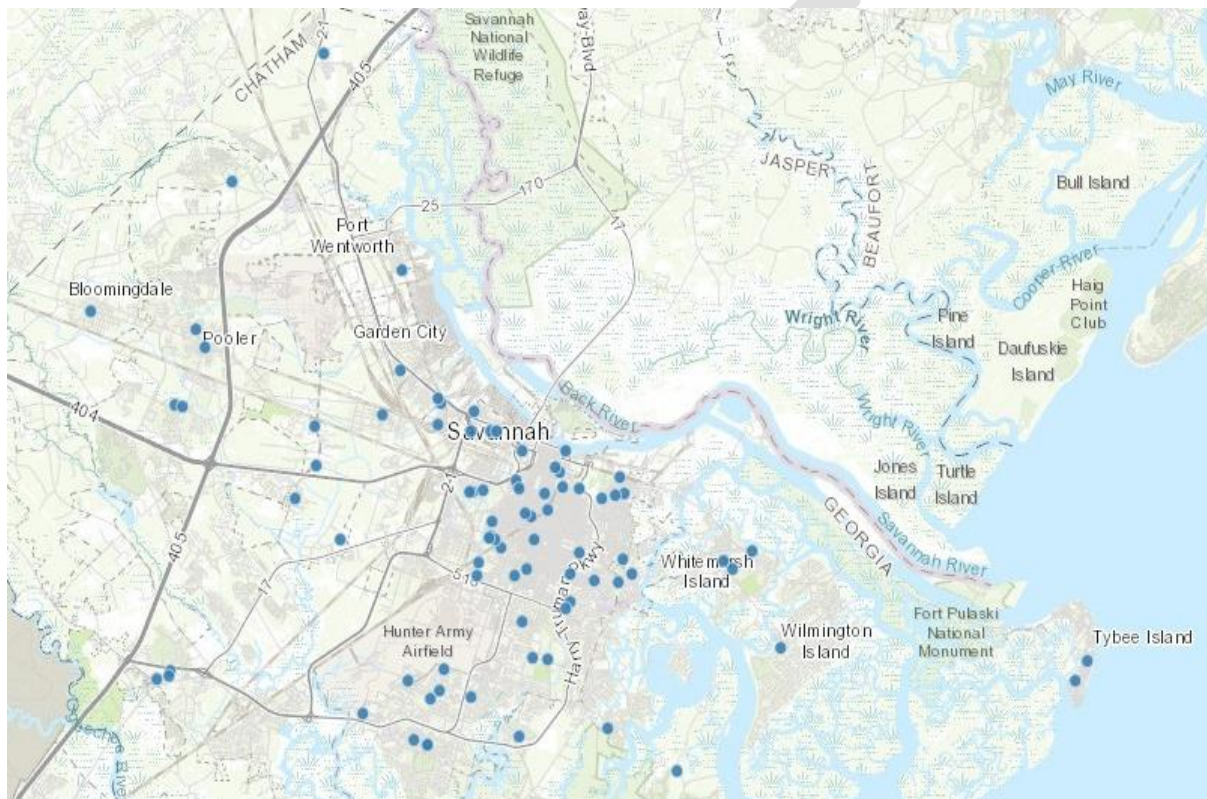


Exhibit 8.13 – Community Food Gardens

Chatham County manages the establishment of community gardens primarily through its existing Residential-Agriculture (R-A) zoning district. The City of Savannah established the Community Garden Policy in 2011 to allow community groups to utilize vacant City-owned properties for community gardens. The Community Garden Manual was updated on 10/2020 to provide guidance, terms of operation, site selection and plan checklist, and establish standards on the utilization of targeted plots for agricultural use, including City owned lots and lots purchased with FEMA grants by the City of Savannah, as part of a flood mitigation program) and clarify the distinction between community gardens (defined as a single parcel of land divided into separate plots and gardened collectively, wherein each plot is worked by an individual or a group to grow produce and flowers for personal use and/or for donation) and urban farms, which operate as a business for profit. A fundamental requirement is that only raised beds with imported soil are

utilized, with no direct plantings into existing soil.

Healthy Corner Store Initiative

The Healthy Corner Store Initiative in Savannah, GA, led by Healthy Savannah and the YMCA of Coastal Georgia, aims to reduce nutrition insecurity by increasing access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food in underserved areas. Funded by a CDC REACH grant, the program helps local corner stores stock produce, whole grain product, low sodium canned options, and low-fat dairy, in targeted food desert areas. Secondary benefits include providing assistance to store owners with managing SNAP benefits and the applicability of "double-up" incentives which doubles the amount of produce for the original price. The program has been shown to increase sales of healthy items for businesses and improve healthy food access for the community, resulting in a reduction of high-risk disease conditions.

Farmer's Markets

In an effort to increase access to healthy and affordable foods, Forsyth Farmers Market holds a farmer's market every Saturday at 13 E Park Ave. The YMCA of Coastal Georgia and Healthy Savannah operate Farm Truck 912, which is stationed at several different locations in the City every day of the week offering local and fresh produce for primarily Black/African American communities most in need of healthy foods. Other farm to table market resources include Savannah State Farmers Market on U.S. Highway 80 West, Davis Produce on U.S. 80 near Tybee Island, and Keller's Flea Market at 5901 Ogeechee Rd. in western Savannah.

REAL Task Force Health Analysis

The REAL Health team focused on the lack of access to affordable, healthy food in low-wealth populations of color communities in Chatham County. The primary challenge identified was that communities of color exist under a "food apartheid" system, whereby access to food is segregated by race and geography, particularly in Savannah. In the City, populations of color comprise just over 50% of the residents. However, they constitute roughly three-quarters of individuals living in areas without healthy food access. This results in the concentration of unhealthy venues (e.g., fast food, liquor stores, corner stores, and convenience stores) in majority populations of color neighborhoods, while grocery stores with fresh produce and restaurants with healthy options flourish in more White areas of the City.

The committee established a causal association between race, poverty and income in the production, distribution and marketing of food, resulting in food insecurity and chronic disease outcomes. The areas most impacted by these disparities in Savannah are the 31404 and 31415 zip codes, which correlate to the areas identifying food deserts in Exhibit 8.12 above. Recommendations include:

- Evaluate the viability of Savannah opening supermarkets sustained by the local community (co-op) or a non-profit organization.
- Increase the availability of healthy food in existing corner stores.
- Expand of the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP) incentives for fresh produce.
- Incorporate food placement strategies in food retail stores to improve dietary related

behaviors.

- Create initiatives focused on reducing the price of healthy food in existing stores.

Open Space Access

Chatham County offers extensive access to open spaces, parks, and recreational facilities through both the County and City of Savannah parks departments. These include community parks, nature preserves, sports complexes, and walking trails with various amenities, which are further discussed in the Natural Resources Element. Proximity to green places has been linked to an increase in physical activity. Regular physical activity health benefits include weight control, muscle and bone strengthening, improved mental well-being, opportunity for social interaction, and improved life expectancy, as well as reduction in the risk of type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and some cancers.

It has been found that proximity to green space within a 10-minute walk (roughly one-half mile) results in higher life satisfaction. The County hosts a Wellness Walk every Wednesday at either Whitemarsh Preserve or trails behind Tom Triplett Park near Pooler. In 2025, 89.3% of the population countywide has access to a park, trail, or recreation facility, an increase over 2020. Downtown Savannah encompasses multiple opportunities for accessing greens and parks within short walking distances. The Trust for Public Land's ParkServe index estimates that 50% of City residents live within a 10-minute walk of a public park and 76% within walking distance of some type of greenspace. A higher proportion of seniors live within half-mile of a park, with a slightly lower rate for children and residents between the ages of 20 to 64. Additionally, proximity varies between income groups, with a greater proportion of lower-income residents living within one-half mile. There does not appear to be definitive racial disinvestment and exclusionary policies that have shaped who has access to parks and quality public spaces, as statistics do not disclose a significant difference in predominant race of residents benefitting from a short distance to a park. However, statistics show that the majority of residents in lower density unincorporated identify as White, which likely influences this finding.

According to the 2020 Census, 97% of Chatham County residents lived in urban areas, suggesting that park access is largely dependent on the density and infrastructure of Savannah and surrounding municipalities. Some of the disparity in access countywide is due to the natural location of resources, particularly in more rural portions of the County. Access is further constrained by a disconnected street network, lack of interconnected sidewalk infrastructure and dedicated bicycle facilities along many streets in the County. Often the right of way of roads leading to popular open space areas are narrow and winding, with limited space for pedestrians and cyclists, and due to lower densities, park and open space amenities may be distanced too far from residential areas to be safely walkable for most of the population. However, most, although not all, parks within the unincorporated area have internal, paved, walking paths. The issue most often cited by survey respondents is that access to the parks and open space amenities which might provide internal pedestrian and bicycle paths, is limited to auto travel.

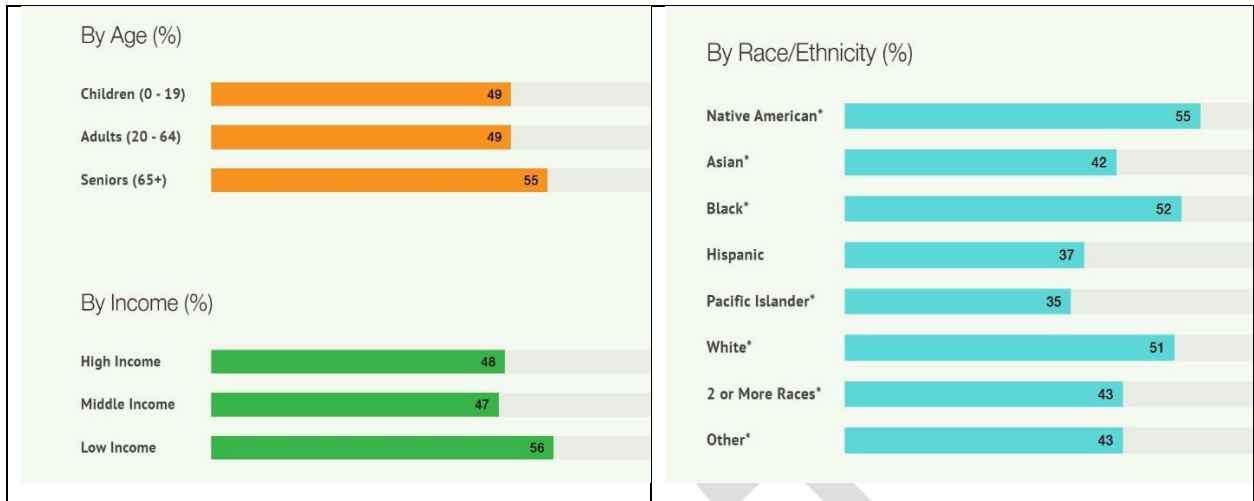


Figure 8.13 – Savannah-Chatham County: % Within One-Half Mile Proximity to Parks

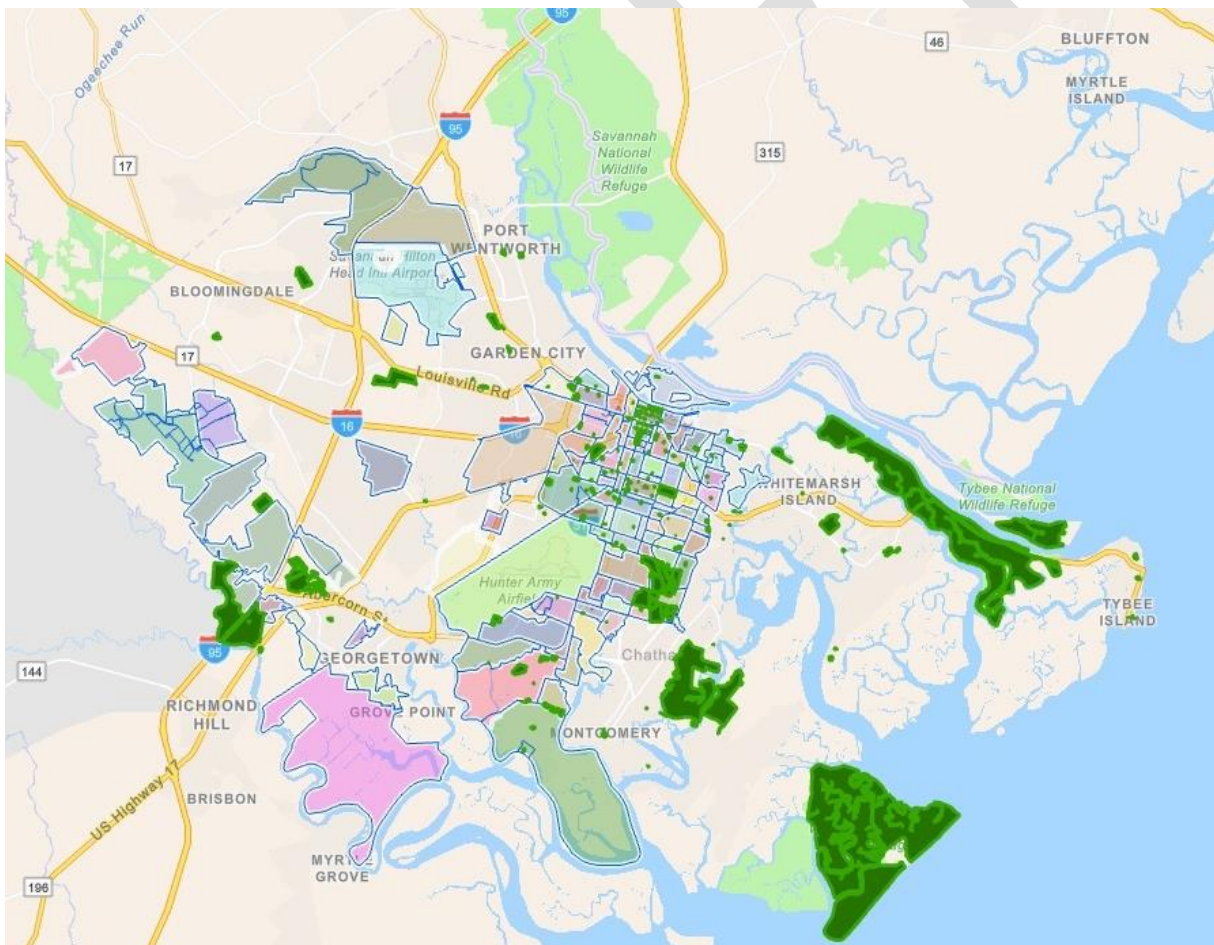


Exhibit 8.14 – Savannah-Chatham County: Parks and Recreation Areas

In addition to providing an adequate quantity and type of parks, recreation, trails and open space amenities, it is important to ensure equity of access to all residents. Interconnectivity improvements and extensions to trails, bikeways, pedestrian paths and other non-vehicular paths should be incorporated between neighborhoods and within green spaces to provide access for those without personal transportation. To decrease the imbalance of accessible park and greenspace opportunities, the County's 2025–2026 budget for capital improvement projects includes increased funding for park services and Special Service Districts to improve infrastructure in unincorporated areas, increasing connectivity.

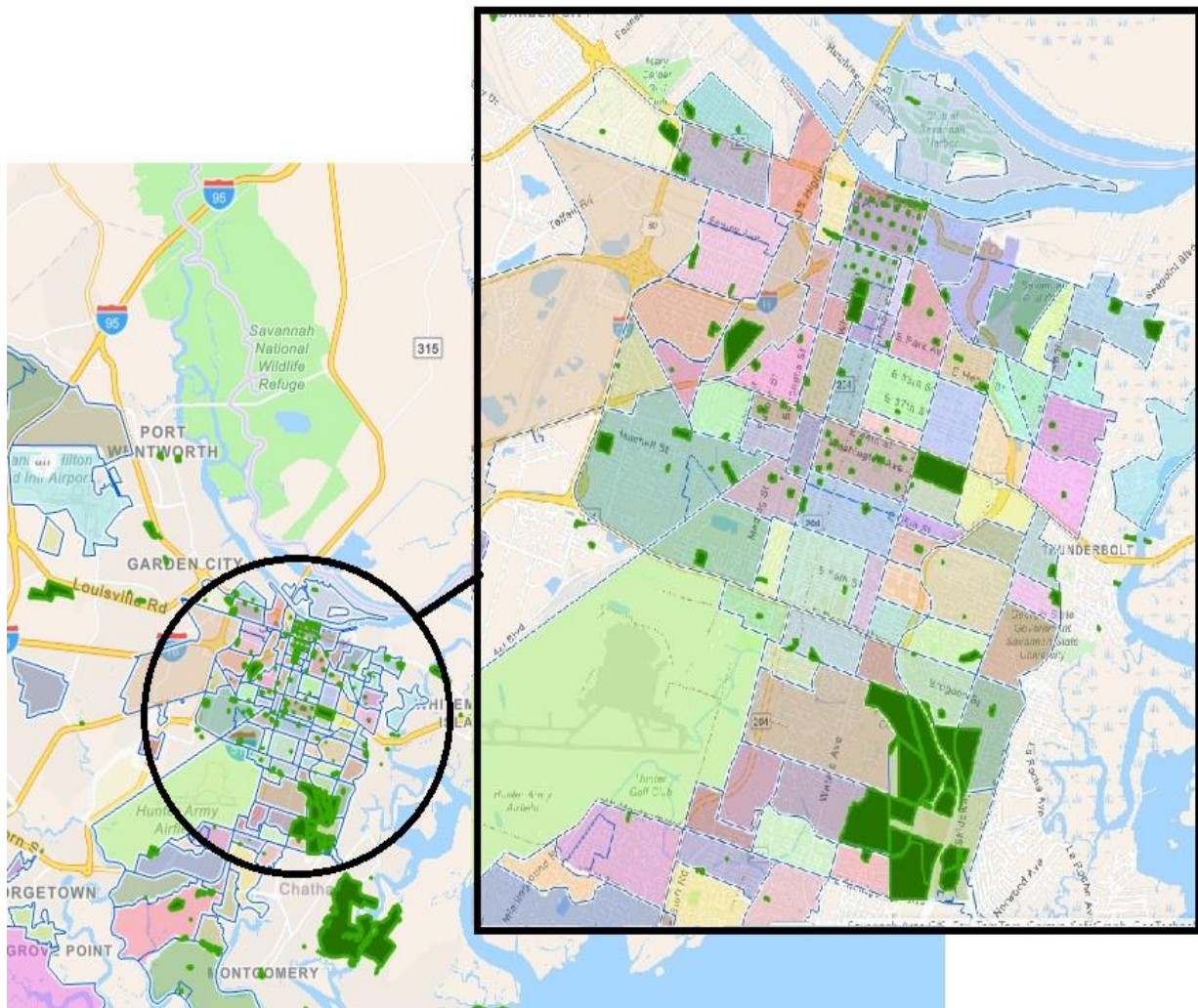


Exhibit 8.15 – Savannah City Core Area Park and Recreation Facilities

The County is actively upgrading pedestrian infrastructure funded by SPLOST funds through multi-use paths, sidewalk construction, and intersection safety projects, focusing on connectivity between residential and commercial zones, including:

- Whitmarsh Island Pedestrian improvements
- Lower Haw River State Natural Area
- L. Scott Stell Park walking trail
- Penn Waller road sidewalks near schools and State Rd. 204
- Marsh Hen pedestrian and Bike Trail to connect US 80 to Tybee Island (proposed)

The City of Savannah utilizes impact fees to fund parks and recreation amenities. Improvements are documented in the Capital Improvement Element (CIE), adopted February 2023, which amended the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The fee program was activated July, 2023. Other potential funding sources for consideration to augment the SPLOST in unincorporated County include:

- A park dedication ordinance (PDO) which requires a developer to provide land, funding, or both to meet the park needs created by a new development, typically within the property boundary of the contributing development.
- Impact fees, or an in-lieu fee, which are one-time charges required from developers to offset the cost of city infrastructure, such as parks, that will need to be built to serve the new development.

Tide to Town Plan

The Tide to Town Urban Trail will ultimately be a protected network of walking and bicycling trails connecting all of Savannah and Chatham County. When complete, the core route will be a 30+ mile continuous transportation system connecting 62 neighborhoods, 30 schools, 3 major hospitals, and several economic centers. It will be a combination of off-road shared-use paths and barrier-separated on-street bike lanes. The Tide to Trail Plan's purpose is to ensure that this major route of the growing citywide trail and path system supports community connectivity and active recreation while also promoting economic, social, and recreational justice for the culturally rich, yet economically low-wealth communities along the trail. The network is intended to provide priority access to low-income and minority neighborhoods, connecting homes to schools, employment centers, and services, as well as the CAT public transit system. Segments of the trail are completed along Truman Parkway, ultimately providing a single continuous 7-mile-long stretch of trail along Truman Parkway from Police Memorial Trail to Lake Mayer Park.

Savannah & Ogeechee Canal Trail

The 16.5 mile Savannah-Ogeechee Canal, constructed in the 1820s, originally served as an important plantation trade route for getting plantation goods to market. The Chatham County Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs Department is working with the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal Society and the PATH Foundation to transform the entire canal into a multi-purpose linear park. The current 5.3 miles of pedestrian and bicycle trail is paved on portions, dirt on others, winding through sandhills, swamp, and pine forests. Boardwalks traverse wetland areas but high tides can sometimes cause flooding, and alligators sometimes share the trail.

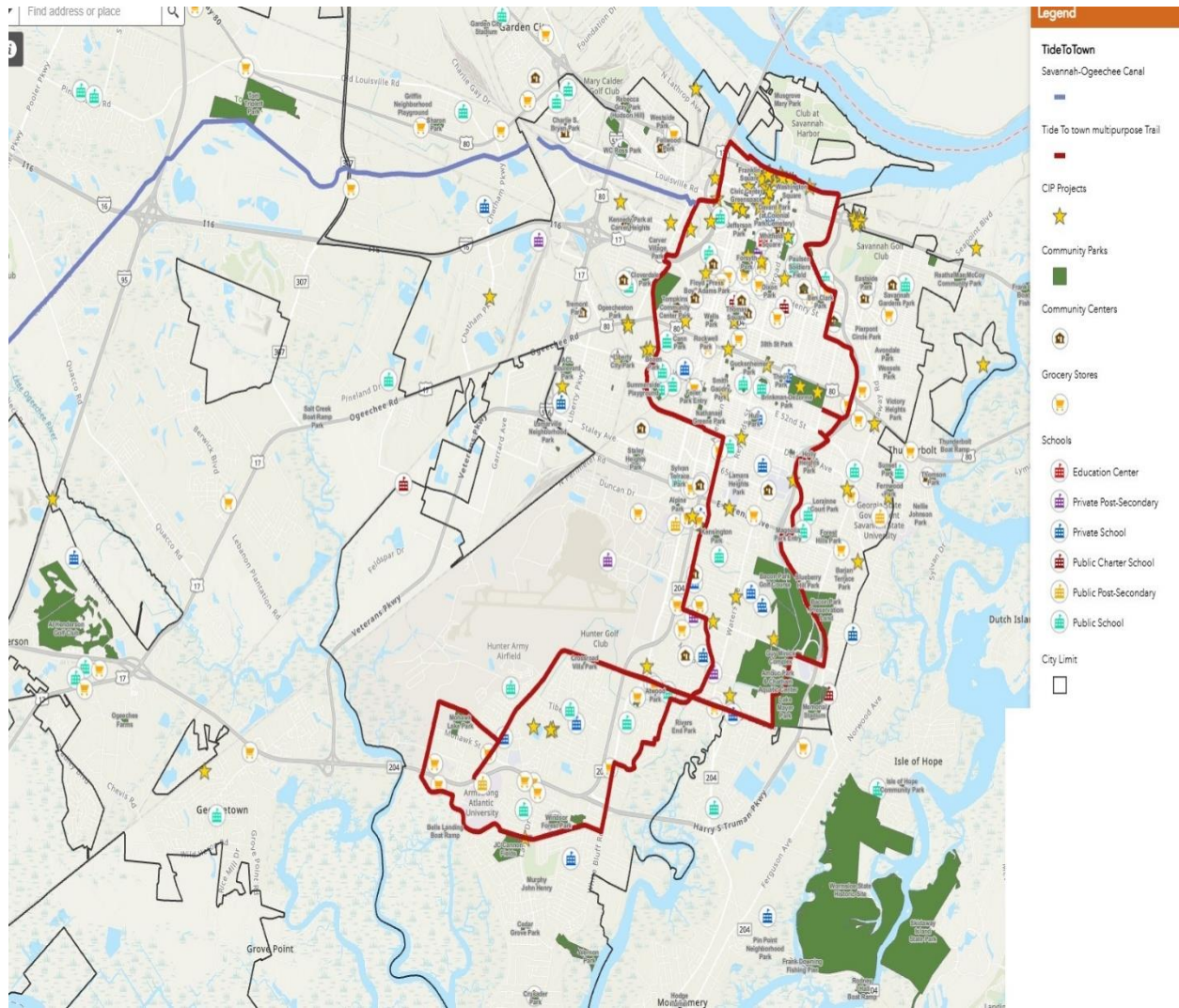


Exhibit 8.16 – Tide to Town Trail

The ultimate plan for the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal Trail, shown on Exhibit 8.16, is to create a fully restored, 16.5-mile linear park and trail system connecting the Savannah and Ogeechee Rivers. It aims to provide a multi-use recreational trail for walking and biking, linking neighborhoods and historic sites while preserving the natural landscape and supporting environmental education.

Climate Change

Variable changes in weather patterns due to climate change impact all facets of society. Research has indicated that children, the elderly, health compromised and communities of color are at higher risk of climate related health impacts. Evidence strongly suggests climate change is an environmental injustice that is likely to exacerbate existing racial disparities across a broad range of health outcomes.

More frequent and intense heat episodes have increased the number of emergency room visits for strokes, dehydration, and other heat-related illnesses. Studies have also revealed the correlation between excessive heat and violent crimes, which are especially linked in low-income areas (The Urban Crime and Heat Gradient in High and Low Poverty Areas/NBER). At the same time, extreme cold temperatures decrease the amount of time people spend outside, which in turn lowers levels of vitamin D, resulting in weaker immune systems, seasonal affective disorder (seasonal depression), and even more serious consequences for the unhoused or economically disadvantaged who cannot afford adequate heat.

Many states and local governments are ill-prepared for large-scale weather pattern deviations (such as hurricanes, sea level rise, flooding, hard freezes and ice storms, heat waves) resulting in power source interruptions and infrastructure damage. These events, and efforts to assist and protect our most vulnerable populations and communities are discussed in more detail in the **Natural Resources Element, Resiliency and Local Preparedness** section.

It is known that renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, help to reduce the human impact on climate change by reducing noxious emissions from coal-fired power plants. Research also shows that implementing renewable energy policies have the added benefit of improving public health. A concentrated local effort must be made to help reduce the impacts of emissions and other pollutants on Chatham County's population, further discussed in the **Natural Resources Element, Renewable Energy** section.

Community Health Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Effectively address mental health by educating the public and reducing stigma, increasing early intervention programs, removing gaps and barriers, and increasing access to treatment including returning and detained residents, children, adolescents, and the homeless.

Addressing mental health through public education, early intervention, and a holistic focus on lifestyle factors like nutrition and mental wellness is essential to improving individual outcomes and reducing broader societal burdens. Addressing gaps such as financial constraints, insurance limitations, and provider shortages ensures that under-represented groups receive the care they deserve. Early detection prevents symptoms from escalating into more severe, chronic conditions. Normalizing mental health in schools and workplaces fosters inclusive environments where individuals feel safe discussing their needs and seeking treatment.

- Continue to promote and expand the network of providers to meet regularly and provide better coordination of services and leveraging of resources.
- Increase access to recovery and crisis services and increase capacity of service providers to provide for those who lack resources.
- Advocate for expanded high quality transitional care management services to help residents with behavioral health illnesses successfully re-enter the community.
- Integrate behavioral health screening with primary care assessments and services.
- Enhance accessibility to behavioral health services by developing community-based and school-based behavioral health/counseling centers that operate on a sliding fee scale.
- Identify an organization with a steward who will create and maintain an online resource directory specific to behavioral health services.
- Increase employer and employee awareness and training regarding health insurance coverage to facilitate a broader understanding of the benefits of behavioral health services and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) resources.
- Increase suicide prevention efforts to include safety and resilience training.

Goal 2: Invest in community-based and employer-based health resources to increase health equity by providing access to preventive health services, health education, and strategies to encourage individuals and families to adopt healthy behaviors.

Investing in community and employer-based health resources is critical for health equity because it addresses the root social determinants of health, such as housing, food security, and safe environments, where people live and work. These targeted investments reduce disparities, lower long-term costs, boost workforce productivity, and build essential trust within underserved populations. Community investments tackle the root causes of poor health, including housing, education, transportation, and safety, improving access to healthy food, safe, walkable spaces, and clean air, reducing the risk of chronic conditions.

- Expand community access, knowledge, and availability to preventative services including physical activity, nutrition, and tele-health to integrate behavioral health care with primary health care.
- Increase funding for and improve knowledge of how to access and enroll in affordable health insurance and connection with primary care providers.
- Network with healthcare providers and patients with programming for successful implementation of current clinical and nutritional guidelines to prevent and manage chronic illness; including but not limited to mental illness, cancer, diabetes, weight management, heart disease, asthma and other significant community illnesses and diseases.
- Provide consumer preventive education programs free (participatory education) including tele-medicine programs at school-based health centers.
- Create systemic ways to provide the community with success stories in behavioral health and primary care.

Goal 3: Instill healthy practices in schools by providing comprehensive health education, nutrient-rich foods, opportunities for physical activity, and prevention education including resiliency skills (mindfulness and emotional intelligence) towards behavioral health.

Instilling healthy practices in schools is considered an educational and social imperative that directly links student well-being to academic and lifelong success. Research indicates that students who regularly eat breakfast and balanced meals have significantly higher grades compared to those with poor diets. Establishing healthy habits helps prevent the development of chronic diseases like heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. Health education provides students with critical thinking skills to avoid risky behaviors such as substance abuse and tobacco use. Providing emotional intelligence and mental wellness training equips students with tools to handle academic pressure, anxiety, and social challenges. Mental wellness training is increasingly valued by employers; schools that instill these "soft skills" prepare students for future leadership and collaborative professional roles.

- Provide health and wellness educational programming specific to adolescents to promote healthy behaviors.
- Implement 30 minutes a day of physical exercise that fosters leadership, sportsmanship, and social skills for students of all abilities in their learning environment.
- Encourage district and school administrators to provide health enrichment and wellness programs to all staff.
- Increase healthy snack options at public and private school events.
- Increase the proportion of public schools with at least 1 full-time or part-time counselor, social worker or psychologist to provide mental health services to students.

Goal 4: Increase access to healthy food for populations that are most likely to be food insecure such as older adults, children, those in poverty, and those that live in food apartheid areas.

Increasing access to healthy food for food-insecure populations is critical to reducing chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease, which are prevalent in these communities. It improves physical and mental health, lowers long-term healthcare costs, and addresses systemic inequities, acting as a preventative approach to enhance overall quality of life.

- Consistently explore policy and funding mechanisms to eliminate food apartheid areas.
- Continue to create farmer and grower support programs to expand all types of gardens, rural and urban farms, food systems, and associated educational programs.
- Provide culturally appropriate educational programming and nutritional counseling specific to healthy cooking and eating habits.
- Advocate and create incentives with local grocery and corner/convenience stores regarding product placement of healthy food options.
- Encourage local institutions to examine their procurement policies to create a current and long-range plan for buying and using local Georgia-grown produce.

Public Safety

It is the responsibility of local government to serve and protect the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens and businesses. The safety of a community is fundamental to the wellbeing and longevity of its residents and economy. In today's world, there are critical threats that communities must continuously monitor: domestic and international terrorism, cybersecurity attacks, environmental and climate related hazards, rising sea levels, social and economic disruptions, and pandemics such as COVID-19. In response to these threats, a successful government employs departments and passes ordinances to plan for emergency preparedness to sustain the safety and health of its community.

In day-to-day life, it is the responsibility of local governments to protect residents and respond to incidents involving criminal activity, car accidents, house fires, and downed power lines.

Generally, for local governments, public safety includes fire protection, emergency management services, and law enforcement.

Emergency Management

Chatham County Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) services all of Chatham County and its municipalities and is responsible for the welfare of the County in the midst and aftermath of major disasters and emergencies. CEMA has developed a Disaster Recovery Plan, Emergency Operations Plan, and Hazard Mitigation Plan to proactively provide protection and courses of action in response to a number of different hazards and emergencies. In the Hazard Mitigation Plan, CEMA has listed severe weather, extreme heat, and flooding as the most likely hazards to impact the county. Hazard mitigation planning reduces loss of life and property by minimizing the impact of disasters. Mitigation plans are key to breaking the cycle of disaster damage and need for reconstruction.

Savannah Fire and Emergency Service Department (SFD)

The City of Savannah Fire and Emergency Service Department (SFD) provides fire protection and emergency response services to the businesses and households within the City of Savannah's boundaries. The City's first fire company was founded in 1759 in the wake of a historic and devastating fire. The Department has continued to grow in size along with the City. As of 2025, approximately 18 administrative staff and 318-325 firefighters were stationed within 15 fire stations citywide. The City's 2026 budget expands operations with a new station at the New Hampstead facility in the western edge of the city, adding 32 fire personnel, bringing total number of stations to 16 and personnel to almost 360 staff. Equipment includes 16 engines, 5 ladder trucks, 2 marine rescue boats, and 2 heavy rescue vehicles. The department is divided into five divisions: Logistics; Investigations; Operations; Special Operations; and Emergency Preparedness.

Chatham Emergency Services (CES)

Chatham Emergency Services (CES), formerly known as Southside Fire Department, was founded in 1961 by a collective of volunteer firefighters as a not-for-profit organization. Over the

early part of the 2040 Plan period, a Chatham County transition team led by County Manager Michael Kaigler, CCPD Chief Jeff Hadley and CCFD Chief James Vickers had been negotiating with Chatham County Emergency Services (CES) to move fire services under the County government umbrella. Recognizing the evolving needs of the community, the CES Board of Directors has expressed their confidence in Chatham County taking on the responsibility of fire services. This insightful decision aspires to ensure the best interests of Chatham County residents and enhance the collaborative efforts between Chatham County and CES to foster a safer and more resilient community for everyone. On June 30, 2024, the County purchased the fire trucks and all equipment from CES. To further support the newly formed Chatham County Fire Department operation, CES leased 14 stations to the County on a long-term lease for \$1 a year. The current staffing for the newly formed Fire Department is 27 officer positions, 89 shift positions, and 36 support staff.

Currently, CES operates 9 EMS stations throughout the County and has a staff of approximately 250 paid and volunteer workers, serving exclusively as the 911 emergency and non-emergency ambulance service in Chatham County. CES is one of only 7 CAAS-accredited ambulance services in Georgia and one of 180 accredited ambulance services in the world, carrying some of the best equipment available anywhere in the EMS industry. The agency is held to rigorous response time standards and also deploys specially trained medical personnel on an infectious disease transport team and tactical (SWAT) medic team.

Law Enforcement

Chatham County

The Chatham County Police Department employs approximately 150 officers and over 20 civilian staff. The department consists of a Patrol Division, Criminal Investigations Division, Forensics Unit, Neighborhood Liaison Officers, Marine Patrol Unit, a SWAT Team in conjunction with the Chatham County Sheriff's Office, and the Chatham County Narcotics Team. The unincorporated county is served from precincts at Whitefield, West Chatham and the Islands.

The Chatham County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) is one of the oldest law enforcement agencies in the United States, established in 1732. The Sheriff's Office serves as the chief law enforcement officer in the County and the Chief is elected every four years. The CCSO is mandated by law to perform certain functions for the County, including maintaining the County Detention Center, located off Chatham Parkway. The current Chatham County Sheriff's Complex was completed in 1993 and the Detention Center was tied in to make up a five unit facility. Current capacity is 2,433 inmates, following two expansions completed by 2012, adding nine detention units to the original facility.

The Enforcement Bureau is comprised of three divisions:

- Street Operations - Handles approximately 7,000 warrants and 60,000 civil processes, delivered by the courts each year. This includes public building security; courtroom security; extraditions; arrest orders; summonses; execution of protection orders; monitoring sex offenders, and writ of execution/levies.
- Court Services - The Sheriff is mandated to execute all warrants and civil processes.

CCSO currently provides this service to Recorders, Magistrate, State, Probate, Superior and Juvenile courts, serving 18 judges. The Court Services Division is staffed with 40 deputies and 26 security personnel. The division also processes over 12,000 inmates through the courts each year and screens over 700,000 visitors through the security checkpoint at the Judicial Complex and Juvenile Court each year.

- Administrative Services – Handles budgeting, quartermaster functions, and telecommunications, as well as managing the grant that operates the Regional K-9 training facility and the eight handlers/instructors, which has qualified K-9 teams from 101 different federal, state and local agencies throughout the southeast. It also operates one of the largest firearms facilities in the southeast United States and provides firearms training to most of the local and federal law enforcement agencies in this area as well as to the local police academy.

Savannah

Law enforcement in the City of Savannah dates to the 1790s in the City’s colonial period where a band of men served as guard and watch under the direction of a captain. The present-day police force was founded in 1854. The Savannah Police Department has continued to protect and serve the City of Savannah through notable and transformative time periods including the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement.

In the early 20th Century, areas outside of Savannah began to grow in population. With this influx of residents, Chatham County officially established its Police Department in 1912. After decades of frequent and close collaboration on numerous matters, the decision was made in 2003 to merge the Savannah Police Department and the Chatham County Police Department. On January 1, 2005, the Savannah–Chatham Metropolitan Police Department (SCMPD) officially became the law enforcement provider for all unincorporated areas in the county and the entire city of Savannah. In 2017, after much public input and discussion, the decision was made to end the contract for the merger of the two police forces.

As of 2026, the Savannah Police Department holds 534 budgeted uniformed positions, and actively recruiting vacancies. The department encompasses the following specialized units:

Savannah Police Department Specialized Units		
Behavioral Health	Dive Team	H.E.A.T Unit
K-9 Unit	Mounted Patrol	Special Events
Traffic Enforcement	Crisis Intervention	Explosive Ordinance Disposal
Mobile Field Force	Honor Guard	Internal Affairs
Reserve Police Officer	SWAT	Training Unit

Figure 8.14 – Savannah Police Department Units

Fire Statistics

The number of emergency calls received by both the City of Savannah Fire Department and Chatham Emergency Services has remained relatively consistent within the past few years. The majority of calls both departments receive are for medical emergencies. While it appears that total

number of fire incidents in the County has increased very slightly, the incidence of structure fires has decreased. In contrast, although 2025 total fires is not yet available for Savannah, statistics indicate an increase in structure related fires with a decreasing trend in total fire incidents, suggesting that code enforcement activities associated with exterior maintenance and non-operational vehicles has resulted in reduction of potential external fire hazards.

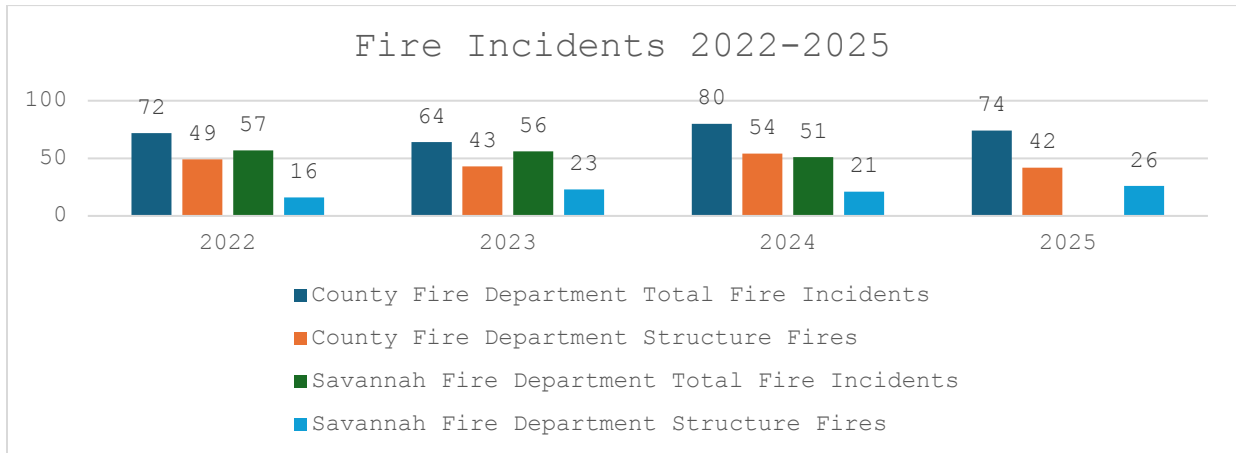


Figure 8.15 – Savannah-Chatham County: Fire Incidents; 2022-2025

Crime Statistics

Unincorporated Chatham County’s total reported crime has decreased overall between 2023 to 2025, based on readily available data. While burglary crimes have remained consistent in number overall, property crimes have been trending downward, and violent crimes by approximately 30%.

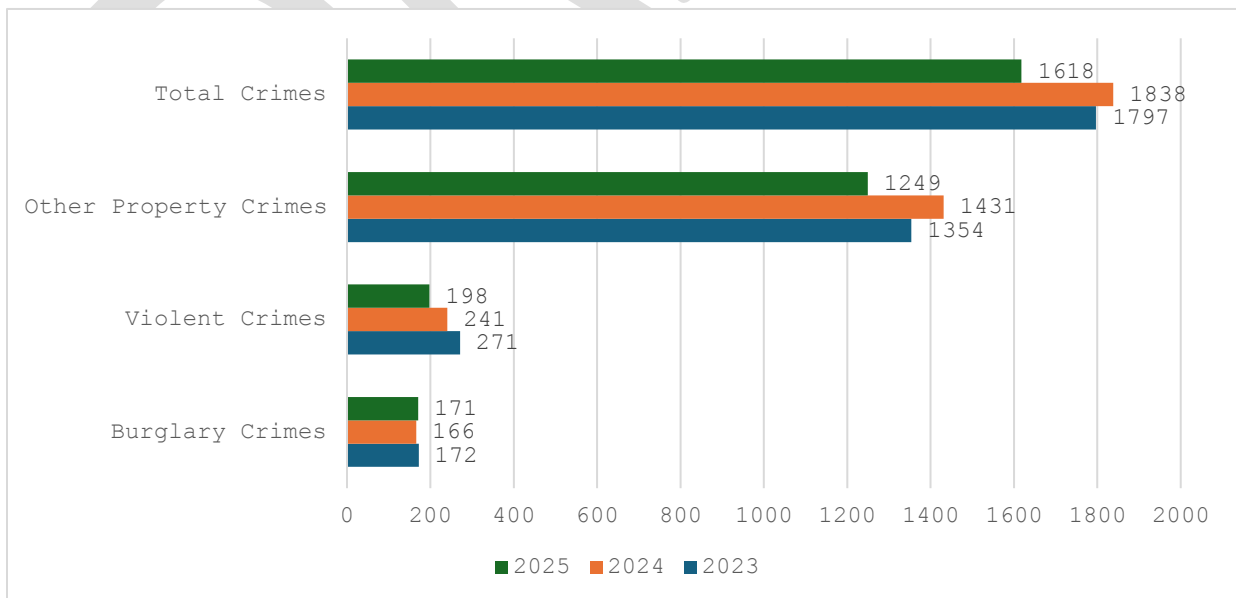


Figure 8.16 – Chatham County Police Department Crime Records

The City of Savannah has witnessed a decrease in overall reported crime between 2020 and 2024. Records indicate a spike in total crimes in each classification experienced in 2022, predominantly property crimes, following the height of COVID. During COVID, restrictions were in place which limited normal activities and affected the number of crimes that occurred. The majority of the overall decrease is the result of fewer violent crimes, while property and burglary crimes have remained fairly constant over the time period. This trend suggests the need to address the root of property crimes in the City, while diligently striving to further decrease violent crimes and continue the positive trend.

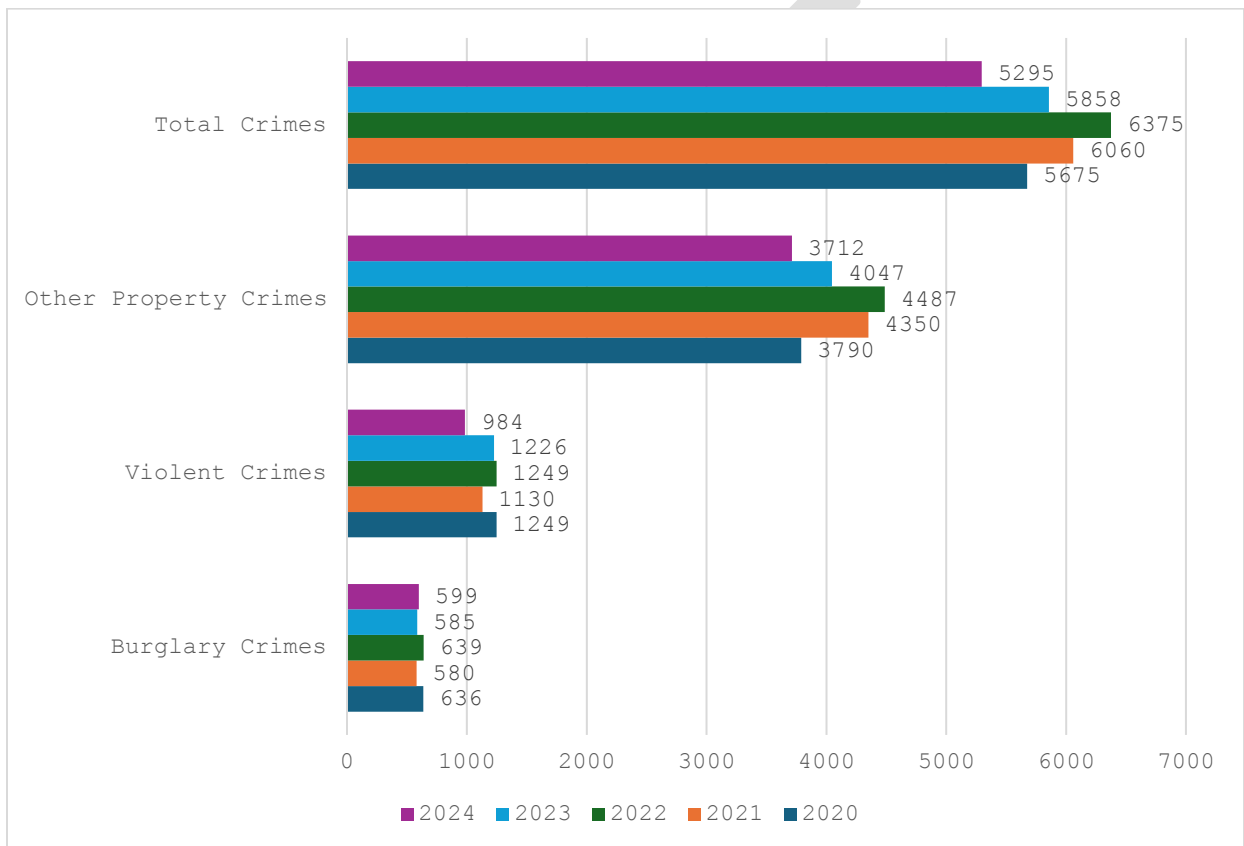


Figure 8.17 – Savannah Crime Statistics 2020 - 2024

According to the Savannah Police Annual Report 2022, the year with the most elevated crime statistics during the period, detailed statistics indicate that there were six (6) defined areas of more concentrated criminal activity, termed “hotspots”. The highest crime density (Hotspot 1) occurred in the NE Historic District, NW Historic District, and MLK/Indian St. neighborhoods. Medium crime density occurred in Hotspot 2 within the Kayton/Frazier, SW Historic District, and W. Victorian District neighborhoods. Hotspot 3 was centralized within the Cuyler/Brownville and Metropolitan neighborhoods, exhibiting a medium crime density. Hotspot 4 included medium and high crime density areas, with incidents occurring primarily in the Victory Square/Pinehurst and the Victory Heights neighborhoods with a small amount in the Bee Road/Whole Foods and East Hill/Victory Manor neighborhoods. The high crime density portion was centered around the Home

Depot located at 1901 E. Victory Dr as the result of shoplifting incidents. The medium crime density area surrounded the Victory Square shopping center and crossed over Victory Dr. and the Harry S. Truman Parkway to neighboring shopping centers. Hotspots 5 and 6 included both high and medium crime density areas within the Abercorn Strip, Oglethorpe Mall, and Southside Commercial District neighborhoods. From a positive perspective, there were a large number of neighborhoods in the City that experienced decreased incidents. Analysis of the higher number of calls within these medium and high crime density neighborhoods correlates with a high concentration of crime, resulting in a hotspot.



Exhibit 8.17 – Crime Hot Spots

Arrest records for both adults and juveniles in Savannah reflect this decrease in overall crimes reported within the five-year time span. As the number of arrests has decreased, data indicates a number of repeat offenders continue to be arrested for criminal activity. This information reveals two things: first, there is a need for an alternate solution to assist and redirect individuals from repeated criminal behavior; and second, fewer crimes are being committed by new offenders, especially among the juvenile population.

REAL Task Force Georgia Systemic Change Alliance Analysis

The REAL Task Force analyzed trends in the public safety and the criminal justice system as it pertains primarily to the Savannah jurisdiction, although generally trends are likely to be relevant countywide. However, the analysis and recommendations for implementation were based on 2015 to 2020 data, and this does not reflect conditions and trends experienced over the Plan 2040 period. For this reason, findings are summarized and numerical statistics originally presented are not reported in the following discussion.

The REAL Task Force found that African Americans are impacted at disproportionate rates and that nearly one in three Black men will have some experience with the criminal justice system in their lifetime. A correlation between poverty and the probability of involvement with the criminal justice system was also noted. The committee defined the scope of the problem in Savannah with the following disparities:

- People of color are disproportionately arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced for low-level crimes, which includes offenses such as contempt of court, traffic incidents, and substance abuse. Although African Americans only make up 40% of Chatham County's population, of those residents involved in the local criminal justice system, approximately 80% were people of color.
- Local probation and cash bail systems criminalize poverty and disproportionately impact people of color. In general, Georgia has more people on probation than any other U.S. state and has led the nation in capital execution.
- There is a lack of alternatives to jail and re-entry programs, which disproportionately impacts people of color. Almost 70% of incarcerated individuals in Chatham County are Black men, yet proportionately represent one-fifth of the population.
- Many people are involved in the local justice system due to a lack of mental health and trauma support.
- Youth of color are disproportionately referred to the local juvenile justice system.

Based on evaluation of socio-economic population data, crime statistics and systemic organizational procedures, the committee recommended the following strategies:

- Redefine the City's approach to public safety to include housing and mental health services, as well as training for community-level interventions.
- Revise the City of Savannah's public safety budget.
- Address the trauma that the local system has inflicted on African Americans.
- Eliminate Savannah's school-to-prison pipeline.

- Shift the post-incarceration paradigm from disintegrating to re-integrating the formerly incarcerated.
- Reform the cash bail and probation systems to decriminalize poverty.
- Address ways in which the system criminalizes poverty, particularly cash-bail and probation systems.
- Create a public safety review board for Chatham County and an internal body in the Chatham County District Attorney's office.
- Implement an arrest diversion procedure for Chatham County and City of Savannah.
- Implement local restorative justice programs and alternatives to incarceration.

DRAFT

Public Safety Goals and Objectives

Goal 1 - Ensure better quality of life through multifaceted strategies of public safety. The strategies include reducing crime by focusing on asset building, meeting community needs, expanding visibility and capacity of resources and programs provided by first responders, and building trust between law enforcement and residents.

Reducing crime is a top priority for the police department and many members of the community. Lower rates of crime benefit residents, businesses, and the long term development of the area. At the neighborhood level, trust between officers and citizens is an essential component of improving safety. Addressing the root causes of crime; including poverty, lack of education, and limited employment and other opportunities, is vital to reducing crime in the community.

Objectives

- Build trust between law enforcement and residents
- Focus enforcement in high crime areas
- Expand visibility of police to ensure all residents feel safe
- Identify and support programs to prevent juvenile involvement in criminal activities
- Identify and support programs to rehabilitate individuals who have been in the judicial system to break the cycle of repeat offenders

Goal 2 - Develop local and regional collaboration among organizations to improve the delivery of social services and to expand resources including but not limited to behavioral health and public health services.

Ensuring access to social services and resources to those in need not only helps to reduce the suffering of the individuals and families utilizing the services, but it improves the community as a whole. Eliminating poverty, improving education and job opportunities, and providing preventative health care services are all means to reduce crime, improve the local economy, and lessen the dependence on social services in the future. All of these strategies are good for everyone in the community. Interagency and cross organization collaboration can reduce duplication of services (freeing up funds to provide additional services or improve existing services), increase the ability to reach underserved communities, and improve community health. Independently, local service providers are making a difference in many lives, but working cooperatively can help to expand their reach and make sure that the services are adequately delivered and sustained into the future.

Objectives

- Inventory the existing social services and resources within the community and identify which organizations/agencies provide those services
- Identify needed, but not currently provided, social services and resources
- Identify funding sources to provided needed services and resources
- Identify barriers to access services and resources and work to eliminate those barriers

- Create a plan to improve collaboration among organizations/ agencies to provide services in a more effectual manner

Goal 3 - Provide effective and efficient government services while ensuring that processes and procedures are planned and executed with transparency

A safe community creates better neighborhoods, economic development, and overall quality of life for all residents. It is a primary responsibility of a municipality to ensure public safety that protects and serves its residents. Chatham County and the City of Savannah coordinate their efforts to ensure that police, fire, and emergency management services are provided for all residents. It is imperative to continuously assess the efforts of the service providers, identify strengths and weaknesses, and adjust as needed.

Objectives:

- Encourage collaborative efforts between departments and jurisdictions
- Increase tax or cost for services where appropriate
- Seek funding from state and federal level
- Ensure that the hiring process selects highly qualified candidates
- Establish rapport and trust within the community

Broadband & Fiber Optics

Digital technology has become the key to effectively managing and using conventional resources. It is creating new possibilities for business, commerce, education, healthcare, governance, public safety, and recreation. Digital infrastructure has become essential to deliver essential community services, enable a modern, connected economy, and support a higher quality of life. All of this depends on bandwidth and internet connectivity, and the ability to move information quickly and flexibly across invisible boundaries. The keystones of technology providing the opportunities for interconnection and access to valuable resources continues to grow and evolve.

The end goal is for all of Chatham County to help its citizens achieve better connectivity and increased bandwidth, while meeting its internal technological needs. It is recommended that all jurisdictions in Chatham County invest in fiber-optic infrastructure and related facilities to better serve its citizens, enhance quality of life and quality of place, and spur sustainable economic growth, all while ensuring it is economically feasible, fiscally responsible, and practical.

Network Technology

Broadband refers to high-speed internet services, which provide online content, such as websites, television shows, video conferencing, cloud services, or voice conversations which are accessed and shared via computers, smartphones, and other devices. The Federal Communications Commission recently updated the minimum broadband requirements to be at least 100 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream to the device, and 25 Mbps upstream. Although there are multiple broadband delivery systems, primarily cable, DSL, fiber, and wireless connect devices to the internet.

Broadband

Broadband is deployed throughout communities as wires that carry digital signals to and from users. The content comes into the local community from around the world via global, national, and regional networks. The local infrastructure is built, connected, and operated by internet and telecommunications companies that own the physical wires to each user. It has become evident that aging infrastructure and older technologies results in slower, less reliable access to internet content. Due to capacity limits of this infrastructure, companies cannot reliably provide high speeds, and often limit the amount of data consumers can use.

Fiber-optics

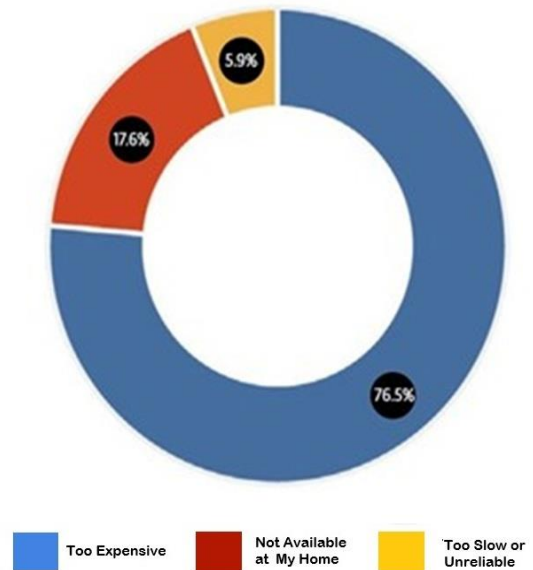
Fiber is considered the more superior option for supporting broadband, essential for fast, reliable connections. Fiber is a strand of glass the diameter of a human hair that carries waves of light. Using photons across glass, as opposed to traditional electrons across copper wire, fiber has the capacity to carry nearly unlimited amounts of data across long distances, literally at the speed of light. Fiber provides the robust infrastructure that connects telephone and cable infrastructure between communities and around the world. It was originally used by telecommunication utilities for their core infrastructure, to connect their major switching centers, and was only available to their biggest corporate and institutional customers. Today, fiber is in homes and businesses

throughout the world providing telephone and television as well as internet services.

Barriers to Household Internet Subscribership

In more rural communities, high-speed internet access may remain physically out of reach due to lack of infrastructure coverage. However, in more covered jurisdictions, including the Savannah-Chatham County region, it has been found that affordability greatly influences accessibility.

A series of surveys investigating user characteristics was conducted in 2017. Although dated, results indicated that 1.7% of households in the County and 3.1% of households in Savannah did not subscribe to internet services. Of those households, over 75% respondents reported the main reason they chose not to subscribe to internet service is because it is too expensive. The findings were not aligned with national trends, which prescribed the lack of internet availability as a more predominant reason for lack of subscribership. These findings illuminate issues beyond simply having access to the internet and reveal the digital divide in Chatham County and Savannah is based more on cost of services and access to alternatives, rather than availability. Aging individuals, people with disabilities, and English language learners constitute additional groups with meaningful adoption gaps. For the proportion of non-subscribers citing a lack of need or interest in the internet, digital skills programming may be an impactful intervention for increasing internet usage.



The underlying conditions for non-subscribership may be two-fold. Current service providers may be charging high rates for service, combined with communities at lower income levels where home internet service is a luxury. Even though service provision is considered important, alternatives are sought, predominantly reliance on mobile devices, which offer voice and mobility aspects, or utilization of internet outside the home, including work, school, public library, eating establishments, or other public Wi-Fi locations around town. *Summarized from Chatham County, Georgia Fiber-Optic Feasibility Study (May 2017 Magellan Advisors), as well as the City of Savannah Municipal Fiber Feasibility Study (May 2017 Magellan Advisors).*

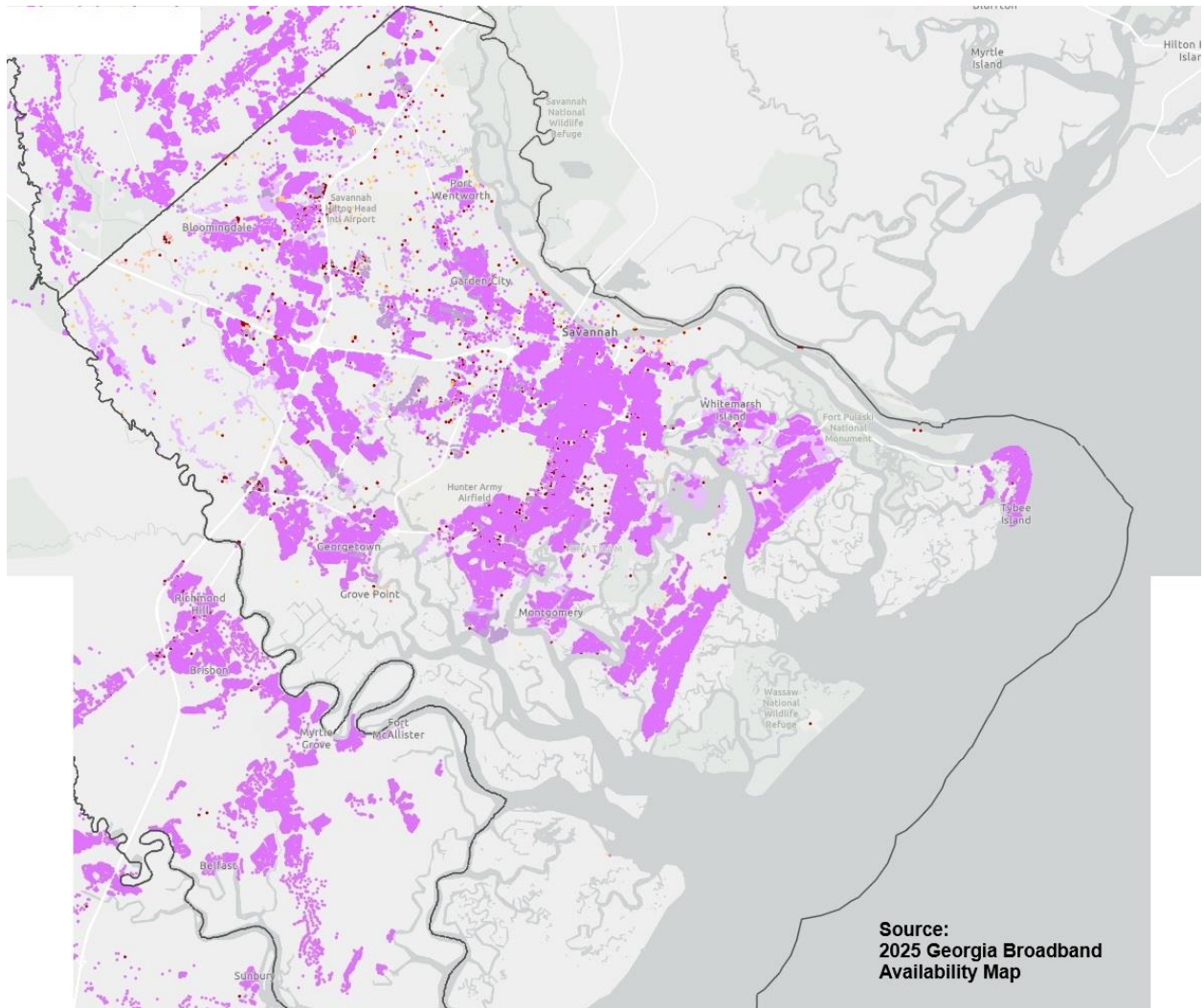


Exhibit 8.18 – Savannah-Chatham County: Broadband Availability

Local Provider Resources

The competitive landscape in the region has shifted from a cable-dominant market to one with multiple high-speed fiber options.

- In July 2025, IQ Fiber launched its 10-gigabit capable fiber-optic network in Savannah, following a \$50 million investment in the region.
- LiveOak Fiber reached a major milestone in 2024, completing 50% of its planned expansion in Georgia. As of late 2024, they were actively connecting 1,200 homes in Bacon Park and Sandfly, with a long-term goal of serving 46,000 premises across Savannah and Chatham County.
- Clearwave Fiber (formerly Hargray) has continued building out its fiber network across the city since 2022, branching into the Ardley Park neighborhood, facilitating connections to 15,000 customers in the region.
- AT&T Fiber continues to offer multi-gigabit speeds (up to 5 Gbps) in various Savannah neighborhoods. Additionally, AT&T and Simestsu, provide download capabilities of 1,000

Mbps or greater.

- Cable providers include Xfinity, Verizon, Minternet, T-Mobile and AT&T, providing download minimum 100 Mbps capabilities.
- Starlink provides next-gen satellite services with 280 Mbps,
- Old-school satellite is provided by Viasat and Hughesnet, with Mbps between 50 and 100.

Governmental entities at the federal, state and local levels have been responding with new investments in technology, but facilitating the provision of more efficient fiber-optic infrastructure is not the only issue to be resolved in ensuring that residents of a community have access to broadband services. Financial assistance is also a critical factor.

Next Steps

Savannah-Chatham County's vision for a fully connected region is to ensure that every resident has reliable and affordable access to the internet along with the necessary tools and skills to unlock opportunities for educational advancement, economic success, improved health, and strengthened social ties. This will create more connected, resilient, and prosperous communities and cultivate an environment across the state where the workforce can thrive, the infrastructure can support growth, and industries can continue to lead the way.

Drawing on recommendations from the two local studies, the next steps for the 2040 Plan was to move Chatham County toward developing and realizing county-wide fiber-optic infrastructure goals. Many of these recommendations centered around forming local collaborations to aggregate demand and formalizing broadband-friendly policies across the County. These also included organizational, and policy-oriented measures devised to lead to a broader fiber-optic partnership and county-wide fiber-optic deployment. These findings shine a light on issues beyond access to the internet and reveal that addressing the digital divide in Chatham County is based more on cost than availability.

Municipal and State Initiatives

Savannah, Chatham County and the State of Georgia have prioritized data-driven expansion to identify underserved areas, including:

- City of Savannah Fiber Mapping: A dedicated project was launched in 2023, completed in 2024 to create a comprehensive map of all city-owned fiber paths and connection points to improve future infrastructure projects and digital equity. As of August 2025, upgrades were in progress for paths connecting City Hall, the Adams Complex, and Daffin Park (southside ring repair).
- Broadband improvements totaling roughly \$2.4M
- The County has approved funds to support partnerships with ISPs for expanded high-speed access in unserved areas.
- Fiber Optic Cable extensions budgeted at \$254,000
- Georgia Broadband Availability Map was launched in 2020 and updated through 2025, providing address-level precision in identifying "dead zones".

Microwave Internet Service

Microwave radio transmission has been used for wireless data transmission since before the terms wireless broadband or Wi-Fi were commonly used. However, transmission was limited by slower data speeds, line-of-sight connections, and bandwidth issues. Microwave relay stations typically were located on tall buildings and mountaintops, with their antennas installed on towers to get maximum range. Although alternate modes of transmission are more prevalent today, some microwave systems continue to serve as emergency backup or in rural areas, and in microwave radio relay systems supporting portable radio applications. More routinely, retractable, telescoping masts with microwave dishes are used for remote broadcasts by television and news companies to transmit live video back to the studio.

While fiber expansion will continue to be deployed countywide, with focus on residential neighborhoods, not all urban cell sites can be supported by fiber. Microwave is versatile and can support significant amounts of data, and has the advantage of immediacy of deployment, a moderate cost profile, and accessibility. It serves as a reliable alternative for dedicated business lines. (Summarized from Techwalla.com)

Microwave Evaluation	
Microwave Pros	Microwave Cons
<p>Lower Initial Costs. The costs of installing a microwave tower are significantly less than those of installing traditional buried cable systems, such as DSL or cable.</p>	<p>Interference. Microwave radio frequency transmissions can be adversely affected by weather conditions and terrain. Temperature, humidity, precipitation, and wind can all cause interference with microwave radio frequency communications. Terrain features like hills can reflect or block signals, and the density and height of nearby trees and buildings will also affect reception, sometimes creating a "shadow" or dead zone nearby. Additionally, rivers and other water features are extremely reflective to radio transmissions</p>
<p>Mobility. Mobile microwave networks, such as Cellular on Wheels (COW) systems, have a range of about 2.5 miles and provide greater flexibility due to their mobility. These networks are used during localized high-wireless usage events</p>	
<p>Permanence. Microwave systems can also be placed permanently so they become possible alternatives for underserved areas and communities where infrastructure is lacking</p>	
<p>Immediacy. Portable cellular sites can provide temporary network and wireless coverage to locations where cellular coverage is minimal or temporarily compromised, allowing for continuity and resilience planning to not be reliant on just one technology for internet access</p>	
	<p>Shared Bandwidth. All connections within range of a tower share the same bandwidth, which can significantly reduce connection speeds. Speed also decreases the farther one is from the tower.</p>

Figure 8.18 – Microwave Service Evaluation

A high-reliability microwave network, employing Harris Constellation radios is still utilized in the County and Savannah, implementation is focused primarily for critical infrastructure, public safety communications, and business connectivity. Ultimately, issues with shared bandwidth and the widespread adoption of the internet has precipitated the move away from microwave internet service and toward broadband.

Broadband Ready Community Designation

Broadband Ready Communities recognize that high speed internet is critical infrastructure to their community. These communities prioritize the need for expansion, incorporate the need for broadband into their goals and strategies, and promote themselves as “expansion ready.” In order to qualify for the certification, communities must demonstrate compliance with the adoption of both a Comprehensive Plan inclusive of the promotion of the deployment of broadband services and the adoption of a Broadband Model Ordinance.

The purpose of the Broadband Ready Site Designation is to encourage economic development and attract technology. With the assistance of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the Georgia Department of Economic Development will designate facilities and developments that offer broadband services at a rate of not less than 1 gigabit per second in the downstream to end users that can be accessed for business, education, health care, government, and other public purposes (O.C.G.A. §50-40-61). Once designated, the Department of Economic Development will promote the facilities and developments as local community assets. Additionally, standardized graphics and materials will be provided to the owner(s) and the county or municipal corporation in which the facility or development is located in order to promote the status as a Georgia Broadband Ready Site.

Based on the City of Savannah’s zoning ordinance (effective September 1, 2019), broadband, telecommunications, and satellite infrastructure are regulated through specific land use classifications, primarily categorized as accessory uses, utility facilities, or specialized infrastructure, often falling under Section 16 - Wireless Telecommunications Facilities. The zoning code emphasizes that these facilities should be designed to operate without violating noise or safety ordinances and often require screening.

The Broadband Ready Designation status, as discussed, can be earned by communities that streamline local regulations for faster provider deployment. Broadband deployment refers to the planning, construction, and installation of high-speed internet infrastructure, such as fiber-optic cables, towers, and related equipment, to provide or upgrade service, particularly in unserved or underserved areas. It involves overcoming geographic and economic barriers to connect homes, businesses, and community institutions to reliable, fast internet access. This designation is a potentially important tool in attracting economic development drivers to the region, and application for the designation is recommended for consideration. The first requirement, the Comprehensive Plan 2040 Update includes broadband deployment objectives and strategies already underway. The Savannah City Council and MPC must amend and adopt local ordinances that comply with state standards for streamlining broadband deployment.

BROADBAND AND FIBER OPTIC GOALS

Goal 1 - Ensure all of Chatham County has access to broadband service

Internet is critical in today's world for both households and businesses. Areas of Chatham County still experience gaps in cellular coverage and have limited access to high-speed internet service even though multiple providers exist. The digital divide is real however, and although coverage has expanded greatly throughout the County, access may be limited by economic conditions. Internet providers are working to extend fiber and new 5G wireless technology; however, some rural areas in the County are experiencing a reduction in coverage as these new technologies are implemented.

Objectives

- Develop applicable codes and ordinances to phase in the requirement for all newly built residences have broadband connections installed
- In underserved areas where fiber installation is cost or location prohibitive, analyze the feasibility of using microwave systems to provide alternative coverage
- Work with local providers to develop and implement an outreach campaign to educate the general population on low-cost/affordable internet service program options
- Develop a plan and program to provide innovative solutions to access Wi-Fi throughout the County, such as in municipal parks, squares, and street corridors, in addition to CAT bus stops
- Explore technology spaces that offer creative opportunities such as virtual reality labs, music studios, and interactive technology
- Consider adoption of a model broadband ordinance in the City of Savannah for application for designation as a Broadband Ready Community