

9/6/2023

Note: *This edition of the Habersham County 2023 Joint Comprehensive Plan is a working draft. There are elements still being developed (Implementation Chapter and Appendix), and all portions of the document are subject to change based on comments and suggestions still being received and as the staff proofreads the document.*

The revised version of this document is expected to be made available between September 11 and September 15.

For any questions or comments, please contact ahazell@gmrc.ga.gov, using "Habersham Plan" in the subject line.

2023 JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



established 1823
CLARKESVILLE
We Call it Home.



September, 2023
- DRAFT -

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The purpose of planning and community development is to provide guidance for everyday decision-making by local government officials and other community leaders. Within Georgia, comprehensive plans are seen as both a useful tool for long-term government efficiency and for ensuring sound land use development. Over time, such documents foster a wise use of fiscal and environmental resources, help coordinate community improvements across agencies, and enables citizen input in both fostering a vision for the future and outlining a practical means for achieving that vision. Further, as a measure designed to ensure State programs are being utilized wisely, State regulations require local governments maintain their comprehensive plans in order to have access to various forms of State assistance.

This document, the *2018 Joint Comprehensive Plan for Habersham County*, represents the culmination of the efforts to plan for the future well-being for the County and the municipalities of Clarkesville, Alto, Demorest, and Mt. Airy. The residents and various stakeholders worked to identify the critical, consensus issues and goals for their communities, and implementing the plan will help the governments address those critical issues and opportunities while moving towards realization of the unique vision for its future. Thus, local planning recognizes that assets can be improved, liabilities can be mitigated, and opportunities can be cultivated.

Scope

This document addresses the local planning requirements and community development of Habersham County, Ga, and the municipalities of Clarkesville, Alto, Demorest, and Mt. Airy. Some consideration has been given to those areas and neighboring political entities that influence conditions within Habersham, however, all the cited issues, objectives and opportunities discussed herein are solely focused on the County or the participating municipalities.

Plan Elements

This comprehensive plan serves to meet the requirements and intent of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' *"Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning,"* as amended in 2013, and the Georgia Planning Act of 1989. In accordance with those standards, this plan contains at a minimum the following elements:

- *Community Goals/ Vision)*
- *Statement of Needs and Opportunities*
- *Community Work Program*
- *Environmental Compliance Factors*
- *Assessment of Broadband Capacity and Needs*



"The trees of tomorrow are born of the seeds we plant today."

PLANNING PROCESS

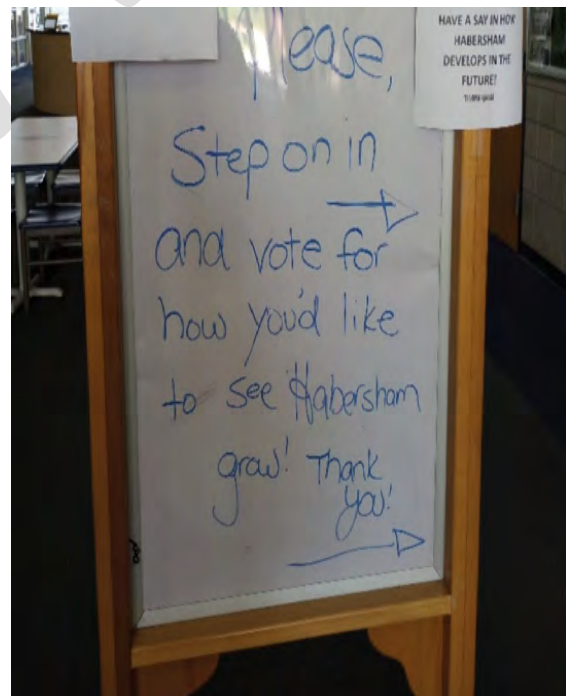
Since the comprehensive plan is intended to represent a consensus vision for the community, Georgia's planning standards require opportunities for public participation, including public forums, a means for stakeholders to submit written comments, and an advisory committee involved throughout the process.

The planning process for the Habersham County Joint Comprehensive Plan began in late 2022 as community leaders considered the scope of work and identified nominees for the Advisory Committee. During this time, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) worked with local government staff to evaluate needs and performance of local services, utilities, and programs. The GMRC also spoke with neighboring communities and select State agencies to identify any opportunities for collaboration or conflict and assess development forces that might affect Habersham County and its municipalities.

Additional public hearings were also held outside of normal committee meetings. They were held in various locations across the county to increase options for citizen involvement, with participants supplementing Committee discussions on plan elements such as critical needs and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each community. Public hearing opportunities were also made available through general County Commission and City Council meetings, where elected officials would permit suggestions and questions about their respective communities' future. *(Copies of sign-in sheets and other evidence of public involvement are included in the Appendix.)*



In addition to public forums, an online survey was shared via government web sites and promoted across media and online platforms. This survey was available from March through June, ultimately yielding almost 700 unique participants. Participants were asked about such topics as their prospects for growth, primary needs in the areas of economic development and housing, and their overall satisfaction with various public services and facilities. Survey results provided key insight into the perceptions and desires of many residents, giving the Advisory Committee valuable material as they shaped the plan's objectives and priorities according to citizen interests. *(A summary of survey results is included in the Appendix.)*



COMMUNITY VISION

Identification of Community Ideals in a Simply Expressed and Understood Statement

The *Minimum Standards* defines a community vision as something “... intended to paint a picture of what the community desires to become, providing a complete description of the development patterns to be encouraged within the jurisdiction.” Visioning helps communities consider the “big picture” while defining their ideal future and the best path to that future. As a process, this requires people to reflect on their current state and consider what elements of their community they wish to preserve, and which elements they wish to improve.

COMMUNITY PROFILES



Tallulah Gorge State Park

Habersham County, Ga., is located in the northeastern Georgia Mountains, in the foothills of the Appalachians as the piedmont gives way to more rugged terrain. It is a community with serene beauty and rolling, picturesque landscapes. It is populated by several small cities and towns and serves as part of the gateway for tourists traveling to and from the Appalachians.

At just over 47,000 residents, Habersham is also part of the transitional buffer between the suburban sprawl of metropolitan Atlanta and the rural, agrarian character of north Georgia. Industrial activity in neighboring Hall County and elsewhere is expected to bring more than 100,000 new residents to the area by 2040. Coupled with the volumes of commercial and tourist traffic traveling through, it's understood that Habersham County is poised for dynamic change within the next 20-40 years.

Total Population Estimates				
	2010	2022	2010 - 2022	
Habersham County	43,058	47,475	4,417	10.3%
Alto (pt.)	680	621	-59	-8.7%
Baldwin (pt.)	2,562	3,166	604	23.6%
Clarkeville	1,711	2,112	401	23.4%
Cornelia	4,194	5,004	810	19.3%
Demorest	1,865	2,056	191	10.2%
Mount Airy	1,235	1,446	211	17.1%
Tallulah Falls (pt.)	97	82	-15	-15.5%
Balance of Habersham	30,714	32,988	2,274	7.4%

Source: US Bureau of the Census

Habersham County is oriented along a longer north/south axis amidst the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Its cluster of municipalities is found running axially along the main arterial roads forged from historical trading paths, with all but one (Tallulah Falls) located in the southern half of the county. This means the bulk of the county's population and economic activity is clustered, ranging from North Georgia

Technical College in Clarkesville to the State penitentiary located in Alto. Households and commercial options have matured around the various major employers in the area, creating a more suburban half of Habersham to the south, and a largely agrarian half to the north, nearer the National Forests and State Park.

The former village of **Clarkesville** was made the County seat in 1823. Named in honor of Georgia Governor John C. Clarke, Clarkesville features many elements of classic small cities with a modest downtown commercial center, a primary main street of historic structures, and some vintage urban neighborhoods adjacent to downtown. The community has worked hard to preserve their character and the vitality of the urban core, even after a major fire destroyed several historic structures in 2014.



Today, Clarkesville is known as a lively rural community, with a thriving arts scene, the campus of North Georgia Tech, and attractive riverside park, and the myriad of civic and recreational centers inherent with being the County seat. There are some large employers in the community, including Fieldale (poultry) and Habersham EMC, but many residents also work elsewhere in Habersham or the region.



The Town of **Alto** is the smallest of the southern municipalities. Known largely as the home of the Lee Arrendale Correctional Facility, Alto's location amidst the GA 365 corridor, along with rail access and proximity to the airport and industrial park, suggests change and growth is on the horizon. There are a few commercial businesses in the town, with most residents utilizing Baldwin or Cornelia for commercial needs, but the Town remains committed to activating Main Street as businesses come to the area.

In the absence of other economic activity, Alto's primary focus is on retaining its rural character and affordability while also seeking to support the investment and revitalization of an aging housing supply. Alto does not have large neighborhoods but does have some established residential areas with older units that need repair and/or are outdated for conventional markets. The growth can be seen, however, in the recent relocation of the Town Hall to a larger facility better equipped to serve the community, including the capacity to host more events.



Defined largely by the presence of Piedmont University and its location between Clarkesville and Cornelia, **Demorest** is part of the urbanizing economic hub of Habersham County. Today, those three communities very much bleed into one another, linked via Business 441, which serves as Demorest’s main street and the artery for most major retail, dining, and social activity. Demorest provides a residential hub around the university and the nearby medical center, exuding vintage small-town charm in the few blocks of downtown and the nearby City Park.

Demorest is also a primary provider of water and sewer service in the area, using its location to provide utilities across more than just its boundaries. Two county schools are also located in/ adjacent to the city, and the largest portion of commercial activity in the county is between Demorest and Cornelia. The area is projected for significant growth, though at present Demorest is content to remain small but provide utilities elsewhere.

Established in 1874, **Mount Airy** was named for its “lofty” elevation of 1,545 feet along a specific rail line, and was once known as a resort town with summer homes, tourist cottages, and hotels built during the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. As the times changed and the region’s economy shifted to more agrarian uses, proximity to key roadways helped neighboring Cornelia grow, while Mt. Airy settled into more of the bedroom community role established today.

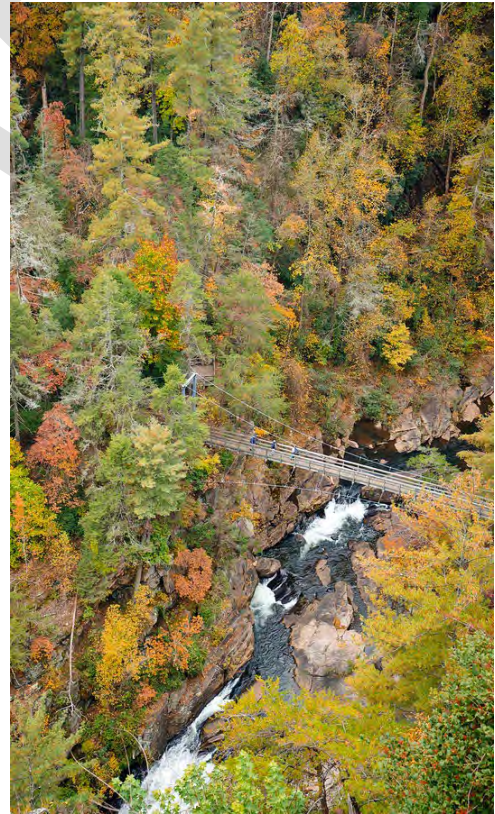
Compared to almost all the other municipalities in southern Habersham, Mt. Airy is both small and projected to see the least amount of change. Part of this is its location and limited accessibility, part of it is the lack of utilities, and part of it is the desire of area residents to retain the town’s character. Commercial services and employment options are available right next door in two directions, so Mt, Airy residents have limited needs for new development. Instead, the desire is to preserve the community as a quiet reserve amid any new suburbanization. To keep Mt. Airy a rustic, country town reminiscent of quieter eras.



VISIONS AND GOALS

A vision for the community's future must be included in the comprehensive plan. The community vision is intended to provide a complete picture of what the community desires to become. The community vision must be based on public input, the assessment of current and future needs and be supported by the goals, policies and objectives in the comprehensive plan. In addition, there must be consistency between the community vision and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Quality Community Objectives as well as consistency with the community visions of other communities within the region.

The vision statements for Habersham and the participating municipalities originated from the previous planning cycle in 2018, derived from the various comments and suggestions raised during public meetings and through the available survey process. The updated statements (shown below) encapsulate the basic principles and values desired by existing residents and stakeholders, with an emphasis on desires to retain their communities' existing character amidst the potential for projected economic development. Any amendments were derived from the words used by residents to illustrate values they feel describe the county and municipalities as they are today *AND* that they desire to see embodied a generation from now. The vision statements, then, reflect the general direction of Habersham County favored by area residents and key stakeholders.



HABERSHAM COUNTY

Habersham County will continue to provide a healthy, appealing, and safe quality of life to residents and tourists, serving as a role model community for rural Georgia. Habersham County will:

- *Preserve its rural character, unique small towns, scenic beauty, and natural environment.*
- *Support residential development that is coordinated with supportive infrastructure & utilities, and that provides housing choices for residents.*
- *Have effective facilities, resources, and recruiting for business and industry that will provide jobs for county residents and maintain a balanced tax base.*
- *Support area medical and educational institutions to enrich the local quality of life and sustain our labor force.*
- *Be attractive to tourism with choices for sports, outdoor recreation, and cultural experiences with friendly services and facilities.*
- *Support agricultural industries and protect farmland as key elements of our rural character and our local economy.*
- *Manage infrastructure that enables residents, businesses, and tourists to move safely and efficiently to their destinations.*
- *Optimize services countywide through effective coordination and efforts to reduce costs.*



Most Common Values Cited in Planning Process

Safe
Rural
Beautiful
Small town (...charm/ feel)
Peaceful
Charming
Home/ Hometown
Thriving
Friendly
Quiet
Affordable
*Community (...oriented/
focused)*
Family (... oriented/ friendly)



CLARKESVILLE

The City of Clarkesville will preserve and enhance our community, fostering a safe and vibrant quality of life as a model historic small-town. The City will sustain a vital downtown for commerce, culture, and the arts, will preserve our natural and cultural resources, and give residents peaceful and healthy neighborhoods that celebrate our spirit and encourage community engagement. The City will provide high quality services while being fiscally responsible and will continue to work with neighboring jurisdictions and community partners to enhance the Clarkesville experience.



Most Common Values Cited in Planning Process

Charming
Safe
Quaint
Beautiful
Small town
Rural
Small
Friendly
Peaceful
Thriving
Historic/ Historical
Fun
Home/ Hometown
Lovely
Vibrant

DEMOREST

The city of Demorest is a proud hometown and cultural destination with small-town charm and southern hospitality. The City will preserve and enhance its college-town urban fabric and the community's unique character, and create a vibrant core for civic, social, and commercial opportunity. The City of Demorest will provide efficient, high-quality services in support of citizens, visitors, and local businesses, and will be a wise steward of area financial and natural resources in pursuit of the well-being and prosperity of residents, enabling growth while focusing on the preservation of local character.

City Goals:

1. Strengthen downtown's character through preservation and appropriate infill
2. Bring more business into downtown
3. Strengthen the pedestrian connectivity of downtown, the college, and residential neighborhoods



Most Common Values Cited in Planning Process

Safe
Charming
Beautiful
Improved
Quaint
Rural
Inviting
Thriving
Historic
Friendly
Small town (...charm/ feel)

ALTO

The Town of Alto is proud and protective of its small hometown heritage. The Town is dedicated to maintaining a quiet and safe community for residents, and maintaining its rustic character through the preservation of existing neighborhoods and by facilitating new development that embraces the area's rural charm. The Town encourages prosperous economic growth through working with neighboring communities and capitalizing on our agricultural roots. The Town will work with partners and neighboring communities to ensure residents have sufficient levels of service to maintain a healthy way of life at affordable costs.



Most Common Values Cited in Planning Process

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| <i>Charming</i> | <i>Peaceful</i> |
| <i>Safe</i> | <i>Prosperous</i> |
| <i>Clean</i> | <i>Better</i> |
| <i>Rural</i> | <i>Quaint</i> |
| <i>Small</i> | <i>Inviting</i> |
| <i>Quiet</i> | <i>Grown</i> |

MT. AIRY

The Town of Mt. Airy is a rural community dedicated to the preservation of its small-town character. It celebrates the country lifestyle rooted in its agricultural history and the Appalachian character of the region by offering families and visitors a serene environment to live and grow. Mt. Airy will work with neighboring communities to support economic development, will maintain and improve the character of its built environment, and support the inclusion of small-scale commercial and institutional uses that complement the rural residential setting.



Most Common Values Cited in Planning Process

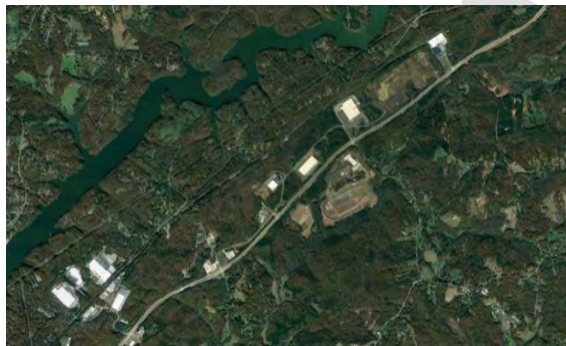
- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| <i>Safe</i> | <i>Peaceful</i> |
| <i>Charming</i> | <i>Friendly</i> |
| <i>Rural</i> | <i>Affordable</i> |
| <i>Quaint</i> | <i>Scenic</i> |
| <i>Quiet</i> | <i>Small</i> |
| <i>Clean</i> | <i>Welcoming</i> |

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Land use management policies and capital improvement programs will shape development patterns that affect growth and the management of sensitive social and environmental areas. Communities should assess their current and projected conditions to identify needs regarding the built environment and how to efficiently service the community in the future.

DEVELOPMENT TRENDS AND INFLUENCES

I-985/ GA 365 in Hall County, just south of Habersham, is rapidly becoming an industrial growth corridor. Buoyed by amenities like 2 universities, a regional medical center, and Lake Lanier, Hall County is projected to add another 100,000 residents within the next 25 years. To maximize the economy for such potential growth, the County and its partners are actively working to utilize the highway as a harbor for goods production and related industrial activity. Home to large employers such as Kubota, Cottrell, and King’s Hawaiian, this corridor will also become site of the Georgia Port Authority’s next inland port – A rail port just north of Gainesville used to expedite freight transport between northeast Georgia and the port of Savannah. It is presumed the bulk of GA 365 between Gainesville and Lula will continue to see industrial development, which may likewise seep into Habersham County or at the least lead to residential construction in the area.

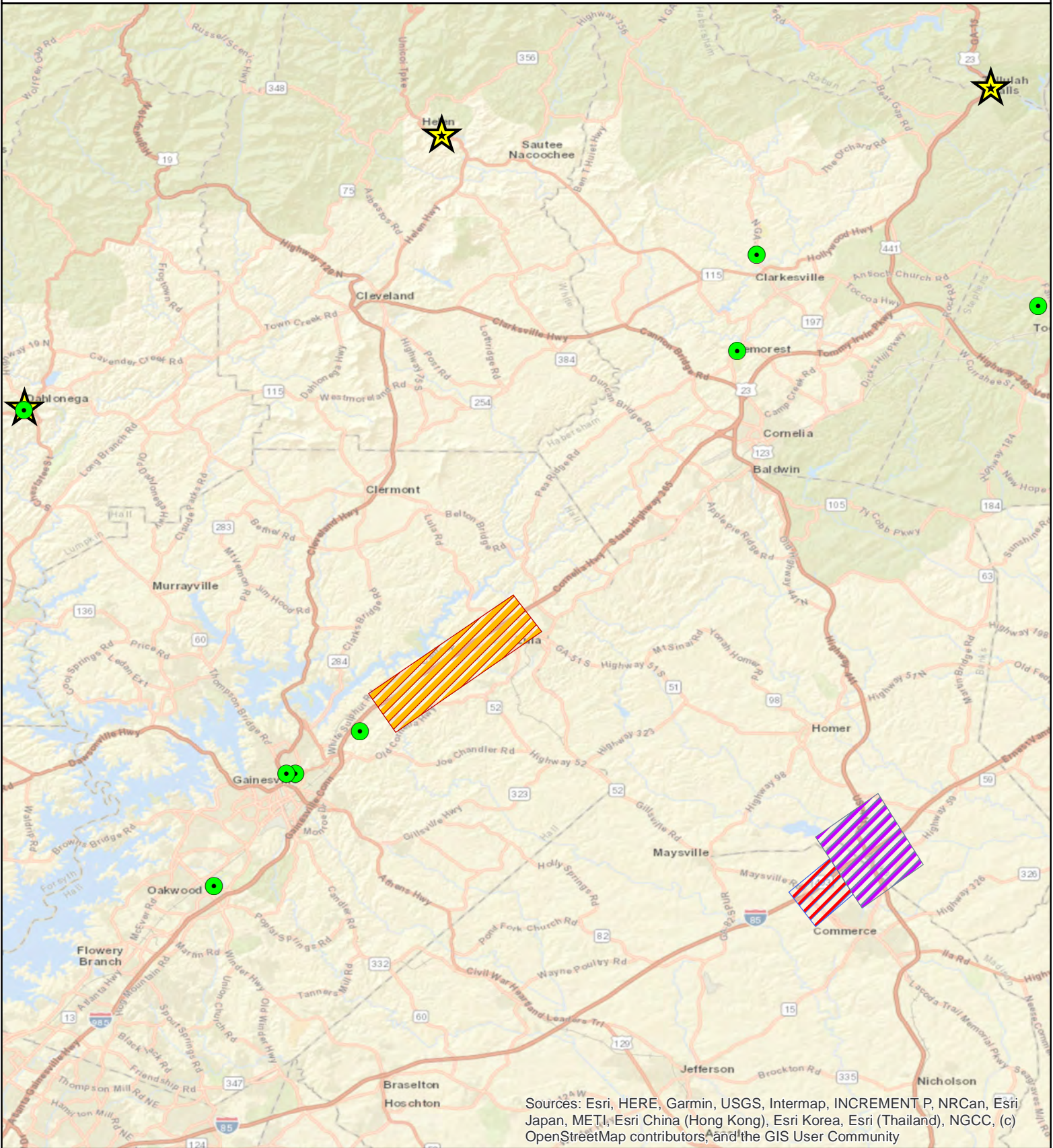


Industrial development along GA 365, and an inland port comparable to one proposed for Gainesville.

One trend in regional development is ***the growing importance of the shipping and warehousing industry.*** As both households and businesses rely more and more heavily on the direct delivery of goods, the facilities needed to store and manage transport of these goods are becoming more common and more dispersed. Though the largest distribution centers remain clustered near key arterial intersections, smaller facilities are locating in more diverse suburban and rural locations. Such developments can impact traffic patterns, exacerbate flood issues in sensitive areas, and attract other comparable uses. They can also provide another non-residential source of property taxes, some employment, and equate to faster delivery of some goods.





Similar to GA 365, ***US 441 in Banks County has similar potential for economic development.*** While much less developed at the moment, and with Banks County actively searching for ways to preserve its rural character, US 441 may not see as much industrial activity introduced in the next generation, but it will grow increasingly vital as a freight corridor and is expected to absorb some development in Baldwin/ Cornelia area and further south in Banks Crossing. Though 15 miles away, it is that access to I-85 and the regional retail centers at Banks Crossing that may signal a future wave of growth coming toward Habersham County from the southeast. The I-85 corridor is rapidly developing and will need to be widened all the way out to the State line. Pending forces in Banks County and their plans to manage growth, some of this activity may drive development into and around the areas of Alto, Cornelia, and southern Habersham.

Area Development Forces



Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, Intermap, INCREMENT P, NRCan, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri Korea, Esri (Thailand), NGCC, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Legend

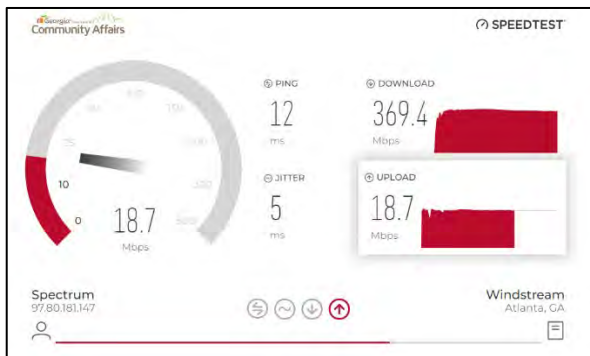
-  Banks Crossing/Commerce Industrial Corridor
-  Inland Port Industrial Corridor
-  Pendergrass Industrial Area
-  Medical Institutions/Colleges and Universities



Tourist Destination



Though Habersham is credibly served for communications access, ***there remains an ever-increasing demand for broadband capacity across all sectors of the community.*** Similar to how water and sewer lines were once the anchor draws for economic development, today most businesses and residents seek access to the highest speed and capacity of broadband service due to the increasing importance of the internet in all aspects of our lives. Schools, medical offices, retail outlets, governments, and even religious institutions rely on their online activities to facilitate operation. Residents use the internet for entertainment, to pay bills, to communicate with others, work from home, and for varieties of shopping. This means local governments are all the more dependent on supporting a service that not only provides high capacity but also can reach as much of their community as possible.



Broadband capacity and elder care services will become increasingly important to Habersham County.

An ongoing social phenomenon that remains a factor for the region is ***the aging population and its impact on various markets.*** With residents living longer and most households featuring fewer children, the elderly will represent an increasing share of the area population, which affects the demands for medical services, specialized transport and recreation, and the dynamics of local labor pools. People delaying retirement can offset some labor shortages from youth departing a region, but older workers will also have different skillsets and demands of the workplace. Communities in areas expecting to see marked shifts in this demographic should plan accordingly for their particular needs.

An assessment of the region’s economy finds ***tourism remains strong despite the pandemic, but some agriculture markets are in flux.*** The presence of the mountains, waterfalls, and lakes within the area’s many parks, National Forests, and wildlife management areas means there will always be high demand for and from visitors to the area. Several communities remain heavily tourist-oriented, including nearby Helen, while many others still count on visitors for a significant part of their economies. As a result, there are abundant opportunities for retail and hospitality services, including short-term rentals, in select areas. Conversely, some livestock and row-crop agricultural operations have struggled over the past decade. Poultry farming remains healthy due to the volume of supporting industry, but some farmers in the region have not found successors to take over their operations or decide to sell off their property regardless, because of the land’s value to developers. This will affect not only development patterns but also shape local economies, as well.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

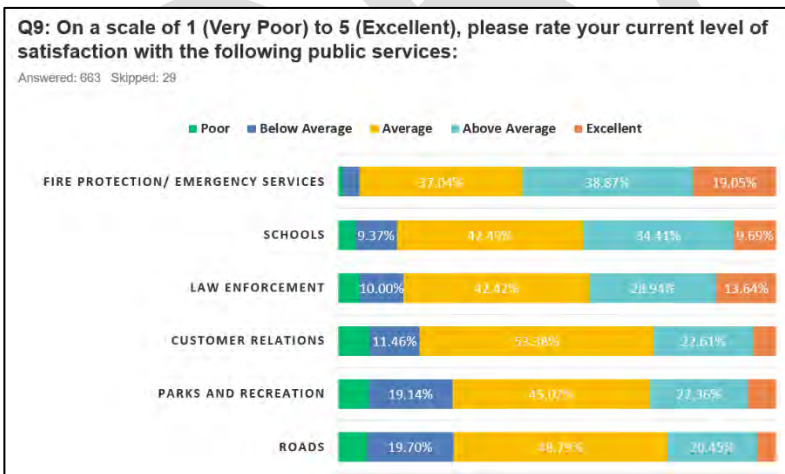
Public facilities and services are those elements vital to a population’s health, safety, and welfare that are most effectively provided by the public sector, such as sewerage, law enforcement and school services. This element examines the community’s ability to adequately serve the present and projected demands for such services, identifying concerns with the spatial distribution and conditions affecting service delivery. These assessments can then assist in projecting future demands and in planning future capital improvement projects.

The Department Heads for Habersham County and the participating municipalities were surveyed for their thoughts on the existing levels of performance and needs for their department in order to sustain levels of service as the county grows and changes. Based on responses received, only a few departments across the five local governments currently have long-range plans and budgets for capital projects. This means that there are many facilities, vehicles, and pieces of equipment for which there is no strategy for eventual replacement. There are efforts underway to address this, but it the local governments may wish to transition to an accounting program that improves asset management and allows department heads and elected officials to better monitor long-term capital improvement needs.

Departmental Assessment

Community	Has long-range plan and budget	Has concerns about existing levels of service	Needs capital improvements < 10 years.
Habersham Co.	EMA/ EMS Water & Sewer Sheriff Airport	Parks and Rec. Sheriff EMS Solid Waste	All but Water & Sewer
Clarkeville	Utilities Planning & Zoning		All
Alto	-		All
Demorest	-		All but Water & Sewer
Mount Airy	-		TBD

Critically, only a few departments suggested they could provide comparable levels of service beyond ten years without needing some form of capital investment. A few departments even felt their existing level of service needed improvement as soon as possible, let alone when Habersham County’s population grows. Like many communities, Habersham and its municipalities have struggled to stay ahead of the curve financially as new development comes into the area. It can take time for tax revenues to catch up to the impacts of growth on utilities, infrastructure, schools, and more.



Participants in the public survey scored most governmental services average or above average. Roads and Parks and Recreation drew the lowest overall scores, with the former being cited for both traffic congestion and safety at key points. The biggest concerns for parks revolve around both a desire for more facilities around the county and a variety of new recreation options, particularly passive use options like trails.

Targeted mid-to-long term Needs/Objectives by Department

The following items were identified by the respective departments as probable needs for maintaining levels of service in the next 5-20 years. *These do NOT include proportional increases in personnel to handle any growing scope of operations, nor recommended upgrades of office technology.*

City of Clarkesville

- Wastewater upgrade, fleet plan to include equipment (ie: trash truck, bucket truck, pump truck, daily vehicles), 2 - 4 additional full-time employees.
- need a newer and bigger fire station and possibly a second station.
- Water/sewer infrastructure and street/road upgrades along with improvements in stormwater mitigation.

City of Demorest

- Maintenance, repair and eventual replacement of mechanical equipment at the wastewater treatment facility and lift stations as well as ground water wells, water booster pump stations and water storage tanks.
- Potential addition of new ground water wells, increase in water purchase agreements with current interconnects with other water utilities. Eventual expansion of wastewater treatment facility.

Habersham County

- More space for offices, storage and courtrooms for judicial operations.
- Additional water sources are necessary to ensure reliability, allow growth and provide backup capacity. Some lines have high operating pressures and old lines result in frequent leaks and broken pipe.
- Vehicles and equipment for Deputies.
- Need to replace/ upgrade old, dilapidated jail facility.
- Increased hangar capacity at airport.
- Skid steer track loader, concrete pads for material storage. New recycling facilities and upgrades for existing centers.
- Diagnostic scanners, tools, and new tow truck for overall fleet maintenance.

Broadband Assessment

The growing importance of access to reliable and high-speed, high-capacity internet connections cannot be overestimated. Unserved and underserved areas of Georgia will not remain economically competitive without sufficient internet infrastructure, as this technology becomes the default utility for all manners of communication. To address this issue the Georgia General Assembly amended the provisions of local planning in Georgia by passing the "Achieving Connectivity Everywhere (ACE) Act" to facilitate the enhancement and extension of internet access in communities. The ACE Act requires all local governments to incorporate the "promotion of the deployment of broadband internet services" into their local plan. Once these are in place the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Department of Economic Development will identify and promote facilities and developments that offer broadband services at a rate of not less than 1 gigabit per second in the downstream to end users that can be accessed for business, education, health care, government.

One of the first products to come out of the Georgia Broadband Initiative was an inventory of general conditions across the State regarding access to high speed/ high-capacity broadband technology. Utilizing demographic data from the US Census Bureau and cross-referencing that information with knowledge of broadband infrastructure, the Department of Community Affairs produced a series of maps depicting the state of broadband accessibility in rural areas.

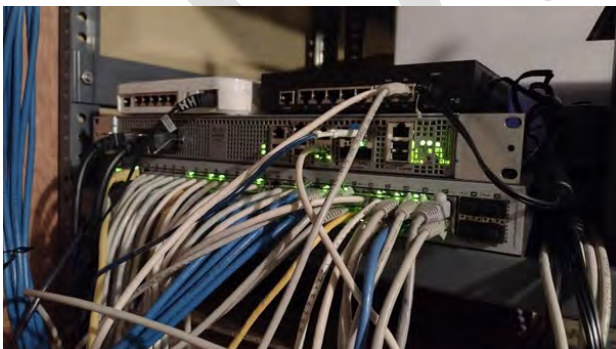


According to the Georgia Broadband ready information, as of 2023, about 3% of Habersham County households still remain without access to sufficient broadband service. The bulk of these properties lie in rural blocks to the north end of the county, or in select properties down around the Alto-to-Mount Airy corridor. In the latter instances, the prevailing neighborhood may have access to a high-capacity trunk line, but certain blocks or individual properties have not yet tied in.

Overall, Habersham County is among the better served rural counties in the Georgia Mountain region when it comes to broadband accessibility. The County's major population and economic centers have access to the North Georgia Network (NGN), an incorporated cooperative providing a regional fiber optic system with over 1,600 linear miles of infrastructure. The NGN provides infrastructure that loops through the northeast Georgia mountains with 100 gigabit core line and connects to almost all the schools and colleges in the region as well as reaching many government structures and prominent business parks.

Priorities for Future Network Enhancements

- Ability to increase "last mile" connections in rural areas
- Higher-capacity trunk lines from providers extending westward into county
- Assistance with last-mile connections into providers along Hwy 365 corridor in projected industrial areas



PUBLIC COMMENT AND COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

Public Comment

The Habersham County online surveys yielded more than 420 unique responses, while the public meetings combined had more than 50 additional participants offering input. Combined, their comments and ideas provided insight into the prevailing interests and concerns of the general populace of Habersham County and the various municipalities. This information was collected and presented to the Advisory Committee, contributing to the basis for selecting Plan priorities and objectives.

The bulk of public comments received were in consensus with their preference for maintaining safety and a rural lifestyle in the face of oncoming growth, and that while some change was desired, the form of that change and growth should be managed so as to elicit key job centers and commerce without disrupting the sense of community already in place. Many respondents expressed concern regarding the prospects for increased crime accompanying growth in the area, especially in the short-term if law enforcement departments were understaffed to meet growing need. There was also concern about the nature of criminal activity evolving as the community became more suburban.



Coupled with this concern overgrowth was the prevailing notion that many Habersham communities had vacant, dilapidated, or underutilized land that could be used by new businesses and residents. Efforts should be directed at making these properties viable and active before concentrating too greatly on developing greenfields or sacrificing rural properties. This was especially true for housing where participants want to see established neighborhoods full and thriving, and see older and distressed properties revitalized. Absent attention while the county is growing many participants expressed concerns the existing dilapidated properties would be left to “*die on the vine,*” being abandoned for something new and different.

Additional areas of focus included quality of life amenities, such as parks, roads and entertainment options. Roads and parks both scored passing grades among survey participants, but they also scored the lowest among public facilities and services in Habersham County. Much of the road issue was divided equally into traffic issues along the main roads in the southern half of the county and the condition of the local roads in aging cities and neighborhoods. The parks issue, meanwhile, could be paired with a lot of calls for additional entertainment options and retail in the area. Many residents expressed the lack of such amenities as one reason many kids don't return to the area for work after graduating, implying that other places not only have more job opportunities but also a great variety of things to do under the "Play" element of the "Live, Work, and Play" mantra. There was no consensus as to the types of amenities, retail, or dining was needed but respondents implied such things should conform to other Plan objectives about staying rural.

The following issues and opportunities were the most commonly raised themes during the public input process. As best as possible, and with acceptance of the limitations of local government finances and abilities, Habersham County and its municipalities should strive to act on the priorities listed below.

Priorities for All Governments

- **Maintain Public Safety**
- **Maintain Rural Character**
- **Minimizing Impacts of Growth**
- **Target Low Property Taxes and Budget Efficiency**
- **Support Local Labor Force**
- **Invest in "Community"**
- **Prioritize Intergovernmental Coordination**

Priorities for Habersham County

- **Update Land Use Policies**
- **Coordinate Land Use with Utilities**
- **Identify Acceptable Sites for Industry**
- **Support Agriculture**

Priorities for Municipalities

- **Seek to Repair/ Upgrade Housing Stock**
- **Continue to Invest in Historic Town Centers**
- **Focus on Sustaining/ Improving Neighborhoods**
- **Emphasize Efficiency of utilities**
- **Invest in Parks**

AREAS REQUIRING SPECIAL ATTENTION

Analysis of prevailing development trends assists in the identification of preferred patterns for future growth. More specifically such analyses can identify those areas requiring special attention regarding management policies, such as natural or cultural resources likely to be intruded upon or otherwise impacted by development. As part of this process, stakeholders and local governments are encouraged to evaluate the presence of subsets of their communities subject to special circumstances such as:

- ✓ *Areas where rapid development or change of land uses is likely to occur*
- ✓ *Areas where the pace of development has/ may outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation*
- ✓ *Areas in need of redevelopment and/or significant improvements to aesthetics or attractiveness*
- ✓ *Large, abandoned structures or sites, including possible environmental contamination.*
- ✓ *Areas with significant infill development opportunities (scattered vacant sites).*
- ✓ *Areas of significant disinvestment, levels of poverty, and/or unemployment substantially higher than average levels for the community as a whole*

Upon consideration of development trends and land use issues in Habersham County and the participating municipalities, the following priorities stand out for the 2023 planning period:

The various ***Downtowns for the Clarkesville, and Demorest*** retain the form and most of the structures of traditional main street or town square communities, complete with historic zero-lot-line buildings recalling each community's bygone days as more established commercial and employment hubs. Baldwin has torn down some of its older structures as they seek to revitalize the area, but they retain a nodal intersection and collection of commercial structures that may form the basis of a future urbanized area. Together with their respective surrounding neighborhoods these city cores should be retained and restored both to provide a source for civic pride and community identity but also to foster more economic development within the city center that is conducive to supporting area residents and strengthening the community's character.

Lake Russell, the small reservoir east of Mt. Airy, remains a secluded and loved outdoor recreation area, one with potential for greater use. This water body should be preserved in terms of its natural surrounding and general public accessibility, ensuring that as a local destination it can be enjoyed for generations.

Natural resources, particularly water resources, are of special concern as Habersham County experiences population growth and associated housing and commercial development. Greenspace planning and preservation will also be important to achieve preservation of natural resources and provision of recreation facilities and transportation alternatives for residents. Areas for water and sewer development have been identified and infrastructure expansion projects are planned. It is important to encourage development in the areas planned for infrastructure expansion. Additionally, planning for future infrastructure expansions should be coordinated with and guided by land use planning that is consistent with a comprehensive vision for growth and development.

The ***Highway 365 corridor*** and the ***US 441 corridor*** are both attracting attention for various development opportunities. These major transportation corridors provide direct, four-lane highway transportation links between communities, plus they offer special opportunities for targeted economic development activity that is reliant on regional accessibility, particularly large scale

employers. These areas also contain undeveloped/underdeveloped lots conducive to easy purchasing and development when full utilities are available.

The bulk of unincorporated Habersham County is rural and agricultural, save for select corridors and the commercial/industrial mix south of Clarkesville. The distribution of sewer and water lines will be monitored as the communities look to improve coordination of service delivery to foster better economic development. At the moment, however, there are no larger, significant areas where development is outpacing utility capacity. *(Note: There could be considered an exception for high-speed telecommunications, but this issue is a part of a broader matter currently being addressed by the State.)*

Downtown areas in the cities, with their historic structures and classic main-street or town square character, are ideally suited for small scale urban commercial activity. The Cities and area residents would like to see these areas continue revitalization efforts and grow stronger as civic and commercial destinations.

Environmental Assessment

The following is provided as a simplified assessment of critical environmental conditions in effect in Habersham County. The locations for any identified conditions can be found on the correlating map.

Clean Water Act Compliance

Y	Any “not supporting” 303(d) listed waterbodies? If yes, these waterbodies have been found contaminated to the extent that they are not considered supporting their designated use. As such the local community should seek to manage land uses within the watershed so as to yield healthier water quality.
Y	Any 305(b) listed waterbodies?
N	If yes, do the Implementation Plans/Watershed Management Plans require any outstanding actions from the local government? If so, please include these actions within the Implementation Program.



There are several listed stream segments within Habersham County, predominantly for fecal coliform (bacteria) and for sedimentation, however the County, municipalities and other area stakeholders have worked hard the past 10+ years to greatly improve water resource stewardship practices and water quality standards. The Soque River Watershed Partnership, with support from North Georgia Technical College, has made great strides in educating the public and performing watershed improvements that have already yielded results. Further efforts are ongoing and the prevailing outlook for streams in Habersham County is much stronger compared to the early 2000’s.

Environmental Planning Criteria

Y	Water Supply Watersheds	Minimum regulations in place?	Y
Y	Wetlands	Minimum regulations in place?	Y
Y	Groundwater Recharge Areas	Minimum regulations in place?	Y
Y	Protected River Corridors	Minimum regulations in place?	Y
Y	Steep Slopes	Minimum regulations in place?	Y
N	Protected Mountains	Minimum regulations in place?	NA
N	Coastal Areas	Minimum regulations in place?	NA

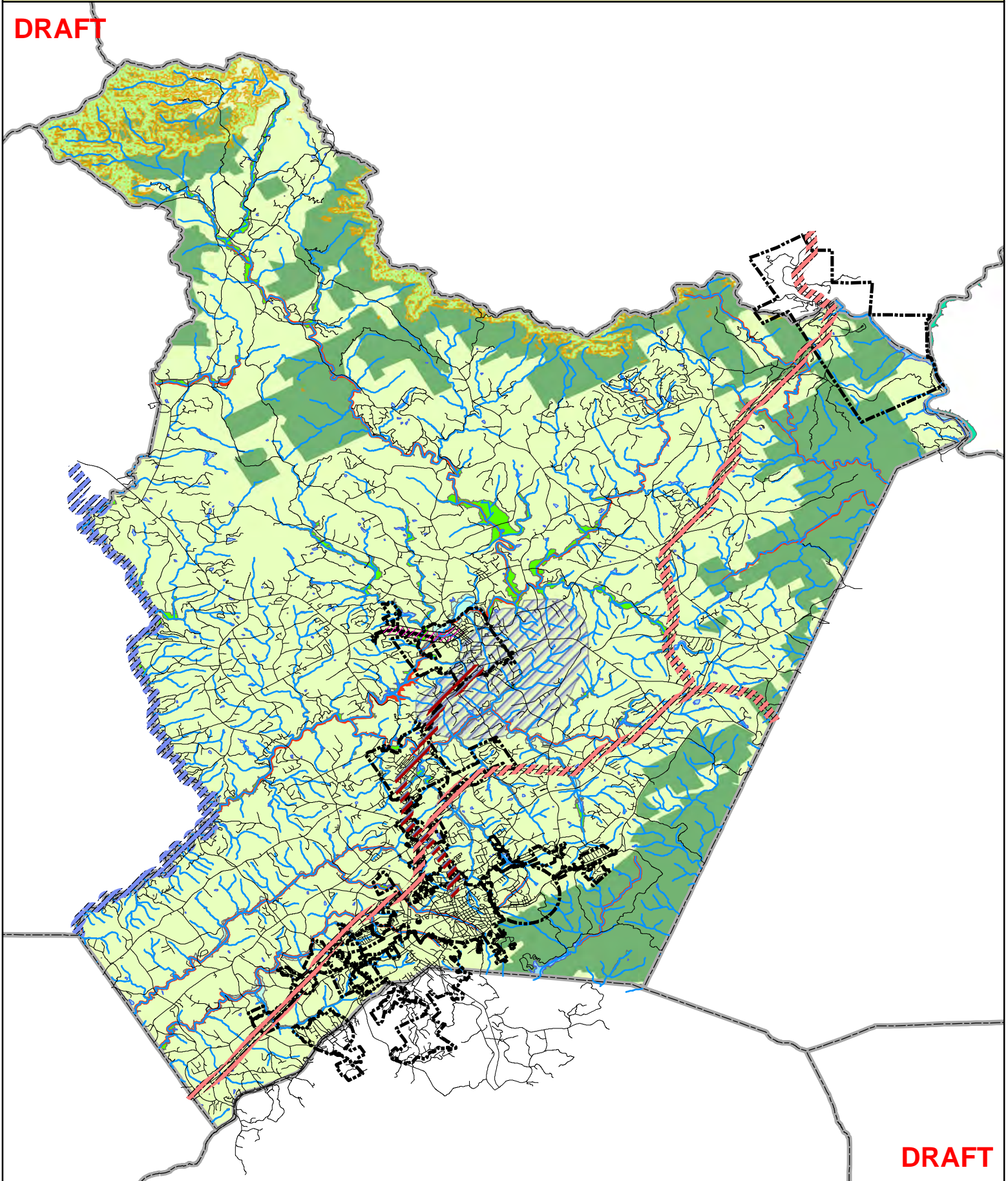
State Listed Water Bodies in Habersham County (2020)

NAME	LOCATION	SIZE (miles)	CAUSE	SOURCE
Supporting or Assessment Pending				
Camp Creek	North Tributary to Wells Pond Tributary	1.0	Trichloroethane	I2
Davidson Creek	Headwaters to Panther Creek near Tallulah Falls	6.0		
Glade Creek	Deep Creek to Deep Creek	1.0		
Little Panther Creek	Headwaters to Big Panther Creek	5.0		
Mauldin Mill Creek	Pond off Windvane Lane to the Chattahoochee River	4.0		
Middle Fork Broad River	Tributary 1.8 miles upstream of Sellers Road to Dicks Creek	3.0		
North Fork Little Mud Creek	Headwaters to Little Mud Creek	3.0		
Raper Creek	Chastain Branch to the Soquee River	2.0		
Sautee Creek	U/S Chattahoochee River	5.0		
Soquee River	SR17, Clarkesville to Chattahoochee River	6.0		
South Fork Mud Creek	Headwaters to Mud Creek (Cornelia)	2.0		
Yellowbank Creek	Headwaters to the Soquee River	6.0		
Non-Supporting				
Chattahoochee River	Soquee River to Mossy Creek	5.0	E Coli, FC	NP
Deep Creek	Headwaters to Soquee River	8.0	Bio F	NP
Hagen Creek	Headwaters to Bellton Creek	5.0	Bio F	NP
Hazel Creek	Reservoir No. 12 to Law Creek	4.0	Bio F	NP
Hazel Creek	Law Creek to the Soquee River	5.0	Bio M	NP
Little Mud Creek	Confluence of North and South Fork Little Mud Creeks to Mud Creek	9.0	Bio F, FC	NP
Mud Creek	Headwaters to Little Mud Creek	13.0	FC, Bio F	NP
Nancytown Creek	Headwaters to Nancytown Lake	3.0	Bio F	NP
Panther Creek (Big Panther Creek)	Upstream Lake Yonah	9.0	FC, Bio F	NP
Shoal Creek	Nerve Branch to the Soquee River	2.0	Bio F	NP
Soquee River	Goshen Creek to SR 17, Clarkesville	29.0	Bio F	NP
Sutton Mill Creek	Beaverdam Creek to the Soquee River	1.0	Bio F	NP
Legend				
*	Assessment Pending	FC	Fecal Coliform	
NS	Not Supporting	NP	Nonpoint source pollution	
Bio F	Biota – Fish Impairment			

Source: Georgia EPD, 2020

Habersham County Areas Requiring Special Attention

DRAFT



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Legend

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Interjurisdiction | Habersham State Corridor | Habersham County DEIRM (2015) - A | National Wetlands Inventory |
| Road | Charleston River | B | Wetland Mitigation |
| Habersham State Corridor | 2015-2020 Stream | C | Ground Water Recharge Area |
| US Corridor | Protected Stream | D | OMB Conservation Bank |





RECOMMENDED CHARACTER AREAS





Character area planning is designed to focus on the physical appearance (aesthetics) and function of a particular area. Development strategies are tailored and applied to each individual area. The goal is to enhance the existing character/function or promote a new, more desirable character for the future. Character areas identify portions of the community that have a unique or special character that needs to be preserved or require special attention because of unique development issues.

A key component of the comprehensive planning process is the development of a Character Area Map that reflects the communities' vision for future growth and development during the course of the planning period. This vision was developed through an extensive public visioning process and expresses the unique character of various portions of the county. The various character areas, when combined, form a single map that is intended to supplement the Future Development Map by organizing common themes of development patterns throughout the county. They promote the desired development patterns guiding the design of structures and physical development. They also provide a framework for changes to development regulation and policies. Finally, they help to guide future zoning decisions.



Character Areas

	Habersham Co.	Clarkeville	Alto	Baldwin	Demorest	Mt. Airy
US 441 Throughway	X	X				
SR 365 Corridor	X		X	X	X	
Industrial	X	X		X		
Institutional	X					
Gateway Corridors	X	X			X	
Commercial	X	X			X	
Village Center	X		X			X
Downtown Clarkeville		X				
Downtown Demorest					X	
Traditional Neighborhood		X	X	X	X	X
Mixed Residential		X	X		X	X
Suburban Transition	X				X	X
Rural	X					
Parks and Greenways	X	X				X
Conservation	X			X		X



441 Throughway	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>This refers to US 441 from Antioch church road to Tallulah Falls, and the portion of SR 17 coming out of Stephens County and connecting with US 441. Both are divided highways that serve as a primary route for commuters, tourist, and commercial traffic into and out from the north.</p> <p>The goal is to maintain these roads as high speed throughways, while preserving adjacent open space and agricultural lands, as well as historic features along old 441. Commercial developments and residential subdivisions that create an excess of local traffic are required to use access roads. Conservation subdivisions and other clustered mixed use development is allowed, using other roads for access. Development is buffered from view from the roadways protecting rural scenery. The proposed route of the former Tallulah Falls railway has been protected to allow for conversion to a recreational trail</p>	<p>Agriculture, conservation covenants and easements, developments such as conservation subdivisions, clustered mixed commercial and residential use, all visually screened and on access roads.</p>
	Implementation Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop overlay district regulations to assure adequate right-of-way, and protect the corridor from excess local traffic through access management standards. • Amend ordinances to require development of access roads as a condition for future commercial development along the corridor. • Request DOT to restrict further curb and median cuts.
	

SR 365 corridor	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>This area serves as a primary transportation artery connecting North Georgia to I-985, Gainesville and Atlanta, Georgia. Many drivers use the highway system as a primary commuter route for employment and entertainment. This business related travel makes the corridor prime for developing commercial and industrial interests along the corridor. Baldwin could serve as a major hub for attracting and retaining business investments including major industries, corporate headquarters and commercial/retail businesses.</p> <p>New commercial projects will be planned at the individual site level but with consideration of inter-parcel access among compatible properties. This area will continue to be auto-dependent.</p>	<p>Highway-oriented commercial land uses, offices, services, and institutions. Generally, residential is not provided (though not necessarily discouraged) because land values are prohibitive for residential due to highway frontage and access.</p>
	<p>Implementation Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop access management standards for this area to reduce traffic conflicts and maintain roadway efficiency. • Ensure compatible uses through continued enforcement of land use ordinances. • Develop corridor-specific quality development regulations.
	
	

Industrial	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>The Industrial character area describes the portion of land that includes land uses of low and high intensity manufacturing, wholesale trade, distribution, assembly, processing and similar uses that may or may not generate nuisance characteristics such as excessive noise, particulate matter, vibration, smoke, dust, gas, fumes, odors, radiation, or other nuisances.</p> <p>Identified industrial areas are provided with adequate infrastructure and designated truck/rail access routes that are safe and where heavy vehicles can maneuver with minimal noise, vibration, and intrusion of trucks in residential areas. Industrial site design provides adequate room for expansion and the development of ancillary businesses and employee services. Landscaped entrances and grounds are encouraged, environmentally sensitive areas protected, and surrounding neighborhoods buffered. Truck docks and waste handling areas are screened from public view. The intrusion of obnoxious uses into industrial parks is discouraged. Institutional uses are buffered from view through extensive landscaping to avoid negatively affecting adjacent property values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Industrial ▪ Commercial ▪ Professional offices (corporate headquarters/medical office complexes) ▪ Research and Development facilities ▪ Mixed-use developments (commercial/industrial; but no residential)
	Implementation Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update existing land use and development regulations to accommodate desired changes • Employ design/development standards for industrial sites • Incorporate into the development review process a “development impact matrix” to determine impacts of specific industries on the environment and infrastructure • Coordinate economic development activities for recruiting new business investments
	
	

Institutional	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>This category includes campus developments like those for North Georgia Tech, the Habersham Medical Center, and area schools, in recognition that they stand apart from the surrounding context and may continue to expand as a distinct land use by comparison.</p> <p>The vision for this area is to foster an appropriate setting for major educational or institutional facilities. The impact of automobiles on pedestrian and bicycle traffic is minimized by constructing sidewalks and bicycle paths to connect campus areas with nearby activity centers. Development and traffic management strategies are to be coordinated between local governments and the college. Development is compact in form centered around the school campus cluster.</p>	<p>Primarily single- function institutional uses, with several buildings of varying sizes and heights, along with incidental open space or recreation, off-site parking, and accessory uses. Residential and commercial uses appropriate for locating next to a school area; businesses such as neighborhood stores, small restaurants, service stations and similar uses.</p>
	Implementation Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rezone land adjacent to UNG campus allowing only appropriate residential and commercial uses. • Maintain a cooperative relationship with the schools and colleges in order to better coordinate land use decisions and institutional goals.
	

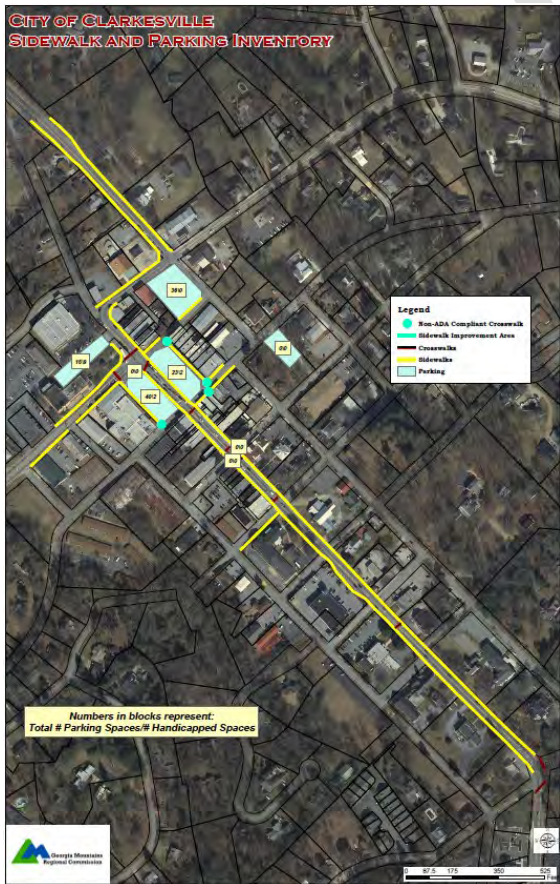
Gateway Corridors	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>This refers to four, predominantly 2-lane rural arterials that connect Demorest and Clarkesville to US 441 and to one another:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business 441 from Cornelia to Clarkesville • Demorest/ Mt. Airy Highway • SR 197 <p>These are smaller roads that handle some freight and through traffic but primarily serves local traffic into and out of these burgeoning small-urban cities. The roads already feature a mix of uses, including some commercial retail, service and dining, but also harbor plenty of residential use. They are also scaled for rural uses, with limited strip shopping-style developments and most properties exhibiting modest lot sizes and limited parking.</p> <p>The desired pattern is more of the same with some refinements to ensure traffic and pedestrian safety, and to minimize the scale of destinations along the roadways so that they may remain rural in size and facilitate through traffic to the cities.</p>	<p>A mix of uses will be promoted, including businesses and offices, as well as single-family residences.</p> <p>Residential in the form of conservation subdivisions and commercial uses in master planned developments that do not directly access the gateway corridor.</p>
	Implementation Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure compatible uses through continued enforcement of land use ordinances. • Undertake streetscape improvements to enhance the aesthetics and pedestrian orientation

Commercial	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>This area is typified by its commercial uses that are larger than those found in urban, downtown settings. It is typified by auto-oriented commercial activities such as retail, dining, service industries and professional offices.</p> <p>These areas are found along major arterial roadways, with building sizes, styles, and locations of notable scale to attract and serve customers and visitors from around the region. There are often expansive parking lots with multiple points of entry and possibly internal navigation corridors, plus the potential for stand-alone signs, out-parcel structures, and more. Such developments are not conducive to high grade pedestrian accessibility beyond selective sidewalks, but they serve a vital role in providing the large-scale commerce considered vital to local economies.</p>	<p>General commercial and business activities, such as service establishments, restaurants, professional offices, financial institutions, government offices, utilities, for-profit and non-profit uses, theatres and churches.</p>
	<p>Implementation Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide development and use of properties in the Commercial Character Area by providing compatible zoning requirements. • Support mixed use development, business community organizations, streetscape enhancements and state community development programs such as Better Hometown and Signature Community. • Support design and architectural standards to promote pedestrian-friendly environment by adding sidewalks, bike/trail routes linking neighborhoods and commercial centers. • Promote infill development of existing properties.
	




Village Center	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>This district comprises those areas that function as an existing or potential commercial and civic node within a neighborhood or village scale. Preferences are for pedestrian friendly areas and retail or dining options within minimal parking lots and styles that evoke rural settings. This district includes the downtown core of Alto, the main street corridor of Mt. Airy, and select crossroad intersections in the unincorporated county.</p> <p><i>The Alto area includes a collection of historic and modern buildings housing a small number of commercial uses. With the location of the railroad through the center of Town, they will have to be innovative enough to integrate pedestrian accessibility to existing commercial properties. The vacant convenience store and church have been purchased by the Town and they are being renovated to house the Police Department and the City Hall Complex respectively.</i></p> <p><i>The commercial areas of Mt. Airy are comprised of the lands on both sides of the town's high-volume roadways, Old 123, Nancy Town Road and State Hwy 197.</i></p> <p><i>Service activity areas located at highway intersections that provide a mixture of uses to serve passers-by and adjoining rural and agricultural areas such as Batesville and Habersham Mill Village.</i></p> <p>These goals for areas is to foster thriving commercial civic centers with a variety of retail and service uses tailored for local residents and in keeping with the rural, small-town nature of the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Single-family residential ▪ Multi-family residential (when part of a master planned development or subarea master plan) ▪ Mixed-use (when part of a master planned development or subarea master plan) ▪ Commercial and retail uses ▪ Professional offices ▪ Public/Institutional ▪ Parks/Recreation ▪ "Strip" style development is not appropriate.
	Implementation Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update existing land use and development regulations to accommodate desired changes • Examine the use of CIDs, TADs, BIDs and similar tools to foster development and redevelopment • Develop a County Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan • Develop a Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) ordinance • Consider an Infill Development ordinance • Develop street connectivity requirements for new developments • Develop a County Parks and Recreation Master Plan



Downtown Clarkesville	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>Located within the twelve block centralized heart of Clarkesville, this area contains several 100-year old structures, exemplified by hand-made brick facades, parapet walls and handcrafted scrollwork typical of the architecture of the period. The majority of the buildings on the east side of the square are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The area will remain a vital commercial and community center and the distinctive character of downtown Clarkesville will be maintained through community based preservation efforts.</p> <p>The shape the future of their downtown, this district will pursue the visions and guidelines established as part of a 2015 planning process specific to downtown.</p>	<p>Commercial establishments, service industries, professional, institutional, governmental and residential uses.</p>
	<p>Implementation Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage a relatively high-density mix of retail, offices, services, and employment. • Require design standards that are pedestrian-oriented with strong walkable connections between different uses. • Update architectural and design standards for existing and new construction to preserve these sites and the district. • Allow residential development in Downtown District in conjunction with business activity. • Identify historical and cultural sites and adopt local requirements consistent with state and federal preservation standards.






Downtown Demorest			
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses		
<p>This area is comprised of the five blocks in the center of Demorest, which are the historic commercial core of the city, bisected by Old Historic Highway 441 Business Route. Development in this area is compact and pedestrian-friendly. The area has been aided by concentrated public investment.</p> <p>New development will follow the original downtown pattern of small rectangular blocks. Buildings are brought up to the street with little or no setback from the road and development follows “Main Street” principles. Consistent with historic district guidelines developed in alignment with the principals governing historic districts placed on the National Register of Historic Places.</p>	<p>Predominantly commercial, services, office and civic- institutional uses. Residences on upper stories of multi-story buildings are appropriate, as are adaptive reuse of structures for mixed uses.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="background-color: #e6e6e6;">Implementation Measures</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Beautification Enhancements (maintain/ implement program) (Policy) Encourage public-private partnerships to continue investment in the area and redevelopment of historic buildings.(Policy) Make use of a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to foster continued revitalization. (Policy) Establish a local Historic District by ordinance governed by a Historic Preservation Commission charged with implementing design guidelines. Pursue National Register of Historic Places designation for eligible structures. </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Implementation Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Beautification Enhancements (maintain/ implement program) (Policy) Encourage public-private partnerships to continue investment in the area and redevelopment of historic buildings.(Policy) Make use of a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to foster continued revitalization. (Policy) Establish a local Historic District by ordinance governed by a Historic Preservation Commission charged with implementing design guidelines. Pursue National Register of Historic Places designation for eligible structures.
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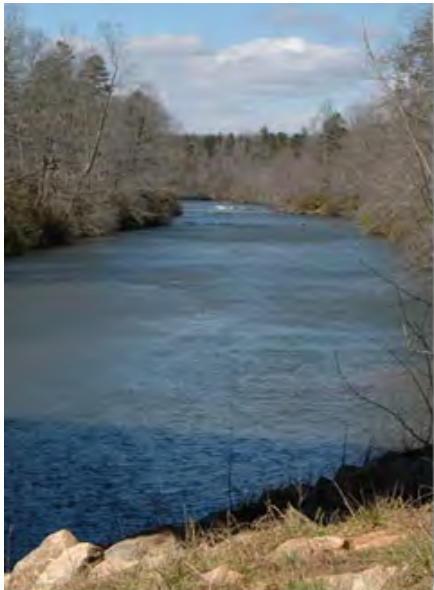

Traditional Neighborhood	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>This area refers to the mix of urban residential neighborhoods and stable suburban subdivisions that comprise the densely populated areas in and around the municipalities. For Clarkesville and Demorest this can include historic neighborhoods that warrant additional layers of protection, but all of these areas are considered stable, safe, and attractive areas that contribute to the communities' family-oriented profile. Efforts to grow the county should begin by seeking to preserve these areas and replicate their form as new residential growth comes into the area.</p> <p>Most of the properties within this character area are single-family detached housing, typically in the 3-bedroom range and built before 2000. Within the cities this can include traditional urban blocks and gridded, or heavily connected, street patterns. Further outside the city cores there are more conventional subdivisions with minimal entries, common amenity areas, and more winding roads with longer blocks. Combined, these areas cater to the middle and upper middle-income households and provide serene residential settings distinct from the truly rural parts of the county.</p> 	<p>Limited recreation uses Low to medium density single- family detached houses Neighborhood commercial, professional and institutional</p>
	<p>Implementation Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect historic properties and encourage rehabilitation, including National Register Designation • Historic properties should be maintained or rehabilitated/restored according to federal guidelines. • Develop design and architectural standards for new development in historic district. • Amend ordinances to require new developments to include parks and other amenities. • Amend ordinances to require new development to connect internal pedestrian circulation systems to the nearest off-site sidewalks. • Amend ordinances to require master planned new development to include neighborhood-serving commercial centers plus tree preservation and replacement standards
	

Suburban Transition	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>This character area corresponds with properties that have been subdivided and developed as conventional suburban subdivisions during the past several years. Also, this character area corresponds with properties that have not yet been developed to any significant degree but are anticipated to be subdivided and developed for new, detached, single-family dwellings. Since these areas are mostly undeveloped, there are opportunities to influence their character in the future.</p> <p>Residential development is encouraged and promoted in moderate to high density consisting of traditional residential subdivisions for single and multifamily housing. New developments are master-planned with mixed-uses, blending residential development with schools, parks, recreation, retail businesses and services, linked in a compact pattern that encourages walking and minimizes the need for auto trips. Connectivity occurs between each development, allowing good vehicular and pedestrian/bike access to retail/commercial services as well as connecting to adjacent properties and subdivisions. Compatible architecture styles are encouraged to maintain the regional character. Wherever possible, regional networks of green space and trails are developed. Street design fosters traffic calming, e.g. narrower residential streets, on- street parking, bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Existing trees are preserved in new developments or replaced.</p>	<p>Uses in these areas should be predominantly residential with scattered civic buildings and small hubs of commercial and service business development to serve adjacent neighborhoods. Residential development will vary from single family homes on lots of 1/3 - 2 ½ acres to condominiums, townhouses and apartments. Mixed use development is encouraged in the form of planned urban developments and planned residential developments.</p> <p>Predominantly detached, single-family, site-built dwellings on individual lots. Supportive civic and recreational uses may be included, such as churches, schools, community centers, and parks.</p>
	Implementation Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop policies for decentralized waste treatment. • Establish the urban service boundary. • Expand sewer and water infrastructure into these areas on a priority basis. • Modify ordinances to encourage mixed use and higher density residential development. • Implement a tree preservation ordinance. • Modify ordinances to encourage Rails to Trails organization and greenways.

Mixed Residential	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>This designation corresponds with areas that are already predominantly developed with some diversity in residential building types (e.g., duplexes, manufactured homes, apartments, and/or manufactured home parks).</p> <p>Lots shall be large, but may contain more than one dwelling unit on a given lot. The street pattern in these areas is more similar to traditional neighborhood development principles than conventional suburban subdivision characteristics, in that cul-de-sacs generally do not exist and road patterns resemble a “grid” or “modified” grid pattern. Densities are higher than other residential areas in most cases, and hence these areas need to be connected to the public sanitary sewer system. Compatible infill development will be encouraged in these areas, as multiple housing options may provide access to housing that is more affordable than that found in the more suburban areas of the city.</p>	<p>The land use categories to be allowed are low to medium density with mixed mobile homes and houses.</p> <p>Combinations of residential dwelling types, including detached, single-family, site-built units; manufactured homes on individual lots; duplexes, townhouses; apartments; and manufactured home parks. Supportive civic and recreational uses may be included, such as churches, schools, community centers, and parks.</p>
	Implementation Measures

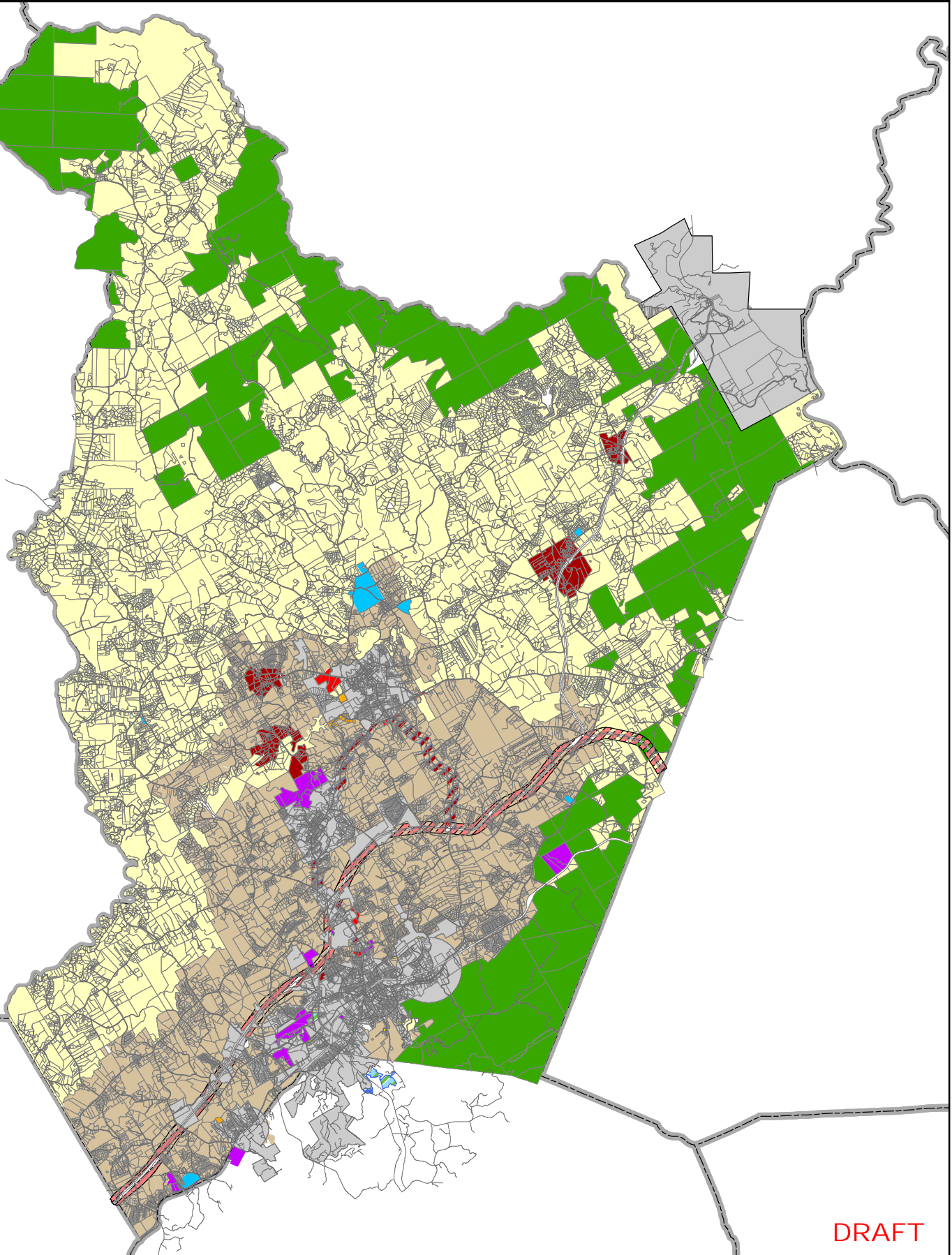
Rural	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>Unique rural neighborhoods and undeveloped land that help establish the rural character of the County. These areas have low pedestrian orientation and accessibility, large lots (2 ½-20 acres), open space, pastoral views, and a high degree of building separation.</p> <p>Preserve the rural atmosphere of these areas and ability to farm while accommodating new residential developments using rural cluster or conservation subdivision design principles that incorporate significant amounts of open space. The regional rural character is enhanced by encouraging compatible architectural styles, fostering a regional network of green space and trails, preserving cultural and historic sites.</p>	<p>Agriculture, small family and hobby farms, conservation subdivisions, planned residential development with significant open space. Traditional residential subdivisions should have lot sizes greater than 2 ½ acres.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traditional large lot single-family residential ▪ Conservation subdivisions ▪ Traditional neighborhood commercial ▪ Forestry/agricultural ▪ Passive recreation
	Implementation Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update existing land use and development regulations to accommodate desired changes. • Encourage farming through financial incentives, TDR programs, conservation easements, and restrictive covenants. • Consider raising minimum lot size in areas without water and sewer • Develop a Conservation Subdivision ordinance
	
	

Parks and Greenways	
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses
<p>This character area consists of the active-use parks and greenways that will serve as destinations for outdoor recreation. While serving some greenspace protection purposes the main goal of these areas is to encourage and cater to people gathering for outdoor activities.</p> <p>This area is found adjacent to US 123 from the town's boundary to Lake Russell Road and is comprised of the undeveloped land paralleling the roadways. This green gateway into the town will be maintained and preserved so as to provide delineation between the town and the unincorporated county.</p> <p>Included in this are plans for the proposed Wilbanks Park, a 5-acre property amidst Baldwin's residential uses, between the airport industrial area and the Highway 441 corridor. This new park would provide a walking trail and picnic facilities as well as an athletic field. Additional land across from this facility has also been identified for potential expansion.</p>	<p>Parks with athletic fields Passive use parks with on-site facilities and within developed areas Recreational trails and pathways</p>
	Implementation Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop county-wide Parks and Recreation Master Plan Support plans for Tallulah Falls Rails to Trails (Policy)
	
	

Conservation		
Vision	Appropriate Land Uses	
<p>This area includes the most scenic views in the County, steep slopes, woodlands, meadows, and large parcels of actively farmed land, including those used for poultry and livestock production. The area is sparsely settled with rural roadways that have minimal visual and environmental impact. A large portion of this area is within the Chattahoochee National Forest.</p> <p>Protect the sensitive environmental and unique scenic nature of Habersham County’s rivers both as critical water resources and as recreation areas. Efforts will be made to maintain public access. Passive recreation areas and trails are encouraged in the vicinity of these resources to increase their attractiveness to residents while strengthening the county’s tourism potential.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undeveloped areas in their natural state ▪ Nature Preserves and WMAs ▪ Parks and recreation ▪ Agriculture 	
	<th style="background-color: #e1f5fe;">Implementation Measures</th> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage farming through financial incentives, TDR programs, conservation easements, and restrictive covenants. • Encourage US Forest Service to give priority to recreation and scenic impact when implementing Best Management Practices. (Policy) • Widen roadways in this area only when absolutely necessary and then carefully design improvements to have minimal visual and environmental impact. • Identify historical and cultural sites and specify measures for their protection including available grant funds. • Develop a comprehensive tourism strategy for Habersham County to foster tourism for the local economy with emphasis for the potential for this area. 	Implementation Measures
		
		

Habersham County Character Areas - 2023

DRAFT



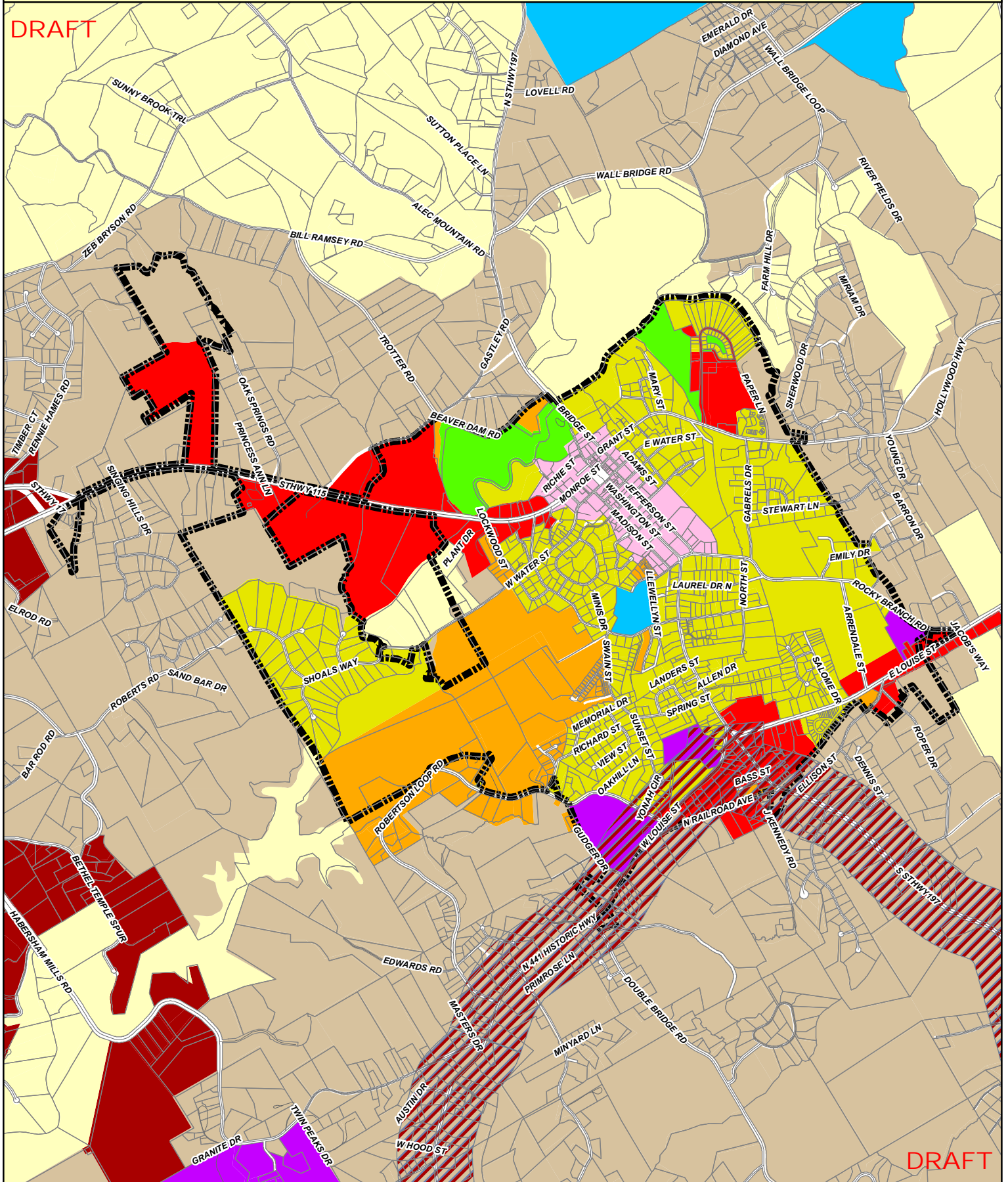
Legend

- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Roads | Rural | Village Center | Institutional |
| Parcels | Mixed Residential | Commercial | Parks and Greenways |
| Municipalities | Suburban Transition | Downtown | Conservation |
| | Traditional Neighborhood | Industrial | Gateway Corridor |
| | | | 365 Corridor |



City of Clarkesville Character Areas - 2023

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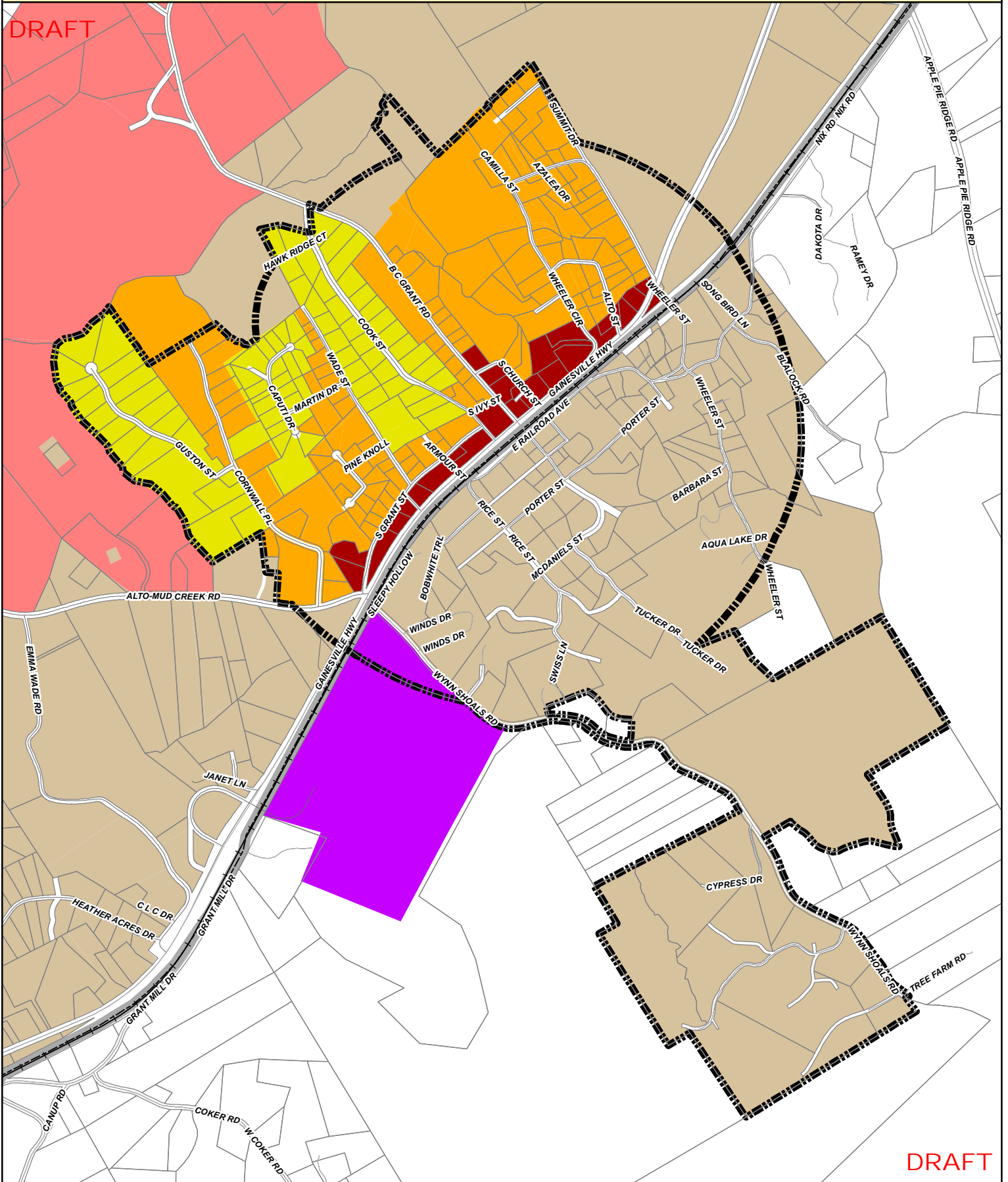
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- Roads
- Parcels
- Habersham Character Areas
- Rural
- Mixed Residential
- Suburban Transition
- Village Center
- Commercial
- Downtown
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Parks and Greenways
- Conservation
- Gateway Corridor
- 365 Corridor



Town of Alto Character Areas - 2023

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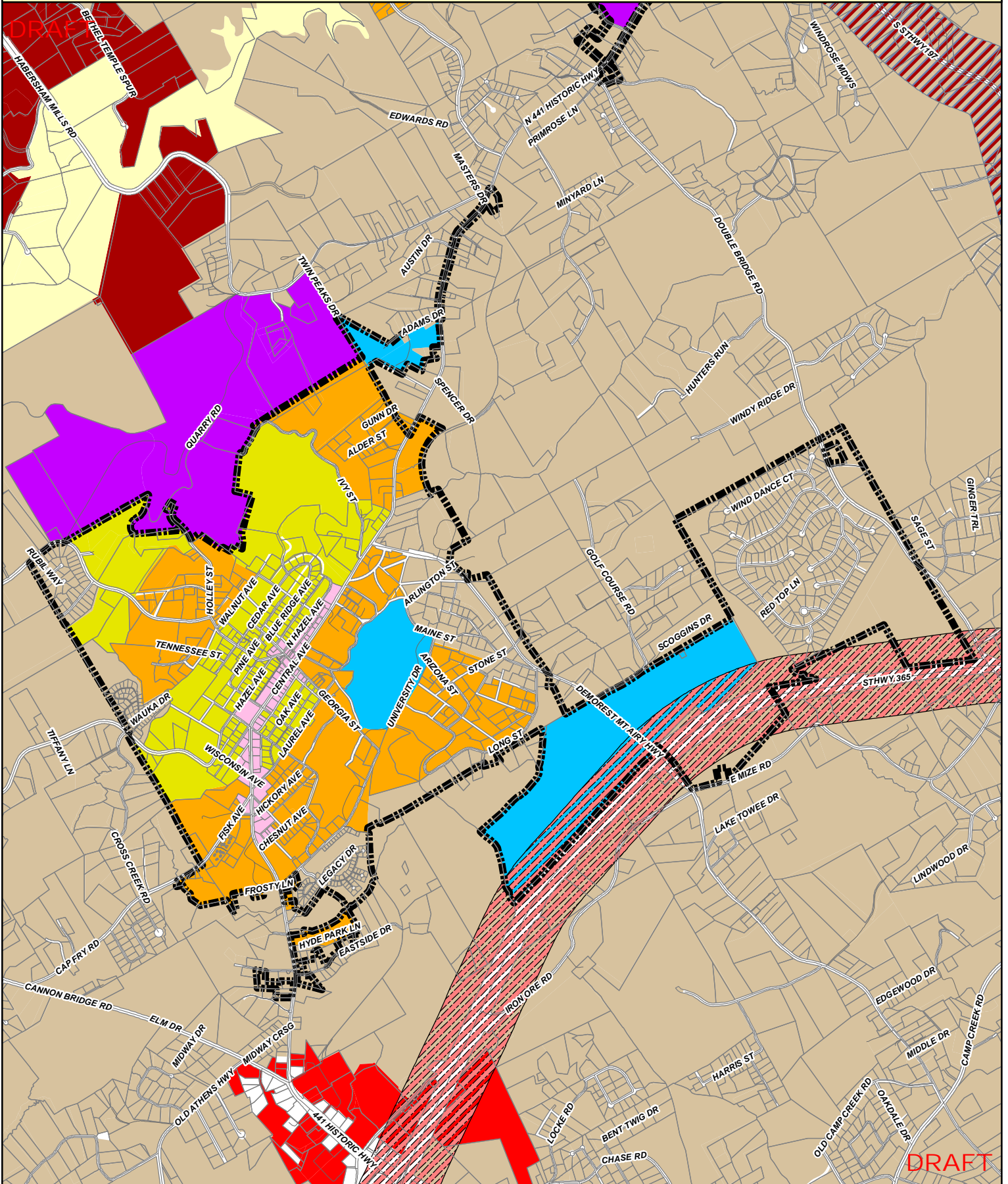
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Legend

-  Roads
-  Parcels
-  Rural
-  Mixed Residential
-  Suburban Transition
-  Traditional Neighborhood
-  Village Center
-  965 Corridor
-  441 Throughway
-  Gateway Corridor
-  Commercial
-  Downtown
-  Industrial/Institutional
-  North Georgia Technical College
-  Parks and Greenways
-  Conservation
-  441 Business Corridor



City of Demorest Character Areas - 2023

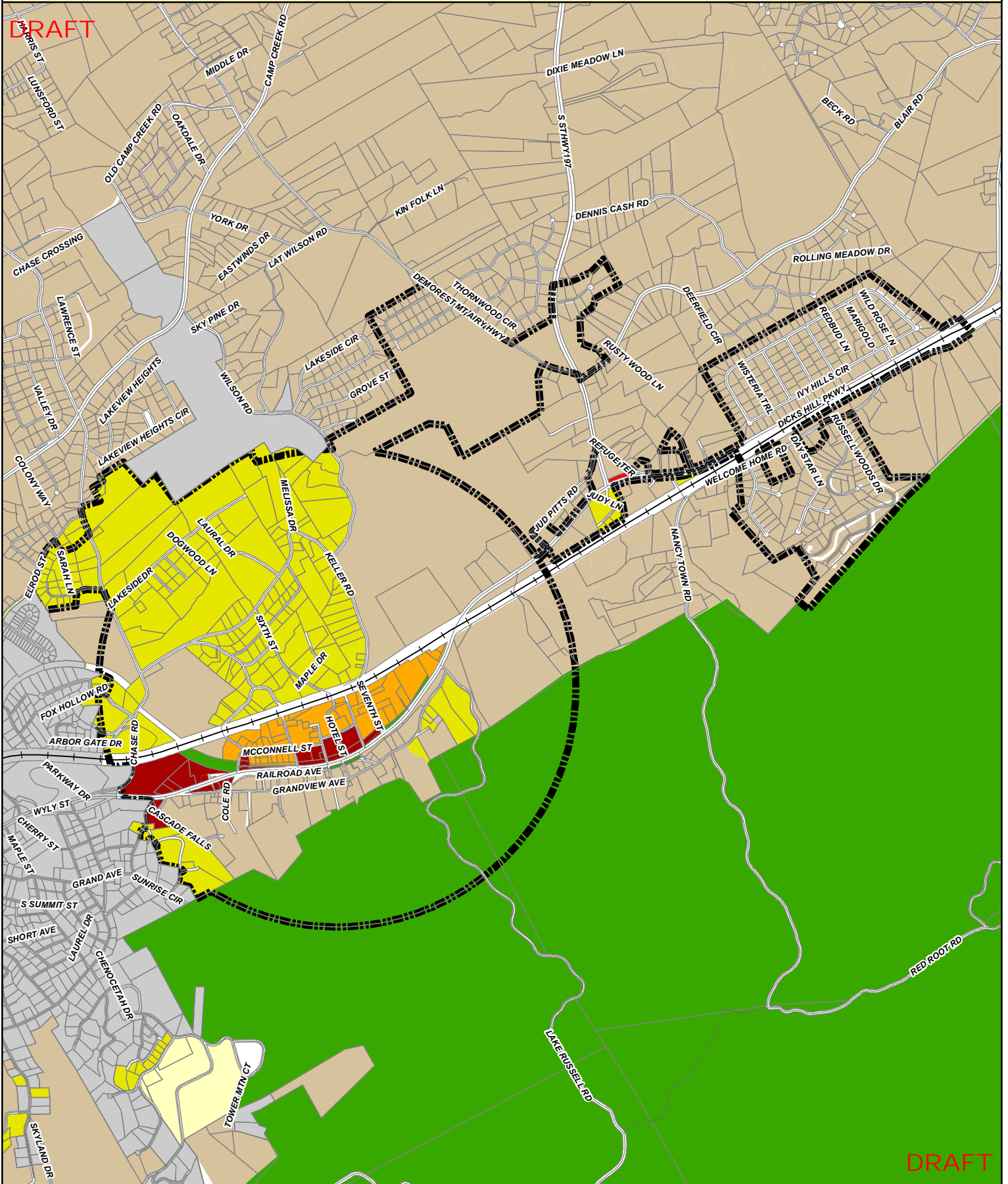


Legend

- | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| — Roads | Habersham Character Areas | Traditional Neighborhood | Industrial | Gateway Corridor |
| □ Parcels | Rural | Village Center | Institutional | 365 Corridor |
| | Mixed Residential | Commercial | Parks and Greenways | |
| | Suburban Transition | Downtown | Conservation | |

Town of Mt Airy Character Areas - 2023

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Legend

- Roads
- Parcels
- Municipalities
- Rural
- Mixed Residential
- Suburban Transition
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Village Center
- 365 Corridor
- 441 Throughway
- Gateway Corridor
- Commercial
- Downtown
- Industrial/Institutional
- North Georgia Technical College
- Parks and Greenways
- Conservation
- 441 Business Corridor



IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

Achieving the Vision and our goals for the community

While the Future Development Map illustrates the physical conditions expressed within the Vision, the Implementation Program is the overall strategy for achieving the Community Vision and for addressing each of the Community Needs and Opportunities. It identifies specific measures, both short and long-term, that must be undertaken by the community in order realize the community's goals.

The Implementation Program features four main components.

Needs, Opportunities, and Mitigation Strategies

These reflect an assessment of the conditions and factors influencing the area and people, stakeholder knowledge of the community and comments received throughout the planning process. To effectively realize their vision for the future a community must develop a well-defined implementation plan. By identifying the core issues and priorities of the community, the government and its partners can develop specific strategies that must be accomplished to fulfill the desired goals and objectives of the vision. It is critical that these issues and opportunities be clearly defined and understood by the stakeholders because they form the basis for the development of the community's long and short-term action plans.

Report of Accomplishments

This is the review of the Community Work Program (CWP) from the previous five years. As a new CWP is produced every five years, the items within the previous CWP must be identified for their status as complete, in progress, either postponed or cancelled. Those items that have been postponed or are in progress must be shown in the next CWP where appropriate, while those items that have been postponed or cancelled must also include a reason for their status.

Community Work Programs

The third forward-thinking element of the Implementation Program is the CWP. This identifies specific implementation actions the local government or other entities intend to take during the first five-year time frame of the planning period. This can include any ordinances, administrative systems, community improvements or investments, financing arrangements, or other programs or initiatives to be put in place to realize the plan goals.

Policies and Long-Term Objectives

One type of action a community can establish to achieve its vision is the establishment of policy. These are those ongoing principles and practices that the community will observe in order to realize specific objectives. Some policies may compliment single action-items while others may provide ongoing guidance and direction to local government officials for making decisions consistent with achieving the Community Vision or addressing Community Issues and Opportunities.

POLICIES, LONG-TERM ACTIVITIES AND ONGOING PROGRAMS

One type of action a community can establish to achieve its vision is the establishment of policy. These are those ongoing principles and practices that the community will observe in order to realize specific objectives. Some policies may complement single action-items while others may provide ongoing guidance and direction to local government officials for making decisions consistent with achieving the Community Vision or addressing Community Issues and Opportunities.

In addition to establishing policy, communities may also establish long-term or ongoing programs and activities that support identified objectives. These measures may complement policies or may simply be action items that must be employed more than once. These are recognized here to distinguish their need and conditions apart from the single-action items and to identify any required special terms or context.

(Unless otherwise indicated, policy is applicable to all participating governments.)

- Maintain State Environmental Planning Criteria
- Support the Soque River Watershed Association
- Maintain Service Delivery Agreement
- Maintain support for Habersham County Development Authority (HDCA)
- Work with GDOT to improve/maintain safety and flow conditions on Hwy 365, including possible new interchanges
- Support efforts to develop the Tallulah Falls Rail-to-Trail and comparable trail projects in the area
- Implement the County's 50-year Comprehensive Water Development Plan
- Make use of a Downtown Development Authority (DDA), and or Main Street programs to foster continued revitalization
- Maintain/ Expand sidewalks (Cities)
- Maintain/ Implement existing parks, recreation, greenway, and trail programs

Appendix

5

County Fact Sheet

Area Labor Profile

Summary of Survey Results

Sample evidence of Public Forums