

Quality Of Life Draft

CHAPTER 8
QUALITY OF LIFE ELEMENT

DRAFT

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.

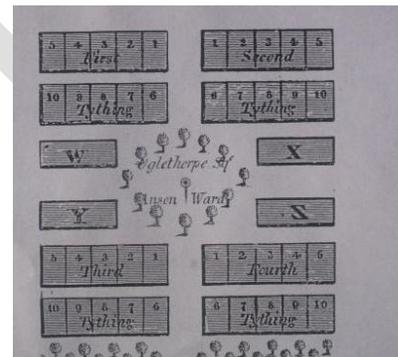
Following the loss of many significant buildings, such as the 1901 Grand Union Station and the City Market building in Ellis Square, the public began to recognize the importance of preserving architecturally and culturally significant buildings and sites. Historic preservation in Savannah and Chatham 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.

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.

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.

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) |
| 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

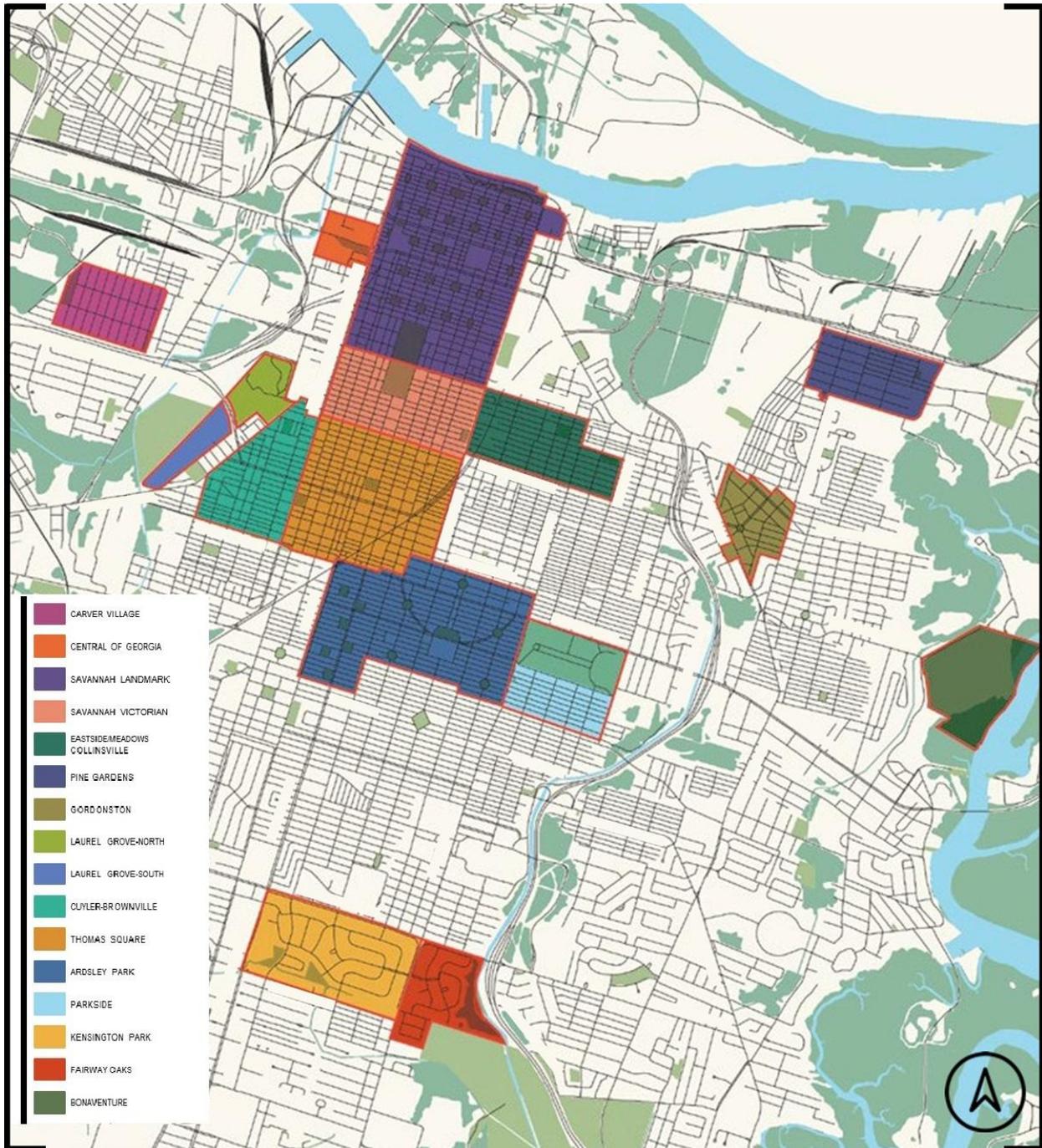


Exhibit 8.1 – Savannah: Historic Districts: National Register of Historic Places

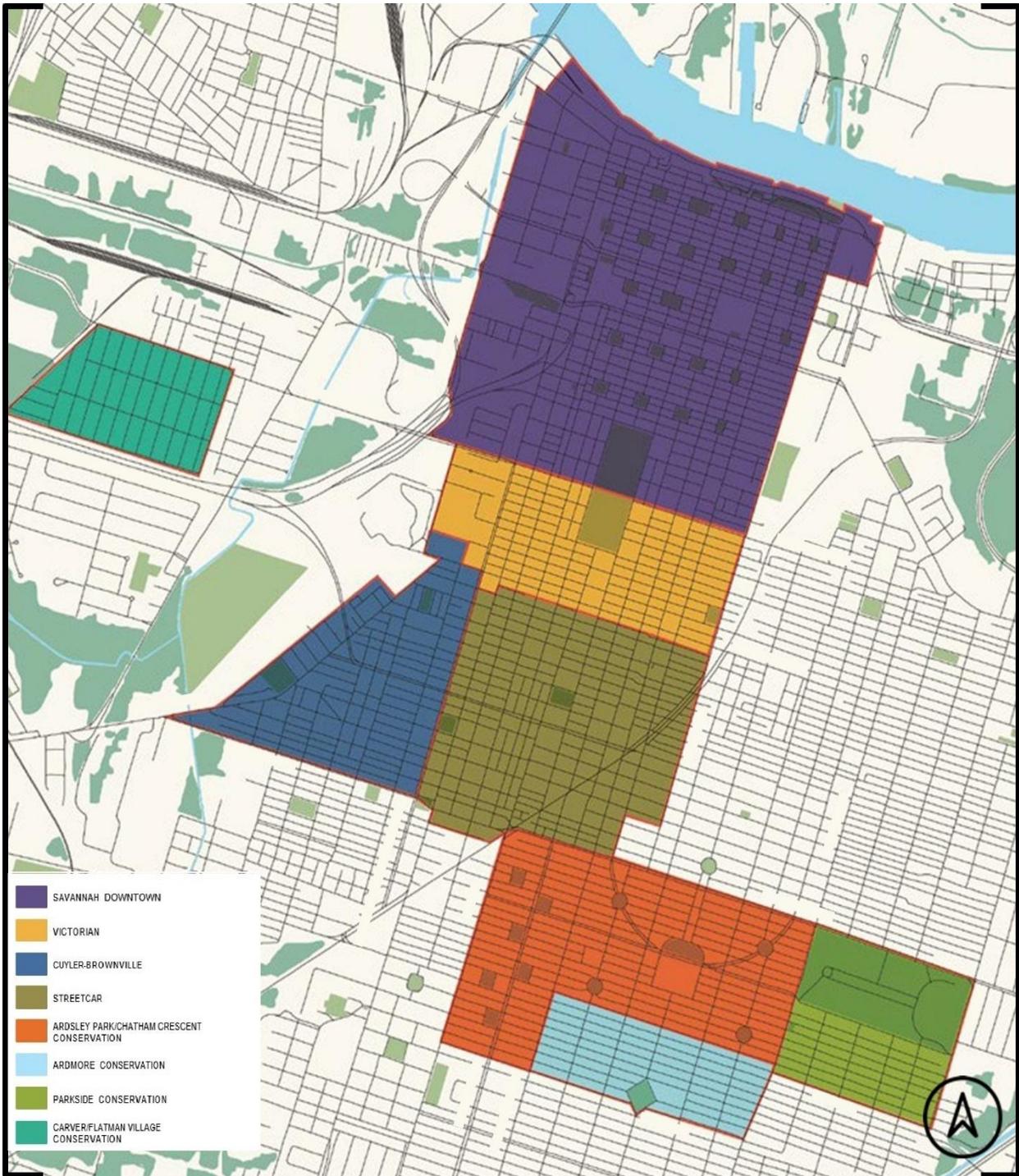


Exhibit 8.2 – Savannah: Local and Conservation Districts

| 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)

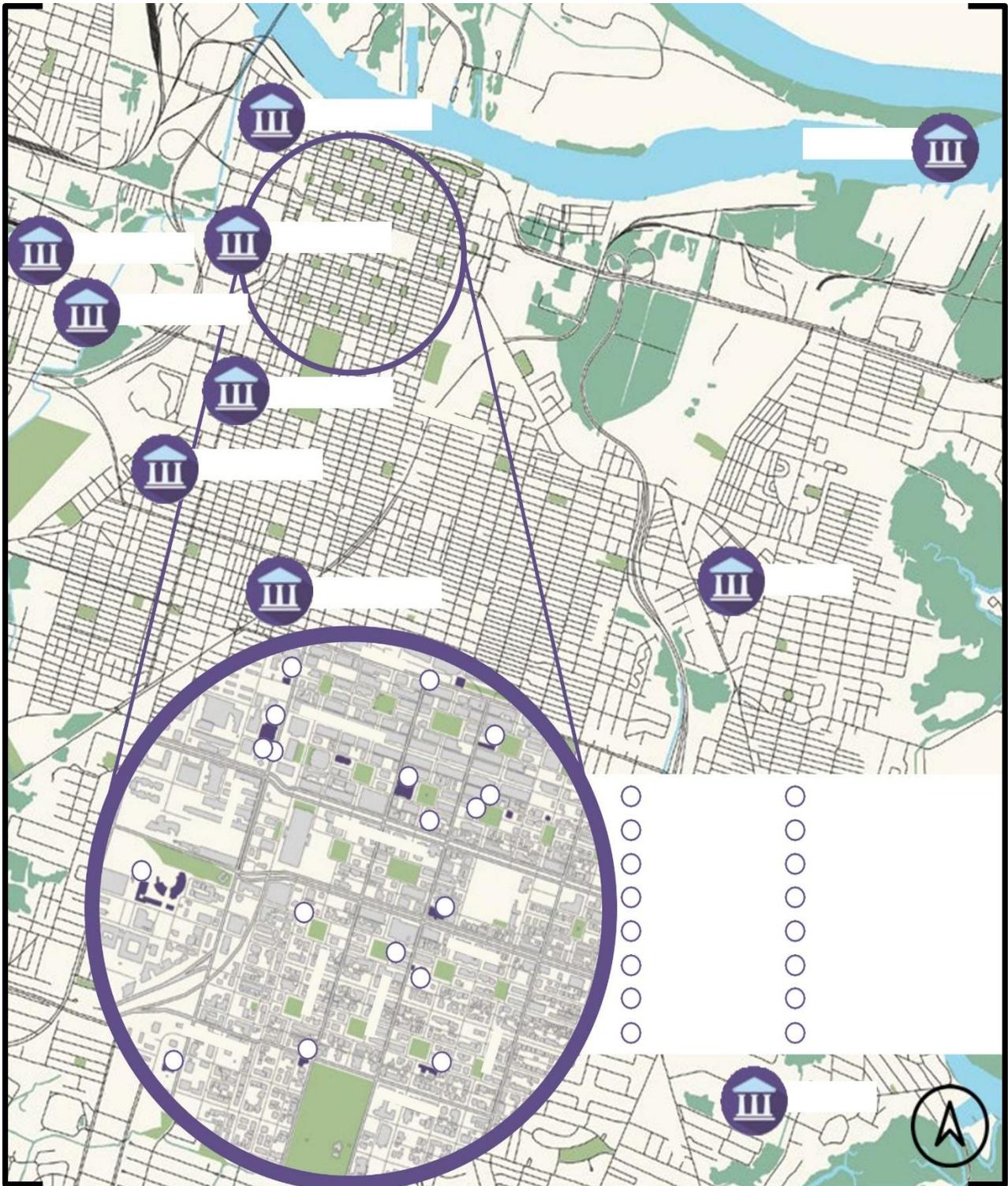


Exhibit 8.3 – Savannah: Individual Properties (NRHP)

| 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)

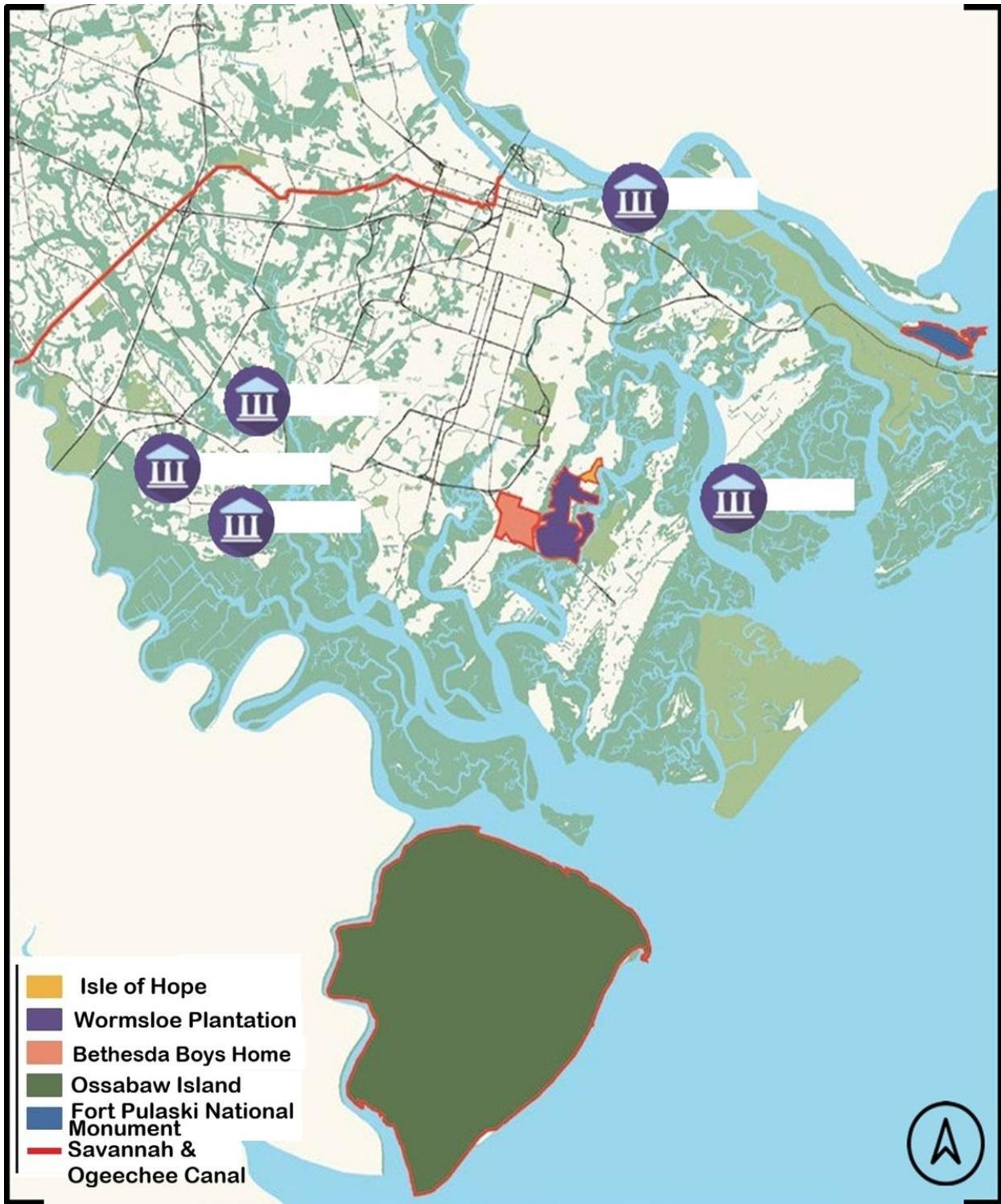


Exhibit 8.4 – Unincorporated Chatham County: Historic Districts & Individual Properties (NRHP)

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.

| |
|---|
| <p>Education is a right Education is a social contract with a community Education is a determinant of the socioeconomic well - being of a community</p> |
|---|

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.

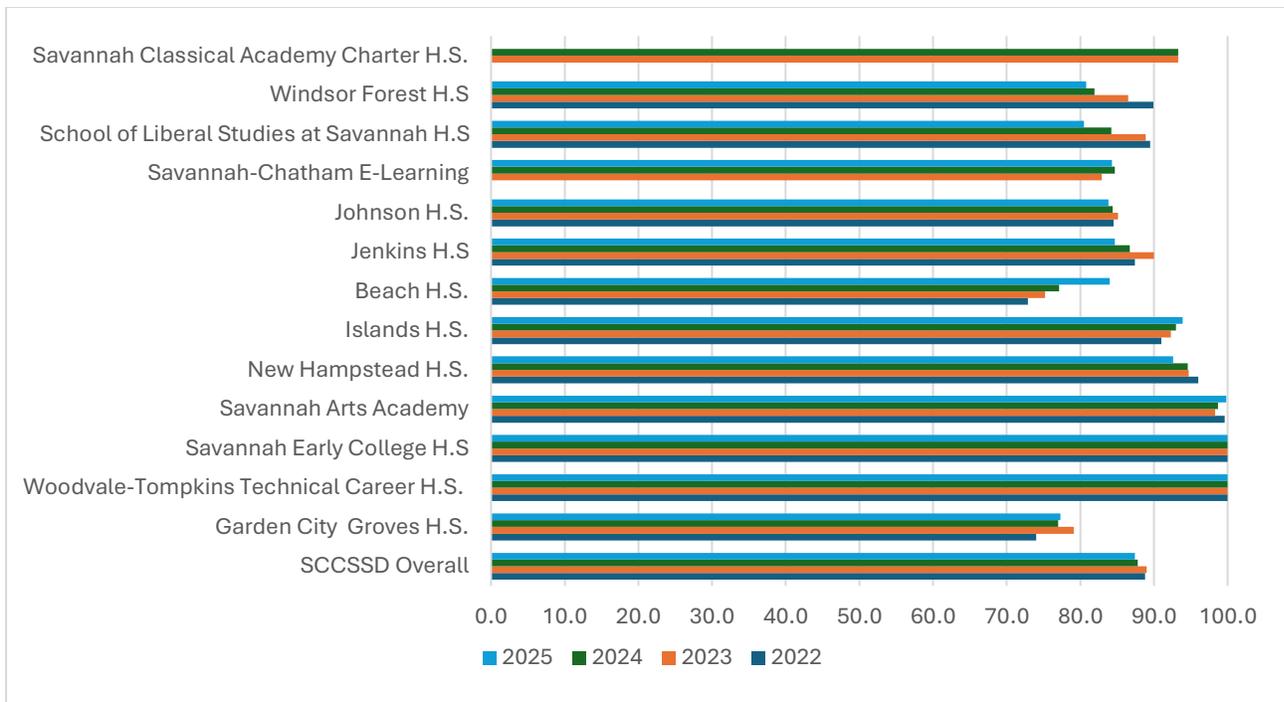


Figure 8.8 – SCCPSS High School Graduation Rates 2022-2025

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

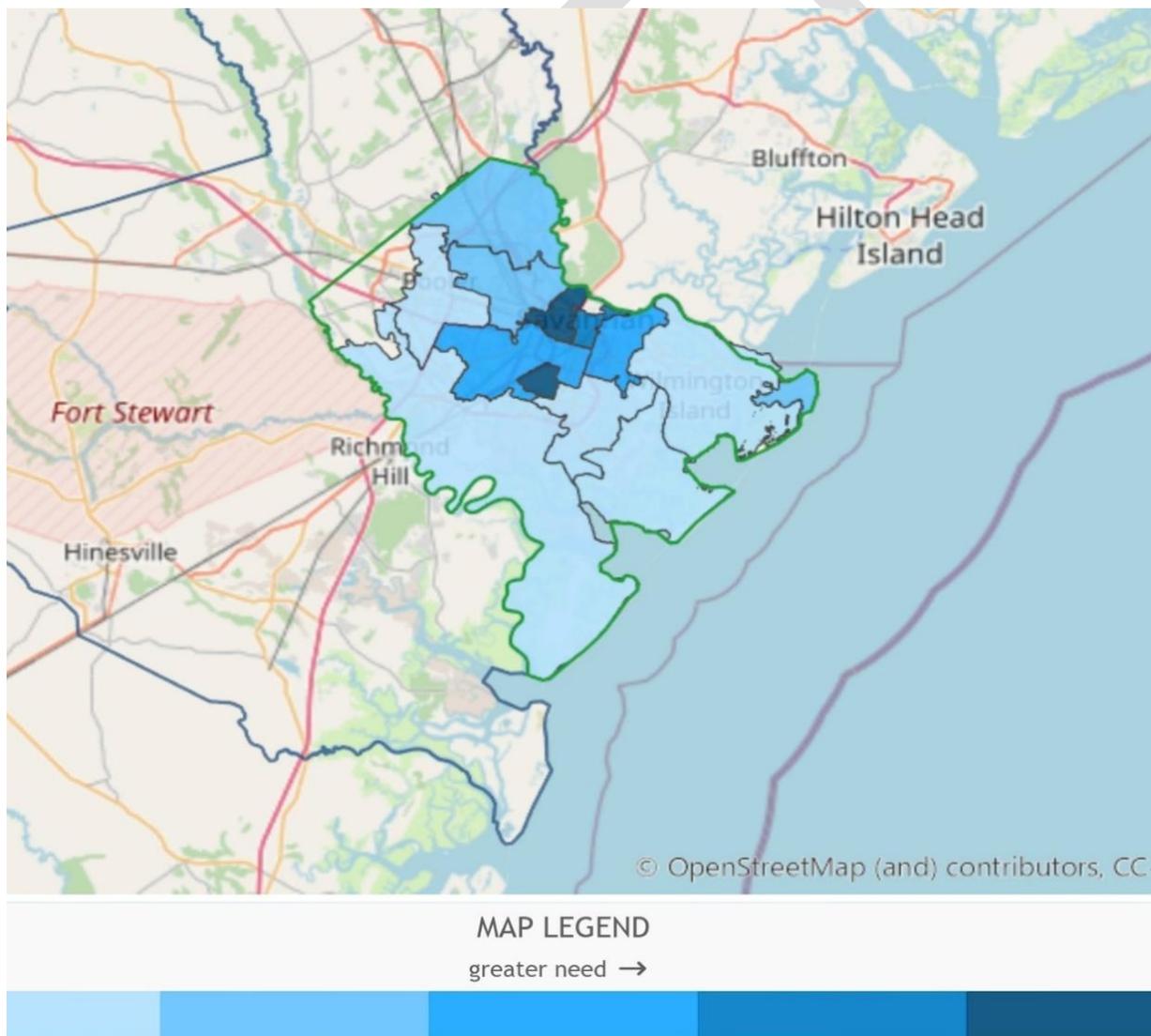


Exhibit 8.7 – Community Health Concerns

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.

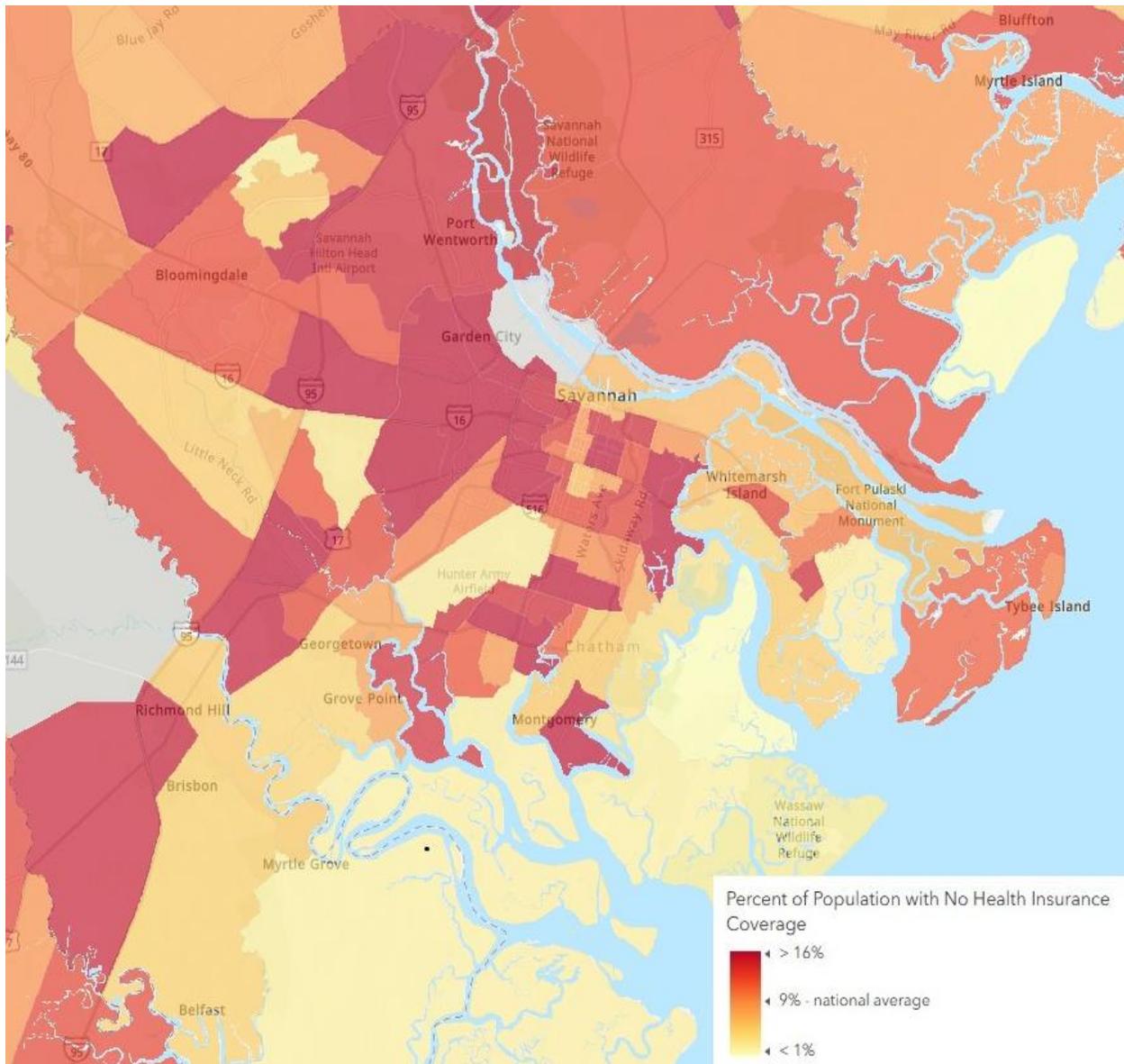


Exhibit 8.8 – Savannah-Chatham County: Health Insurance Coverage

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.

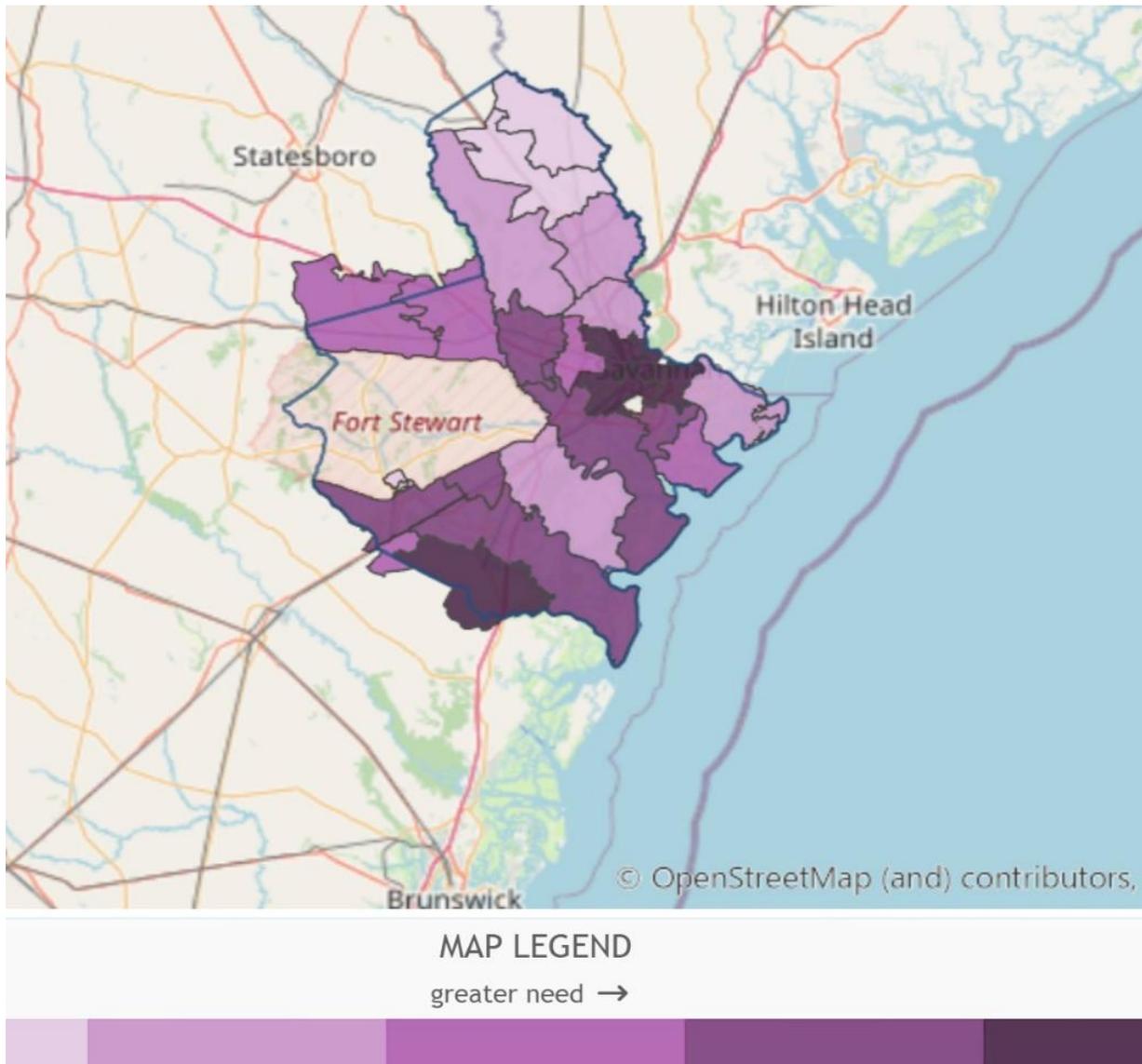


Exhibit 8.9 – Savannah-Chatham County: Mental Health Index

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.

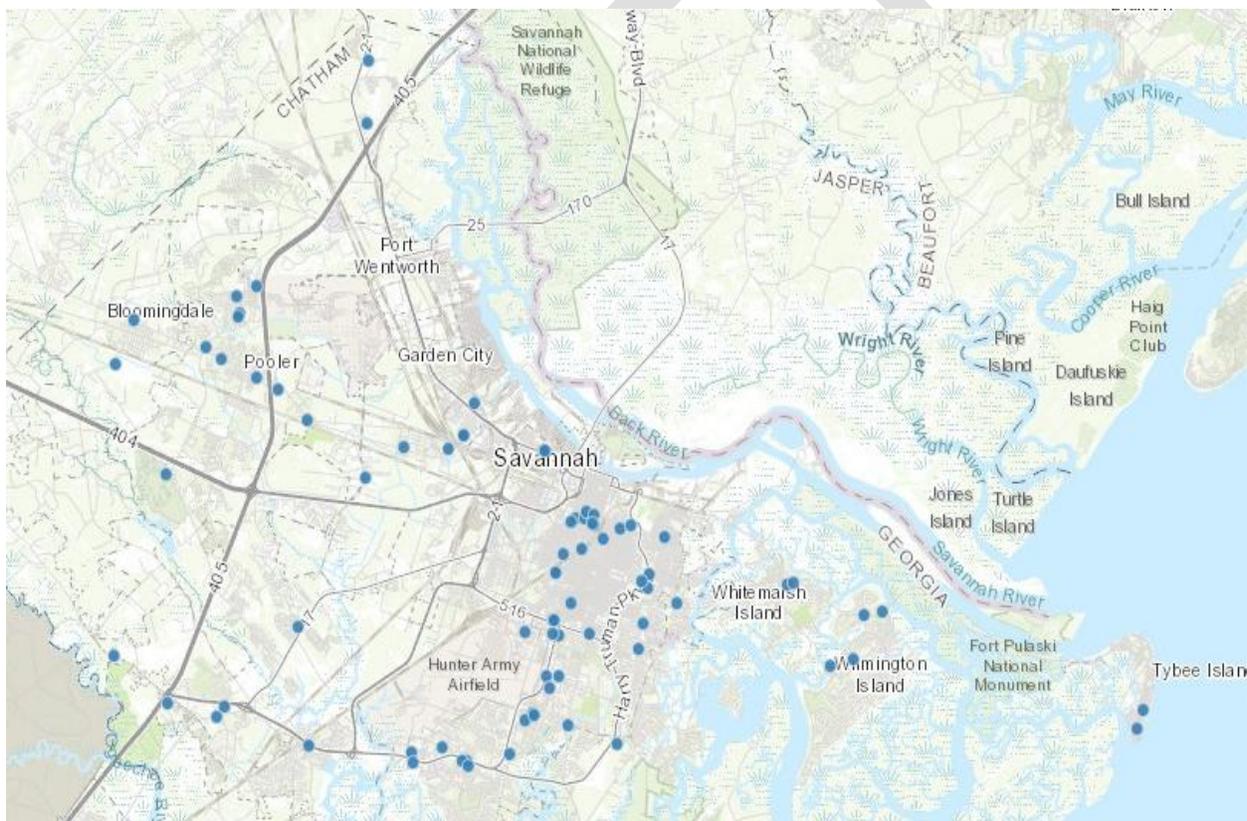


Exhibit 8.10 – Savannah-Chatham County: Grocery Stores

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.

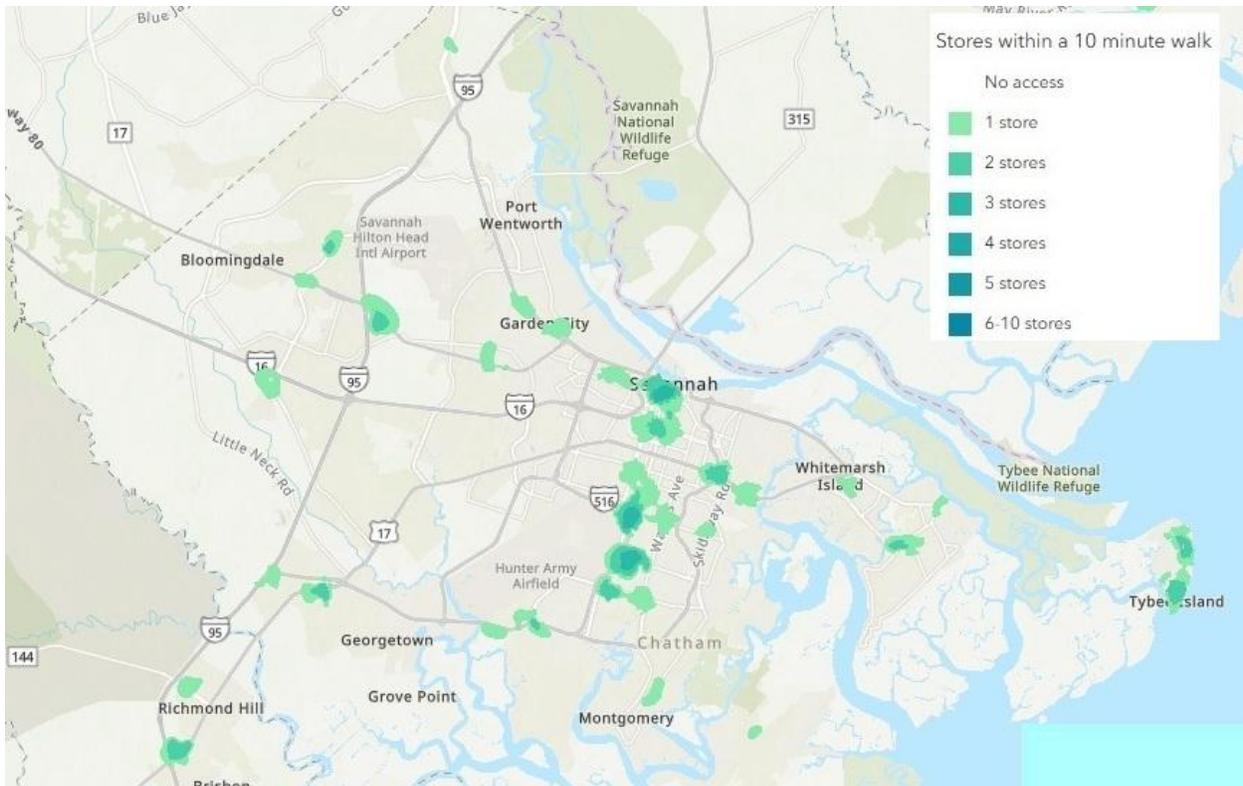


Exhibit 8.11 – Savannah-Chatham County: Distribution of Stores Within a 10-Minute Walk

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.

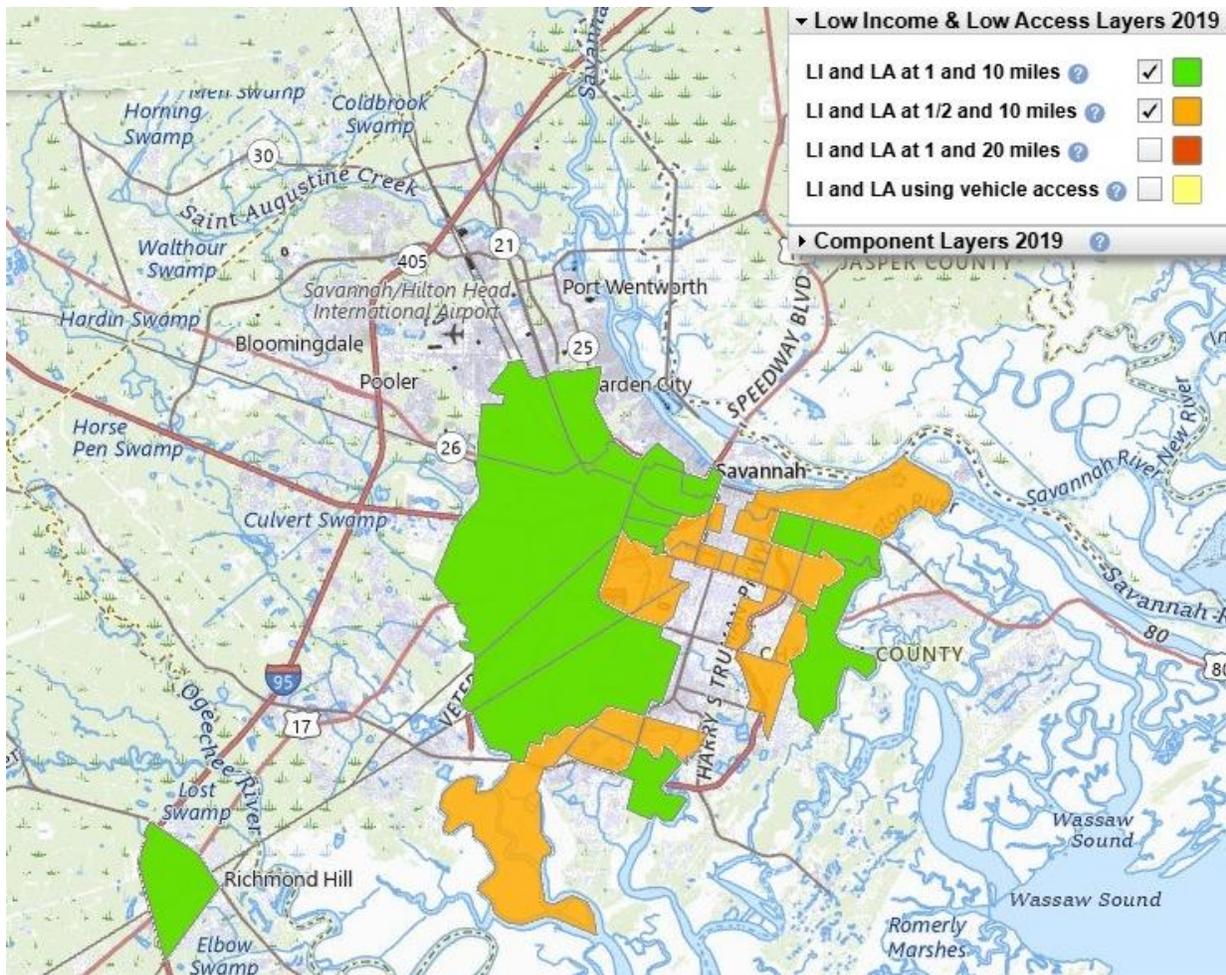


Exhibit 8.12 – Savannah-Chatham County: Food Deserts

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.

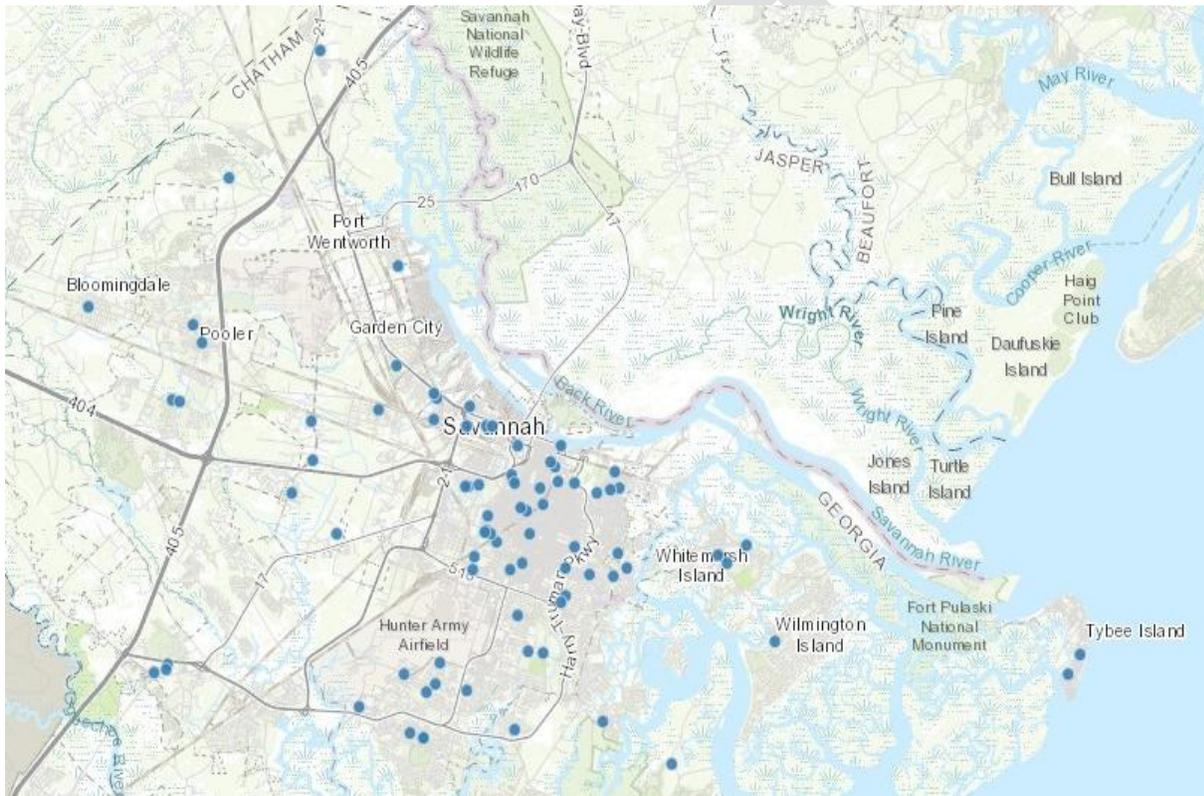


Exhibit 8.13 – Community Food Gardens

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.

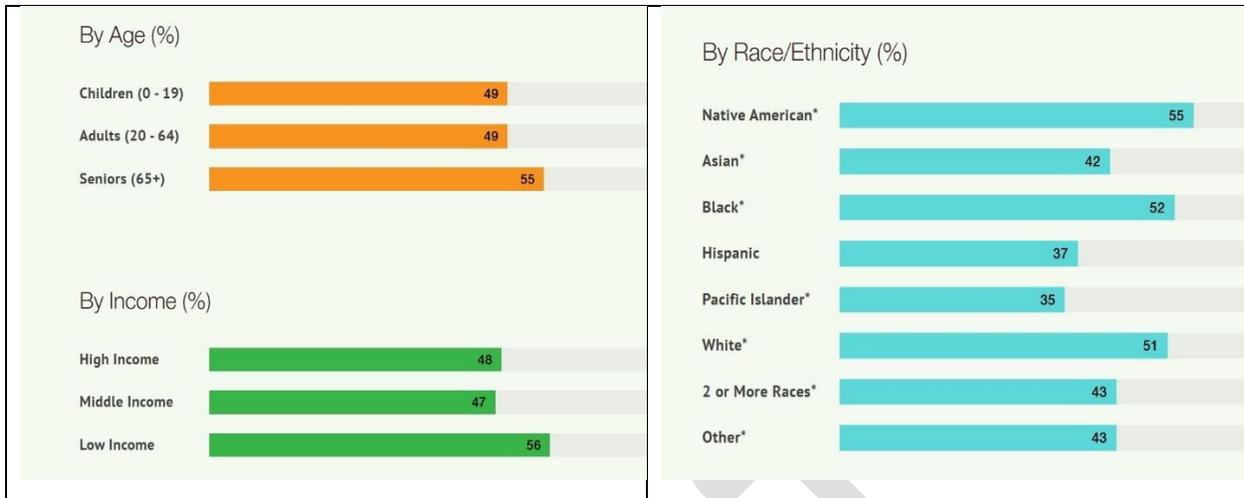


Figure 8.13 – Savannah-Chatham County: % Within One-Half Mile Proximity to Parks

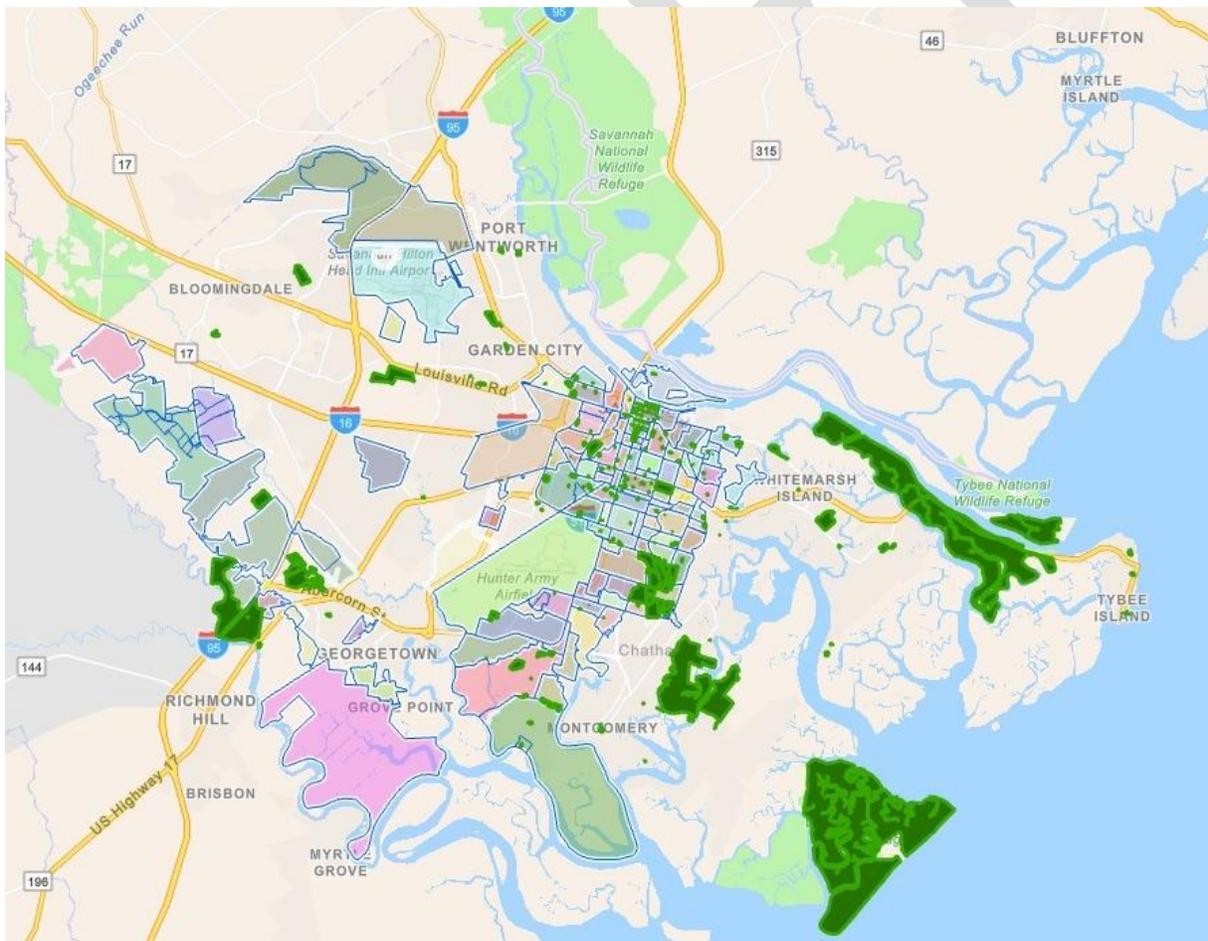


Exhibit 8.14 – Savannah-Chatham County: Parks and Recreation Areas

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.

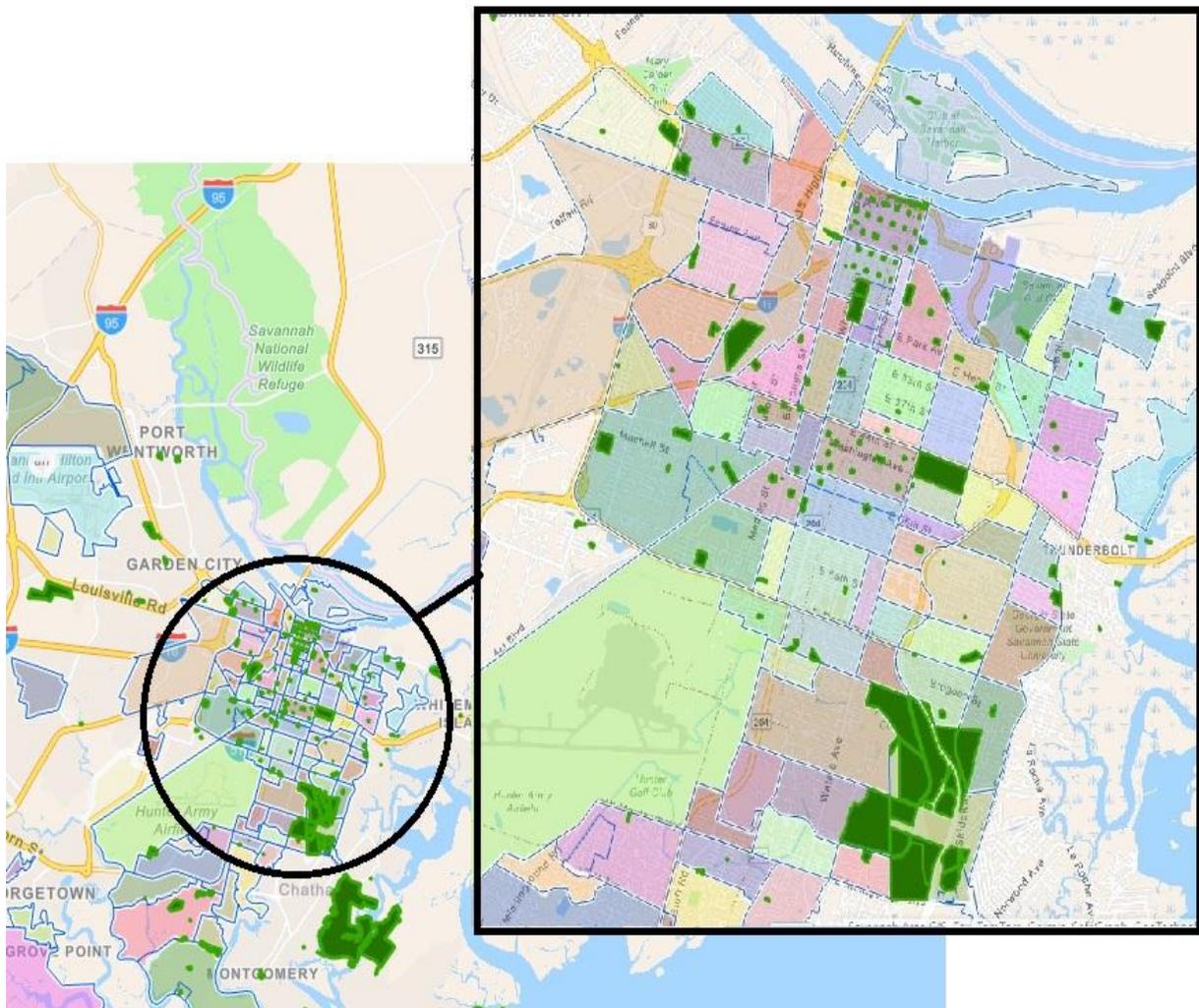


Exhibit 8.15 – Savannah City Core Area Park and Recreation Facilities

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.

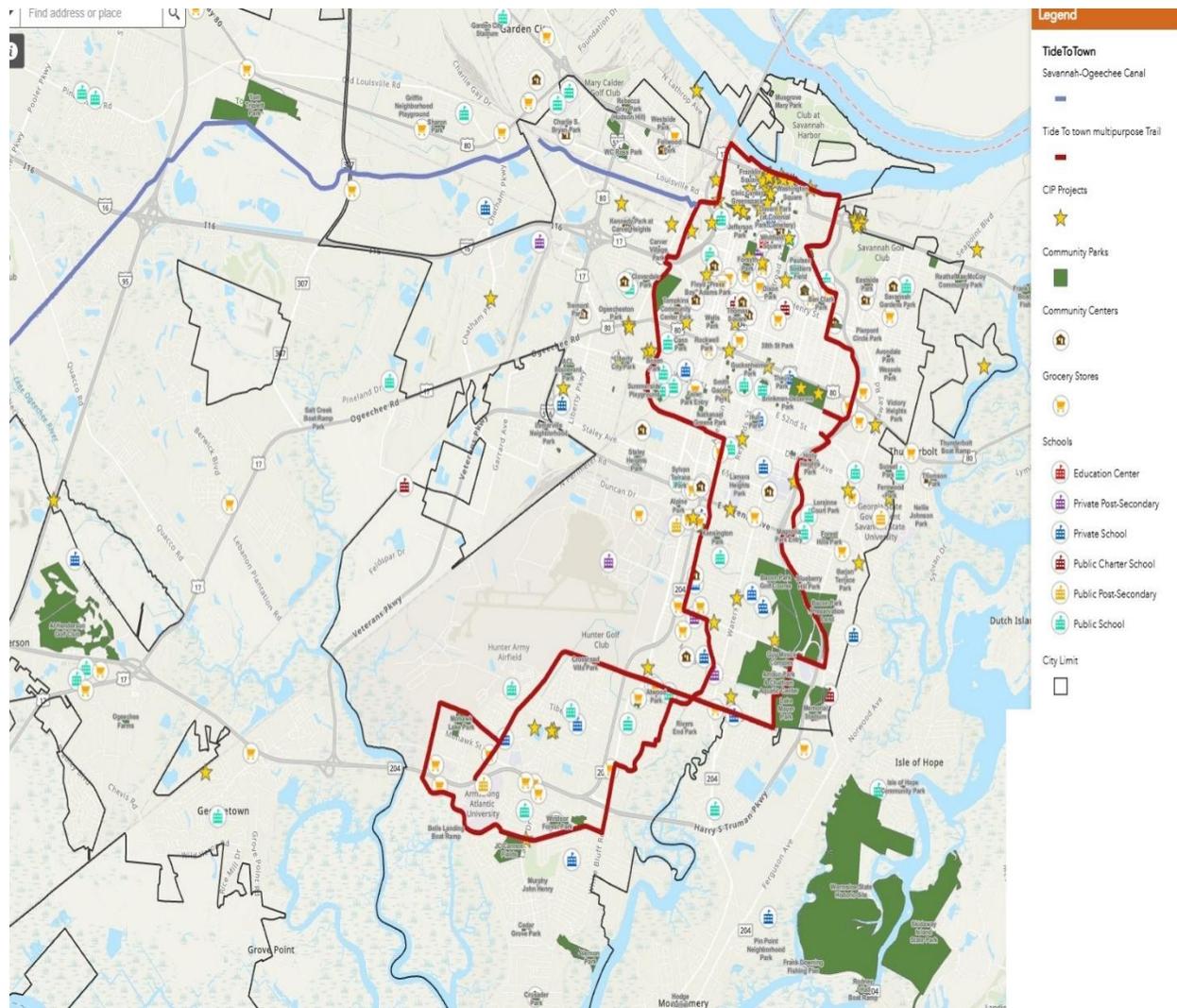


Exhibit 8.16 – Tide to Town Trail

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.

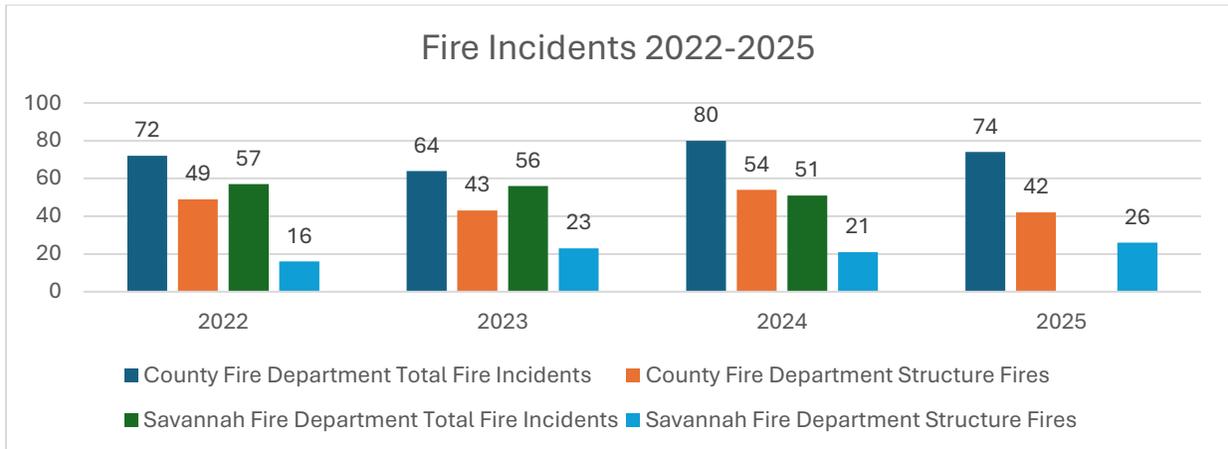


Figure 8.15 – Savannah-Chatham County: Fire Incidents; 2022-2025

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%.

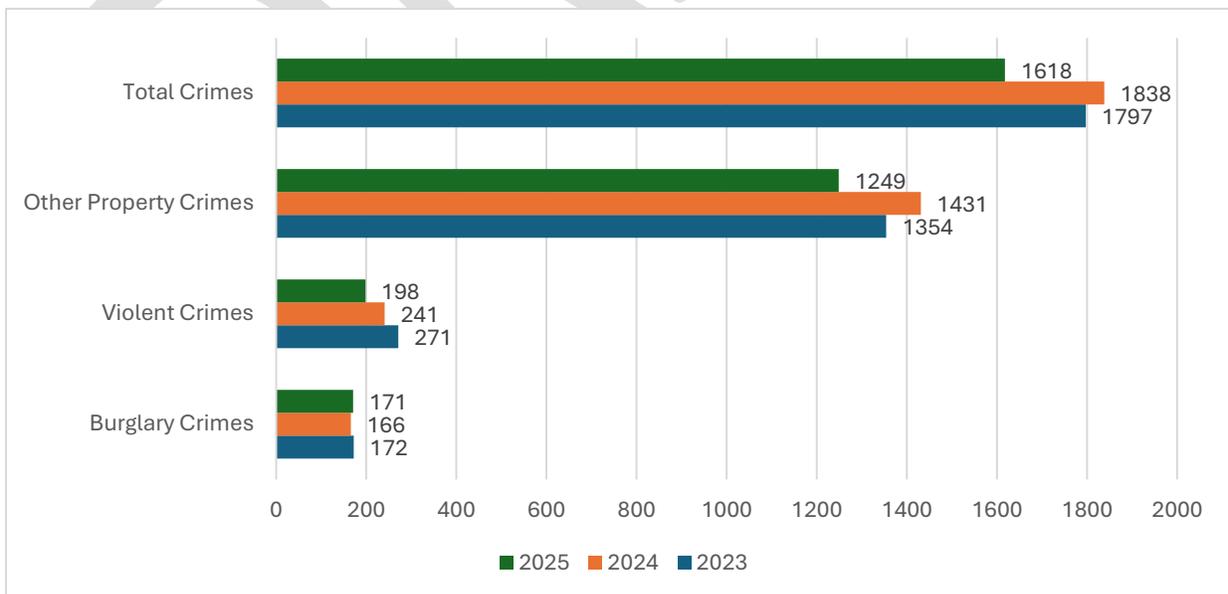


Figure 8.16 – Chatham County Police Department Crime Records

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.

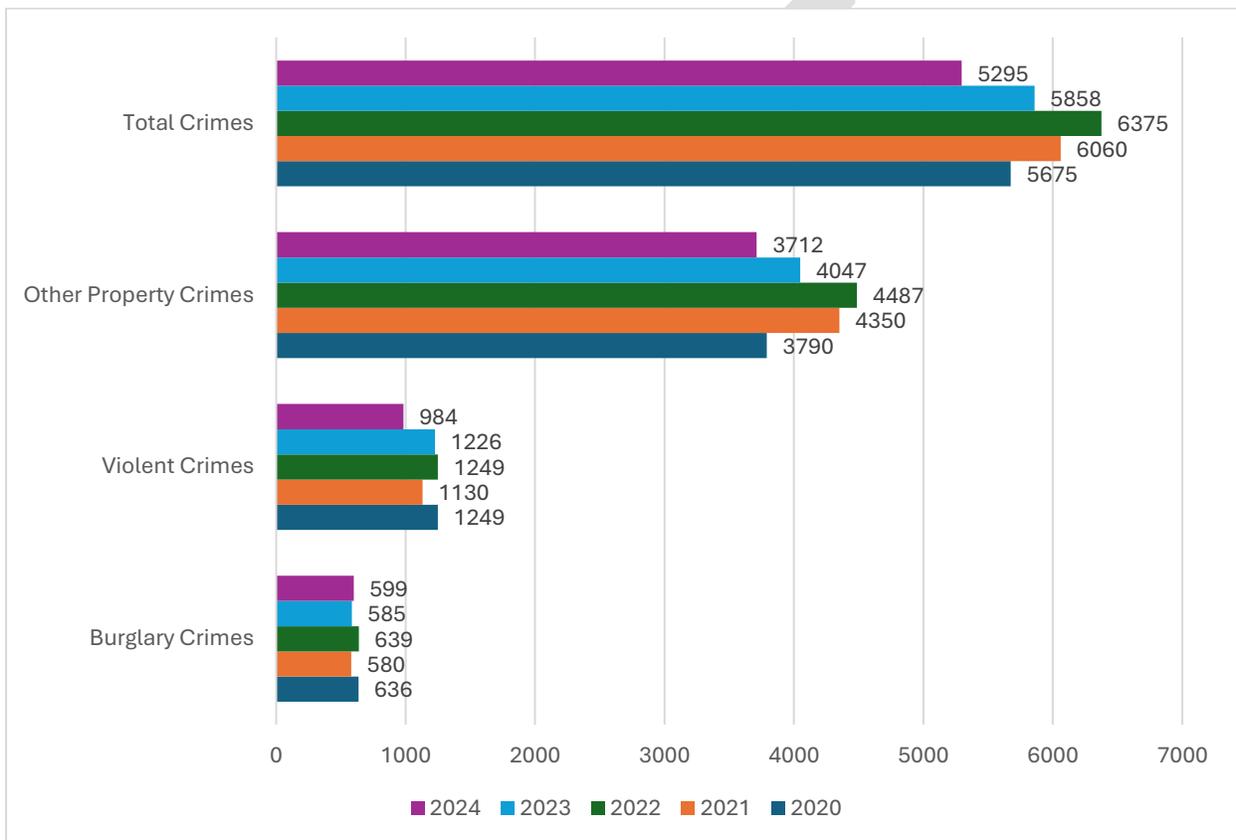


Figure 8.17 – Savannah Crime Statistics 2020 - 2024

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