



# GROWING A BETTER BLECKLEY

A Joint Comprehensive Plan for  
Bleckley County and City of Cochran, Georgia

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August, 2021

# GROWING A BETTER BLECKLEY

A Joint Comprehensive Plan for  
Bleckley County and City of Cochran, Georgia in accordance with  
the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 and the Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures  
established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs  
with an effective date of October 1, 2018

Prepared By:

The Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan Coordination Committee  
The Bleckley County Local Governments  
Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission



# Contents

<b>Introduction &amp; Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Community Goals</b>	<b>17</b>
Community Vision	18
Cochran Municipal Description	23
Community Goals	27
Long Term Community Policies	32
<hr/>	
<b>Needs &amp; Opportunities</b>	<b>37</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Broadband Services</b>	<b>43</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Economic Development</b>	<b>47</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Land Use</b>	<b>58</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Community Work Programs</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Bleckley County</b>	
Report of Accomplishments	73
Community Work Program, 2022- 2026	78
<b>City of Cochran</b>	
Report of Accomplishments	70
Community Work Program, 2022- 2026	71
<hr/>	
<b>Maps</b>	
Bleckley County Existing Land Use	59
City of Cochran Existing Land Use	60
Bleckley County Future Land Use	65
City of Cochran Future Land Use	66
<hr/>	
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>86</b>
Community Involvement	87
Public Hearing Notice 1	88
News Release	89
Comprehenisve Plan Website	90
Community Vision Survey	94
Public Hearing Notice 2	95
Meeting Agendas	96
Stakeholders Invited to Participate	101
Active Participants	102



# INTRODUCTION & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Growing A Better Bleckley -- The Bleckley County - Cochran Joint Comprehensive Plan is a comprehensive plan prepared under the current Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures of the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 adopted by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) with an effective date of October 1, 2018. It is a joint plan for Bleckley County and the City of Cochran.

Bleckley County is a small, progressive rural county of about 13,000 persons located in Middle Georgia. It is located less than an hour south of Macon along U.S. Highway 23 and Georgia Highways 26 and 112 with access to I-16 in the northeast corner of the county. The community is an exceptional small town with the City of Cochran as its only incorporated municipality. There is a long community history and association with education, leadership,





and culture not usually expected in a rural, smalltown. Today the community is home to the main campus of Middle Georgia State University campus, the only university in the Region. Bleckley's fields and forests have provided much past economic influence, and continue to do so today. Agriculture contributes over \$30 million in direct farm gate impacts to the local economy annually, and has been another avenue of local leadership and exceptionalism. The community has experienced some economic setbacks in recent years, but its location, outstanding quality of life, and economic influence from the nearby Robins Air Force Base, have allowed for continuing growth. Its fields, forests, and verdant natural resources including the Ocmulgee River, Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area and Public Fishing area provide an appealing scenic backdrop and outlets for outdoor fun and adventure which only add to the exceptional quality of life enjoyed by the community.



*Paddle in Ocmulgee River, Bleckley County*

Although Bleckley County is one of Georgia's youngest counties, having been created through impetus of local leadership in 1912, the area has a long history dating to early 1800s frontier days. Early settlers in the county of the Longstreet Community on the old Milledgeville-Hartford postal route helped bring the Macon and Brunswick Railroad to the community (still functioning today as a Class I railroad operated by the Norfolk Southern System), and establish Cochran as a municipality in 1869. These same leaders helped establish an early local school, and Ebenezer College, an early Regional postsecondary college. It was this college campus which later transitioned into a district-wide agricultural and mechanical school (over the competition of much larger cities), and then into Middle Georgia College. In 2012, Middle Georgia College transitioned into a four-year college and university campus, known as Middle Georgia State University. For many years, Middle Georgia College was recognized as the oldest two-year college in the U.S. Cochran leaders constructed an early opera house, and the community was also the center of early agricultural leadership in purebred hog breeding and black angus cattle raising. Middle Georgia State University now has campuses in Cochran, Eastman, Dublin, Macon and Warner Robins, Georgia.

Bleckley County continues to build today on its extraordinary history of leadership, education and culture unique to a rural smalltown. The community boasts of not only the campus of Middle Georgia State University but an awarded, high quality local school system; an outstanding adult learning center; a modern library; a well-managed local hospital; a general aviation airport; many active and involved civic clubs including Pilot Club Rotary, and Maso-



*Middle Georgia State University*

nic lodge; two local golf courses with 45 total holes; and many other amenities. There is an annual biking event, a fall fest, and an annual Christmas parade. All of these community activities and family-friendly events take place in a tapestry of true Southern Charm of well-manicured and lovingly preserved homes and churches, an involved and caring populace, and a surrounding and comforting environment of unmatched natural beauty and outdoor splendor. Cochran-Bleckley County is without doubt an exceptional rural smalltown community and a haven of education, culture, and leadership unexpected in such a small rural location. The community does enjoy an extraordinarily high quality of life as a result, and this, combined with its other advantages of location, transportation resources, and natural and cultural appeal, provides much to offer the entrepreneur, resident, or visitor alike. This community comprehensive plan provides the guide and framework by which the local governments, citizens, and others plan to continue “growing a better Bleckley.”



While there is much to celebrate and be optimistic about future growth and development within the community, there are issues requiring attention. With the closing of Acuity Brands Cochran lighting plant, which once employed over 1,000 persons, in 2012, the community was left with no major industry. Over seventeen (17) percent of Bleckley Countians are 65 or older, compared to about 13 percent in Georgia. Poverty rates have improved in recent years from 23.2 percent to 18 percent, and equal percentage to the State of Georgia. Incomes overall are low. Per capita money income in the county, as measured by the Census Bureau from 2015-2019, (\$20,458) is about 65 percent that of Georgia (\$31,067). The county median household income for the same period (\$48,174) is 77 percent that of Georgia (\$61,980). Unemployment in the county was 6.5 percent as an annual average in 2020, a net decrease of 2.6 percent since 2015. This rate is relatively higher when compared to the surrounding area, however it is equal to Georgia's 6.5 percent. Such statistics have resulted in Georgia ranking Bleckley County as a 2021 Job Tax Tier 1 county. While this ranking is for Georgia's bottom 40 percent of counties needing an economic boost, it has the advantage of offering Georgia's largest tax breaks for job creation within Bleckley County, and thus a big incentive for business job creator entities and further economic improvement. The issues also somewhat hide the fact that Bleckley County may have more to offer than many of its surrounding counties.



**L** Residence in Cochran   **R** Cotton Field at Harvest, Bleckley County

The future Bleckley County will continue to take advantage of its assets and opportunities, and address its issues. It will continue to be at the forefront of rural family-centric living and a high quality of life with progressive leadership, and a recognized haven of rural education, culture, and life. The community will take steps over the next five years to encourage redevelopment in the downtown area. Efforts have already begun with a reconstituted Cochran Downtown Development Authority, and partnerships with the local university for greater community participation by the student population. Growth will be well managed and guided to locate near the existing infrastructure and services of Cochran, and will be respective and protective of existing character, and the community's fields, forests, open spaces, and its unique and special natural and cultural resources. Many will enjoy the welcoming Southern hospitality and charm, and living, working, playing, or doing business in Bleckley County.



This Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan was developed with current local needs, and perceived capital improvement needs. Growth management and community interest was an objective. It was intended to be a locally driven plan principally addressing local needs and cultivating widespread community interest, support, and buy-in, while meeting state standards. As a result of the planning coordination meetings held over several months, the



**L** Biking in Bleckley County   **R** At Home Senior Living

Bleckley County committee is able to comfortably assert the community wants to protect its heritage, rural character, and smalltown charm; enhance its economy; conserve its fields and forests and natural splendor; improve its infrastructure; support the university and other educational venues; attract new residents and retirees; locate businesses and compatible jobs; celebrate its heritage; and grow tourism, among its guiding aims and principles outlined herein. The community truly wants to be a recognized as an exceptional rural smalltown widely known for its many attributes, its educational, cultural, and business opportunities; and its celebrated balance and overall quality-of-life.

**Previous Plans.** This comprehensive plan is the fourth within the County prepared under the auspices of the Georgia Planning Act of 1989. The first was adopted in 1994, the second in 2011, and most recently the third was adopted in 2016. The community also prepared a partial update, which was adopted in 2008 in accordance with state requirements. All of these previous plan efforts were intensively data and state requirement driven, although local objectives are outlined and portrayed. The second plan and the partial update do contain some local information which may not easily be found elsewhere and may remain of use. These plans should remain, at least in hard copy, available from the Bleckley County local governments and the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission. At the time of this plan preparation, the 2016 plan is available in digital format on the state ([www.georgiaplanning.com](http://www.georgiaplanning.com)) and region ([www.hogarc.org](http://www.hogarc.org)) websites.

**Data.** The emergence of the world wide web with its vast data repositories accessible through free search engines allows anyone easy access to significant amounts and a wide variety of data, and profiles of any jurisdiction, including Bleckley County and Cochran. For this reason, this comprehensive plan includes only limited data to depict or illustrate points. The current DCA planning standards actually encourage such non-inclusion of data. Almost any

data depicted at a moment in time quickly becomes dated, and maybe irrelevant. The world wide web offers the opportunity of more relevant and up-to-date data at the time of access.

There are a variety of reliable public and private sources of data. Of course, the traditional source of official community data is the U.S. Census Bureau. Data on Bleckley County, its municipalities, or any other jurisdiction is quickly accessed at [quickfacts.census.gov](http://quickfacts.census.gov) which will provide a summary community profile on many popular data items, and links to even more data. Another quality source of data is the website, [www.statsamerica.org](http://www.statsamerica.org), which provides a compilation of primarily government data on many items for any county in any state of the U.S. The site is maintained by Indiana University in partnership with the federal Economic Development Administration. The University of Georgia maintains a website, [www.georgiadata.org](http://www.georgiadata.org), where county level data for nearly 1,300 variables related to a wide variety of subjects on population, labor, natural resources, government, health, education, and crime can be accessed. The data can be compared to other counties and the state as well as on a historical change basis, among various user options. The data is compiled from The Georgia County Guide and the Farmgate Value Report prepared by UGA's Extension Service. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs has available data for cities and counties under "Community Planning Resources," and will also prepare community data reports when requested under "Other Resources." The State of Georgia has official labor and economic data in its Georgia Labor Market Explorer as organized by the Georgia Department of Labor at [explorer.gdol.ga.gov](http://explorer.gdol.ga.gov). Additional state sponsored economic data is available at [www.georgia.org](http://www.georgia.org). Excellent overall private data sources include [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com), [datausa.io](http://datausa.io), and [www.usa.com](http://www.usa.com), while [www.headwaterseconomics.org](http://www.headwaterseconomics.org) is an excellent source for socioeconomic information, including data and interpretation through its economic profile system.

**Population Projections.** As noted earlier, the official 2010 Census population of Bleckley County was 13,063, up by about 12 percent from 2000's 11,666. This growth slightly tapered in the official U.S. Census Estimate of 2019 with a population total of 12,807. This slight retraction in population shows that despite economic difficulties, Bleckley's location and



**L** Social Facility, Gully Branch Tree Farm **R** Bleckley County Jail

attributes are allowing a sustained population with some ebb and flow, but with a general growth trend since 2000. Bleckley County's location, transportation access, Middle Georgia State University, the nearby influence of Robins Air Force Base, outstanding natural and historic resources, its family-friendly attitude and venues, its heritage of progressive and adaptive leadership, its cultural opportunities and overall high quality of life portend well for the future. The high mark of population in Bleckley County was that recorded in 2010, and there has only been a short period of declines from 1920 to 1930 and 1980 to 1990 in county history, with general stability from 1930-1960.

While past and present population levels are readily available on the world wide web, population projections are not so easily accessed. The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) is responsible for generating official state population projections for Georgia counties. Current OPB projections for Bleckley County from 2020 are 12,755 persons in 2030 and 12,830 persons in 2040. The Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission (HOGARC) also prepares population projections which have proven to be relatively accurate in the past. HOGARC's population project for Bleckley County, as noted in the 2019 "Regional Plan 2040," show significantly higher projected population levels than the current OPB projections. More recent Regional Commission projections, which take into account lower 2019 Census estimates, are relatively higher than the Regional Plan estimates. These latest Regional Commission projections include 13,995 in 2030 and 14,796 in 2040. All of these projections indicate continued relative slow, but steady, expected population growth.

### Population Projections, Bleckley County

	2010	2020	2021	2025	2030	2035	2040
OPB, 2020	13,063	12,778	12,697	12,946	12,755	12,798	12,830
HOGARC Regional Plan	13,063	13,136	-	13,494	13,861	-	14,626
Regional Commission	13,063	-	13,310	13,610	13,995	14,390	14,796

*Sources: State Office of Planning and Budget, 2021; Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission Regional Plan, 2019; Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission staff projection using Microsoft Excel GROWTH formula, 2021; Excel Forecast method using the AAA version of the Exponential Smoothing (ETS) algorithm at a 95% confidence interval.*

**Coordination with Other Plans.** Bleckley County and Cochran has an approved and adopted a joint hazard mitigation plan prepared for the Federal Emergency Management Agency to remain eligible for federal disaster assistance. This Hazard Mitigation Plan's preparation was coordinated with past comprehensive plan preparation. It is clear that the two most prominent hazards facing Bleckley County that can be influenced by the comprehensive plan are the hazard mitigation plan goals to reduce damage from flood hazards and wildfire, and thereby protect life and health. The comprehensive plan objectives to conserve the county's river and stream corridors, to maintain healthy working forests and fields (including employing proper management techniques), to improve fire/emergency management and



other public safety services, and to enhance growth management/code enforcement regulation are generally consistent with, and offer implementation to, the hazard mitigation plan.

The Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan is also consistent with the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The Strategy's goals and objectives to develop industrial parks; develop/improve local infrastructure; enhance telecommunications infrastructure; retain existing businesses/industry; attract new industry; and spur non-traditional economic development, like tourism and downtown development, are repeated as principal goals in the Bleckley County Comprehensive Plan. The local plan is similarly supportive of espoused state economic goals.

**Regional Water Plan and Environmental Planning Criteria Consideration.** Bleckley County is part of the Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council. The adopted regional water plan, Altamaha Regional Water Plan (2011 and 2017 update), was considered by the Bleckley County Local Plan Coordination Committee and the local governments in preparation of this plan. This local comprehensive plan's objectives to maintain viable agriculture/forestry uses, protect/conservate natural resources, to enhance intergovernmental coordination and government/efficiencies, and upgrade local infrastructure all help implement, and maintain consistency with, the regional water plan. The vision of the regional water plan, "to wisely manage, develop and protect the region's water resources...to enhance quality of life..., protect natural systems..., and support the basin's economy," is inherent in this comprehensive plan's community vision and goals. In the Regional Water Planning Council's previous implementation reports, Cochran's Community Development Block Grant for water improvements was specifically cited as a supportive implementation activity. Other water/sewer improvements would also be supportive implementation.

Similarly, the Environmental Planning Criteria were also considered in the development of this comprehensive plan. The local governments of Bleckley County, including Bleckley County, and the City of Cochran, are in compliance with the Environmental Planning Criteria, having adopted implementing, consistent ordinances in 1999. The local governments, with the assistance of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission, adopted the Region's model "Environmental Conservation, On-Site Sewage Management, and Permit" Ordinance.

**Consistency with Quality Community Objectives.** In 2011, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs changed its Quality Community Objectives to a more general listing and summary of the 10 objectives. These include: Economic Prosperity, Resource Management, Efficient Land Use, Local Preparedness, Sense of Place, Regional Cooperation, Housing Options, Transportation Options, Educational Opportunities, and Community Health.

The Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan directly espouses (many of) these objectives and therefore, is very consistent with, and supportive of them. This comprehensive plan has goals to achieve a brighter future and better community for Bleckley County, which is consistent with a quality community and the DCA Quality Community Objectives. The

Bleckley County Local Plan Coordination Committee reviewed and considered these Quality Community Objectives at one of its meetings.

**Community Involvement.** Throughout the planning process, the City of Cochran and members of the plan coordination committee actively collected and incorporated input from community members. Creating civic engagement was an essential component to developing the comprehensive plan. Several opportunities, including stakeholder meetings, a community survey, and community drop-in session, were provided to the community in order to gain as much input as possible.



**L** Rural Scene in Bleckley County **R** Public Meeting

To accomplish this, they created a steering committee, the Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan Coordination Committee, of all local stakeholders who could be envisioned to help guide this plan's development, and make the community a better place to live, work, recreate, and learn. This committee did include elected and appointed members from the governing authorities, local economic development practitioners, and local government staff, as well as many others concerned with community and economic development and other issues within the entire community. This Coordination Committee had notable participation; was actively involved in the development of all facets of this comprehensive plan; and had numerous opportunities to both help develop, review, and revise all components. The first orders of business at any Coordination Committee meeting were review of any revisions to previous elements based on committee input, and chances to return to and modify earlier elements, if desired. The initial meeting of the Local Plan Coordination Committee included a formal identification of strengths and weaknesses of the community, including opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis). This identification was utilized in developing all plan elements. A total of five stakeholder meetings were held throughout the planning process.

In addition to holding regular stakeholder meetings, several other opportunities were given to the community to participate in the planning process. An initial public hearing was held on

April 15, 2021 and was advertised in the newspaper in order to make citizens aware of the plan update and the planning process. On May 4, 2021, a community input drop-in session was held in order to provide citizens with another opportunity to discuss their opinions on what changes they would like to see with the plan and with their community. Several residents attended and an open discussion occurred. In addition, a final public hearing was held on August 31, 2021, in order to provide the public with the opportunity to review the updated final comprehensive plan draft. A more detailed summary of community involvement is included in an appendix.

### 1. Interactive Website

In order to provide the community with a clear understanding of how the planning process would work and to keep residents updated throughout the process, an interactive website was developed. Through the website, citizens could access documents and notes from each stakeholder meeting and could submit responses to the survey questions at any time throughout the planning process. In addition, a planning timeline was made available on the website so that community members were always aware of when different meetings and planning sessions were occurring.



**L** Heartland, Bleckley County   **R** Public Boat Ramp

### 2. SWOT Analysis

An initial steering committee meeting was held on March 17th, 2021. During this meeting, members of the steering committee participated in a SWOT analysis where they identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in Bleckley County. Figure 1, page 15 shows the results of the SWOT analysis. This activity provided a starting point in identifying the overall needs and opportunities of Bleckley County, which are addressed in "Needs and Opportunities".

The SWOT analysis showed that one of Bleckley County's greatest strengths includes its education system. Bleckley County takes pride in its public schools and university. This education system in Bleckley County has helped to create a skilled labor force. Another strength of



Bleckley County is its location. Bleckley County has highway access which is great for industry and those who need to commute. Bleckley County's natural resources are also a strength of the community. The county is home to the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area, diverse agriculture, and a portion of the Ocmulgee River runs through the county as well. Other strengths of Bleckley County include its infrastructure, the airport, public library, the hospital, various churches, the county's public services, and affordable land prices.

During the SWOT analysis, several weaknesses of Bleckley County were discussed. A key concern for the county is the lack of industry and the number of people leaving to work elsewhere. There is poor marketing of the local opportunities that do exist, and the retention of the educated and skilled workforce needs to increase. With unresponsive landlords, vacant buildings, and a lack of amenities, Downtown Cochran is perceived poorly by the community. Currently, businesses operate with limited hours and there is a lack of diversity in products available. Other weaknesses that were shown in the SWOT analysis include the lack of funding for infrastructure, broadband is too expensive with limited options, the population of the homeless, a lack of community involvement, and limited housing options.



**L** Public Meeting **R** Downtown Cochran

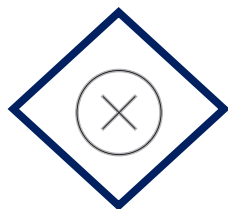
The next portion of the SWOT analysis pertained to identifying opportunities in Bleckley County. The county has the opportunity to expand its relationship with the university and technical colleges in the area which could help to increase economic activity within Bleckley County. Subdivision opportunities also exist within the county given the affordable land prices. While vacant buildings are seen as a weakness, they are also an opportunity for redevelopment. The expansion of the Federal Park Ocmulgee National Monument is also an opportunity for Bleckley County to increase tourism and offer more recreational activities. Another opportunity is for Bleckley County to capitalize on its close proximity to the Air Force base in Warner Robins.

The final portion of the SWOT analysis included the discussion of possible threats to Bleckley County. The County recognizes that Warner Robins and the City of Dublin are possible economic threats, as these cities currently offer more amenities, services, and commercial options. If the Air Force base were to close in Warner Robins, this also would be a threat to Bleckley County as many choose to work at the base but live in Bleckley County. Other threats that were identified include weather conditions, the declining population of the Middle Georgia Region, and an increase in crime and drug use.



## Strengths

- Education System: Public schools and university
- Location to highway
- Skilled labor force
- Infrastructure, roads, bridges, water/sewer, drainage
- Airport
- Public library
- Hospital
- United community
- Churches
- River, water trail location, Dykes landing
- Diverse agriculture
- New Businesses
- Public Services, EMS
- Low land prices
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century resource



## Weaknesses

- Lack of diversity in school system
- Lack of funding for infrastructure and capacity for infrastructure
- Housing options
- Lack of industry
- People leaving to work elsewhere
- Lack of community involvement (volunteers)
- Limited options for broadband, too expensive
- Perception of downtown and its aesthetics
- Lack of communication between residents, lack of unification for information.
- Lack of trained workforce-mostly commuters
- Need more mentorship/apprenticeship programs and opportunities.
- Retention of trained workforce
- Poor marketing of local opportunities and industries.
- Lack of amenities
- Unresponsive landlords and vacant buildings
- Services for aging community
- Lack of operating hours for resources, businesses, essential services, retail
- Diversity of products available
- Population of homeless



## Opportunities

- Joint county industrial development
- Relationship with DCA, DNR, etc. for state funding
- University/technical colleges
- Air Force base
- Subdivision opportunities (land prices)
- Development of amenities
- Vacant buildings
- Expansion of Federal Park Ocmulgee National Monument
- Future business owner's leadership program for high schoolers
- Youth leadership
- Resources for homeless population and mental health resources



## Threats

- Warner Robins
- City of Dublin
- Airforce base closure
- COVID-19
- Weather conditions
- Declining population of Middle Georgia Region
- Aging Community
- Crime and crime organization
- Drug use

Figure 1. SWOT Analysis Results

### 3. Community Survey

With the help of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission, Bleckley County, and its municipalities, developed a survey to distribute to community members. The survey consisted of nine questions and the goal of the survey was to gain additional public input on the needs and opportunities of the community, which are addressed in "Needs and Opportunities". The survey was distributed to community members through email, through paper copies, and was made available on the Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan Update webpage. Results of the survey were discussed at a later stakeholder meeting where the needs and opportunities community were being addressed. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.



**“Growing a Better Bleckley”** is truly a locally developed guide to, and framework for, future growth and development of Cochran-Bleckley County designed to generate local pride and enthusiasm, to accentuate assets and improve weaknesses, and ultimately bring about a desired future which makes the Cochran-Bleckley County community an improved place to live and work with an outstanding and enhanced quality of life. It is realized that to take advantage of opportunities and to make a difference will take time and considered effort, but it is felt this plan is pragmatic and practical in outlining a course and roadmap for steps and actions which can be achieved and which will move the community forward. The plan continues with delineation of the Community Goals element and a Community Vision which essentially and succinctly summarizes the community’s aspirations and plan’s objectives.



# COMMUNITY GOALS



The Community Goals Element is described in the State Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive planning as the most important part of the comprehensive plan. It is a concise summary of future community desires and wishes, and is an easily referenced roadmap for community leaders and all concerned with growth and development of the community and its future.

The Bleckley County - Cochran Joint Comprehensive Plan includes three of the four possible components detailed in the Minimum Standards for the required element. These include: a general Community Vision, separate municipal descriptions/visions, listing of Community Goals, and a description of Long Term Community Policies. These components seek to paint a picture of the desired future community, and answer the planning question, **“Where does the community wish to go?”** To some degree, the Long Term Community Policies also outline guidance strategy of, **“How are we going to get where we desire to go, and also, what do we desire for other development parties to pursue?”**



## Community Vision

**B**leckley County envisions a future where opportunity is embraced. Bleckley County will become a community that capitalizes on diversity and will be a place with a broad range of choices for its residents. The County will embrace and promote its centralized location in order to become a hub for commerce and industry. The goal is to establish countywide prosperity by creating a sustainable system of high-quality education, healthcare, public safety, infrastructure, recreation, commerce, and housing. Bleckley County will be a great place to live with attractive neighborhoods, green spaces, schools, and job opportunities.



## Economic Development

Bleckley County will have a vibrant economy with a skilled workforce, which will attract businesses who value highly educated and technically oriented employees. The diversity of industry and innovation will be encouraged, and residents will have access to high paying jobs with benefits. The expansion of educational training programs will provide the opportunity for all members of Bleckley County to participate in the local economy. Workforce support programs will be implemented within the County in order to train and empower not only members of the current workforce, but also younger generations. By partnering educational institutions with local businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, the Joint Industrial Development Authority, the Cochran Downtown Development Authority, and other government organizations, younger generations will be encouraged to become and remain members of the Bleckley County workforce. The encouragement of technical and vocational training will also be established within the community. This will be provided through the Bleckley County High School and will also be encouraged at the post-secondary level in order to fulfill much need professions within Bleckley County.

Investment and development of local infrastructure will be encouraged. Residents and business owners within the county can expect to have a clean water/sewer system and access to broadband. The development of additional amenities, such as restaurants, supermarkets, hotels, and truck stops, will also be encouraged and promoted in Bleckley County. Visitors to downtown Cochran will experience a thriving and active environment that is filled with shops, restaurants, services, and opportunities. Investment in underdeveloped areas



**L** Chamber of Commerce    **R** Downtown Cochran

of downtown will be supported and efforts will be taken to create a set of standards/ordinances for buildings and businesses in downtown Cochran. The unique heritage, small town charm, and architectural style of downtown Cochran will be celebrated and capitalized upon in order to create a memorable and attractive gathering space for residents, businesses, and visitors of Bleckley County.



## Community/Recreation

Residents of Bleckley County will feel a sense of pride for their close-knit and friendly community. Community engagement will be encouraged through a variety of organizations. By pursuing a campaign to decrease litter in the County, residents will enjoy living in an environment that is clean and attractive. There will be a diverse range of opportunities for citizens and younger generations to influence the decision-making process for their community. Bleckley County has the advantage of building upon existing natural resources in the areas to promote different recreational activities, such as fishing, hunting, and kayaking, through agricultural tourism. The community will also have access to a variety of other outdoor areas including hiking trails, campgrounds, walking trails, community parks, playgrounds, a splashpad, a pickleball court, and even fishing competitions. Residents of all ages will always have something to do in Bleckley County to help keep them happy, fulfilled, and entertained. Throughout the year, Bleckley County will host a range of community events to help bring people together. Residents can look forward to events like outdoor movies, food trucks, fairs, parades, and music concerts that will take place within their community. The Ocmulgee Water Trail and the expansion of the nearby Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park will provide recreational and cultural opportunities and activities for local residents and area tourists. These events will add to the small-town charm and character of Bleckley County that residents can enjoy for years to come.



**U** Paddle in Ocmulgee River  
**B** Biking Event in Bleckley County



## Public Service

Bleckley County understands the importance and need for a high-quality system of public services. The County and City will work to promote collaboration between emergency services that are essential to the safety and wellbeing of the community. Bleckley County is also committed to improving its current infrastructure in order to attract further growth and investment within the area. These improvements will include updating the water, sewer, and drainage system in Bleckley County and in the City of Cochran. Enhancements to sidewalks, bike lanes, community facilities, and road improvements will also be pursued. In order to maintain a high quality of infrastructure, developing a maintenance schedule will be prioritized.

The future of Bleckley County will be a place where the community feels a sense of ownership, empowerment, and is actively involved in decision making. Collaboration efforts between citizens and local government institutions, elected officials, and appointed boards will be established through a sense of trust and open communication policies. These efforts will enhance Bleckley County and will encourage leadership development within the community.



**L** 1st United Methodist Church   **R** Bleckley County Court House  
**L** Bleckley Memorial Hospital   **R** Cochran City Hall

## Healthcare

Bleckley County will be a place where everyone has access to quality healthcare. Existing hospital and healthcare organizations will be supported and expanded upon; Bleckley Memorial Hospital will be a designated critical access hospital. Residents of Bleckley County will have the ability to receive excellent healthcare within their own community. Access to family healthcare, general practices, urgent healthcare, specialty healthcare, and veterinary care will be available for residents. A variety of excellent long-term care facilities will be accessible to the community. There will also be options for a healthcare transit system. A healthcare transit system will provide mobility options for residents, especially senior citizens, to reach their healthcare providers.

## Housing

Bleckley County will have an expanded supply of affordable housing, senior living options, student housing, and workforce housing options that are available to either rent or own. Residents of all income levels will have access to quality housing that meets their needs. This extended supply of housing options for residents will provide stability for families and improve opportunities for education and career advancement.



**U** Bleckley County Health Center **B** Residential area in Cochran



# City of Cochran

## Description

The City of Cochran is conveniently located in the heart of central Georgia along U.S. Highway 23 between I-16 and I-75 less than one hour's drive south of Macon. It is almost equidistant between Atlanta's Hartsfield Airport and the Port of Savannah and has a local general aviation airport. Cochran is the only incorporated municipality within Bleckley County and has a population of about 5,000 persons. The community is home to the Cochran Campus of Middle Georgia State University, and is known for a cultured, progressive atmosphere almost unheard of in a rural community. Agriculture remains a mainstay of the local economy, although there is major influence from the nearby Robins Air Force Base. Not only does Cochran enjoy many locational, economic, educational, and cultural assets and advantages, the community is surrounded by much natural beauty and outdoor adventure from its scenic and pastoral countryside to the historic and fabled Ocmulgee River, the Ocmulgee Water Trail, and the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management and Public Fishing areas. All of this affords the community an extraordinary quality of life equivalent to an unexpected haven or oasis in a peaceful, relaxing rural area. The community describes itself as an outstanding place of Southern hospitality and charm which offers a tranquil, relaxing place and pace of living with many urban-like amenities and cultural opportunities.

Although Bleckley County is one of Georgia's youngest counties (established in 1912), the City of Cochran has a much older and fascinating history. The community has long been associated with education, leadership, and culture. The city traces its municipal history to the mid-1800s location of the Macon and Brunswick Railroad. The City of Cochran is named for Judge Arthur E. Cochran who first campaigned as a state legislator for a railroad to develop the area, and who resigned a superior court judgeship to return to the legislature to seek state development support for the railroad. Judge Cochran subsequently served as the Macon and Brunswick Railroad's president. The community is still served by the railroad, a Class I rail line operated by the Norfolk Southern system.

Before the railroad, the Cochran area was on the Indian frontier and settled in the early 1800s after Creek Indian cessations. Cochran was actually located on the Uchee Indian Trail, and truly was an oasis for the Native Americans as it was the known location of several Creek Indian wells/watering holes. The nearby Longstreet Community of early settlers along the federal postal road between Milledgeville, when it served as the state capital, and Hartford on the Ocmulgee River frontier, played pivotal roles in Cochran's establishment, and its educational and cultural leadership. These settlers, particularly the Walker family, helped first establish an early school, the Longstreet Academy; then facilitated routing the railroad throu-

gh Coley's Station and Cochran; and later championed the town, and the development of a postsecondary school, Ebenezer College, in Cochran. Cochran was formally incorporated as a town in 1869 as Station #15 on the Macon and Brunswick Railroad soon after its completion. The Town of Cochran was reorganized as the City of Cochran in 1904. Ebenezer College later transitioned into the 12th Congressional District Agricultural and Mechanical School on the



*Downtown Cochran*

same campus in World War I, and then to Middle Georgia College in 1929. For many years, this school was recognized as the oldest junior college in the United States. Local leadership was also evidenced in the establishment of Bleckley County itself when the newspaper was purchased primarily to campaign for separate county status. Leadership in the agricultural sector has also been quite evident within the community. Cochran was the center of early 1900s establishment of purebred hog breeding, and later the breeding of Black Angus cattle. A 1950s history noted the community was well-known then as the “Home of the Champions” as the city and county could boast of several all-time high records in the farm production of cotton and corn. This community agricultural leadership continues today with the “Back to Basics 101” organic whole wheat farm and business which garnered 2016 Flavor of Georgia recognition.

The City of Cochran currently carries on its rich tradition with an awarded and honored local school system, a modern library, a self-sufficient community hospital, the Middle Georgia State University campus, a local facility of the Oconee Fall Line Technical College, churches of many faiths, an impressive array of civic clubs, an involved populace, and many other amenities. The City of Cochran truly is an unexpected haven and bastion of Southern charm and culture with an extraordinary high quality of life which rivals many urban areas, while being located in a bucolic and pleasing rural environment. The City has many advantages and much appeal to the entrepreneur, resident, or visitor alike.



## Vision

The City of Cochran wishes to continue to cultivate and nurture its image and reality as a unique and special place where Southern hospitality and charm is a way of life and which continues to exhibit progressive leadership, extraordinary educational and cultural opportunities, and an outstanding quality of life. The community will continue to exhibit a comfortable, caring, and involved family atmosphere and cooperative civic pride which celebrates, protects, and improves its heritage and rural environment. Cochran will continue to build on its many social and economic strengths; and to modernize and improve its infrastructure, facilities, and amenities. Commercial amenities will be expanded with the introduction of additional downtown incentives; promotion of the downtown business district; development and blight control regulations implemented through land use, zoning, and other ordinances; and active restoration of historic properties. Desired business and industry will be aggressively pursued to provide the community with jobs and amenities for citizens and visitors to the area. Existing healthcare facilities will be supported and access to specialty healthcare will be expanded as new healthcare services are sought. Safety and emergency service capability will be strengthened as the city will pursue cooperative efforts with the County to continually



**UL** Walker Hall   **UR** US Post Office in Cochran   **BL** Ebenezer Hall   **BR** Downtown Cochran

improve services. The community will remain vibrant and interesting as its transportation corridors improve, its downtown is revitalized and teeming, the University, Oconee Fall Line Technical College, and the local school system expand and improve, and other opportunities for economic growth are realized.

The City of Cochran will enjoy an expanded reputation as a pleasing and enviable haven located in a bucolic backdrop of an appealing and comforting rural countryside. Existing community events will be promoted, and new community events will be introduced. Public spaces and community parks will be constructed and designated to enhance quality of life and public use. Greater efforts in intergovernmental collaboration will result in effective communication, efficiency in project coordination, and inspire public participation and sense of ownership in the community. Cochran will seek opportunities to engage and empower and retain younger generations and young families. A Cochran address will be a much desired and coveted badge of honor for businesses, and residents alike.



**L** Cochran Police Department   **M** Bleckley County Court House   **R** Rural Scene, Bleckley County

Issues	Opportunities
Economic development/jobs	Location
Downtown revitalization	U.S. Highway 23
Water and sewer infrastructure improvements	Middle Georgia State University
Transportation improvements	Oconee Fall Line Technical College
Recreation/park improvements	Involved citizenry and civic clubs
Housing stock improvements	Robins Air Force Base
	Cochran Municipal Airport
	Biking Bleckley



# Community Goals

## Economic Development



1. Nurture existing businesses/industries/entrepreneurs
2. Utilize/support Cochran-Bleckley Chamber of Commerce, local Industrial Development Authority, and other local/regional/state agencies
3. Develop detailed economic development marketing strategy/community branding
4. Develop/extend/maintain infrastructure to facilitate/guide development
5. Seek diversified economic development
6. Attract new businesses/industry/jobs
7. Support entrepreneurial/small business development
8. Address continuing education/job skills improvements
9. Retain local graduates
10. Improve adult literacy rate
11. Support Oconee Fall Line Technical College/local Dr. Peyton Williams, Jr. Adult Learning Center and expanded offerings
12. Continue support for Middle Georgia State University

**L** Downtown Cochran

**R** Paddle in Ocmulgee River





## Economic Development



13. Upgrade local school system infrastructure/facilities/services, as needed
14. Improve transportation access/quality
15. Continue to develop/maintain existing sites and new industrial park through technological, infrastructure, and other enhancements
16. Enhance/grow tourism
17. Support continued downtown revitalization of Cochran
18. Maintain economic viability/support/enhance agriculture/forestry land uses
19. Seek additional enterprises/venues/markets supportive of agriculture/forestry
20. Guide/direct appropriate development along U.S. 23/Cochran Bypass
21. Promote location on I-16/facilitate desired GA 112 interchange development
22. Proactively manage/guide growth and development through coordinated planning
23. Seek compatible development supportive of community's rural character and quality of life
24. Promote appropriate infill development
25. Improve community appearance/aesthetics
26. Seek county-wide broadband/fiber availability upgrades



*Cotton Field at Harvest, Bleckley County*





U Park Scene  
B Ocmulgee River



## Natural & Cultural Resources

1. Protect significant natural resources of Bleckley County
2. Conserve/protect Ocmulgee River and its corridor
3. Seek compatible utilization/recreational development supportive of existing rural character/quality of life
4. Conserve existing agricultural/forestry land uses
5. Address growth management/natural and cultural resources protection
6. Utilize existing and new public infrastructure to guide desired growth and development
7. Conserve/protect Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area and Ocmulgee Public Fishing Area
8. Maintain/utilize/preserve/promote/adaptively use historic resources/heritage of Bleckley County
9. Continue downtown revitalization of Cochran
10. Support existing/encourage development of new nature-based, heritage, recreation, and agri-tourism opportunities
11. Improve community's appearance/aesthetics through countywide planning and appropriate regulation
12. Support the expansion of the Ocmulgee Mounds National Park along the Ocmulgee River to include preserve status







## Housing



1. Encourage use of state/federal programs
2. Improve housing quality/appearance
3. Seek to encourage more diverse housing mix
4. Guide location of compatible housing developments through planning/infrastructure location/regulation
5. Upgrade community appearance through coordinated, comprehensive regulations

1. Plan/manage/guide future growth and development
2. Encourage compatible development/utilization
3. Preserve rural, small town character/quality of life
4. Develop/implement/enforce cooperative land use planning/subdivision/manufactured housing/growth management/nuisance/environmental and code enforcement regulations
5. Continue downtown Cochran revitalization
6. Explore feasibility of annexation into Cochran
7. Conserve/protect significant natural/cultural resources through compatible development/utilization
8. Utilize existing and new infrastructure to guide desired growth/development
9. Encourage appropriate infill development
10. Preserve/maintain forestry/agriculture/open space
11. Improve community's appearance/aesthetics



## Land Use





## Community Facilities and Services



1. Utilize to enhance/promote existing and develop new parks/recreation facilities/activities with a master planning approach
2. Improve public access to Ocmulgee River
3. Guide/direct appropriate development along U.S. 23/Cochran Bypass
4. Improve/promote transportation access/quality
5. Continue to improve fire/public safety/emergency medical facilities/services countywide
6. Continue to support/maintain Bleckley Memorial Hospital's status as critical access hospital
7. Provide/maintain adequate governmental facilities/services
8. Maintain/upgrade/expand water/sewer and other infrastructure facilities and service, as needed
9. Utilize existing and planned infrastructure location to guide growth/development
10. Upgrade countywide solid waste/recycling services/facilities/initiatives in conjunction with improving community appearance
11. Continue support for Tessie W. Norris/Cochran-Bleckley Library
12. Maintain/upgrade quality educational facilities/programs
13. Improve countywide broadband technology/fiber access availability
14. Continue support for and enhance cultural facilities/programs/events

## Intergovernmental Coordination



1. Cooperate in coordinated growth management/nuisance/environmental regulation/code enforcement
2. Maintain/enhance local, regional, state cooperation
3. Continue to seek sharing/cooperation/consolidation in service delivery

# Long Term Community Policies



## Economic Development

1. The community will support and promote programs for the retention of existing local industries and entrepreneurs in its support and quest of business/industry retention and additional job opportunities
2. The community will utilize and support the Cochran-Bleckley Chamber of Commerce, Bleckley-Cochran Industrial Development Authority, and other existing local, regional, and state agencies to improve all of Bleckley County
3. The community will work with the Chamber of Commerce and Industrial Development Authority to develop a detailed economic development strategy and enhanced marketing to attract business/industry
4. The community will work to develop, extend, and maintain the necessary infrastructure to facilitate, guide, and accommodate future development
5. The community will seek diversified economic development with jobs and wages of all levels
6. The community will continue to actively recruit new industry and commercial/retail development compatible with, and supportive of, the resources, infrastructure, existing economy, and the natural environments of the county
7. The community will work to support entrepreneurial/small business development to promote job diversification
8. The community will work together to improve educational and skills levels to ensure a better qualified workforce for existing and future employers
9. The community will work together to develop, support, and promote programs which will enhance opportunities for local graduates to both live and work in the community upon graduation
10. The community will collaboratively support efforts to improve the county's adult literacy rate through cooperative efforts with the Oconee Fall Line Technical College at the local Dr. Peyton Williams, Jr. Adult Learning Center and other educational outreach programs
11. The community will continue to support Middle Georgia State University and its future expansion, as needed, through infrastructure upgrades, increased program offerings, and other means
12. The community will continue to support and encourage Oconee Fall Line Technical College to expand course offerings and programs to better serve existing and future students
13. The community will collaboratively support efforts to continuously improve the local school system as needed through infrastructure (technology and otherwise) upgrades and/or additions, the development of a local Career Academy, and other means

14. The community will continue to seek transportation improvements (highway, airport, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian) to enhance and support economic development efforts
15. The community will work to develop and maintain the necessary infrastructure and other industrial park improvements to facilitate and accommodate desired economic growth
16. The community will work cooperatively to increase promotion and marketing of tourist facilities/services and attractions located in the community, and otherwise grow tourism as an important component of the local economy
17. The community will continue downtown revitalization efforts in Cochran through the use of the Main Street or similar program, Downtown Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce, and local, state, and federal incentives, as appropriate
18. The community will maintain agriculture/forestry as viable economic land uses through traditional and alternative enterprises, such as agri-tourism and nature-based tourism
19. The community will seek to conserve, protect, and keep viable its valuable agricultural lands and timberlands, and will work to pursue additional public and private supportive enterprises, venues, agribusinesses, or markets
20. The community will work to guide and direct appropriate development along the U.S. 23/Cochran Bypass
21. The community will increase promotion of its location on I-16 and facilitate desired interchange development at GA 112 interchange
22. The community will support the continuing improvement and utilization of the Cochran Municipal Airport
23. The community will proactively manage and guide its future growth and development through coordinated planning, and will seek development which protects its existing rural character and quality of life
24. The community will cooperate to promote appropriate infill development; upgrade gateways, commercial areas and substandard housing; and otherwise improve the appearance and aesthetics of the county and Cochran



## Natural and Cultural Resources

1. The community will seek to conserve and protect the Ocmulgee River Corridor, the county's significant groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, other important natural and cultural resources and the open spaces and landscapes of the county while promoting compatible utilization and recreational development
2. The community will work to conserve its existing prime farmland and forest areas while seeking development compatible with its existing rural character and quality of life
3. The community will manage its growth and development, and protect and conserve its important natural and cultural resources, through public infrastructure location/community investment and county-wide land use planning and appropriate regulations



4. The community will seek to conserve and protect the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area and Ocmulgee Public Fishing Area, and will work to pursue additional public and private outdoor recreation or nature venues
5. The community will maintain, utilize, promote, and preserve its heritage, and will seek to encourage public and private adaptive use/reuse of its historic buildings, historic districts, and landmark structures and pursue listing in the National Register of Historic Places and/or in local historic district(s), as appropriate
6. The community will work to utilize and promote the county's historic, natural, and agricultural sites and venues for compatible, appropriate heritage, nature-based, and agri-tourism development
7. The community will work to improve its appearance and aesthetics through county-wide planning and appropriate regulation



## Housing

1. The community will encourage the use of state and federal programs to improve availability of quality housing for all residents, and to encourage home ownership
2. The community will address substandard housing and concentrations of blight, including manufactured housing developments, and will cooperatively upgrade their quality and appearance through rehabilitation, removal, code enforcement and regulation
3. The community will seek to encourage a diverse mix of safe, quality housing, including affordable, rental, elderly, starter homes, and compatible workforce housing
4. The community will provide guidance to and for location of compatible housing developments through planning, infrastructure location, and regulation
5. The community will upgrade its appearance and the quality of its housing developments through coordinated and comprehensive land use planning/subdivision/manufactured housing/code enforcement regulations



## Land Use

1. The community will plan, manage, and guide its future growth and development, and encourage growth compatible with its existing rural, small town character and quality of life
2. The community will cooperate to develop, implement, and enforce county-wide land use regulations,

subdivision/manufactured housing regulations, growth management/nuisance/environmental regulations, and housing and building codes

3. The community will continue downtown/central business district revitalization efforts in Cochran through use of the Main Street or similar program, Downtown Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce, and local, state, and federal incentives, as appropriate
4. The community will work together to explore the feasibility of annexation into Cochran where appropriate and desired
5. The community will seek to conserve and protect the county's significant natural and cultural resources through their compatible development/utilization
6. The community will work to encourage appropriate infill development through planning, infrastructure location, and regulation
7. The community will encourage growth which preserves and maintains forestry and agriculture as viable, functioning land uses and promotes the preservation of the county's open space
8. The community will seek to improve its appearance and aesthetics, including enhancing gateways/entranceways through litter control, landscaping/beautification, and other means



## Community Facilities and Services

1. The community will enhance and promote existing parks/recreation facilities and work to establish additional such facilities and activities to serve existing and future populations, and to further cultivate/support tourism in accordance with the development of a long range Recreation Master Plan
2. The community will continue to seek to provide improved access to the Ocmulgee River
3. The community will work to guide and direct appropriate development along the U.S. 23/Cochran Bypass
4. The community will continue to seek transportation improvements (highway, airport, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian) to enhance and support community and economic development efforts, future growth, and quality of life
5. The community will continue to seek resources to maintain existing roads/streets and to pave additional dirt and connector roads
6. The community will continue to improve local roads and improve traffic flow through paving, resurfacing, and other means
7. The community will work to improve fire, emergency medical, and public safety services county-wide, including equipment maintenance and upgrades, adequate training of personnel, and facility improvements as needed
8. The community will continue to work together to maintain and upgrade its health care facilities and services, including future services/equipment/facilities improvements and additional physician recruitment

9. The community will continue to support and maintain its local critical access hospital, Bleckley Memorial, through facility, service, personnel, and equipment improvements/upgrades, as needed
10. The community will provide and maintain adequate government facilities, including city and county administrative facilities
11. The community will maintain, upgrade, and expand its existing infrastructure and services to enhance the quality of life, and to attract/guide desired, compatible growth and development
12. The community will guide growth and development to areas of existing infrastructure and will plan and develop expansions to help bring about desired patterns of growth
13. The City, with community support as appropriate, will continue to plan for, and support the extension of, water/sewer and natural gas services to all feasible areas of the existing incorporated limits, and to any areas proposed to be annexed to the City
14. The community will work to upgrade county-wide solid waste/recycling services/facilities/initiatives, in conjunction with other efforts to improve community appearance/aesthetics
15. The community will continue to support the Tessie W. Norris/Cochran-Bleckley Library through facility, equipment, staffing, program, and other improvements/expansion, as needed
16. The community will seek to enhance local educational and technological opportunities by continuing to support, maintain, and upgrade its local educational system facilities and programs
17. The community will encourage and support the maintenance, enhancement, and promotion of existing local and regional cultural facilities and opportunities, and will further develop cultural facilities and assets to pursue and promote additional venues/activities
18. The community will support the educational, social, and transitional services afforded by such organizations as Bleckley RSAT, Promise of Hope, and others



## Intergovernmental Coordination

1. The community will cooperate in coordinated growth management/nuisance/ environmental regulation and code enforcement to manage and guide its future growth and development
2. The community will continue to cooperate locally, regionally, and on the state level to improve, develop, and plan for the desired future of Cochran-Bleckley County expressed and outlined in its comprehensive plan
3. The community will continue to seek ways to cooperate and coordinate efforts in the delivery of services, and will investigate the possibility of shared and consolidated services where appropriate and feasible



# NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES



The Needs and Opportunities Element is required of all local governments by the Minimum Standards and Procedures. The community needs are those weaknesses or liabilities which have to be addressed, changed, or mitigated to help achieve the desired community future. The community opportunities are strengths and assets which can be utilized as starting points and foundations to easily accentuate or capitalize on to move the community forward on its desired future path.

The Needs and Opportunities Element generally answers the planning question, **“Where are we currently?”** The answers can provide the compass point guidance necessary to begin and advance along the improvement journey. The Bleckley County - Cochran Joint Comprehensive Plan identifies each community goal as an issue for improvement, and further identifies local needs and opportunities, as appropriate.



## Economic Development

### Opportunities:

1. Have Freeport Exemption
2. Excellent public school system
3. Increased enrollment, programs/course options/degree programs at Middle Georgia State University
4. Low crime rate
5. Good people/unified community
6. Rural character/Quality of Life preservation
7. Strong senior services
8. Population growth
9. T-SPLOST
10. Location-in proximity to shipping routes
11. Cochran DDA reactivated
12. Local support of Downtown revitalization
13. New Businesses locating in Cochran
14. University/technical colleges
15. Golf courses
16. Drainage improvements
17. Bleckley Memorial Hospital
18. Airport
19. Infrastructure, roads, bridges, water and sewer, drainage
20. Skilled Labor Force
21. Joint County Industrial Development
22. Chamber of Commerce
23. Future business owners leadership program and other youth leadership programs for high school students
24. Downtown murals donations
25. Consistant Airport Improvements
26. Federal opportunity zone

### Needs:

1. Education levels/job skills improvements
2. Expand Oconee Fall Line Technical College presence
3. Need technical education
4. Lack of state/federal attention
5. Business/industry retention/expansion
6. Attraction of new economic development
7. Small business/entrepreneurial development/Need business incubator
8. Need more restaurants
9. Detailed Economic Development Strategy development
10. Enhanced economic development marketing
11. Need community branding/community unity
12. Affordable broadband-limited options
13. Transportation improvements/resources
14. Warner Robins/Dublin - Competition
15. Vacant buildings
16. Unresponsive landlords of vacant buildings
17. Need to increase downtown parking
18. Declining Population of Middle Georgia Region
19. Aging Community
20. Job diversification needed with wages for all levels
21. Need for Job creation
22. Local, regional, and state cooperation
23. Retention of local graduates
24. Airforce Base – workforce competition
25. Airforce Base Closure (BRAC)
26. COVID

### *(Economic Development "Needs" Continued)*

27. Lack of diversity of products available
28. Lack of operating hours for resources, businesses, essential services, retail / Noon Wednesday closures
29. Lack of industry
30. Lack of entertainment/restaurants/events
31. Lack of trained workforce-mostly commuters
32. Need more mentorship/apprenticeship programs and opportunities
33. Retention of trained workforce - People leaving to work elsewhere
34. Marketing of local opportunities and industries needed
35. Enhanced options to attract students
36. Downtown Cochran commercial area revitalization/demolition needed
37. Limited tax base
38. Road conditions – improvements needed
39. Rail access-side tracks needed for industry
40. Extend natural gas service area
41. Community events/Community aesthetics/gateway improvements
42. I-16/GA 112 interchange development, including development of industrial park
43. Rehabilitated water/sewer infrastructure
44. Growth management
45. County-wide access to DSL/fiber optic
46. Protection/promotion of agricultural/forestry uses
47. Need west bypass/truck route to link with east bypass
48. Retirement facilities
49. Lack of funding for infrastructure and capacity for infrastructure



## Housing

### **Opportunities:**

1. Relatively low housing costs
2. Land Prices
3. Subdivision opportunities (land prices)
4. Loft apartments downtown
5. Homestead exemption
6. Georgia Initiative for community housing
3. Need more Senior housing options
4. Need more multi-family housing
5. Utilization of state/federal programs, including historic preservation rehabilitation tax incentives
6. Need for growth management/nuisance/environmental/subdivision/mobile home regulation and code enforcement

### **Needs:**

1. Improvement of housing quality
2. Need for additional affordable housing
7. Improve substandard housing/eliminate blight
8. Diversity of housing mix
9. Lack of housing options







## Natural & Cultural Resources

### Opportunities:

1. Natural Resources
2. Ocmulgee Water Trail Partnership
3. Dirt racetrack
4. Natural resources conservation/protection
5. Successful 4-H program
6. Two campgrounds
7. Hillside Bluegrass Festival
8. Agritourism potential
9. River, Water trail location, Dykes Landing
10. Diverse agriculture
11. Wildlife management area/outdoor recreation development
12. Expansion of Federal Park Ocmulgee Mounds National Monument

### Needs:

1. Perception of downtown and its aesthetics
2. Lack of community involvement (volunteers)

3. Lack of communication between residents, lack of unification for information, limited.
4. Better utilization of natural resources
5. Compatible, supportive development needed
6. Compatible economic utilization/opportunities needed
7. Environmentally responsible/more sustainable growth
8. Historic resources preservation/utilization needed
9. Growth management/regulation
10. Community aesthetics/appearance improvements
11. Need to expand on improvements community appearance/curb appeal to make more attractive
12. Rural agricultural character preservation
13. Tourism development/promotion
14. Expand public parks/ public spaces



## Land Use

### Opportunities:

1. Subdivision growth in rural areas
2. Have building/codes enforcement in city and county
3. Rural character/Quality of Life preservation
4. Agricultural resources
5. Natural resources
6. Annexation

### *(Land Use "Needs")*

#### **Needs:**

1. Need for growth management/nuisance/environmental/subdivision/mobile home regulation in unincorporated county
2. Need to expand on improvements community appearance/curb appeal to make more attractive
3. Infill development and location of use management
4. Community appearance/aesthetics improvements
5. Preserve existing residential areas within Cochran
6. Utilization of infrastructure to guide growth
7. Compatible/supportive development
8. Utilization of future land use plan when reviewing planned development
9. Preserve prime farmland and open space



## **Community Facilities and Services**

#### **Opportunities:**

1. Airport
2. Public Library
3. Public Schools
4. Hospital
5. Renovation of City Auditorium
6. Adequate emergency medical services
7. Rehabilitated water/sewer infrastructure
8. Excellent school system
9. Middle Georgia State University
10. Peyton Williams Adult Learning Center
11. Low crime rate
12. Provision of adequate government facilities, including city administrative facility
13. Excess wastewater treatment capacity availability
14. 21 century Resource/ Family Connection
15. Civic clubs/ Churches
16. Dirt racetrack
17. United Community/Collaboration
18. T-SPLOST
19. Strong Recreation Department
20. Golf courses
21. Successful 4-H Program
22. Communities and Schools collaboration board
23. Well-used public library with 24-hour Wi-Fi
24. Park/recreational facilities improvements/funding
25. Future business owners leadership program and other youth leadership programs for high school students
26. Resources for homeless population and mental health

#### **Needs:**

1. Affordable broadband-limited options
2. Extension of water/sewer access as needed
3. Need for strong services for aging community/Seniors
4. Lack of diversity in School System
5. Provision of adequate water/sewer service through capital improvements program
6. Highway improvements/upgrades

### *(Community Facilities and Services "Needs" Continued)*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 7. Transportation resources  | 15. Long term waste disposal site selection                          |
| 8. Road condition  | 16. Health care system improvements, including physician recruitment |
| 9. Perception of downtown and its aesthetics                             | 17. Retirement facilities  |
| 10. Long-range capital improvement program for roadway improvements      | 18. Public safety enhancements                                       |
| 11. Need expanded Oconee Fall Line Technical College programs            | 19. Fire service improvements/need for more stations in county       |
| 12. Education facilities/services improvements                           | 20. Limited tax base   |
| 13. Limited recreation access, especially for youth activities           |  |
| 14. Need long-range comprehensive Recreation Master Plan for City/County |  |



## Intergovernmental Coordination

### **Opportunities:**

1. Outstanding Public-Private partnerships
2. Relationship with DCA, DNR, etc. for state funding
3. Local, regional, and state cooperation
4. University/technical colleges
5. Airport
6. Hospital
7. Cochran DDA
8. Joint County Industrial Development Authority
9. Chamber of Commerce

### **Needs:**

1. Services sharing/cooperation/consolidation/improve efficiency
2. Need community branding/community champions
3. Coordinated planning/growth management
4. Lack of community involvement (volunteers)
5. Unresponsive landlords of vacant buildings
6. Need to implement a method of distributing news and communication through diverse sources





# BROADBAND SERVICES



Since the discovery of electricity, people all over the world have dreamed about the exciting possibilities of technology sure to be right around the corner. Each new invention or innovation brought increased excitement. What made electricity service vital to people and industry of the United States in the 20th century will make broadband service a necessity in the 21st century. We recognize high speed technology has developed in disparity across the nation and the state of Georgia largely due to population densities and cost- return on infrastructure investments. It is Bleckley County's goal to determine the broadband infrastructure shortfall within the county and seek ways to improve its current position.

Broadband is defined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as a minimum of 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed. It should be noted the broadband definition has changed twice since its inception in 1996 due to technology advancements. Broadband delivery methods include, but are not limited to, digital subscriber

lines, cable modems, fiber, wireless, broadband over power lines, and satellites. The Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region, within which Bleckley County is located, was determined in a 2015 Digital Economy Plan to rank 12 out of 12 areas of Georgia for technological capability. It is significant to note the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region is the only region of Georgia without a metropolitan area included. Nationally, 99.1 % of the population have access to either fixed terrestrial service at 25 Mbps/3 Mbps or mobile LTE at 10 Mbps/3 Mbps; this percentage drops to 94.9% in rural areas. Rural areas in the State of Georgia are 80.3% served with broadband capability as compared to 97.9% in the urban communities. Also in the FCC's 2020 Broadband Deployment Report, it is reported 43.3% of the population in Bleckley County have access to fixed broadband technology served by DSL, and Fiber networks.

DSL service is available with a speed up to 25 Mbps in an area within and around the City of Cochran. Various blocks in the unincorporated county have access to DSL technology with download speeds up to 6 Mbps. Cable line access is not available within Cochran or Bleckley County. As of the 2020 FCC Broadband Deployment Report, several Census blocks are served by a fiber optic network in Bleckley County. The blocks are located within the City of Cochran and surrounding area.



**L** Public Park **R** Downtown Cochran

Data reported by the State of Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative's (GBDI) 2020 Broadband Report and accompanying map indicates a higher percentage of locations being served with broadband than the FCC data. This data varies due to the methodology of calculating the locations unserved. The FCC data considers an entire census block and population within as served if one location is served within the block. The data presented by the GBDI reports consider a census block served if 80 percent of locations are served with broadband capable speeds. Areas of Bleckley County without broadband capable technology are located genera-



lly north of Cochran to Interstate 16 with exception of few blocks within the unincorporated area. The areas unserved blankets the entire area primarily considered rural. Within this unserved area, 1,995 locations or 33 percent of Bleckley County are considered unserved by the State of Georgia. Agricultural interests within the County may benefit from improved internet capabilities; the farming operations to see the greatest benefit are located in the unserved areas.

Other avenues of broadband service technologies available in the community are through either satellite or wireless 4G LTE service. Satellite service speeds are generally slower download speeds compared to wired infrastructure and are prone to weather related outages. Wireless 4G LTE technology is widely available throughout the State of Georgia and is used by smartphones and tablets to download content reliably, although speed is determined by proximity to a communications tower and the speed at which the tower is capable. Bleckley County has a reported 4G LTE coverage area over the entire county. This avenue of service is generally sufficient for a homeowner or cell service subscriber; however, according to the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission's Digital Economy Plan in 2015, service reliability can be an issue with this technology.

An industry desiring an improved communications network will likely seek a fixed connection service provider and will need at minimum 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speeds. For this reason, the community will seek broadband capabilities exceeding the minimum to reach 1 gigabit per second (Gbps) (1 Gbps = 1,000 Mbps). According to data provided by the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA), National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and the FCC, the infrastructure for broadband services is located in portions of Bleckley County; however, the fixed broadband technology fails to reach 56.7 percent of the population and 33 percent of locations within the county (see Figure 1). Increased competition among providers may also decrease the cost charged to the consumer. According to FCC data, four fixed network providers operate within Bleckley County; the providers include EarthLink (DSL), AT&T (DSL) and Hargray (Fiber), ComSouth Wireless 4G LTE in the county meets minimum speeds of wireless broadband, but it is inadequate for industry seeking to locate in the county. The need for broadband service in Bleckley County is critical as it is determined to be underserved by both fixed broadband technology and wireless broadband technology. Bleckley County and City of Cochran desire to be fully served by broadband capability through broadband deployment with service areas reaching the minimum speeds to be considered "Broadband Service."



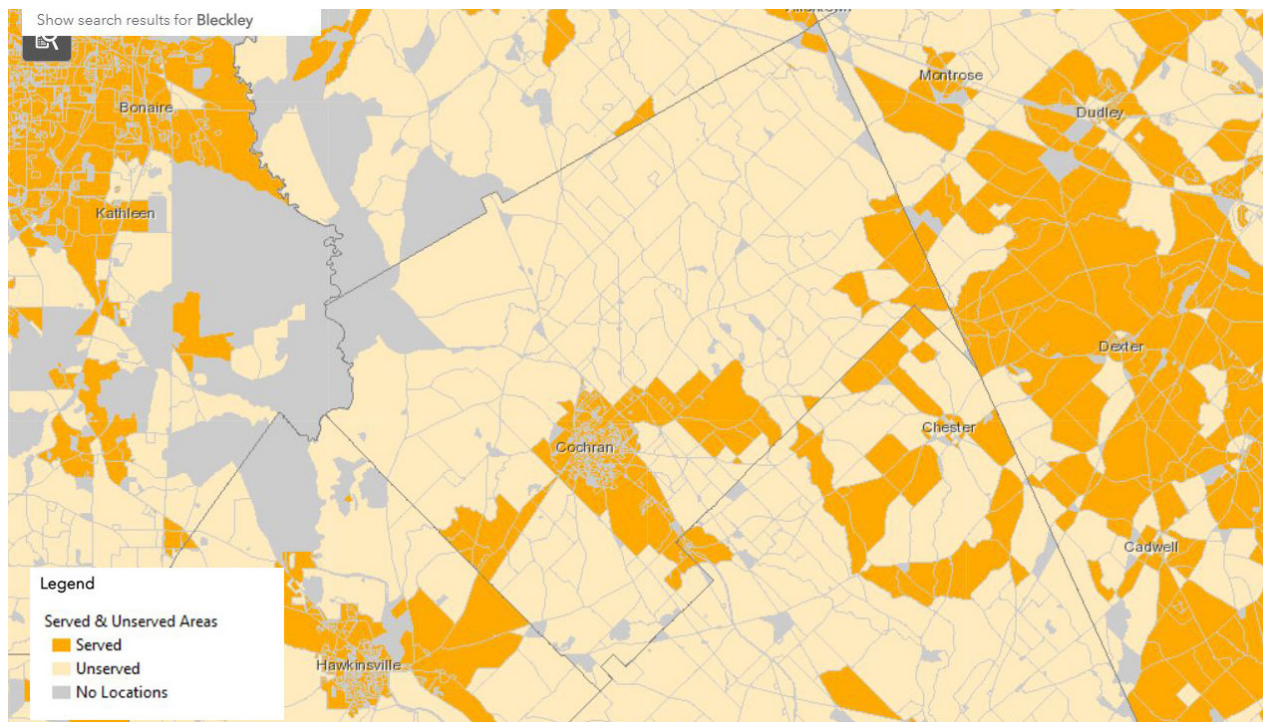


Figure 1: Broadband Availability within Bleckley County

Source: Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative 2021; <https://broadband.georgia.gov/maps/gbdi-unserved-county>

The Bleckley County community has chosen a multi-faceted approach and strategy to improve the availability of broadband and broadband deployment. The following items are actions steps the community will take to increase economic, educational, and social opportunities for citizens and businesses through the deployment of universal broadband and other communications technologies.

1. Develop and maintain an inventory of Community Anchor Institutions (schools, library, medical and healthcare providers, public safety entities, and higher education facilities) within the community to determine areas of greatest broadband need.
2. Develop or otherwise enact a model ordinance which determines a contact person for any broadband projects within the community, outlines a streamlined permit process for broadband projects, keeps broadband project permit fees reasonable, and ensures equal treatment for applicants applying for use of jurisdictional rights-of-way.
3. Apply to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for certification as a “Broadband Ready Community” or similar certification by the State of Georgia.
4. Partner with state agencies (Georgia Technology Authority, Department of Community Affairs, and Department of Economic Development) and area local governments to promote broadband deployment in the community, region, and state.
5. Identify broadband deployment projects eligible for OneGeorgia Authority funding and/or other state and federal grant or loan opportunities.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Economic prosperity is a key to community improvement. A community's comprehensive plan seeks at its core to make the community a better place to live, work, and recreate. To improve quality of life, there is a need for income and an increased tax base to help enhance the ability to afford needed and desired improvements, and afford better housing and a higher standard of living. Commerce and economic development have a major influence on overall population growth and development. The relationship is quite evident in Bleckley County and has been throughout its history. The Ocmulgee River and the forested lands of Bleckley provided avenues of exploration and access to life sustaining wildlife populations and water resources both to Native Americans and European explorers long before the county's formal establishment. The county's settlement in the early 1800s related to Indian treaties and land lotteries for persons seeking new lives and fortunes. The first county development related to river commerce, ferries, and the opening of stagecoach routes and early public roads. The completion of the Macon and Brunswick Railroad in the mid-1800s led to the establishment and growth of Cochran. The railroad also opened up markets and

fierce competition over the county's abundant yellow pine forests and lumber resources. Significant economic influence ensued for Bleckley County. As forests were cut and cleared, farming operations developed, and Bleckley became a center of early purebred hog and Black Angus cattle breeding. The community also established itself as an educational and cultural center. Maintaining an aura of leadership in agricultural row crop production led to the community becoming known as "home of champions." Being an economic, educational, and cultural center led to outside recognition and a local desire to showcase its influence and exert local control of its destiny. This led to early 20th century formal county establishment, and facilitated the location of Middle Georgia College. For many years, the college was cited as the oldest two-year college in the U.S. The college has been a major influence in the local economy and has now transitioned into a campus of Middle Georgia State University, the only university campus in the Region. The college/university has helped the community maintain its reputation and status of exceptional leadership in education and culture. These attributes continue to serve the community well. The location of the community along U.S. 23, its proximity to Macon and Robins Air Force Base, and continuing agricultural prominence have all been economic attractors and exerted positive influences. The railroad remains as an active Class I rail line of the Norfolk Southern system. The community also owns and manages a local general aviation airport important for community access and economic development.



**L** Bleckley High School **R** Downtown Cochran

These impressive attributes, and many assets, accentuated by the scenic countryside and significant natural resources, including the Ocmulgee River and the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management and Public Fishing areas continue to serve the county well. They contribute to an unexpected high quality of life in a relaxing, tranquil setting, attracting families and business alike. The overall family-friendly quality of life within the county, the university and other educational and cultural opportunities, and the community's location, remain key factors and attractors in future growth and development. Because of its economic history and successes, its educational and cultural advantages, its cooperative spirit and involved citizenry,



its significant and celebrated natural and cultural resources, and its high overall quality of life, Cochran-Bleckley truly is an “exceptional rural smalltown community.” As a result, the community continues to enjoy slow, but steady growth and development, even absorbing a major industry closing, Acuity Brands Lighting, which employed over 1,000 persons at its heyday, with only slight hiccup.

Bleckley County is a small, progressive rural county of about 13,000 persons located in Middle Georgia. It is located less than an hour south of Macon along U.S. Highway 23 and Georgia Highways 26 and 112 with access to I-16 in the northeast corner of the county. The community is an exceptional small town with the City of Cochran as its only incorporated municipality. The community promotes itself as a haven of Southern Charm where hospitality is a way of life, with much appeal to the young and the young at heart. There is a long community history and association with education, leadership, and culture not usually expected in a rural, smalltown. Today, the community is home to a campus of Middle Georgia State University, one of its three campuses within the Region. Bleckley’s fields and forests have provided much past economic influence, and continue to do so today. Agriculture contributes over \$40 million in direct farm gate impacts to the local economy annually, and has been another avenue of local leadership and exceptionalism. The community has experienced some economic setbacks in recent years, but its location, outstanding quality of life, and economic influence from the nearby Robins Air Force Base, have facilitated continuing growth. Its fields, forests, and verdant natural resources, including the Ocmulgee River, the Ocmulgee River Water Trail, and the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area and Public Fishing Area, provide an appealing scenic backdrop and outlets for outdoor fun and adventure which only add to the exceptional quality of life enjoyed by the community.



**L** Rural Scene, Bleckley County   **R** Public Fishing Area Sign

Bleckley County continues to build today on its extraordinary history of leadership, education and culture unique to a rural smalltown. The community boasts of not only the campus of Middle Georgia State University but an awarded, high quality local school system; an outstanding adult learning center; a modern library; a well-managed local hospital; many active

and involved civic clubs; an arts alliance; two local golf courses with 45 total holes; and many other amenities. There are two local potters, an annual biking event, a fall fest, and an annual Christmas parade. All of these community activities and family-friendly events take place in a tapestry of true Southern Charm of well-manicured and lovingly preserved homes and churches, an involved and caring populace, and a surrounding and comforting environment of unmatched natural beauty and outdoor splendor. Cochran-Bleckley County is without doubt an exceptional rural smalltown community and a haven of education, culture, and leadership unexpected in such a small rural place. The community does enjoy an extraordinarily high quality of life as a result, and this, combined with its other advantages of location, transportation resources, and natural and cultural appeal, provides much to offer the entrepreneur, resident, or visitor alike.



**L** Walker Hall   **R** Downtown Cochran

For all of Bleckley County's attributes and economic success, it remains a Georgia Job Tax Credit Tier 1 county, meaning it remains in the bottom 40 percent of counties on factors including unemployment rate, per capita income, and percentage of residents below the poverty level. This is primarily a function of being a rural county in south central Georgia, and such status does allow a business creating new jobs to claim Georgia's highest job creation tax credit (~\$4,000/job). It also conceals the fact that Bleckley County is statistically better off than many of its surrounding neighbor counties.

There are certainly continuing needs for Bleckley County's economic development. The closing of Acuity Brands Lighting in 2012 left the county without a major local industry. The unemployment rate averaged 6.5 percent in 2020, an equal percentage to the Georgia rate of the same period. The per capita money income in Bleckley County as reported by the Census Bureau for 2015-2019 is \$20,458, about 65% that of Georgia as a whole (\$31,067). Me-

dian household income is \$48,174, about 77% that of Georgia (\$61,980). An improved poverty rate for Bleckley County citizens, (18%), was reported in 2019. This remains higher compared to 15.3% in Georgia as a whole. High poverty has persisted for a number of decades and a measurable improvement is much celebrated. There are needs for more jobs. Unemployment in the county at an annual average of 6.5% in 2020 is equal to that the state, but is higher than surrounding counties in the Bleckley Labor Market. Only about 42 percent of county workers do work inside Bleckley County, although another almost 16 percent work in Houston County (home of Robins Air Force Base) and nearly 9 percent in neighboring Dodge County. Job skills of local residents remain somewhat of a concern, although about 8.2% of local residents are without a high school diploma, much less than the state average of 15%. Transfer payments represent almost 30% of total personal income compared to about 17% statewide. On the positive side, there is more home ownership in the county (74.3%) than Georgia (63.3%), and housing costs are cheaper as well. The median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2015-2019, was \$102,300 in Bleckley County as compared to \$176,000 in Georgia, and median gross rents, 2015-2019, were \$620 in the County as compared to \$1,006 in Georgia. Compared to the rest of the country, Cochran-Bleckley County's cost of living is 18.2% lower than the U.S. average.



*Downtown Cochran*

There are opportunities and optimism for future economic development in Bleckley County as well. Employment within the county does remain concentrated within the government and services sectors, and agriculture also provides relative stability as well. There remain many unrealized opportunities related to the abundant fields and forests, outstanding natural resources of the county, and the educational and cultural advantages afforded by Middle Georgia State University. The cost of living in Bleckley County is relatively very low, and the crime rate is low making it even more attractive as a place to live for families and new residents and retirees. Relatively stable population growth is anecdotal evidence that the overall outstanding quality of life, educational opportunities, local culture, outdoor fun, and community location are contributing to continuing success, and portend well for the future.



The county's location, its verdant landscape punctuated by outstanding natural and cultural resources, the almost limitless outdoor recreation opportunities, the low cost of living, the family-friendly atmosphere, the involved community spirit, citizenry, and leadership, and the extraordinary quality of life present locally provide even more opportunities for success.

The Bleckley County community has chosen a multi-faceted approach and strategy to improve its economic status and further economic development in the county. The following goals and objectives were chosen to address identified economic development issues in Bleckley County.

### **Address Low Educational Levels/Improve Jobs Skills**

Bleckley County has a long history of educational leadership beyond Middle Georgia State. The community has an awarded quality local school system and constructed an adult learning center named for a noted local educator, Dr. Peyton Williams, Jr. in the early 2000s. The community hopes to utilize the center to expand Oconee Fall Line Technical College campus and programs, and to support regional Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs. It is also recognized the course offerings at nearby Central Georgia Technical College in Warner Robins attracts near equal amount of students from Bleckley County. Further participation and alignment with Central Georgia Technical College will be explored when developing education partnerships. The community will also develop a local Career Academy. It will further develop public/private partnerships through its Chamber of Commerce, civic groups, and continuing intergovernmental cooperation.



**L** Downtown Cochran **R** Dykes Plantation

### **Support/Enhance/Maintain Viability of Agriculture/Forestry Uses**

The community will support efforts to create additional markets, explore alternative crops, and seek value-added businesses which keep such uses viable and profitable. The marketing and development of agri-tourism and nature-based tourism are other means. The develo-

pment of a local farmers market, and the support of existing agricultural operations, such as the Back to Basics 101 organic wheat farm, and the outstanding local 4-H program are positive steps and tremendous assets and opportunities. The local Country Fest reinforces and highlights community support.

### Address/Improve Infrastructure/Broadband Needs

The Cochran-Bleckley County community will jointly work to solve any infrastructure deficiencies, including highway needs, and otherwise address water/sewer, drainage and other needs, particularly for fire protection and natural gas services. The lack of appropriate broadband telecommunications service and access will also be addressed with the use of state and federal grant programs and designations. Future development of the I-16 Georgia Highway 112 interchange will require major infrastructure investment.



**U** Citizens Bank **M** Georgia Department of Human Services (DFACS) **R** Downtown Cochran

### Nurture Existing Businesses/Entrepreneurs/Industries

This has been a local hallmark critical to past successes, and will continue with passion. The Cochran-Bleckley County community will work through its Development Authorities and Chamber of Commerce, and in cooperation with Oconee Fall Line Technical College and state agencies, to meet local needs and encourage expansions and new local business and entrepreneurial development. Special efforts will be made for agricultural/forest interests. In recognition of downtown Cochran improvements, the City has reconstituted the Downtown Development Authority and will utilize its ability to attract infill commercial and mixed use into the downtown. Many improvements are already underway.

### Attract New Businesses/Jobs

The Cochran-Bleckley County community, through its Development Authorities, Chamber of Commerce, and intergovernmental cooperation, will seek compatible business and industrial development. The community will participate in state designation programs, and will

cooperate in providing appropriate funds in making full-time economic development efforts more efficient and effective. State tax credits and local tax incentives for job creation will be marketed. Small businesses will be a focus for the downtown area with the reconstituted Downtown Development Authority leading the efforts. Our small business lenders will be a crucial partner with future development and business creation. Within the City of Cochran we have several local banks participating with the Small Business Administration loan program. Enhancing existing industrial sites and developing a new industrial park will assist. The location of I-16, U.S. 23 and of several state highways, the rail and airport facilities, the proximity to Macon and Robins Air Force Base are major assets and calling cards. The family-friendly atmosphere, many natural and cultural amenities, and overall high quality of life will attract more than people.

### **Develop/Enhance Tourism**

Bleckley County's extensive outdoor amenities and splendor; including the Ocmulgee River, the Ocmulgee River Water Trail, the Ocmulgee WMA, the Ocmulgee PFA; many historic structures and sites; unique existing and potential festivals; the local unique cultural attractors; as well as the many farms and scenic countryside offer much more potential to increase visitors. The Ocmulgee Mounds Historical Park, located in Macon, has much to offer and ongoing efforts to expand the park into a National Park and Preserve has gained attention recently. The community will continue to support expansion of the park along the Ocmulgee River Corridor from Macon south to Hawkinsville.

### **Improve Transportation Access/Quality**

The Regional T-SPLOST has resulted in many needed local resurfacing and other road improvements, which enhance the community as a place to live and work. The multi-laning of U.S. 23 with complete by-pass will also be a major enhancement. It may open up other opportunities for job creation, as well. Another Regional T-SPLOST authorized by voters upon the conclusion of the current 10 year period in 2022 will enable additional transportation projects to be built in the community. With anticipation of a reauthorization of the Regional T-SPLOST in 2022, Bleckley County and the City of Cochran plan to construct multi-modal transportation infrastructure to include sidewalks and streetscaping in the Downtown Cochran area. These and other improvements will continue to enhance local travel and make business markets more accessible. It would also make it easier to live in Bleckley, but work in nearby urban growth centers, something which already occurs. Promotion of trails including a possible Rails to Trails; improving bicycling opportunities and facilities, including upgrading Biking Bleckley; and otherwise promoting tourism would also help quality of life and economic development. The expansion of Georgia's ports will make the Norfolk Southern Railroad even more important, as will continued improvement of the local airport.

### **Revitalize Downtown**

The historic fabric and available buildings in Cochran, already the social, cultural, educational, governmental, and economic center of Bleckley County allow for much opportunity. Their



historic nature allows for development incentives, preservation of unique character, and enhanced quality of life. Community projects in historic structures create civic pride and community cooperation. They also can stimulate private investment. The many active civic clubs and involved citizenry can provide the spark and support needed to realize this potential. The Cochran Downtown Development Authority has been played an active role in planning for capital improvements in downtown and aims to see increased coordination between the City and Middle Georgia State University.

### **Develop/Improve Local Industrial Parks/Sites**

The community has a number of available sites and buildings to market. The existing industrial park needs further improvement, and there is a need to further develop a new industrial park to facilitate and encourage efforts in industrial expansion and location. A portion of Bleckley County is within a Federal Opportunity Zone. This new tool should be marketed statewide to attract outside investment. The zone located within the county may be more advantageous for investors compared to other zones across the state.



**L** Rural Scene, Bleckley County    **R** Police Department, Cochran

### **Promote Quality of Life/Civic and Community Pride/Location**

Bleckley County does possess extraordinary educational and cultural opportunities and many amenities and charm unique to a rural smalltown. There are many opportunities to promote its small town and rural character and quality of life through its Chamber and other means. The welcoming, family atmosphere; low crime rate; low cost of living; the outdoor adventure; the WMA and PFA; the local festivals; Middle Georgia State University; the award winning local schools; local museums, and other cultural outlets; the many, active civic clubs; and the landscape and outdoor amenities are all easy selling cards. The overall county location and easy access to larger urban areas further contribute and facilitate promotion of the county as an excellent place to live, visit, or do business.

### Enhance Intergovernmental Cooperation

Community efforts working together both within the county, and through neighbors, the region, and state agencies can only facilitate success and scope of effort. This will build on, and take advantage of, the strong tradition of local cooperation and innovative leadership. An active chamber of commerce and many civic groups can only make public/private partnerships easier to achieve and more successful. Active participation in regional economic, tourism, and natural resource partnerships offers much potential and benefit.

### Address Growth Management/Rural Character Preservation

A well planned community and one which appears neat, orderly, and attractive supports and encourages additional investment. The community has developed limited individual land use and building regulations to address specific issues and nuisances, but more stronger, general, and coordinated efforts and joint code enforcement are needed. The community can also utilize infrastructure location and civic organizations and programs to assist.



**L** Downtown Cochran   **R** Ocmulgee Public Fishing Area

### Enhance Economic Development Marketing

Bleckley County has been noted in the past for its local leadership and community involvement and cooperation. Reenergized, concerted efforts supported by the local governments, local chamber, and local civic groups can accomplish much to help the community coordinate and advance in economic development. Participation in regional and state partnerships and utilizing state designation programs can help. State job tax credits and recently developed local tax incentives can be highlighted.

### Support Existing Industries/Entrepreneurs

Existing businesses, local entrepreneurs and farming operations have been principal contributors to past success and a stabilized local economic base. The community needs to be vigilant to support and ensure these pillars and foundations for other growth remain strong and

vibrant. The nomination and recognition this year for the Back to Basics 101 organic wheat farm business as a Flavor of Georgia finalist shows how this strategy can bring attention and results. The outstanding natural resource outlets within the county offer similar potential for support and marketing.

### **Maintain/Increase Retail Trade/Service Sectors**

Retail and service sectors are underrepresented and lacking diversity given the location of a Middle Georgia State University campus, and the increasing attraction of the community for families, retirees, and entrepreneurs. These are also sectors which would require expansion to help grow tourism. While the attraction of larger numbers of families and retirees would facilitate and make easier this effort, so would additional promotion and marketing. Downtown revitalization, new job creation, and the overall marketing of the community to make more people aware of the rural smalltown haven the community is and the opportunities that exist will also help.



**L** Russell Hall, Middle Georgia State University **R** Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area Sign

### **Support of Middle Georgia State University, Oconee Fall Line and Central Georgia Technical Colleges**

The Cochran community has been associated with a postsecondary educational institution long before Bleckley County even became a separate Georgia county. This association has been a significant contributor to the community's leadership, cultural opportunities, overall high quality of life, and local economy throughout the community's history. It is the principal fabric which ties the community together, and allows for its extraordinary status. In some sense, Cochran has always been a college town in the best aspects of the term. The community should be steadfast in its vigilance and support that this remains so, especially now that the local campus is one of five campuses for Middle Georgia State University. Additionally, the community should embrace the various programs offered by the two regional technical colleges located in and nearby the community. While course offerings may vary by location, Oconee Fall Line Technical College and Central Georgia Technical College will play an important role in training our workforce for the future available jobs.



# LAND USE



The landscape and the way land is used is often visible and tangible evidence of planning or the lack thereof. It reveals the pattern of growth and development, and how we relate to the natural environment. It often defines what we view as the character of our community, and is a major component in our determination of quality of life. As science evolves, we realize with greater certainty that the way our land is used and managed has definite implications for air and water quality, and the diversity and health of our ecosystems.

The awareness of the impacts and consequences of the way land is used illustrate the need for wise use of our finite supply of land, and the necessity of sound decisions in its development or protection. The need for sustainable growth and development, which accommodates our development needs while maintaining balance and control, and limiting impacts on the natural and built environment, is recognized in the state quality community objectives.

Sound, quality growth and development results from effective and balanced land use planning that anticipates, prepares, and exercises control over development decisions. It guides and directs growth and development into a desirable and efficient pattern of land use to achieve compatibilities in use, proper return and effective use of public investments in infrastructure and services, and minimal impacts to environmentally or aesthetically important natural and cultural resources.

The lack of planning, on the other hand, can result in uncontrolled and unmanaged growth which can wreak havoc on community desires and plans, negatively impact property values, degrade the environment and landscape, and foster other detrimental effects or burdens in a short period of time. It can destroy important natural functions and treasured views or other parts of the landscape. It can cause new public tax or service burdens while lowering return or lessening use of public infrastructure already paid for or invested in. Public desires or future plans or options can be precluded or prevented by such uncontrolled growth, while other ill-advised consequences or burdens upon the general public can result.



**L** Dillard Hall, Middle Georgia State University **R** Ocmulgee PFA

A community's land use planning efforts are an attempt to provide a policy guide and framework or blueprint for desired growth and development. Sound planning provides for managed growth and development, allowing for necessary land use and development, but guiding it in such a manner that balances and protects resources, systems, and other aspects of the landscape important to the community. Such planning tries to lessen, mitigate, or avoid inconsistencies, inefficiencies, or conflicting land use efforts. Existing patterns and trends of land uses, community investment in and location of facilities and services, important natural and cultural constraints, and overriding community desires are considered and accommodated in developing and delineating the desired pattern of growth and development.



Cochran and Bleckley County are united in their vision and desires for continued exceptionalism and quality growth. It is a rural county with abundant natural and cultural resources, great natural beauty, envinous location, excellent transportation access, and many assets for growth. The community has a long history of agricultural, educational and cultural leadership, an involved and caring citizenship, family centered activities, and exhibiting progressive community advancement. As a result, the community has enjoyed slow, but steady, growth and a high quality of life somewhat unusual for a rural area. The community's vision for its future growth and development is one that maintains this heritage, culture, leadership, and high quality of life, and one that protects and utilizes its natural and cultural resources and landscape as well as its human advantages and citizen involvement. The aim is to continue quality growth and exceptional development conducive and compatible with the abundant beauty, family fun, outdoor adventure, and community exceptionalism. Land uses would continue to look similar to those existing, and the small-town, family-friendly rural character would be maintained. Educational opportunities, on the local, university, and technical college levels, would be nurtured and enhanced. Infrastructure and amenities would be expanded and developed to support and attract both population and business growth, primarily in or



**L** Historic Residence   **R** Downtown Cochran

adjacent to Cochran and related developed areas. Agricultural and forestry uses would be kept viable and remain the principal land uses of the county. The outstanding natural and cultural resources would be protected and utilized for increased tourism. These rural open landscapes would be an integral component of the economy of the county, and the preservation of rural character and a quality of life supportive of open space and natural and cultural resource protection. Commercial and industrial growth would be compatible and supportive of continued agricultural/forestry uses, and would maintain the high quality of life and small-town, rural character while providing additional jobs and economic opportunity. Middle Georgia State University's local campus would remain a focal point of local opportunity, pride,



and culture. All of this would be components of a concerted strategy to attract new residents, retirees, and economic development supportive and complementary to existing uses and character which further adds to the exceptional quality of life and extraordinary amenities now present.

While technically only the City of Cochran is required, because of its zoning ordinance, to have a Land Use element in its comprehensive plan under the current DCA planning standards, both local governments in the county have chosen to participate and include the element in this joint comprehensive plan. Existing land use maps visually convey to all concerned the current landscape and correlation of extant development. Future land use maps illustrate to all concerned the community's vision and desires for additional growth and development. Such depictions also lend credence and supporting background information important to understanding and illustrating official local government policy in designating lands unsuitable for solid waste handling facilities in local solid waste management plans. Land use maps do provide official display of community desires and goals for compatible future growth and development.



**L** Church   **R** Memorial Hall, Middle Georgia State University

The community's land use maps are, however, a general policy guide and framework, not necessarily a rigid or unchangeable picture of future growth and development. Not all growth or developments can be foreseen, and other events could necessitate a change in community vision or desires. The depicted pattern of desired future growth and development displayed on future land use maps is a current statement and reflection of community expectations and desires. It provides a context, framework and background for the public and private sector to utilize to plan, evaluate, shape, guide, and evaluate proposed developments and other decisions affecting the use of the land and community growth and development. The plan provides a context for forethought, examination of impacts and consequences, and mitigation of land use decisions on the community's growth and development and desired future patterns and community vision.

## Land Use Categories and Descriptions

Land use categories utilized in the development of this plan and in the land use maps are the standard categories established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and defined in the planning standards as below.

**Residential.** The predominant use of land within the residential category is for single-family and multi-family dwelling units.

**Commercial.** This category is for land dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, office, service and entertainment facilities, located as a single use in one building or grouped together in a shopping center or office building.

**Industrial.** This category is for land dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction activities, or other similar uses.

**Public/Institutional.** This category includes certain state, federal or local government uses, and institutional land uses. Government uses include government building complexes, police and fire stations, libraries, prisons, post offices, schools, military installations, etc. Examples of institutional land uses include colleges, churches, cemeteries, hospitals, etc.

**Transportation/Communications/Utilities.** This category includes such uses as major transportation routes, public transit stations, power generation plants, railroad facilities, radio towers, telephone switching stations, airports, port facilities or other similar uses.

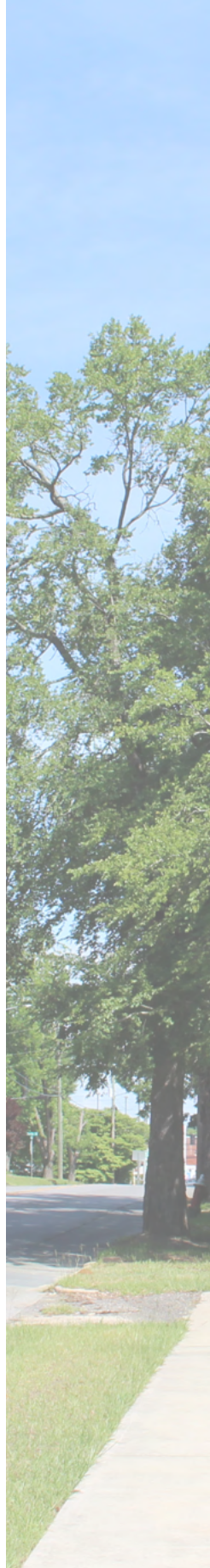
**Park/Recreation/Conservation.** This category is for land dedicated to active or passive recreational and conservation uses. These areas may be either publicly or privately owned and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, other wild lands, golf courses, recreation centers or similar uses.

**Agriculture.** This category is for land dedicated to farming (fields, lots, pastures, farmsteads, specialty farms, livestock production, etc.), agriculture, or similar rural uses.

**Forestry.** This category is for land dedicated to commercial timber, pulpwood production, or other woodland use.

## Existing Land Uses

Existing land use patterns for Bleckley County and the City of Cochran are depicted on the following maps. A table depicting the existing distribution of land use acreages is shown on page 63.



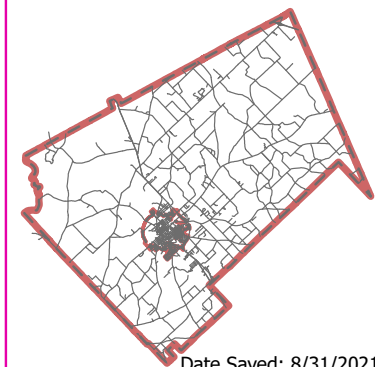
# Bleckley County Existing Land Use

-  Cochran City Limits
- Existing Land Use**
-  Agriculture
-  Commercial
-  Forestry
-  Industrial
-  Park/Recreation/Conservation
-  Public/Institutional
-  Residential
-  Transportation/Communication/Utilities

0 2.25 4.5 9 Miles



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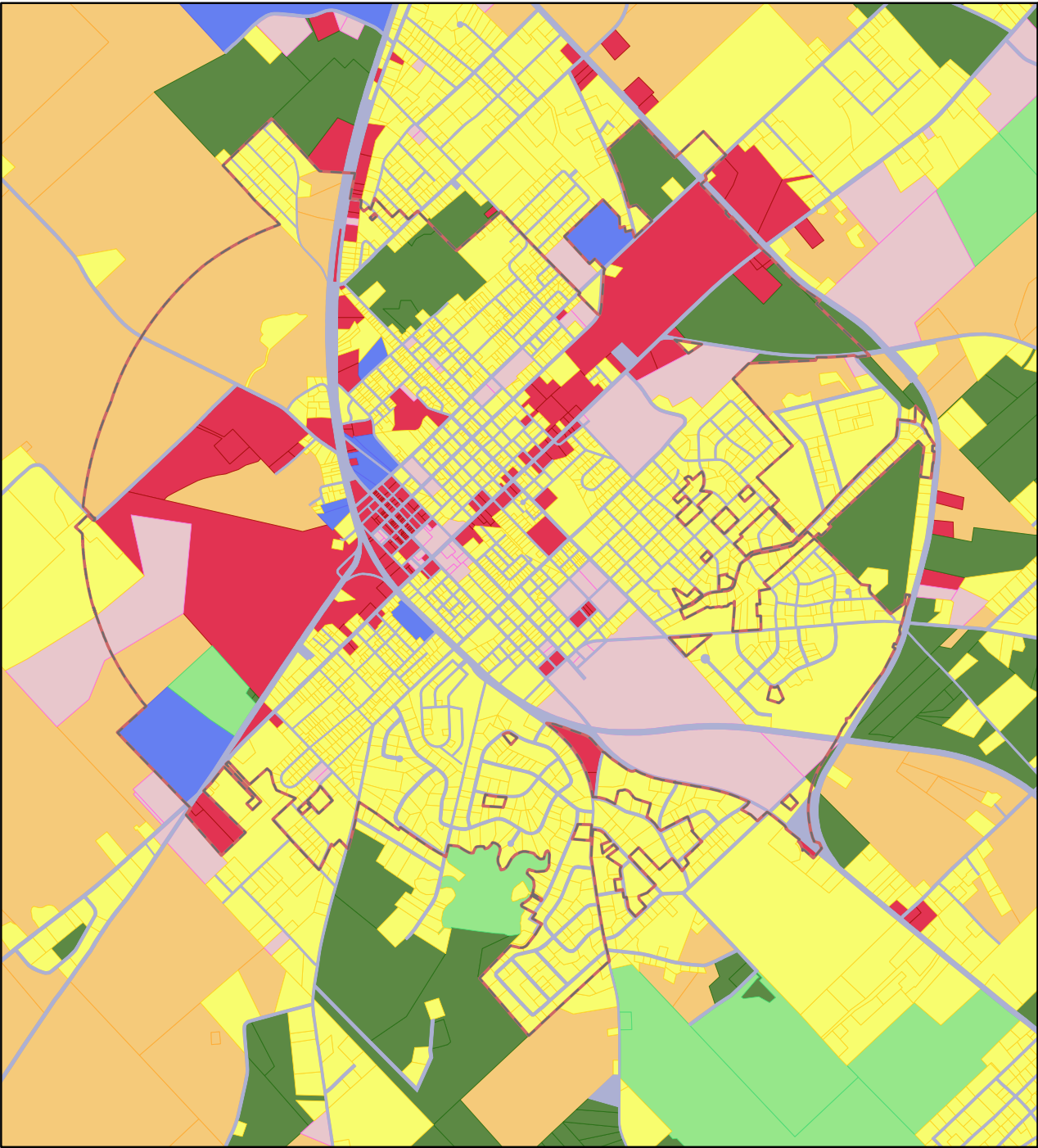


Date Saved: 8/31/2021

SOURCE: HOGARC, 2021

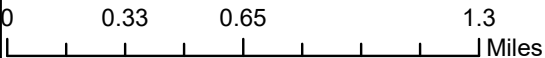




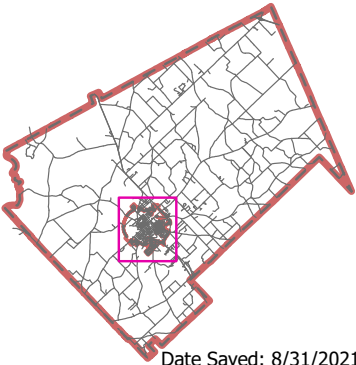


# City of Cochran Existing Land Use

- Cochran City Limits
- Existing Land Use
  - Agriculture
  - Commercial
  - Forestry
  - Industrial
  - Park/Recreation/Conservation
  - Public/Institutional
  - Residential
  - Transportation/Communication/Utilities



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Date Saved: 8/31/2021



**Existing Land Use Distribution, Bleckley County, 2021**  
(Acres)

Land Use Category	Acreage	Percent of Total
Agriculture	59,832	42.65
Commercial	793	0.57
Forestry	55,114	39.35
Industrial	447	0.32
Park/Recreation/Conservation	9,337	6.65
Public/Institutional	767	0.55
Residential	10,736	7.58
Transportation/Communications/Utilities	3,274	2.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>140,300</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Source: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission Geographic Information System, 2021.*

Bleckley County is a small, rural county in central South Georgia, and although created as one of Georgia's youngest counties in the early 20th century (1912), it has a long history of growth and development because of its fertile fields, abundant Southern pine forests, compelling landscape, outstanding natural resources, and early frontier settlement. The county is located along the legendary Ocmulgee River, and was a resting and hunting area, and source of well water for Native Americans. The community was an early bastion of educational, cultural, agricultural and railroad development. The community has a long history of exceptional leadership. Bleckley County is a unique blend of agriculture, education, culture, and environment nestled amongst tranquil natural and cultural beauty, and an extraordinary quality of life unexpected for such a rural community.

Bleckley was first settled because of its forests, fertile lands, and proximity to the Ocmulgee River. The river and the old Milledgeville-Hartford postal road through the county brought early settlement of the Longstreet Community and stagecoach/steamship commerce and markets for agricultural/timber products to the county. The Macon and Brunswick Railroad construction and substantial growth soon followed as a result of the wealth of the area's timber, and agricultural resources. Most growth was centered in and around Cochran during this time. Extraordinary local leadership was responsible for the creation of Ebenezer College in the community which campus later became Middle Georgia College. In 2012, Middle Georgia College transitioned into a four-year college and university campus, known as Middle Georgia State University. For many years, Middle Georgia College was recognized as the oldest two-year college in the U.S.

Since the 1930s much of the force behind the county's development can be attributed to its location on U.S. 23, close to Macon and the Robins Air Force Base, the local college/university and other educational attributes, and its extraordinary quality of life. The old Macon



and Brunswick railroad remains an active Class I railroad operated by the Norfolk Southern system, and an additional economic stimulus. Other critical factors have been committed leadership, an involved citizenry, a cooperative spirit, and the adaptive use of its natural assets and outdoor adventure opportunities.

Bleckley County continues with remarkable slow, but steady growth despite globalization, the mechanization of agriculture, the decline of individual manufacturing concerns (particularly the loss of Acuity Brands Lighting) or recessionary periods which have devastated many rural communities. The community still has many assets for growth, including location, the university and local schools, transportation facilities, cooperative leadership, involved and caring citizenry, the culture, Southern charm, and family-oriented atmosphere, and the outstanding and abundant natural and cultural resources. The community continues to invest in its infrastructure, public facilities, and other amenities to encourage, support, and attract compatible future growth and development. Beginning in 2019, the City of Cochran began its housing revitalization journey with the acceptance into the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) program. The city's GICH designation expires in 2022 and will remain organized thereafter as a GICH alumni community. The focus of the GICH team has been housing standards and blight removal. A renewed focus on regulations led to zoning ordinance changes in 2020. Further research and development guidelines are desired for the downtown Cochran zone.



**L** Cochran Municipal Airport   **R** Havenwood Gardens Multi-family Housing

Continuing slow, but steady growth and development trends are expected to continue as a result. There continues to be much potential for additional residential and business growth and more diverse economic development by embracing and augmenting its backdrop of facilitating community and educational resources, committed leadership, involved citizenry, impressive heritage, abundant natural resources, and great natural beauty. Recent efforts to improve commercial corridors and transportation networks for all travel modes will increase attractiveness for new citizens and visitors alike. As previously mentioned as a development strategy, aging in place and retiree attraction will rely on safety improvements in commercial areas and various modes of travel.



Most current growth, including residential, commercial, and industrial, is concentrated in or near Cochran. Recent commercial growth has concentrated along the U.S. 23 Cochran Bypass. However, there has been limited industrial growth. Investments by the Industrial Development Authority have increased the favorability of being selected by industry. The former Acuity Brands Lighting plant was purchased in 2016 by the Glimer Warehouse and Logistics Company. Other major/commercial growth attractors and locations would include the I-16/Georgia 112 interchange node, existing vacant commercial/old industrial sites along North Avenue and Dohl Street in Cochran, and downtown Cochran. The City of Cochran has begun an initiative to reinvigorate the downtown area. This effort was formally started with an Urban Development Plan in 2018. Upon completion, the City reconstituted the Cochran Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The DDA has been active in securing funding and other resources to improve 2nd Street with streetscaping and alleyway improvements. Additionally, design standards are in development to control uncharacteristic buildings and building facades. With the improvements to the Downtown area, Cochran aims to realize greater infill opportunities and vacancy rate reduction.



**L** Regents Hall, Middle Georgia State University   **R** Downtown Cochran

In general, the southern/eastern area of Bleckley adjacent to Cochran and beyond has seen more growth. Middle Georgia State University, the Bleckley County High School, and the southern terminus of the Cochran Bypass are all located in the southeast vicinity of the city. Similarly, the Lake Linda area is located farther east in the Empire Community, and will also attract residential growth. The Cary community and Georgia Highway 112 areas north of Cochran will attract more limited residential growth. There are infill development opportunities throughout Cochran, particularly east toward the Bypass. Recent multifamily residential developments occurring inside the City of Cochran include a senior assisted living complex, At Home, located on 6th Street, and Havenwood Gardens at the intersection of the Bypass and Daisy Adams Road. Redevelopment neighborhood areas within Cochran include the Tree Streets, Happy Hill, Beech and Cherry streets, the Flower Streets, and Railroad Avenue neighborhoods.

These development trends and growth patterns are expected to continue. The county's future land uses will closely resemble existing land uses. Agricultural, forestry, and conservation uses will continue to predominate the landscape, and maintain the outstanding existing small-town and rural character and appealing high quality of life.

Future land use maps for Bleckley County and the City of Cochran are included on the following pages.

# Bleckley County Future Land Use


 Cochran City Limits


## Future Land Use


 Agriculture

 Commercial

 Forestry

 Industrial

 Park/Recreation/Conservation

 Public/Institutional

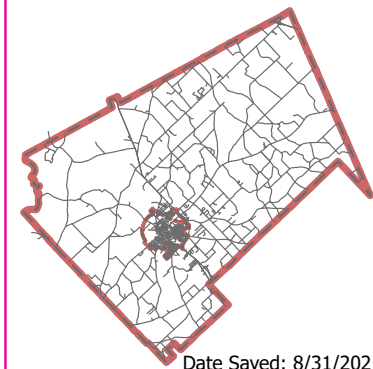
 Residential

 Transportation/Communication/Utilities

0 2.25 4.5 9 Miles



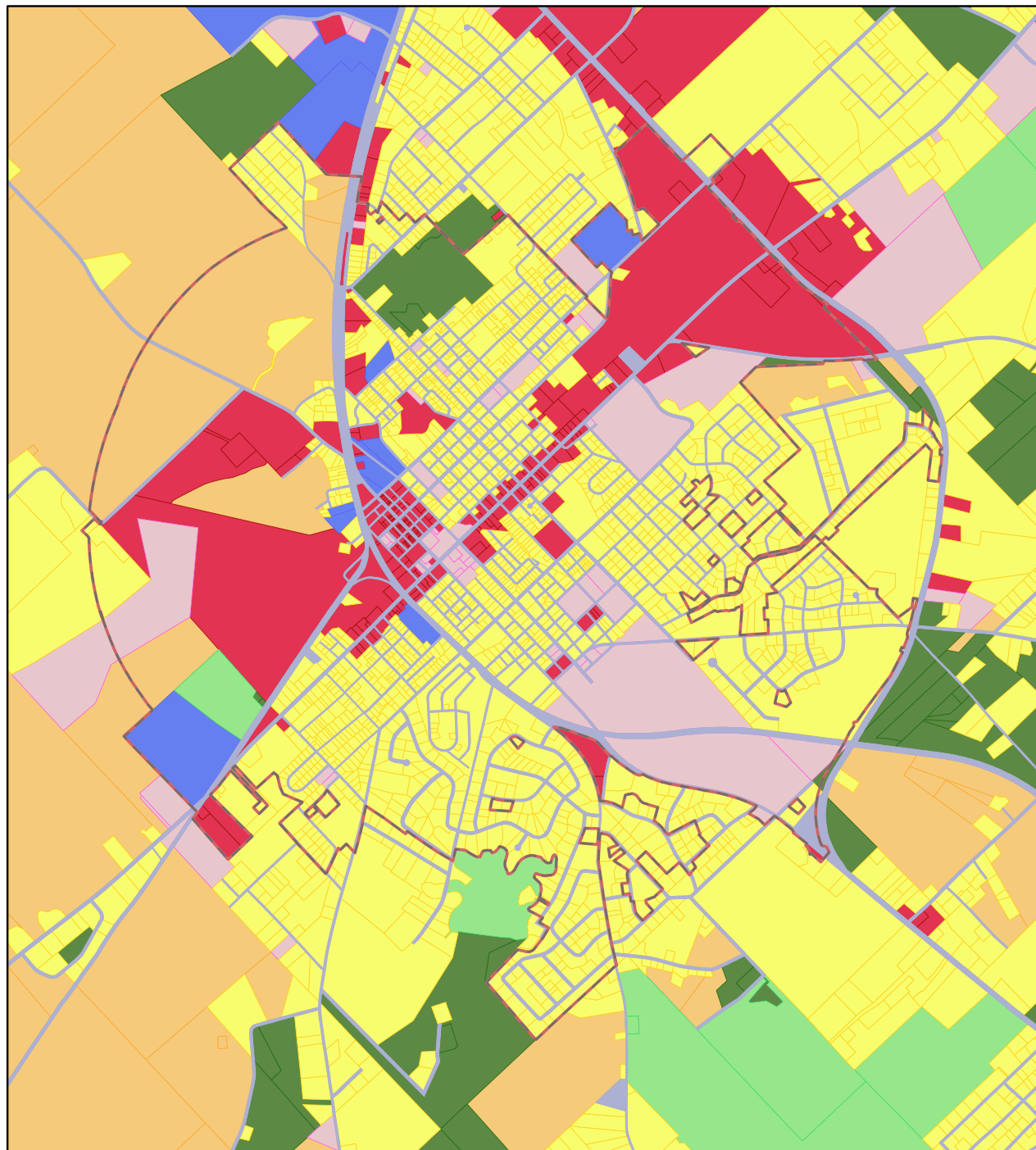
"The data sets represented here-in are presented to the user with the understanding that, because of the nature of some GIS datasets, there is no guarantee of completeness or accuracy. Conclusions drawn from, or actions taken on the basis of this data are the sole responsibility of the user."












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SOURCE: HOGARC, 2021





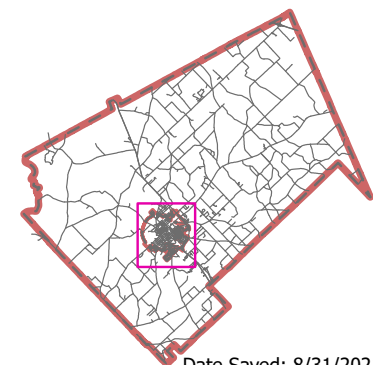
# City of Cochran Future Land Use

-  Cochran City Limits
- Future Land Use**
-  Agriculture
-  Commercial
-  Forestry
-  Industrial
-  Park/Recreation/Conservation
-  Public/Institutional
-  Residential
-  Transportation/Communication/Utilities

0 0.33 0.65 1.3 Miles



"The data sets represented here-in are presented to the user with the understanding that, because of the nature of some GIS datasets, there is no guarantee of completeness or accuracy. Conclusions drawn from, or actions taken on the basis of this data are the sole responsibility of the user."



Date Saved: 8/31/2021





## Land Use Goals

Bleckley County and the City of Cochran seek future growth and development respective of its small-town and rural character, abundant natural and cultural resources and agricultural/forestry/conservation uses, and the existing high quality of life. It desires balanced growth patterns which maintain and keep viable existing agricultural, forestry and conservation uses, which sustain its heritage, abundant natural and cultural resources, and which are otherwise compatible and complementary of existing uses and scale of development. The community has chosen the following land use goals to help bring about its desired future and delineated community vision.

### **Address Growth Management/Guide Compatible Development**

A well planned community and one which appears neat, orderly, and attractive supports and encourages additional investment. The community has developed only limited individual land use and building regulations to address specific issues and nuisances, but more general and coordinated efforts and joint code enforcement are needed. The community can also utilize infrastructure location; improvement of facilities and services; support of agricultural, forestry, and conservation uses; downtown revitalization; and involvement of its citizenry to assist.

### **Improve Subdivision/Manufactured Housing/Land Use Regulation/Code Enforcement/Permitting**

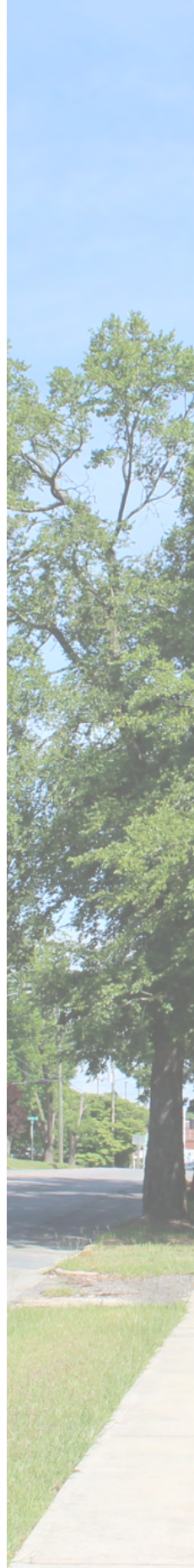
As noted above, Bleckley County has only limited land use and building regulations, road acceptance/subdivision ordinances, a manufactured home ordinance, and others to address specific issues or nuisances. Only Cochran has a zoning ordinance and both have only limited building code enforcement. The City of Cochran completed a major update to its zoning ordinance, and will need revising as issues arise. Other code enforcement related ordinances need updates, expansion, coordination, and joint collaboration/code enforcement/countywide development permitting to initiate a more comprehensive and coordinated approach for land use management.

### **Maintain Open Spaces/Agricultural/Forestry Uses/Rural Character/Quality of Life**

The development of new markets, supporting creation of alternative crops and uses, celebrating the heritage of these uses, providing professional support, and attracting compatible agribusiness or other supportive economic development ventures all can help achieve rural character and quality of life preservation. The Back to Basics 101 farm and organic wheat business is an excellent example of a compatible venture, as are the RV parks. Developing and supporting outdoor events/facilities/festivals, making the Ocmulgee River more accessible, supporting the enhancement of the Ocmulgee WMA/PFA, the Ocmulgee Water Trail Partnership, the expansion of the Ocmulgee Mounds National Park to include the Ocmulgee River, and encouraging tourism will further help.

### **Develop/Improve Recreation/Leisure Use Facilities and Encourage Utilization/Access/Tourism for Natural/Cultural Resources**

The Ocmulgee River, Ocmulgee WMA, Ocmulgee PFA, and the Hillcrest Bluegrass RV Park all have much history and much more potential for recreation and tourism within the county. Increased



recreational and outdoor usage through continued park and trail development, promotion, and growth of tourism of many kinds offers much unrealized potential to both enhanced economic utilization and conservation of the county's significant natural and cultural resources. It can also attract more visitors, and more residents, and build a larger audience of citizen support for protection and enhancement of these resources. Further promotion and development of Biking Bleckley, the Country Fest and the Hillcrest Bluegrass Festival holds additional promise. Improvement of local recreational and biking facilities, museums and other cultural events, enhancement of events or festivals, and development of a rails to trails trail out of Cochran could also reap benefits. Despite significant past success, there is even more unrealized major potential.

### **Encourage Infill Development/Downtown Revitalization**

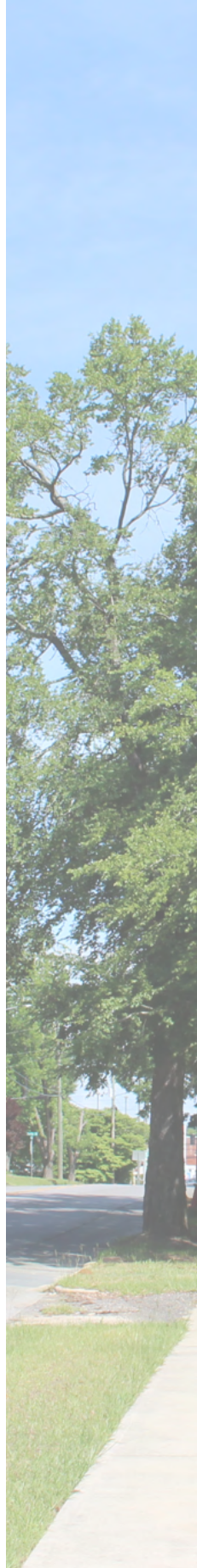
It only makes sense to utilize lands and buildings where taxpayers and private interests have invested in providing costly infrastructure and construction in the past before extending additional infrastructure or incurring completely new construction costs. There are an abundance of available vacant commercial, industrial and residential structures within the community, as well as areas with readily available infrastructure. The city aims to anchor redevelopment in the downtown with a new amphitheater and parking upgrades. Businesses serving the public and oriented to university students are desired in the downtown space. These may include special food service, drinking places, clothing stores, sporting goods, hobby and book stores. Religious use in the traditional commercial spaces should be restricted to other zones. Fixed use in the zone should be restricted to second floor living however the use should be encouraged. Available historic buildings located in downtown Cochran or elsewhere are avenues for preservation of character and heritage and opportunities for economic and community development utilizing existing served areas. Attractive and relatively low-cost historic homes are a potential attraction for retirees and families alike.

### **Improve Community Appearance**

Bleckley County and the City of Cochran have much intrinsic natural and cultural beauty and family-friendly charm attractive to residential location and tourism. These attributes are actually utilized by the Chamber of Commerce in its promotional materials. Landscaping/beautification efforts, general clean-up, and rehabilitation/upgrade of existing structures/areas will serve to mitigate any issue to accent and highlight opportunities and appealing attributes. Correspondingly unkempt appearance and widely dispersed litter can be a turn-off and detractor, and was raised as a current local issue.

### **Seek Compatible Development/Utilization**

Growth supportive, not disruptive through use, scale, or intensity, of the community's existing rural character, small-town atmosphere, extant heritage, abundant natural and cultural resources, and current agricultural/forestry/conservation uses is desired. Protection from degradation or inappropriate development is to everyone's advantage. At the same time pristine and natural scenic beauty is protected, there can be enhanced and increased access. This will both support economic development and the extraordinary local quality of life.



# COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAMS



The Community Work Program Element is the chosen implementation strategy which the community has identified to begin its path toward improvement and its desired future growth and development. These are the immediate steps the community has chosen to address identified community issues, needs, and opportunities, and begin the journey to achieve the desired community vision.

This plan element answers the questions, **“How are we, as a community, going to get where we desire, given where we are?”** The Bleckley County - Cochran Joint Comprehensive Plan includes a separate community work program for each local government involved, as well as a report of accomplishments on their previous work program. The Long Term Policies identified under the Community Goals element identifies implementation activities and ideals which may take longer than five years, or because of circumstances involved, including finances, are not envisioned to begin in the near future.



# BLECKLEY COUNTY

## Community Work Programs



## Bleckley County Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program

### Report of Accomplishments

Initiation Year	Description	Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	Status/Comments
		Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N	
2017	Utilize the Chamber and the Industrial Development Authority to develop a detailed economic development marketing strategy.			Y	2023				Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is currently developing a marketing strategy.
2017	Pursue Guaranteed Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) designation and maintain GRAD compatible industrial sites to encourage/ attract economic development opportunities after designation is received			Y	2023				Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is currently working on certification paperwork.
2017	Pursue the widening of U.S. 23 to Eastman to four lanes.			Y	2022				A portion of this project has been completed, the rest is scheduled to be completed in 2022.
2017	Pursue the widening of the U.S. 23/GA 87 Cochran By-Pass to four lanes	Y	2019						This project was completed in 2019.
2017	Seek the development of appropriate signage and landscaping along the Cochran Bypass			Y	2022				Action is being discussed with GDOT.
2017	Continue to pursue funding as needed to further develop the new Industrial Park, including expansion and additional infrastructure, as appropriate, including the widening and resurfacing of the entranceway			Y	2023				Applied for a One Georgia grant in June of 2021. Project will likely be completed in 2023 if funded.
2017	Seek to develop, improve, and promote the old industrial spec building area as a community industrial park	Y	2019						The old industrial spec building has been purchased by Woody Butts Cargo Trailers.
2017	Seek to reactive and utilize the Ocmulgee Regional Joint Development Authority to assist with economic development efforts			Y	2022				Action is currently being discussed and is underway.
2019	Pursue funding to rehabilitate the former Bleckley County Jail according to preservation standards for compatible new use.							Y	Property has been sold.
2021	Pursue funding to increase local recycling efforts			Y	2022				Planning to have recycling at the transfer station first and then implement a countywide program



## Bleckley County Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program

### Report of Accomplishments

		Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	
Initiation Year	Description	Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N	Status/Comments
2017	Seek to develop improved public safety mutual aid agreements for fire and law enforcement protection.			Y	2023				Action is currently underway.
2021	Seek funding as needed for infrastructure and other improvements at the I-16/GA 112 interchange					Y	2024		Action has been postponed due to lack of funds.
2021	Purchase land for the development of a county annex			Y	2022				Annex will be located on property behind the courthouse.
2018	Pursue the development of a long-range Recreation Master Plan					Y	2024		Action has been postponed until a new potential location for the Recreation Department can be identified.
2018	Pursue the development of subdivision regulations	Y	2018						Action was completed in 2018.
2019	Pursue the development and enforcement of manufactured home/park regulations countywide	Y	2019						Action was completed in 2019.
2020	Replace Motor Grader	Y	2020						Action was completed in 2020.
2020	Replace Hendrick Road Bridge			Y	2022				Action is currently underway.
2018	Reglaze all windows and doors in the courthouse					Y	2026		Action has been postponed due to lack of funds.
2017	Complete Projects Listed in TIA Band 2 (Trail Branch Rd., Limestone Rd., Talmadge Coley Rd., and Irve Land Rd.)	Y	2019						Action was completed in 2019.
2020	Complete Projects Listed in TIA Band 3 (Browning Dr., Bates Rd., Crest Dr., Cary Salem Rd., and Magnolia Rd.)	Y	2021						Action was completed in 2021.





## Bleckley County Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program

### Community Work Program 2022 - 2026

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Each Year	Beyond 2026	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Utilize the Chamber and Industrial Development Authority to develop a detailed economic development marketing strategy		X						X	X	IDA	\$1,000	X			
Pursue Guaranteed Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) designation and maintain GRAD compatible industrial sites to encourage/attract economic development opportunities after designation is received		X						X	X	DCA, USDA Rural Dev't, Chamber, IDA	\$100,000/year	X	X	X	X
Pursue the widening of U.S. 23 to Eastman to four lanes.	X									Chamber, IDA, DOT	\$33,600,000		X	X	
Seek the development of appropriate signage and landscaping along the Cochran Bypass	X							X	X	DOT (TE)	\$100,000	X	X	X	
Continue to pursue funding as needed to further develop the new Industrial Park, including expansion and additional infrastructure, as appropriate, including the widening and resurfacing of the entranceway		X						X	X	Chamber, IDA, DCA,, USDA Rural Dev't, DEcD	\$5,000,000	X	X	X	
Seek to reactivate and utilize the Ocmulgee Regional Joint Development Authority to assist with economic development efforts	X							X		IDA	\$5,000	X			
Pursue funding to increase local recycling efforts	X							X		GEFA	\$5,000	X	X		
Seek to develop improved public safety mutual aid agreements for fire and law enforcement protection.		X						X	X		N/A				



## Bleckley County Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program

### Community Work Program 2022 - 2026

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Each Year	Beyond 2026	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Seek funding as needed for infrastructure and other improvements at the I-16/GA 112 interchange			X					X	X	Chamber, IDA, DCA, GEFA, USDA Rural Dev't.	\$10,000,000	X	X	X	
Purchase land for the development of a county annex	X							X			\$150,000	X			
Pursue the development of a long-range Recreation Master Plan			X					X	X	CBRD	\$20,000	X			
Replace Hendrick Road Bridge	X							X		SPLOST	\$250,000	X			
Reglaze all windows and doors in the courthouse					X			X			\$100,000	X			
Seek funding to develop a multi-use trail through industrial park		X						X		Chamber, IDA, DNR	\$300,000	X	X	X	
Seek funding for splash pad/skate park			X					X		Chamber, IDA, LWCF	\$500,000	X	X	X	
Renovate exterior of courthouse			X					X		SPLOST	\$250,000	X	X	X	X
Pave 4 miles of dirt road every 2 years	X		X		X			X		GDOT, TSPLOST, SPLOST	\$120,000 per mile	X	X	X	
Remodel the Elections Building and create storage space		X						X			\$180,000	X	X		
Develop Dykes landing, attract business, create a kayak launch, and increase security at location.			X					X		Chamber, DNR	\$200,000	X	X	X	
Purchase a Motor Grader		X						X		SPLOST	\$120,000	X			
Adopt the DCA Broadband Model ordinance	X							X		DCA, Regional Commission	N/A	X	X		
Seek to become designated as a Broadband Ready Community	X							X		DCA, Regional Commission	N/A	X	X		



# CITY OF COCHRAN

## Community Work Programs



## City of Cochran Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program

### Report of Accomplishments

Initiation Year	Description	Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	Status/Comments
		Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N	
2017	Utilize the Chamber and Industrial Development Authority to develop a detailed economic development marketing strategy			Y	2023				Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is currently developing a marketing strategy.
2017	Pursue Guaranteed Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) designation and maintain GRAD compatible industrial sites to encourage/attract economic development opportunities after designation is received			Y	2023				Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is currently working on certification paperwork.
2017	Pursue the widening of the U.S. 23/GA 87 Cochran By-Pass to four lanes	Y	2019						This project was completed in 2019.
2017	Seek the development of appropriate signage and landscaping along the Cochran Bypass			Y	2022				Action is being discussed with GDOT.
2017	Continue to pursue funding as needed to further develop the new Industrial Park, including expansion and additional infrastructure, as appropriate, including the widening and resurfacing of the entranceway			Y	2023				Applied for a One Georgia grant in June of 2021. Project will likely be completed in 2023 if funded.
2017	Seek to develop, improve, and promote the old industrial spec building area as a community industrial park	Y	2019						The old industrial spec building has been purchased by Woody Butts Cargo Trailers.
2018	Pursue the feasibility of establishing a local downtown historic district in Cochran to help encourage downtown revitalization activities			Y	2022				Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is currently pursuing this.
2018	Pursue the development of a long-range Recreation Master Plan					Y	2024		Action has been postponed until a new potential location for the Recreation Department can be identified.
2017	Seek to develop improved public safety mutual aid agreements for fire and law enforcement protection			Y	2023				Action is underway.
2021	Seek funding as needed for infrastructure and other improvements at the I-16/GA 112 interchange							Y	Dropped because county responsibility.



## City of Cochran Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program

### Report of Accomplishments

Initiation Year	Description	Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	Status/Comments
		Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N	
2017	Pursue the development of sub-division regulations			Y	2022				This action is currently in a draft phase.
2017	Complete the update to the City's zoning ordinance	Y	2020						This action was completed in 2020.
2017	Phase II Perimeter Fencing at Cochran Municipal Airport	Y	2020						This action was completed in 2020.
2019	Extend runway at Cochran Municipal Airport by 800 feet.					Y	2024		Action has been postponed due to lack of fund. However, repairing of the runway has been completed.
2018	Construct T-Hangers at Cochran Municipal Airport	Y	2020						This action was completed in 2020.
2017	Rehabilitate the City's elevated water tank (Paint, Sandblast, Lining)	Y	2018						This action was completed in 2018. All four of the water tanks were completed.
2017	Install Auto Water Meter Reading System citywide	Y	2018						This action was completed in 2018.
2017	Phase I Sewer Rehabilitation (CIPP) Citywide	Y	2019						This action was completed in 2019.



**City of Cochran Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program**  
**Report of Accomplishments**

		Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	
Initiation Year	Description	Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N	Status/Comments
2019	Phase II Sewer Rehabilitation (CIPP) Citywide			Y	2022				Construction is scheduled to be completed in 2022.
2019	Water line and fire hydrant repair/replacement Phase II			Y	2022				Construction is scheduled to be completed in 2022.
2017	Sewer line Rehabilitation (Hospital and Ann streets)	Y	2018						This action was completed in 2018.
2019	Sewer, Water & Drainage Rehabilitation (Railroad St. & Porter Rd.)	Y	2021						This action was completed in 2021. CBDG funds were used.
2020	Renovate current City Hall or construct a new building			Y	2023				A new roof has been added. Some interior renovations have been completed along with electrical work.
2020	Renovate or replace city police station			Y	2023				A new roof has been added. Some interior renovations have been completed as well.
2018	Pave roadway to water treatment plant					Y	2025		This action has been postponed due to lack of funds.
2020	Dredge and clean blue streams within city limits					Y	2026		This action has been postponed due to lack of funds.





## City of Cochran Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program Report of Accomplishments

Initiation Year	Description	Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	Status/Comments
		Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N	
2017	Install emergency warning sirens for citywide notifications	Y	2019						Action was completed in 2019.
2017	Upgrade/Purchase police equipment (Bulletproof Vests, Radios, Etc.)	Y	2019						Action was completed in 2019.
2017	Upgrade/Purchase turnout gear for firefighters	Y	2019						Action was completed in 2019 through the use of a grant.
2017	Increase housing rehabilitation opportunities by utilizing the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) program			Y	2026				Action is currently underway.
2018	Initiate demolition/land bank program for vacant and condemned housing			Y	2026				Initiated demolition program in 2018. Still need to create a land bank program.
2019	Upgrade basketball court and construct playground at the Payton Williams Center			Y	2025				Basketball courts have been upgraded. A playground still needs to be installed and is reflected in a modified activity in the new CWP.
2017	Repair/replace 1000 feet per year of sidewalks					Y	2025		Action has been postponed due to lack of funds.
2017	Complete Projects Listed in TIA Band 2 (Railroad Ave., Beech St., MLK Blvd.)	Y	2019						Action was completed in 2019.
2020	Complete Projects Listed in TIA Band 3 (Lewis St., Palm St., Crest Dr.)	Y	2019						Action was complete din 2019.



**City of Cochran Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program**  
**Community Work Program 2022 - 2026**

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Each Year	Beyond 2026	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Utilize the Chamber and Industrial Development Authority to develop a detailed economic development marketing strategy		X						X	X	IDA	\$1,000	X			
Pursue Guaranteed Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) designation and maintain GRAD compatible industrial sites to encourage/attract economic development opportunities after designation is received		X						X	X	DCA, USDA Rural Dev't, Chamber, IDA	\$100,000/year	X	X	X	X
Seek the development of appropriate signage and landscaping along the Cochran Bypass	X							X	X	DOT (TE)	\$100,000	X	X	X	
Continue to pursue funding as needed to further develop the new Industrial Park, including expansion and additional infrastructure, as appropriate, including the widening and resurfacing of the entranceway.		X						X	X	Chamber, IDA, DCA,, USDA Rural Dev't, DEcD	\$5,000,000	X	X	X	
Pursue the feasibility of establishing a development standard overlay in the historic downtown Cochran to help encourage downtown revitalization activities.	X								X	Chamber, DDA, BHT	N/A				
Pursue the development of a long-range Recreation Master Plan			X					X	X	CBRD	\$20,000	X			
Seek to develop improved public safety mutual aid agreements for fire and law enforcement protection		X						X	X		N/A				



**City of Cochran Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program**  
**Community Work Program 2022 - 2026**

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Each Year	Beyond 2026	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Pursue the development of subdivision regulations	X								X		\$1,000	X			
Extend runway at Cochran Municipal Airport by 800 feet			X						X	GDOT, FAA	\$400,000	X	X	X	
Phase II Sewer Rehabilitation (CIPP) Citywide	X								X	FEFA, CDBG	\$750,000	X	X	X	
Water line and fire hydrant repair/replacement Phase II	X								X	GEFA	\$2,500,000	X	X		
Renovate Current City Hall or construct a new building		X							X	SPLOST	\$800,000	X	X		
Renovate or replace City Police Station		X							X	SPLOST	\$800,000	X	X		
Pave roadway to water treatment plant				X					X	SPLOST	\$280,000	X			
Dredge and clean blue streams within city limits					X				X	GEMA, FEMA, Army Corp of Engineers, DNR	\$1,000,000	X	X	X	
Increase housing rehabilitation opportunities by utilizing the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) Program						X			X	GA DCA	\$700,000	X	X	X	





**City of Cochran Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program**  
**Community Work Program 2022 - 2026**

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Each Year	Beyond 2026	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Initiate land bank program for vacant and housing and properties					X				X		\$45,000	X			
Construct playground at the Payton William Center				X					X	LWCF, SPLOST	\$200,000	X	X	X	
Repair/replace 1000 feet per year of sidewalks						X			X	TIA GDOT	\$25,000	X	X		
Upgrade/purchase turnout gear for firefighters				X					X	USDA, FEMA	\$20,000	X	X	X	
Acquire Rural Zone Designation for downtown Cochran	X								X	DCA	N/A				
Acquire funding to develop a public community park						X			X	LWCF	\$600,000	X	X	X	
Develop a Community Policing Program		X							X	USDOJ COPS	\$15,000	X		X	
Acquire new/modern fire vehicles and equipment				X					X	USDA, FEMA	\$1,200,000	X	X	X	
Secure funding to maintain and expand capacity at the wastewater treatment plant				X					X	GEFA, USDA	\$3,000,000	X	X	X	
Develop interconnected pedestrian walkways throughout the City/County					X			X	X		\$2,000,000	X	X	X	
Pursue funding for water & sewer infrastructure within the city					X				X	CDBG	\$1,000,000	X	X	X	
Pursue owner occupied housing rehabilitation funding				X					X		\$3,000,000	X	X	X	
Seek funding to develop a multi-modal pedestrian walkway along the Cochran Bypass		X							X		\$275,000	X	X	X	
Adopt the DCA Broadband Model ordinance	X							X	X	DCA, Regional Commission	N/A	X	X		
Seek to become designated as a Broadband Ready Community	X							X	X	DCA, Regional Commission	N/A	X	X		



# Appendix A

- **Community Involvement**
- **Public Hearing Notice 1**
- **News Release**
- **Comprehenisve Plan Website**
- **Community Vision Survey**
- **Public Hearing Notice 2**
- **Meeting Agendas**
- **Stakeholders Invited to Participate**
- **Active Participants**



## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Local Planning Requirements established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) encourage and require that each element of the comprehensive plan “be prepared with considerable opportunity for involvement and input from stakeholders, local leadership, and the general public.” Cochran and Bleckley County took this requirement to heart and placed increased emphasis on getting community leaders, stakeholders, and the general public involved. The need for strong community involvement from a broad spectrum of stakeholders was emphasized by the Regional Commission in communications with the local governments. As a result, the local governments put forth considerable effort for broad community involvement and participation in this comprehensive plan’s development.

The local governments coordinated establishment of a steering committee which they called the “Local Plan Coordination Committee” approximately one to two months ahead of the scheduled first committee meeting, and invited through formal e-mail and direct contact as many stakeholders and community leaders as they could envision. Regional Commission planning staff previously counseled the local governments to make such efforts a priority a number of times, including a plan implementation assessment meeting held in late October, 2020. The Regional Commission offered plan preparation assistance in a letter, and as much in direct communication and follow-up for plan development organization. DCA’s Suggested Community Plan Stakeholder List, some specific known local candidates, and a model invitation for stakeholder participation were provided for local government use. In addition to local government direct contact, the local governments involved local media and their public meetings to notify the general public and any other interested parties to participate. The official public advertising of the required public hearing further invited all those interested to participate. Similar efforts by the local media and local governments occurred prior to the final committee meeting and public hearing to review the draft plan prior to its formal submittal.

These considerable efforts for achieving meaningful community involvement were considered a success by the local governments. The committee meetings participation did include numerous appointed and elected local officials, local economic development practitioners, other local agencies and organizations, and many others. The first committee meeting, as well as the first public hearing, included a strengths/weakness (SWOT analysis) exercise. The results of these strengths/weaknesses exercises were also reviewed at the second committee meeting. In standard practice, the first order of business at each committee meeting was to review all prior committee inputs and their summary by staff for committee amendment before moving to the next input topic. Much community involvement and input was provided in all facets and elements of the comprehensive plan’s development. The local governments were very pleased both with the community involvement/input and the results.

The actual documents utilized or published during the community involvement and comprehensive plan preparation process are provided in this appendix. These include the local government stakeholder invitation, the local government official public hearing advertisements, and the Local Plan Coordination Committee meeting agendas. A list of stakeholders invited to participate in the comprehensive plan preparation process and a list of active participants on the Local Plan Coordination Committee are also included.



## **PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

### **Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan “The Future of All of Bleckley County”**

The local governments of Bleckley County and the City of Cochran are in the initial stages of a process to develop a new joint comprehensive plan in accordance with state law. It is desired that this plan not only meet state requirements, but also truly express the Community’s wishes for the future growth and development of the Community.

Please come to this meeting and express your desires about the Community’s future vision, the issues and opportunities facing the Community, and what should be done to make Bleckley County and the City of Cochran better places to live and work. What should be the Community’s guiding principles, and what can be done to generate local pride and enthusiasm about the future of all of Bleckley County?

**PUBLIC HEARING DATE AND TIME: Thursday, April 15, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.**

**LOCATION OF PUBLIC HEARING: Cochran-Bleckley Chamber of Commerce  
Auditorium, Cochran**

Please attend, voice your opinions, and be involved. Help your community be proud about its future. All persons with a disability or otherwise needing assistance should contact Bleckley County Board of Commissioners, 112 N. Second Street, Cochran, Georgia, or call 478-953-3200.



# HEART OF GEORGIA ALTAMAHA

## Regional Commission

331 West Parker Street  
Baxley, GA 31513  
Phone: 912-367-3648  
Fax: 912-367-3640

5405 Oak Street  
Eastman, GA 31023  
Phone: 478-374-4771  
Fax: 478-374-0703



## NEWS RELEASE

### **PUBLIC INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN DROP-IN SESSION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS' COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**DATE:** Tuesday, May 4, 2021 4:00 – 6:00 PM

**LOCATION:** Cochran City Auditorium  
102 North Second Street, Suite A

Are you concerned about the future of Bleckley County and the City of Cochran? Do you have thoughtful ideas on what needs to be done to make the community a better place? What do you consider to be pressing needs and issues in the community?

The local governments of Bleckley County, the Bleckley County Board of Commissioners, and the City of Cochran, are in the process of updating their comprehensive plan required by state law. The current joint comprehensive plan dates from 2016, and is the principal guide to the long-term growth and development of Bleckley County and the City of Cochran. The new update will focus on achieving a vision set by the community on what it wants to be, and addressing identified needs and opportunities.

You are cordially invited to get involved and to participate in this plan update process. You may do so by attending a public drop-in session concerning the comprehensive plan update to be held at the Cochran City Auditorium at 102 North Second Street, Suite A from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 4, 2021. The session is designed to be informal, to answer any questions you may have, and to allow for one-on-one input at your convenience. Planning staff from the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission will be on hand to discuss the plan and its process, and to receive your input and ideas. There will be no formal presentation. The event is designed as a drop-in at whatever time is convenient for those wishing to participate or learn more.

Please attend and voice your ideas. We want to hear them. Let us know what you think. Do your part in making Bleckley County an even better place to live, work, and play.





**WELCOME!**

Welcome to the home of the Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan Update. The County and the City of Cochran are currently undergoing strategic planning meetings to guide the future growth and development for the community. Issues discussed include economic development, community facilities, natural and cultural resources, housing, intergovernmental coordination, and other important concerns. In a series of meetings, to be held March-August, local government leadership will be seeking citizen input and participation concerning these topics. This page will provide periodic updates and working documents from the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee.







**ADVANCING AN EXCEPTIONAL  
RURAL SMALLTOWN COMMUNITY**

A Joint Comprehensive Plan for Bleckley County and  
City of Cochran, Georgia

July, 2016

[Download a Copy of the 2016 Plan Here!](#)

## WHY IS THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPORTANT?

Effective planning ensures that future development will occur where, when, and how the community and local government wants. There are several important benefits to the entire community that result from the planning process:

- Quality of life is maintained and improved.
- There is a vision, clearly stated and shared by all, that describes the future of the community.
- Private property rights are protected.
- Economic development is encouraged and supported.
- There is more certainty about where development will occur, what it will be like, when it will happen, and how the costs of development will be met.

To encourage local governments' engagement in comprehensive planning, Georgia incentivizes it by allowing cities and counties with DCA-approved comprehensive plans access to a special package of financial resources to aid in implementing their plans. This includes Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), water and sewer loans from the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA), economic development funding from the OneGeorgia Authority, and a variety of other programs from DCA and partner agencies (a detailed list is available in the "Fact Sheets" section, below). Eligibility for this package of incentives is called Qualified Local Government (QLG) status.

<https://dca.ga.gov/local-government-assistance/planning/local-planning/local-comprehensive-planning>





## BLECKLEY COUNTY 2021 JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TIMETABLE

- Wednesday, 3.17.2021, 10:30 a.m. - Initial Meeting Strengths/Weaknesses (SWOT)
- Thursday, 4.15.2021, 1:00 p.m. - Community Vision/Needs and Opportunities/Strategies for Improvement
- Thursday, 4.15.2021, 5:00 p.m. - Initial Public Hearing
- Tuesday, 5.4.2021, 4:00-6:00 p.m. - Community Input Drop-In
- Thursday, 5.20.2021, 10:30 a.m. - Needs and Opportunities/Goals/Policies/Economic Development
- Thursday, 6.10.2021, 10:30 a.m. - Goals/Policies/Economic Development/Broadband/Land Use
- Tuesday, 8.31.2021, 3:00 p.m. - Draft Plan
- Tuesday, 8.31.2021, 5:00 p.m. - Final Public Hearing
- September, 2021 Local Government Submittal

[Click to View Files From First Planning Meeting 3.17.2021](#)

[Click to View Files From Second Planning Meeting 4.15.2021](#)

[Click to View Files From Third Planning Meeting 5.20.2021](#)

[Click to View Files From Fourth Planning Meeting 6.10.2021](#)

[Click to View Files From Fifth Planning Meeting 8.31.2021](#)

## OUR VISION

BLECKLEY COUNTY ENVISIONS A FUTURE WHERE OPPORTUNITY IS EMBRACED. BLECKLEY COUNTY WILL BECOME A COMMUNITY THAT CAPITALIZES ON DIVERSITY AND WILL BE A PLACE WITH A BROAD RANGE OF CHOICES FOR ITS RESIDENTS. THE COUNTY WILL EMBRACE AND PROMOTE ITS CENTRALIZED LOCATION IN ORDER TO BECOME A HUB FOR COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY. THE GOAL IS TO ESTABLISH COUNTYWIDE PROSPERITY BY CREATING A SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM OF HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, PUBLIC SAFETY, INFRASTRUCTURE, RECREATION, COMMERCE, AND HOUSING. BLECKLEY COUNTY WILL BE A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE WITH ATTRACTIVE NEIGHBORHOODS, GREEN SPACES, SCHOOLS, AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?



FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING THE 2021 BLECKLEY COUNTY JCDOT COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS, CONTACT US:

321 West Parker Street - Rosley, GA 31153

912-947-3640

[donor@hogarc.org](mailto:donor@hogarc.org)





## COMMUNITY VISION SURVEY

1. How would you describe your community, particularly to someone who knows nothing about it?
2. What makes your community unique and special as a place to live?
3. What improvement(s) to your community would you most like to see happen?
4. What are the greatest strengths or assets of your community?
5. What are your community's greatest needs, especially long-term?
6. What specific projects/improvements are critically needed in the short term?
7. What opportunities for positive change/improvement/growth are there in your community?
8. How do you think your community change/grow in the next five to ten years?
9. What three words do you hope people use 10 years from now when they describe what Bleckley County is like as a community-the values that define the people who live there?



## **FINAL PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

### **Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan**

The local governments of Bleckley County and the City of Cochran are in the final stages of a process to develop a new joint comprehensive plan in accordance with state law.

The comprehensive plan outlines a community vision, identifies needs and opportunities, and delineates long term policies and a community work program to provide a guide and blueprint for future growth and development within the community jurisdictions. The plan is in draft finalization before submittal to the state for review.

The purpose of the hearing is to brief the community on the content and strategies outlined in the draft comprehensive plan, to address the issues and opportunities facing Bleckley County and the City of Cochran, obtain any final citizen input, and notify the community of the pending submittal of the comprehensive plan for state and regional review.

**PUBLIC HEARING DATE AND TIME: Tuesday, August 31, 2021, at 5:00 p.m.**

**LOCATION OF PUBLIC HEARING: Cochran City Auditorium, 102 North Second Street, Cochran, Georgia**

All persons with a disability or otherwise needing assistance should contact Bleckley County Commissioner's Office: 112 North Second Street, Cochran, Georgia, or call 478-934-3200.

All persons are invited to attend the public hearing and voice your opinion to help your community achieve a better future. If you would like more information, please contact James Pope at the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission, 912-367-3648 or [pope@hogarc.org](mailto:pope@hogarc.org).

**BLECKLEY COUNTY JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
LOCAL PLAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
BLECKLEY COUNTY EXTENSION OFFICE, COCHRAN, GA**

**March 17, 2021**

**AGENDA**

**Introductions**

**Background/Committee's Purpose**

**Proposed Timetable for Plan Development**

**Community Strengths/Weaknesses Identification (SWOT)**

**Community Vision Input**

**Next Meeting**

**Draft Community Vision Review**

**Needs and Opportunities Input**

**Strategies for Improvement**



**BLECKLEY COUNTY JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
LOCAL PLAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
BLECKLEY COUNTY EXTENSION OFFICE, COCHRAN, GA**

**April 15, 2021**

**AGENDA**

**Introduction**

**Community Vision Input/Group Breakout**

**Plan Title**

**Draft Issues and Opportunities**

**Goals/Policies**

**Next Meeting – Thursday, May 20, 2021, 10:30 a.m.**

**Revised Draft Community Vision Review**

**Revised Draft Issues and Opportunities Review**

**Goals/Policies Input**

**\*Public Hearing – Thursday, April 15, 2021, 5:00 p.m., Cochran City Auditorium, Cochran**

**\*Community Input Drop-In Session on Tuesday, May 4, 2021, 4-6 p.m., location needs to be determined**

**BLECKLEY COUNTY JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
LOCAL PLAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
BLECKLEY COUNTY EXTENSION OFFICE, COCHRAN, GA**

**May 20, 2021**

**AGENDA**

**Draft Community Vision/Outline**

**Plan Title**

**Revised Draft Issues and Opportunities Review**

**Goals/Policies**

**Broadband**

**\*Community Input Drop-In Session held on Tuesday, May 4, 2021, 4-6 p.m.,  
102 North Second Street, Cochran, GA**

**\*Next Meeting - Thursday, June 10, 2021, 1:00 p.m., Bleckley County Extension Office, Cochran, GA**



**BLECKLEY COUNTY JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
LOCAL PLAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
BLECKLEY COUNTY EXTENSION OFFICE, COCHRAN, GA**

**June 10, 2021**

**AGENDA**

**Introduction**

**Plan Title**

**Draft Community Vision Review**

**Draft Broadband Element**

**Economic Development Element**

**Plan Coordination**

**Land Use Element**

**Next Meeting – Date to be determined to review draft plan, including Community Work Program.**





**BLECKLEY COUNTY JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
LOCAL PLAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
COCHRAN CITY AUDITORIUM  
AUGUST 31, 2021  
AGENDA**

**Draft Plan Review**

**Submittal Discussion**

**Submittal Letter**

**Public Hearing – Tuesday, August 31, 2021, 5:00 p.m.**

**Stakeholders Invited to Participate  
in Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan Preparation Process**

<b>Bleckley County Commissioner</b>
<b>City of Cochran</b>
<b>City of Cochran Downtown Development Authority</b>
<b>City of Cochran Planning and Zoning Board</b>
<b>City of Cochran Housing Authority</b>
<b>Bleckley County Board of Education</b>
<b>Middle Georgia State University</b>
<b>Oconee Fall Line Technical College</b>
<b>Cochran-Bleckley Industrial Development Authority</b>
<b>Cochran-Bleckley Chamber of Commerce</b>
<b>Cochran-Bleckley Tourism</b>
<b>Bleckley County Farm Bureau</b>
<b>Bleckley County Cooperative Extension</b>
<b>Georgia Power</b>
<b>Ocmulgee EMC</b>
<b>Oconee EMC</b>
<b>Georgia Forestry Commission</b>
<b>Bleckley County Emergency Management Agency</b>
<b>Local Fire Departments</b>
<b>Cochran Police Department</b>
<b>Heartland EMS</b>
<b>Bleckley County Sheriff's Department</b>
<b>Local Banks</b>
<b>Local Churches</b>
<b>Local Civic Clubs</b>
<b>Bleckley County Health Department</b>
<b>Bleckley Memorial Hospital</b>
<b>Cochran-Bleckley Ministerial Alliance</b>
<b>Bleckley County NAACP</b>
<b>Bleckley County Board of Assessors</b>
<b>Bleckley County Tax Commissioner</b>
<b>Cochran-Bleckley Library</b>
<b>Cochran-Bleckley Airport Authority</b>
<b>Bleckley County DFACS</b>
<b><i>The Cochran Journal</i></b>
<b>BleckleyProgress.com</b>



## Active Participants in Bleckley County Local Plan Coordination Committee Meetings and Plan Preparation

<b>Bleckley County Board of Commissioners</b>
Mike Davis, Sole Commissioner
Freida Dykes, County Clerk
<b>Bleckley County Tax Commissioner's Office</b>
Paige Baggs, Tax Commissioner
<b>City of Cochran</b>
Billy A. Yeomans, Mayor
Richard Newbern, City Manager
Tracy B. Jones, City Clerk
Julie Peche, Administrative Assistant
<b>Cochran-Bleckley County Chamber of Commerce</b>
Rusty Lloyd, Chamber Director
Mike Stoy, Chamber Board Member
<b>Cochran-Bleckley County Industrial Development Authority</b>
Mike Davis, Sole Commissioner
Billy A. Yeomans, Mayor
Andy Lucas, IDA Director
Mary Brooks, IDA Board Member
<b>Bleckley County Probate Court</b>
Jonathan Fordham, Probate Judge
<b>Bleckley County Board of Education</b>
Trey Belflower, Assistant Superintendent
<b>Bleckley County Senior Center</b>
Anita Purser, Senior Center Manager
<b>Bleckley County Health Department</b>
Rachel Gordon, Nurse Manager
<b>Cochran-Bleckley County Library</b>
Gina Thomas, Branch Manager
<b>Bleckley County UGA Extension Office</b>
Cole Moon, UGA Extension Agent
<b>Middle Georgia State University</b>
Henry Whitfield, Community Director
Adam Holloway, Chief Flight Instructor
<b>Bleckley Progress</b>
Dave Whitaker, Editor
<b>Cochran-Bleckley County Arts Alliance</b>
Bill Coody, Chairman
<b>Bleckley County Communities in Schools Program</b>
Regina Smith, Rural Health Coordinator
<b>Bleckley County NAACP</b>
Vic Cooper, President
<b>Heartland EMS, Inc.</b>
W.J. (Bill) Cheek, Business Owner
<b>Great Oaks Bank</b>
MaryAnn Young, Branch Manager
Sheena Maddox, Customer Service Representative

<b>The Citizens Bank of Cochran</b>
B.J. Coody, Vice President
<b>Local Citizens</b>
Britt Stewart, Business Owner
Dani Dykes, Business Owner
Mike Lucas, Farmer
Kim Wright, Homemaker
Chad Bohannon, Business Owner
Russell Davidson, Citizen
Patricia L. Evans, Citizen
Kay Stephenson, Citizen
Rene Conner, Business Owner

Note: Both elected and appointed local government and local economic development officials participated.





# BLECKLEY COUNTY – COCHRAN

Joint Comprehensive Plan

