

# I. Community Policies

The following policies, numbered to align with the Community Goals, were developed in conjunction with all stakeholders and are intended to provide a qualitative guidance to address the Issues and Opportunities identified in this Plan, and to provide a framework for the development of the Community Work Program. The Policies are built upon those in the previous Comprehensive Plan as well as the Common Community Vision for Greater Lowndes County. The Community Work Program then addresses the Issues and Opportunities through specific projects, for each of which the participants, anticipated cost, and time frame are identified.

## Economic Development

### Issues

**1. A large portion of Greater Lowndes employment opportunities are low-wage retail and service-oriented jobs.**

Policies:

- 1.1. The need for additional high-wage jobs shall be addressed through greater collaboration of community resources.
- 1.2. Promote and support the continued growth of primary regional economic engines such as Valdosta State University (VSU), South Georgia Medical Center (SGMC), Moody Air Force Base (MAFB), Wiregrass Georgia Technical College, and Georgia Military College (GMC).
- 1.3. Ensure continued funding and support of economic development programs, financial incentives, direct financing, etc., to attract and retain new and expanding businesses in the region that will grow the regional tax base and high-wage jobs.

**2. Many young professionals leave the area in search of greater opportunities, and the remaining workforce lacks the skills required by employers who would potentially offer higher-wage jobs. The issues of low wages and declining workforce adequacy should be addressed together.**

Policies:

- 1.4. The issue of declining workforce adequacy shall be addressed through greater collaboration among businesses, educational institutions, and local government regarding to improve the knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed by the existing workforce.
- 1.5. Cultivate a skilled workforce with positive ethics, life skills, professionalism and educational levels within the region that creates and maintains long-term, meaningful employment opportunities around a balanced economic base, that increases per capita income in the region.
- 1.6. Encourage and coordinate public/private partnerships between workforce training agencies, counties, cities, local businesses and schools (K-12 and Technical) for the development of improving work skill programs and career education programs such as career academy for young adults.
- 1.7. Promote continued utilization of skills centers through the Workforce Investment Program and the Labor Department with targeted outreach to low and moderate income persons.
- 1.8. Efforts shall be made to attract and retain young professionals to the Greater Lowndes community to assist in achieving community goals such as providing an adequate workforce and maintaining high wage jobs.

**3. Low business ownership rates and lack of start-up activity.**

Policies:

- 1.9. Support agencies and programs that work with the development of small businesses and community entrepreneurs in order to encourage positive economic development and self-sufficiency.

**4. More support is needed for DBE businesses and small businesses.**

Policies:

- 1.10. The community will target reinvestment in declining neighborhoods to further encourage private sector redevelopment and accommodate future growth.
- 1.11. Encourage and assist local entrepreneurs and small businesses through such programs as businesses incubators and tax incentives such as Enterprise and Opportunity Zones.
- 1.12. Promote and support a Regional Development Authority that coordinates local, state, and federal economic development planning, while continuing to support local development authorities to implement local economic development strategies.

**5. Need more promotion of rural businesses, rural job opportunities, and agricultural education.**

Policies:

- 1.13. Encourage entrepreneurial and small-business development through the development of business incubator sites and resources such as the Industrial Authority, the Chambers of Commerce, and the S.E.E.D.S Center.

**6. Lack of a central resource center for entrepreneurs, such as a business incubator.**

Policies:

- 1.14. Through the SBDC, in partnership with governments and non-profits, provide business development services (such as: training, private consultations, mentoring, etc.) for low and moderate income persons, entrepreneurs, and small business incubators.
- 1.15. Maintain a sufficient source of funding for coordinated economic development efforts within the region, utilizing, where appropriate federal and state assistance opportunities.

**7. Greater diversity of job sectors is needed.**

Policies:

- 1.16. Promote collaboration and support among the various business, education, and local government organizations, as well as the private sector.
- 1.17. Collaborate with the division of Rehabilitative Services to provide employment services to citizens with all types of disabilities.
- 1.18. Develop a region-wide, public/private, funded business plan geared towards marketing the community to regional, national, and global high-wage employers.

**8. Lack of an established investment network, resulting in a lack of access to capital.**

Policies:

- 1.19. Support agencies and programs that work with the development of small businesses and community entrepreneurs in order to encourage positive economic development and self-sufficiency.
- 1.20. Promote and support a Regional Development Authority that coordinates local, state, and federal economic development planning, while continuing to support local development authorities to implement local economic development strategies.
- 1.21. Promote and coordinate long-range economic development plans and neighborhood revitalization strategies for designated revitalization areas to encourage economic development in these areas.

**9. Waste treatment is needed for heavy industry.**

Policies:

- 1.22. Ensure the provision and funding of infrastructure, community facilities, and public services that support efficient growth and development patterns.
- 1.23. Enhanced solid waste reduction and recycling initiatives shall be supported.
- 1.24. Encourage and promote education of enhanced local recycling efforts and waste reduction initiatives identified through an updated Solid Waste Management Plan.

**10. Lack of Downtown tourism booth open on the weekends and after hours.**

Policies:

- 1.25. Develop passive open space and parks in/near Downtown Valdosta that include a cultural anchor facility that is in harmony with the existing urban environment.

**11. Need an electric grid that can balance demand and supply from individual generators of renewable energy.**

Policies:

- 1.26. Promote recycling and renewable energy and resource efforts throughout the community through education on the impact and benefits of recycling and energy conservation and the use of renewable resources (ex; solar/wind power, water conservation, etc.).

**12. The basic broadband (high-speed internet) infrastructure that is needed for economic development is not in place, and needs to be made available, affordable, and accessible.**

Policies:

- 1.27. Community-wide technology infrastructure shall be considered a basic community facility and as such will be adequately planned for.

**13. Air service needs to be expanded to increase the community's economic development potential and accessibility by air.**

Policies:

- 1.28. Following the completion of an Air Service Study, the community should investigate possible implementation and funding strategies for expanded air service.

## Education

### Issues

**1. Need an education system that is current, competitive, and focused on the needs of the 21st Century workforce, preparing students for real life with basic skills (soft skills) from Pre-K onwards.**

Policies:

- 2.1. Develop and support appropriate education programs in local schools that ensure students are ready for further education either at a university, technical college or on-the-job training which meet the needs of local employers in a 21st Century workforce.
- 2.2. Ensure the quality and effectiveness of all educational organizations, facilities, programs and services (including faculty and staff) will be continually assessed to facilitate the improvement of academic and extracurricular programs and objectives.
- 2.3. Various teaching methodologies (including distance learning technologies) will be enhanced based on the needs of the communities and students, including enhancing online services and courses (example: expand dual-enrollment offerings to high school students).
- 2.4. Coordinate with the Department of Labor to host workshops to be held at the Career Center on the topics of interviewing techniques, application preparation, networking, resume preparation, and stress and financial management.
- 2.5. Facilitate regular planning sessions with school systems and local governments to ensure new facilities are properly designed and located to meet future population growth and community needs.

**2. More education in IT (High Tech) skills needed.**

Policies:

- 2.6. Support development and marketing of STEM programs at local schools that contribute highly skilled workers to the fields of environmental technology, information technology, and medical services and support as viable industry clusters for local economic development.
- 2.7. Ensure that local community workforce needs are met through educational and certified workforce training/credential programs, which serve to assist economic development attraction and retention efforts.

**3. Lack of Pre-K facilities, after school programs, and other programs to ensure that all children get a quality education from an early age.**

Policies:

2.8. Fully fund Pre-K programs in order to start students on the path to a quality education by building a foundation of basic life and work skills.

**4. Students have low basic skills coming into college; need to increase expectations for student performance and graduation rates.**

Policies:

2.9. Work actively to increase the number of local students who complete high school and are eligible to attend and obtain a certificate/degree from an institution of higher learning.

**5. Lack of accountability for parental involvement.**

Policies:

2.10. Cultivate an atmosphere of student excellence and high academic performance from pre-K through post-graduate by creating an environment of ownership, stewardship, and responsibility that reduces barriers and includes parent and community support and involvement.

**6. Lack of school options for those who suffer from mental illnesses.**

Policies:

2.11. Expand, organize and develop Adult Education resources to support veterans and military families.

2.12. Various teaching methodologies (including distance learning technologies) will be enhanced based on the needs of the communities and students, including enhancing online services and courses (example: expand dual-enrollment offerings to high school students).

2.13. Collaborate with the division of Rehabilitative Services to provide employment services to citizens with all types of disabilities.

**7. Lack of inclusion of charter schools and home schooling in education system planning.**

Policies:

2.14. Ensure the quality and effectiveness of all educational organizations, facilities, programs and services (including faculty and staff) will be continually assessed to facilitate the improvement of academic and extracurricular programs and objectives.

2.15. Promote the recognition and value of all local educational institutions at all levels.

**8. School culture focused on sports over books.**

Policies:

2.16. Cultivate an atmosphere of student excellence and high academic performance from pre-K through post-graduate by creating an environment of ownership, stewardship, and responsibility that reduces barriers and includes parent and community support and involvement.

**9. There is concern about the long-term effects to city and county growth patterns due to perception of quality differences between the two school systems.**

Policies:

2.17. Promote the recognition and value of all local educational institutions at all levels.

**10. Public schools need more partnerships with private sector to compensate for loss of funds.**

Policies:

2.18. Encourage and coordinate public/private partnerships between workforce training agencies, counties, cities, local businesses and schools (K-12 and Technical) for the

development of improving work skill programs and career education programs such as career academy for young adults.

**11. Educational millage rates are coming close to the maximum allowed.**

Policies:

- 2.19. Encourage and coordinate public/private partnerships between workforce training agencies, counties, cities, local businesses and schools (K-12 and Technical) for the development of improving work skill programs and career education programs such as career academy for young adults.

**12. The high cost of attending college makes college difficult or infeasible for many students.**

Policies:

- 2.20. Communicate the need for additional funds to support existing scholarship programs and new scholarship initiatives that help students to continue to seek higher education opportunities to the community.

**13. Wiregrass Tech and GMC are less accessible to people on the south side of the County who may lack transportation resources or have other barriers preventing them from attending classes at the current locations.**

Policies:

- 2.21. Work with local and state-level partners to establish a common vision, funding support, and coordinated processes to provide an integrated service delivery system that will grow and support WGTC's Adult Education Program students, enabling them to attain skilled, high-wage jobs or continue into credit programs.
- 2.22. Various teaching methodologies (including distance learning technologies) will be enhanced based on the needs of the communities and students, including enhancing online services and courses (example: expand dual-enrollment offerings to high school students).
- 2.23. Implement an accessible, coordinated urban public transit system.

**14. An increasing number of residents have limited English proficiency. Programs at the South Georgia Regional Library, Valdosta State University, and Wiregrass Georgia Technical College should help address the resulting language barriers.**

Policies:

- 2.24. The integration of minority populations shall be encouraged through language programs, cultural awareness programs, and community events.

## **Community Wellness**

### **Issues**

**1. Lack of centralized information resources (such as a 211 system) to promote awareness of existing social services, such as food banks and health & safety programs.**

Policies:

- 3.1. Provide resources to improve the community's public services-including but not limited to employment, crime prevention, childcare, health, drug abuse, education, and recreational needs.

**2. More programs and services are needed for the indigent and for the working poor (disabled, uninsured, etc.).**

Policies:

- 3.2. Existing non-profit, community resources shall be utilized where possible to address community wellness issues and opportunities.

- 3.3. Coordinate with local health officials to educate the public (including school children and seniors) about the importance of a healthy lifestyle that includes being physically active and eating healthy.
- 3.4. Provide resources to improve the community's public services-including but not limited to employment, crime prevention, childcare, health, drug abuse, education, and recreational needs.

**3. Lack of qualified volunteers and lack of a system for coordinating volunteers.**

Policies:

- 3.5. Efforts will be made to ensure all citizens have access to basic technology infrastructure.
- 3.6. Provide resources to improve the community's public services-including but not limited to employment, crime prevention, childcare, health, drug abuse, education, and recreational needs.

**4. Lack of outdoor recreation venues (trails, etc.) and lack of education regarding what outdoor recreation opportunities are available and how to use them safely.**

Policies:

- 3.7. Commit to preserving, improving and marketing affordable and accessible (location and amenities) outdoor recreational facilities (venues/meeting/event space), which include parks and open space as quality of life amenities, resources, and programs for adults and youth.
- 3.8. Locate facilities such as parks, schools, and community centers in appropriately planned activity centers, and near new and existing neighborhoods according to adopted, joint and/or coordinated future development plans and CIPS.
- 3.9. Promote an active, healthy lifestyle through livable community urban design and development patterns.

**5. Need more recreation programs, especially for girls and the disabled.**

Policies:

- 3.10. Community involvement and programming opportunities for youth shall be maintained and enhanced through public-private partnerships.
- 3.11. Existing non-profit community resources shall be utilized where possible to address community wellness issues and opportunities.

**6. The community has a low walkability score, as measured by walkscore.com.**

Policies:

- 3.12. Promote mixed-use, more dense, infill development in our downtowns and commercial corridors, especially within designated revitalization areas, that are vibrant centers for culture, government, entertainment, retail and residential diversity.
- 3.13. Promote and encourage retrofitting of existing and establishment of new developments that encourage active lifestyles for residents of all age groups.
- 3.14. Ensure the community's anticipated growth occurs in a well-integrated yet organized fashion, which protects our community character and resources, promotes efficient use of infrastructure and transportation facilities, and supports quality economic development and a diverse population.
- 3.15. New housing developments should be universally designed to provide access to all persons.
- 3.16. Promote use of innovative design concepts, including appropriate use of increased density, through educational outreach and greater collaboration with the development community, including infill development in designated revitalization areas.
- 3.17. The traffic carrying capacity of existing and planned roadways shall be preserved through coordinated land use and transportation planning decisions.
- 3.18. Support the acquisition, construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation or installation of public facilities and improvements to provide handicap accessibility to public facilities.

**7. Lack of access to healthy food options, especially for the indigent and those lacking transportation.**

Policies:

3.19. Promote healthy eating and active lifestyles throughout the community.

**8. Lack of temporary evacuation shelters.**

Policies:

3.20. Gather and utilize data and research (GIS mapping resources) to identify areas/structures that area susceptible to storm events/natural hazards to minimize loss of property and life, as well as ensuring ongoing levels of service and resiliency, especially of critical facilities.

3.21. Evaluate the structural integrity of critical facilities/utilities (schools, public buildings, water/sewer infrastructure, dams, transportation, etc.) and implement projects to repair/upgrade/substitute facilities and structures to mitigate future damages.

3.22. Provide timely hazard warnings and information to the public to ensure their wellbeing and safety o through education, training, warnings and notifications.

3.23. Increase public awareness of the warning and notification systems available communitywide such as NOAA weather radios, Code Red Emergency Notification System, Emergency Alert System, etc.

3.24. Provide awareness, education and training programs (CERT) on resources available to the public for natural disaster (extreme heat, storm, tornado, hurricane, etc.), and safety precautions to take at home and in the workplace.

**9. Lack of health specialists.**

Policies:

3.25. Continue to provide high-quality, locally-based, low-cost healthcare to a growing regional population in Southern Georgia.

**10. Trauma center needed.**

Policies:

3.26. Continue to provide high-quality, locally-based, low-cost healthcare to a growing regional population in Southern Georgia.

**11. Dumping of toxic waste in landfills and pollution from industries.**

Policies:

3.27. Encourage the consistent enforcement and full consideration and evaluation of water and air permits and state environmental regulations to protect the region's natural resources.

**12. Teenage pregnancy continues to be a problem.**

Policies:

3.28. Cultivate an atmosphere of student excellence and high academic performance from pre-K through post-graduate by creating an environment of ownership, stewardship, and responsibility that reduces barriers and includes parent and community support and involvement.

3.29. Work actively to increase the number of local students who complete high school and are eligible to attend and obtain a certificate/degree from an institution of higher learning.

3.30. Continue to provide high-quality, locally-based, low-cost healthcare to a growing regional population in Southern Georgia.

**13. More education is needed about health and safety risks, especially for youths and adolescents.**

Policies:

3.31. Overcome poor awareness and a lack of information of health and safety programs through new marketing and education outreach strategies throughout the entire community.



- 3.32. Coordinate with local health officials to educate the public (including school children and seniors) about the importance of a healthy lifestyle that includes being physically active and eating healthy.
- 3.33. Existing non-profit, community resources shall be utilized where possible to address community wellness issues and opportunities.

## Housing

### Issues

1. **More affordable housing is needed, as well as land to build it on, for low- and moderate-income individuals and families including the military, college age, and recent high school graduates.**

Policies:

- 4.1. The growing need for workforce and affordable housing shall be addressed through public-private partnerships.
- 4.2. The existing housing stock shall be proactively protected and maintained, utilizing public-private partnerships when necessary.
- 4.3. Provide educational opportunities to the homebuilding industry to implement public/private incentive programs and construction techniques to ensure access to adequate and affordable housing options for all residents in all income levels.

2. **There is a disconnect between where affordable housing is built and where it is needed. Throughout the community, there is a lack of appropriate housing types for the various segments of our population.**

Policies:

- 4.4. A mixture of housing types in varying income levels shall be encouraged and actively promoted.
- 4.5. Analyze the impediments and barriers to affordable housing, and implement steps to alleviate those impediments and barriers, especially in designated revitalization areas.

3. **Education programs and funding assistance are needed to direct people to affordable housing.**

Policies:

- 4.6. Analyze the impediments and barriers to affordable housing, and implement steps to alleviate those impediments and barriers, especially in designated revitalization areas.

4. **Some areas have an overabundance of rental properties due to low homeownership rates and foreclosure, which leads to concentrations of absentee landlords, substandard housing, and degradation of established residential neighborhoods.**

Policies:

- 4.7. The existing housing stock and neighborhoods shall be proactively maintained and protected from incompatible uses and nuisances through the enforcement of local zoning ordinances, code enforcement, and building inspection programs, etc.

5. **Rents and utilities are too high, resulting in high vacancy rates in some areas.**

Policies:

- 4.8. Fund education, rental/down-payment, and maintenance assistance programs through public grants/loans and/or DCA/HUD certified organizations that reduce housing costs of persons living in poverty, including programs for low-income homeowners, renters, and first-time homebuyers, especially in designated revitalization areas.
- 4.9. In response to environmental concerns and rising energy costs, green building principles shall be researched and encouraged in order to conserve natural resources, improve indoor air quality and reduce energy cost.



**6. Foreclosure issues also contribute to high vacancy rates.**

Policies:

- 4.10. Analyze the impediments and barriers to affordable housing, and implement steps to alleviate those impediments and barriers, especially in designated revitalization areas.

**7. Some neighborhoods continue to suffer from blight.**

Policies:

- 4.11. Coordinate public-private partnerships (facade program, demolish vacant/hazardous buildings, etc.) to improve lots and structures in designated revitalization areas to make the areas more attractive to reinvestment and visitors.
- 4.12. Utilize various methods and programs to acquire property within the Designated Revitalization Area, including land donation.
- 4.13. Collaborate with local public safety organizations and the Valdosta Police Department to support programs that reduce crime rates in the Designated Revitalization Area.

**8. The impact of development on natural environments needs to be mitigated and minimized from the start, and wildfire hazards need to be considered for developments in the wildland-urban interface.**

Policies:

- 4.14. Protect the public through well-developed long-range land use plans that direct development to existing, designated activity centers through appropriate infrastructure expansion and incentive programs; that address local natural hazards and actively conserve/acquire areas that mitigate flooding and other natural hazards, and that promote public safety and welfare.
- 4.15. Encourage local developers and homeowner's associations to incorporate Fire-Wise practices into new and existing developments.
- 4.16. Areas where natural processes would be endangered by development (i.e. floodplains, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, etc.) shall be conserved.
- 4.17. Direct growth away from natural and conservation areas, while promoting low impact development that preserves natural areas (floodplains, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, etc.), and cultural or historic resources.

**9. More natural features need to be integrated into development, and existing natural features within developments need to be better utilized for community recreation.**

Policies:

- 4.18. Active preservation and utilization of natural greenspaces and parkland shall be encouraged and actively supported.
- 4.19. Provide education to citizens and the development community regarding natural processes of greenspaces and available incentive programs for conservation.
- 4.20. Promote development patterns that encourage walkability and integrate green spaces as well as both passive and active recreational areas.

**10. Development has "sprawled" out beyond the urban boundaries, and has impacted rural, farm, open and natural lands. Need to educate developers, work to change the mindset that mixed use development is bad, and create more infill and urban area development (less sprawl).**

Policies:

- 4.21. The Rural Service Area shall be protected from incompatible, dense development.
- 4.22. Mixed use developments in appropriate areas shall be encouraged to promote the connection of employment and residential activity centers.
- 4.23. Direct growth away from natural and conservation areas, while promoting low impact development that preserves natural areas (floodplains, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, etc.), and cultural or historic resources.
- 4.24. Provide education to citizens and the development community regarding natural processes of greenspaces and available incentive programs for conservation.

- 4.25. Promote use of innovative design concepts, including appropriate use of increased density, through educational outreach and greater collaboration with the development community, including infill development in designated revitalization areas.

**11. Need to educate people about the benefits of common space and public/private meeting areas.**

Policies:

- 4.26. Active preservation and utilization of natural greenspaces and parkland shall be encouraged and actively supported.

**12. Need retiree housing/active adult developments (example: Thomasville and older planned developments).**

Policies:

- 4.27. New housing developments should be universally designed to provide access to all persons.
- 4.28. Greater Lowndes shall be marketed as a viable location for retirees due to its prime location, community and cultural resources, and climate.

**13. A 24-hour men's homeless shelter is needed.**

Policies:

- 4.29. Provide resources to improve the community's public services-including but not limited to employment, crime prevention, childcare, health, drug abuse, education, and recreational needs.

**14. Clearing the title on an abandoned property takes over a year and therefore delays revitalization.**

Policies:

- 4.30. The existing housing stock shall be proactively protected and maintained, utilizing public-private partnerships when necessary.

## Land Use

### Issues

**1. The continued separation of housing centers and activity centers will cause increased commuting times, traffic congestion, and service delivery costs.**

Policies:

- 5.1. Mixed use developments in appropriate areas shall be encouraged to promote the connection of employment and residential activity centers.
- 5.2. Available land shall be utilized in the most efficient manner while focusing on redevelopment of land where feasible.
- 5.3. Innovative planning concepts shall be employed to achieve desirable and well-designed neighborhoods, protect the environment, preserve meaningful open space, improve traffic flow, and enhance our community's overall quality of life.
- 5.4. Ensure the community's anticipated growth occurs in a well-integrated yet organized fashion, which protects our community character and resources, promotes efficient use of infrastructure and transportation facilities, and supports quality economic development and a diverse population.
- 5.5. The Urban Service Area shall be annually updated to ensure it continues to serve as a guide for future development, and defines a recognizable transition from the urban to rural areas of the community.
- 5.6. Encourage future development to expand in areas contiguous to existing developed areas through sequential and phased utility extensions, infill, redevelopment, compact development, conservation and increased densities, thereby reducing development pressure on agricultural land.

**2. New development should take place closer to existing services/urban areas rather than rural areas.**

Policies:

- 5.7. The Rural Service Area shall be protected from incompatible, dense development.
- 5.8. A recognizable transition from the urban to the rural areas of the community shall be developed.
- 5.9. Encourage future development to expand in areas contiguous to existing developed areas through sequential and phased utility extensions.
- 5.10. Focus targeted development and investment in areas with existing transportation and utility infrastructure; while maintaining, upgrading and expanding existing facilities to support and encourage growth in desired areas.
- 5.11. Encourage future development to expand in areas contiguous to existing developed areas through sequential and phased utility extensions, infill, redevelopment, compact development, conservation and increased densities, thereby reducing development pressure on agricultural land.

**3. Environmentally friendly land uses are needed. Building outside of the urban service area presents problems for conservation.**

Policies:

- 5.12. Locate rural residential, agricultural and forestry uses within the Rural Service Area, and ensure its protection from incompatible, dense development, and promote conservation techniques to maintain rural landscapes.
- 5.13. Ensure the community's anticipated growth occurs in well integrated yet organized fashion, which protects our community character and resources, promotes efficient use of infrastructure and transportation facilities, and supports quality economic development and a diverse population.
- 5.14. Encourage future development to expand in contiguous fashion to existing developed areas through sequential and phased utility extensions.
- 5.15. Promote development patterns that encourage walkability and integrate green spaces as well as both passive and active recreational areas.
- 5.16. Provide education to citizens and the development community regarding natural processes of greenspaces and available incentive programs for conservation.
- 5.17. Reduce air pollution and promote ways to reduce our collective carbon footprint.
- 5.18. The Greater Lowndes Planning Commission shall serve as a leader in promoting quality growth and development through appropriate planning and land use decisions.

**4. Overlay districts can cause problems for property owners.**

Policies:

- 5.19. Joint comprehensive planning efforts and resulting documentation shall be appreciated employed as a vital tool for addressing community issues and opportunities.
- 5.20. Establish and coordinate regular meetings of a stakeholders committee to facilitate discussion and information dissemination regarding planning issues and projects of local and regional importance.
- 5.21. The Greater Lowndes Planning Commission shall serve as a leader in promoting quality growth and development through appropriate planning and land use decisions.

**5. Need more trees and greenery, and more focus on beautification.**

Policies:

- 5.22. Develop and implement appropriate design guidelines/standards for specific areas of the community depending on existing and anticipated growth and enhanced community gateways.
- 5.23. Promote development patterns that encourage walkability and integrate green spaces as well as both passive and active recreational areas.

## Natural Resources

### Issues

**1. Need more local promotion and marketing of natural resources.**

Policies:

- 6.1. Build community awareness of current cultural, recreational and natural resources, and develop a web-based data management system to provide informational resources to local officials and the public.

**2. Current growth trends will eventually lead to degradation of natural greenspaces.**

Policies:

- 6.2. Areas where natural processes would be endangered by development (i.e. floodplains, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, etc.) shall be conserved.
- 6.3. Active preservation and utilization of natural greenspaces and parkland shall be encouraged and actively supported.
- 6.4. Consider and plan for infrastructure, transportation, and natural resource protection during economic development decision-making.
- 6.5. Positive impacts on the built and natural environment shall be anticipated through only the highest standard of development throughout all parts of the community.
- 6.6. Available land shall be utilized in the most efficient manner while focusing on redevelopment of land where feasible.

**3. The community needs more preservation of natural and conservation lands, greenery, and the urban forest within the City, on both private and public lands.**

Policies:

- 6.7. Active preservation and utilization of natural greenspaces and parkland shall be encouraged and actively supported.

**4. In several areas, development has occurred in wetlands or in flood-prone areas.**

Policies:

- 6.8. Areas where natural processes would be endangered by development (i.e. floodplains, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, etc.) shall be conserved.
- 6.9. Encourage the consistent enforcement and full consideration and evaluation of water and air permits and state environmental regulations to protect the region's natural resources.

**5. Poor drainage and stormwater issues are present throughout the community. Water retention and management in the entire watershed needs to be addressed.**

Policies:

- 6.10. Utilize innovative site design to promote on-site detention, reduce stormwater runoff and utilize public sanitary sewer systems in areas not suitable for on-site absorption systems.
- 6.11. Identify opportunities to optimize and cost effectively manage existing and future supplies of water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure delivery systems.

**6. Paving and rooftop development in the upper part of our watershed sends water down the rivers, sometimes causing serious flooding.**

Policies:

- 6.12. Utilize innovative site design to promote on-site detention, reduce stormwater runoff and utilize public sanitary sewer systems in areas not suitable for on-site absorption systems.

**7. There are TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) issues on some stream segments.**

Policies:

- 6.13. Encourage the consistent enforcement and full consideration and evaluation of water and air permits and state environmental regulations to protect the region's natural resources.
- 6.14. Plan for the protection and management of the quality, quantity, and availability of our ground and surface water resources to promote economic well-being, the health and

welfare of citizens, and the diversity and health of its natural environment while ensuring the protection of private property rights.

6.15. Follow Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMP's) to protect streams and lakes.

**8. There are inconsistencies in water quality throughout the community.**

Policies:

6.16. Plan for the protection and management of the quality, quantity, and availability of our ground and surface water resources to promote economic well-being, the health and welfare of citizens, and the diversity and health of its natural environment while ensuring the protection of private property rights.

**9. Need independent third-party water quality monitoring upstream and downstream of all wastewater problem areas.**

Policies:

6.17. Encourage the consistent enforcement and full consideration and evaluation of water and air permits and state environmental regulations to protect the region's natural resources.

**10. Need to increase emphasis on remediating Alapaha River basin in Valdosta, as well as Withlacoochee basin.**

Policies:

6.18. Plan for the protection and management of the quality, quantity, and availability of our ground and surface water resources to promote economic well-being, the health and welfare of citizens, and the diversity and health of its natural environment while ensuring the protection of private property rights.

**11. The community's abundant groundwater resources need to be safeguarded.**

Policies:

6.19. Plan for the protection and management of the quality, quantity, and availability of our ground and surface water resources to promote economic well-being, the health and welfare of citizens, and the diversity and health of its natural environment while ensuring the protection of private property rights.

**12. Retention ponds around the community are poorly maintained.**

Policies:

6.20. Implement land use and development management techniques that promote conservation of natural resources and mitigate impacts to wet-land areas, while providing incentives to mitigate the impacts from existing development on conservation and wet-land areas.

6.21. Provide well maintained, efficient, quality public utility infrastructure (water, storm water, and sewer) that meets the needs of a growing community, and is not harmful to human health or negatively impacts the natural environment.

6.22. Encourage the consistent enforcement and full consideration and evaluation of water and air permits and state environmental regulations to protect the region's natural resources.

**13. There are not enough public facilities and opportunities for local children and adults to swim.**

Policies:

6.23. Provide high quality recreational opportunities that promote and preserve the region's natural resources for future generations and tourism and recreation opportunities including parks, greenways and trails, waterways, etc.

6.24. Build community awareness of current cultural, recreational and natural resources, and develop a web-based data management system to provide informational resources to local officials and the public.

6.25. Protect and maintain regional water-dependent recreational opportunities.

**14. Need bike and/or hiking trails along the rivers.**

Policies:

- 6.26. Provide high quality recreational opportunities that promote and preserve the region's natural resources for future generations and tourism and recreation opportunities including parks, greenways and trails, waterways, etc.
- 6.27. Implement and update community wide recreation plans to aid in future community facility planning and coordination.

**15. More programs are needed that take children on nature tours and educate them about the environment.**

Policies:

- 6.28. Provide education to citizens and the development community regarding natural processes of greenspaces and available incentive programs for conservation.

**16. More public awareness of prescribed burns is needed in order to reduce 911 calls.**

Policies:

- 6.29. Increase public awareness of potential emergencies and disaster response procedures through advanced education, training, and real-time information dissemination during an emergency.

## Cultural Resources

### Issues

**1. There needs to be more awareness of the many cultural programs, activities, and events that are available locally.**

Policies:

- 7.1. Identify, preserve, protect, promote, provide access, and manage the broad range of cultural and historic resources in the Southern Georgia Region, engaging in public-private partnerships when appropriate.
- 7.2. Build community awareness of current cultural, recreational and natural resources, and develop a web-based data management system to provide informational resources to local officials and the public.

**2. More programs are needed for children and the economically underprivileged.**

Policies:

- 7.3. Provide resources to improve the community's public services-including but not limited to employment, crime prevention, childcare, health, drug abuse, education, and recreational needs.

**3. More family-friendly events are needed in the area.**

Policies:

- 7.4. Develop high-quality recreational facilities and programs to improve the local quality of life, and promote an active, healthy lifestyle and the conservation of natural resources.

**4. More volunteers are needed to work with recreation programs.**

Policies:

- 7.5. Provide high quality recreational opportunities that promote and preserve the region's natural resources for future generations and tourism and recreation opportunities including parks, greenways and trails, waterways, etc.

**5. Lack of museums, such as a science museum.**

Policies:

- 7.6. Develop, maintain and improve T the availability of adequate cultural facilities such as community arenas, performing arts venues, museums, monuments, visual arts galleries and conference/meeting centers through public-private partnerships.

7.7. Identify, preserve, protect, promote, provide access, and manage the broad range of cultural and historic resources in the Southern Georgia Region, engaging in public-private partnerships when appropriate.

**6. Historic resources located outside of a designated historic district have virtually no protection from degradation or demolition.**

Policies:

7.8. The continued publication, protection, promotion and utilization of historic resources shall be encouraged and actively supported through efforts like National Register nominations and heritage tourism.

**7. Proliferation of billboards on I-75 impacts the aesthetic quality of the community.**

Policies:

7.9. It is recognized that design and construction of residential and non-residential streets contributes to the overall character and development pattern of the community and thus shall be considered one of the community's most important components.

7.10. Develop and implement appropriate design guidelines/standards for specific areas of the community depending on existing and anticipated growth and enhanced community gateways.

**8. Elements of racial division, perceived or real, still persist and sometimes hold the community back.**

Policies:

7.11. The integration of minority populations shall be encouraged through language programs, cultural awareness programs, and community events.

7.12. Develop regional leadership in local government that promotes transparency, citizen engagement, and coordinated delivery of government services.

7.13. Provide housing throughout the community that is safe, affordable and accessible to all income levels.

7.14. Cultivate a skilled workforce with positive ethics, life skills, professionalism and educational levels within the region that creates and maintains long-term, meaningful employment opportunities around a balanced economic base, that increases per capita income in the region.

## Transportation

### Issues

**1. There is a lack of transportation options for getting to work, education, healthcare, and stores. Traffic planning has focused mostly on the automobile.**

Policies:

8.1. Build and promote bike and pedestrian transportation infrastructure identified in developed plans that links schools, neighborhoods, activity centers, as well as planned transit services that attract residents and tourists for a healthy alternative mode of transportation. Make the community bicycle and pedestrian friendly, and promotes economic development through scenic tourism.

8.2. Newly constructed, reconfigured, or retrofitted roadways shall reflect community standards of aesthetics, environmental stewardship, and urban design; and shall fully accommodate multiple functions, including pedestrians, parking, alternative modes of transportation and vehicular circulation.

8.3. Ensure stakeholders and those affected by local transportation projects are provided early notification, and the public is provided opportunities to become involved with the project goals, timelines, and information throughout the duration of the project.



- 8.4. Encourage awareness through various forms (maps, brochures, etc.) about cycling, walking, sharing the road, and public health and planned transit services, especially to local schools and universities.
  - 8.5. Walking, biking, and accessible public transit shall be considered viable and sustainable forms of transportation supported through appropriate land use and infrastructure decisions.
- 2. Lack of efficient, accessible and affordable fixed-route public transit system; “On Demand” transit is costly and unreliable.**
- Policies:
- 8.6. Implement an accessible, coordinated urban public transit system.
- 3. Pedestrian crossings, particularly around schools, can be dangerous and need to be addressed. Some crossing signals do not work (e.g. around Baytree Rd. near the Mall). Some intersections, even though they have pedestrian signals, are still so dangerous for pedestrians that they need special signage (e.g. Baytree/Gornto, Ashley/Park/Bemiss).**
- Policies:
- 8.7. Improve safety for walking and cycling within the entire community through infrastructure improvements (bike lanes, traffic calming, etc.), education and enforcement efforts.
  - 8.8. Reduce crashes resulting in injury and loss of life through education programs and improvements at identified intersections.
- 4. More sidewalks are needed. Some streets have sidewalks on only one side but need them on both sides (e.g. near Mall and near Blanton Commons). Existing sidewalks need to be maintained and extended.**
- Policies:
- 8.9. Amend, where applicable, local regulations to include requirements for sidewalks and bike routes to be installed with new land disturbance activities, including subdivisions, new construction or other developments.
  - 8.10. Budget for sidewalk, trail and bike lane maintenance. Make sure signage is visible, all bike lanes are clearly marked, and road shoulders are cleared of debris.
- 5. Lack of education for cyclists and motorists regarding bicycling rules, regulations, and safety.**
- Policies:
- 8.11. Improve safety for walking and cycling within the entire community through infrastructure improvements (bike lanes, traffic calming, etc.), education and enforcement efforts.
- 6. More bike lanes are needed. In many places striped bike lanes are insufficient and only protected bike lanes would be effective.**
- Policies:
- 8.12. Budget for sidewalk, trail and bike lane maintenance. Make sure signage is visible, all bike lanes are clearly marked, and road shoulders are cleared of debris.
  - 8.13. Evaluate corridor maintenance and potential reuse of abandoned rail rights-of way for alternative modes of transportation.
- 7. The statewide law banning bicycles on sidewalks is not relevant because bicyclists are safer on sidewalks in many locations.**
- Policies:
- 8.14. Walking, biking, and accessible public transit shall be considered viable and sustainable forms of transportation supported through appropriate land use and infrastructure decisions.
- 8. There is traffic congestion due to lack of connectivity and lack of efficient traffic movement (traffic management/signal timing) in some areas, e.g. Five Points.**
- Policies:

- 8.15. Ensure land development regulations promote interconnected, clustered development at major roadways, which protects natural resources, and reduces traffic congestion, improves traffic circulation, and makes the most efficient use of available land, while providing frontage roads that provide access to businesses, reducing conflicts and congestion on major roads.
- 8.16. Encourage coordination of land use planning and transportation planning in order to provide sufficient carrying capacity to support sustainable economic development while protecting natural and cultural resources and providing affordable, high quality housing.
- 8.17. Encourage local governments to review their comprehensive plans, study growth patterns, and plan growth according to transportation attributes that promote a multi-modal transportation system.
- 8.18. Investigate innovative traffic management techniques to reduce traffic congestion and emergency vehicle delays.

**9. Truck traffic in Downtown poses a safety hazard and needs to be re-routed away from Downtown.**

Policies:

- 8.19. The traffic carrying capacity of existing and planned roadways shall be preserved through coordinated land use and transportation planning decisions.

**10. Lack of East-West connections and/or bypasses (over railroads, rivers, Interstate, etc.**

Policies:

- 8.20. Establish border to border connectivity of the region's transportation network, using a region-wide GIS analysis of activity centers and points of interest, and available transportation options.
- 8.21. Encourage economic development through transportation improvements, connections, and programs that improve access to jobs, and encourage growth in private sector employment.

**11. Lack of passenger rail service to cities such as Jacksonville, Atlanta, or other metropolitan hubs.**

Policies:

- 8.22. Encourage development of efficient air and rail service to promote economic development by connecting the community with major regional centers.

**12. Need a single car rail line for local connections.**

Policies:

- 8.23. A well-maintained system of rail lines shall facilitate safe and efficient movement of goods to serve the economic needs of the community and region.

**13. Several railroad track crossings cause traffic backups, e.g. on Baytree Rd.**

Policies:

- 8.24. Investigate innovative traffic management techniques to reduce traffic congestion and emergency vehicle delays.

**14. Some railroad crossings have only stop/yield signs and no drop arms, and are hazardous with poor visibility; there have been several fatalities recently.**

Policies:

- 8.25. Improve transportation safety throughout the community through capital improvements and public education campaigns.

**15. Poor ROW planning (insufficient width) in some locations.**

Policies:

- 8.26. Ensure stakeholders and those affected by local transportation projects are provided early notification, and the public is provided opportunities to become involved with the project goals, timelines, and information throughout the duration of the project.

**16. Need larger airport with more activity, more routes (e.g. to Orlando), and more than one airline.**

Policies:

- 8.27. Develop an airport that is safe and reliable, and serves as a major gateway to southern Georgia and north Florida, as well as providing multiple, efficient services to major regional hubs.
- 8.28. Consider integrated and compatible land use scenarios which support the economic viability of the airport and surrounding community, and promote economic growth opportunities.
- 8.29. Encourage development of efficient air and rail service to promote economic development by connecting the community with major regional centers.

## **Community Facilities and Services**

### **Issues**

- 1. In the future, the lack of sewer availability will directly impact the economic development opportunities of the Cities of Lake Park and Dasher. Additionally, both communities are located in a groundwater recharge area where extensive use of septic systems should be discouraged.**

Policies:

- 9.1. Public facilities and services shall be coordinated with land use planning through the development of a long-range public facilities improvement plan and a coordinated development review process to promote more compact urban development, preservation of natural resources, development of activity centers and to ensure that capacity is adequate.
- 2. The continued maintenance and expansion of sewer capacity in the City of Hahira has a direct impact on its economic development and residential growth opportunities. The community should examine long-term solutions to the system's limited capacity, in addition to short-term resolutions.**

Policies:

- 9.2. Public facilities and services shall be coordinated with land use planning through the development of a long-range public facilities improvement plan and a coordinated development review process to promote more compact urban development, preservation of natural resources, development of activity centers and to ensure that capacity is adequate.
- 3. In some areas of the community, current development trends do not provide for or promote interconnected access between adjacent developments. Such access, especially for commercial areas, would decrease the amount of traffic entering and exiting major roadways thus providing safer and more efficient traffic circulation.**

Policies:

- 9.3. Ensure land development regulations promote interconnected, clustered development at major roadways, which protects natural resources, and reduces traffic congestion, improves traffic circulation, and makes the most efficient use of available land, while providing frontage roads that provide access to businesses, reducing conflicts and congestion on major roads.
- 9.4. It is recognized that design and construction of residential and non-residential streets contributes to the overall character and development pattern of the community and thus shall be considered one of the community's most important components.

**4. Improvements to wastewater, stormwater, and sewer systems (including the wastewater treatment plant) need to be continued and monitored for effectiveness.**

Policies:

- 9.5. Ensure the provision and funding of infrastructure, community facilities, and public services that support efficient growth and development patterns.
- 9.6. Public facilities and services shall be coordinated with land use planning through the development of a long-range public facilities improvement plan and a coordinated development review process to promote more compact urban development, preservation of natural resources, development of activity centers and to ensure that capacity is adequate.

**5. Ensure that wastewater processing is adequate to handle increased capacity for economic development and that industrial wastewater treatment capability is available. Some regulations are too much of an obstacle.**

Policies:

- 9.7. Ensure the provision and funding of infrastructure, community facilities, and public services that support efficient growth and development patterns.
- 9.8. Public facilities and services shall be coordinated with land use planning through the development of a long-range public facilities improvement plan and a coordinated development review process to promote more compact urban development, preservation of natural resources, development of activity centers and to ensure that capacity is adequate.
- 9.9. Maximize the use of existing infrastructure, the efficient use of future investments in capital improvements and the long term operation and maintenance of facilities and equipment via identified and budgeted revenue sources and a prescribed timetable using innovative technologies (GIS) in the provision of maintenance services.

**6. Planning efforts for a new entertainment venue should be continued.**

Policies:

- 9.10. Develop and promote community resources (theater, music, etc.) for retirees, students, and citizens with special needs and low income populations to improve the quality of life of all residents.

**7. The Public Library needs to continue to be accessible by foot/bike/transit.**

Policies:

- 9.11. Develop and promote community resources (theater, music, etc.) for retirees, students, and citizens with special needs and low income populations to improve the quality of life of all residents.
- 9.12. Walking, biking, and accessible public transit shall be considered viable and sustainable forms of transportation supported through appropriate land use and infrastructure decisions.

**8. The community needs more accessibility to local recreational opportunities and more recreational amenities, especially in underserved areas, for example: Soccer fields, basketball courts, skate rink, more kid-friendly options, community centers, and playground equipment.**

Policies:

- 9.13. Establish public-private partnerships to fund improvements to park and recreation facilities and programs, especially in the Designated Revitalization Area and near Public Housing.

**9. Access to broadband (high-speed internet) desperately needs to be expanded and improved with faster service.**

Policies:

- 9.14. Community-wide technology infrastructure shall be considered a basic community facility and as such will be adequately planned for.

**10. Utility rates are high and options for utilities (including cable) are limited.**

Policies:

- 9.15. Community-wide technology infrastructure shall be considered a basic community facility and as such will be adequately planned for.
- 9.16. Efforts will be made to ensure all citizens have access to basic technology infrastructure.
- 9.17. In response to environmental concerns and rising energy costs, green building principles shall be researched and encouraged in order to conserve natural resources, improve indoor air quality and reduce energy cost.

**11. Portions of the community do not provide sufficient recycling services. Services need to be better facilitated and expanded, with more recycling locations/facilities, better incentives to provide service, more materials accepted, better education and communication about services, and better participation at commercial and multi-family complexes.**

Policies:

- 9.18. Enhanced solid waste reduction and recycling initiatives shall be supported.
- 9.19. Encourage and promote education of enhanced local recycling efforts and waste reduction initiatives identified through an updated Solid Waste Management Plan.

**12. Lack of shelter sites for the homeless during cold weather.**

Policies:

- 9.20. Provide resources to improve the community's public services, including but not limited to employment, crime prevention, childcare, health, drug abuse, education, and recreational needs.

**13. The community needs a local meat processing plant with USDA-certified personnel on-site so that animals can be processed locally and the meat can be sold locally.**

Policies:

- 9.21. Implement and update community wide recreation plans to aid in future community facility planning and coordination.

## **Intergovernmental Coordination**

### **Issues**

**1. Need better coordination, communication, and resource sharing between the local governments, the universities, and businesses.**

Policies:

- 10.1. Cross-jurisdictional coordination and collaboration shall be actively pursued to promote positive impacts of growth and development across jurisdictional boundaries, which is vital to a successful economy and a high quality of life.
- 10.2. Joint comprehensive planning efforts and resulting documentation shall be appreciated employed as a vital tool for addressing community issues and opportunities.
- 10.3. Public entities within each community shall utilize shared services and information to ensure consistent planning efforts.
- 10.4. Actively pursue and promote cross jurisdictional coordination and collaboration, including shared data and services that develop solutions for regional issues.
- 10.5. Participate in joint development authorities, and local and regional planning and economic development efforts. Promote their benefits to produce quality growth and development through appropriate planning and land use decisions.

**2. Engaging stakeholders is not always done effectively; we need more community involvement and participation.**

Policies:

- 10.6. Establish and coordinate regular meetings of a stakeholders committee to facilitate discussion and information dissemination regarding planning issues and projects of local and regional importance.
- 10.7. Establish better coordination, collaboration and communication with local colleges and universities, including information to enhance student life through awareness, organizational access, community services, leadership opportunities and informational materials.

**3. Need improved access (including electronic access) to local governments' and authorities' agendas and minutes, as well as public education on how to access them.**

Policies:

- 10.8. Develop regional leadership in local government that promotes transparency, citizen engagement, and coordinated delivery of government services.

**4. Lack of transparency of local requirements.**

Policies:

- 10.9. Develop regional leadership in local government that promotes transparency, citizen engagement, and coordinated delivery of government services.
- 10.10. Establish and coordinate regular meetings of a stakeholders committee to facilitate discussion and information dissemination regarding planning issues and projects of local and regional importance.

**5. Struggle between full funding of programs and what community budgets can allow.**

Policies:

- 10.11. Establish partnerships of local governments and service providers that leverage and supplement requested state and federal funding

**6. The Greater Lowndes Growth Advisory Committee has not met recently.**

Policies:

- 10.12. Establish and coordinate regular meetings of a stakeholders committee to facilitate discussion and information dissemination regarding planning issues and projects of local and regional importance.
- 10.13. Participate in joint development authorities, and local and regional planning and economic development efforts. Promote their benefits to produce quality growth and development through appropriate planning and land use decisions.

