

## CHAPTER SIX: EXISTING LAND USE

Consideration of existing land use is very important to planning future growth patterns for any community. For Greater Lanier County, existing land use patterns and densities have been fully inventoried and this information will provide community leaders with information needed to develop goals and strategies for future growth patterns, as well as protect/preserve vulnerable natural and historic resources while respecting individual property rights. Existing land use patterns have a direct impact on a county or city's future growth, and the preparation and analysis of existing land use maps and data are important in understanding land use relationships within and between the respective cities and county.

### METHODOLOGY

Based on existing land use inventories conducted and digitized in previous years, rezonings, and field surveys, the land use database was updated for Lanier County. Since a comprehensive land use survey existed, the update of this data required minimal work. For the past several years, any land use changes in Lanier County and the City of Lakeland have been updated in databases maintained by the South Georgia Regional Development Center. This has been done through contracts with Lanier County and the South Georgia RDC. These are the official databases for Lanier County and the City of Lakeland.

Additionally, with upgrades in the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) of the South Georgia Regional Development Center, accurate acreage for land uses were calculated. In some cases, there were major differences from the existing data in the comprehensive plan compared to what was calculated. In these instances, it was determined the new data would be used and considered accurate.

For purposes of analysis, land use inventory data was classified into nine (9) major categories which are based on standards currently established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs ("Minimum Standards and Procedures for Comprehensive Planning", as amended January 2004). The major land use categories are defined as follows:

**RESIDENTIAL:** Land primarily used for dwelling units, including single-family (all kinds), duplex, and multi-family. Farm houses and other singular dwelling units that are secondary to other land uses, and share the same parcel of land, are classified with the other land use.

**COMMERCIAL:** Land primarily used for non-industrial business uses; including retail sales, offices, service and entertainment facilities. Commercial uses may be located as a single use in one building or grouped together in a shopping center or office building.

**INDUSTRIAL:** Land primarily used for manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing, wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction, landfills, or other similar uses.

**PUBLIC / INSTITUTIONAL:** Land which primarily includes certain institutional uses, or federal, state, or local government uses. Government uses include city halls and government building complexes, police and fire stations, libraries, prisons, post offices, schools, military installations, etc.. Examples of institutional land uses include colleges, churches, cemeteries, hospitals, etc.. Facilities which are publicly owned, but would be more accurately classified in another land use category are not included in this category. For example, publicly owned parks and/or recreational facilities are placed in the PARK/RECREATION/CONSERVATION category, public landfills are placed in the INDUSTRIAL category, and office buildings containing government offices are placed in the COMMERCIAL category.

**TRANSPORTATION / COMMUNICATION / UTILITIES:** Land primarily used for street rights-of-way, railroads, public/private utilities, transmission towers, airports, or other similar uses.

**PARK / RECREATION / CONSERVATION:** Land primarily used for active or passive recreational uses. These may be either publicly or privately owned, and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national or state forests, golf courses, recreation centers, or other similar uses.

**AGRICULTURE:** Land primarily used for farming purposes, including fields, lots, pastures, croplands, specialty farms, livestock production, and aquaculture.

**FORESTRY:** Land primarily used for natural tree stands, commercial timber or pulpwood production.

**UNDEVELOPED / UNUSED:** Land that is cleared or platted but not developed for a specific use, or land that was developed for a particular use but which has been abandoned for that use. This includes undeveloped portions of platted subdivisions and industrial parks, and parcels containing structures that have been vacant for some time and allowed to become deteriorated or dilapidated.

## **LANIER COUNTY (In General)**

Lanier County is a primarily rural county located in south central Georgia and is bordered by Berrien, Lowndes, Echols, Clinch, and Atkinson County. The City of Lakeland is the only active municipality and serves as the county seat and hub of urban activity. However, Lakeland is only a minor urban center when compared to the larger communities of Valdosta, Nashville, and Homerville located in adjacent counties. Most major highways in Lanier County intersect Lakeland and serve as connectors to the afore mentioned urban centers. These major highways include US 84, US 129, US 221, and State Routes 37, 122, 135, and 168. I-75 is located approximately 20 miles west of Lakeland and can be accessed via SR 122.

Lanier County was created by Legislative Act on August 7, 1920. Lanier was comprised from sections of Berrien, Clinch, and Lowndes County, and was 155th in order of counties organized in Georgia. The county was named in honor of Sidney Lanier, poet, musician, lawyer, and soldier. Development in Lanier County began with the Atlantic Coastline Railroad which fostered the growth of Stockton. Lakeland has historically been the center for the agricultural activity of Lanier County, and its rapid growth during the 1930's decade can be attributed to the establishment of a lumber mill, the advent of the automobile, and the extensive road systems providing access to larger economic communities. Presently, only Lakeland remains as a functioning city and urban center in Lanier County. The decrease in the number of farms, the destruction of the lumber mill, the removal of railroads, and the increasing growth of urban centers outside Lanier County, such as Valdosta and Nashville have since caused a decline in the population and growth rate of Lanier County.

Table 6-1 is a tabulation of land use acreage for the entire county. These figures represent totals for both the unincorporated portions of Lanier County and the City of Lakeland combined. Greater Lanier County contains over 25,000 acres of developed non-agricultural land, which includes more than 16,000 acres of parks, recreation, and conservation. This accounts for just over 20% of the county's total land area (127,700 acres) but only 8% when excluding parks, recreation, and conservation. Excluding parks, recreation, conservation, and street right-of-way, most of the urban development is spread evenly across the county with the highest single concentration of urban development (City of Lakeland) containing only 4.1% of the total. This very low percentage of urban development coupled with the fact that the majority of it (95.9%) is spread across the county, is indicative of the county's primarily rural character.

**TABLE 6-1  
GREATER LANIER EXISTING LAND USE ACREAGE**

Land Use Category	# Acres	% Developed, Non-Ag./Forest Land	% Total Land
Residential	4,764.34	18.0	3.7
Commercial	87.15	.3	.1
Industrial	92.43	.3	.1
Public / Institutional	2,387.14	9.0	1.9
Parks / Recreation / Conservation	16,334.0	61.7	12.8
Transportation / Communication / Utilities	2,801.43	10.6	2.2
<b>Total Developed, Non-Ag./Forest Land</b>	<b>26,466.49</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20.7</b>
Agriculture (cropland, orchard, pasture)	26,904.46		21.1
Forest (commercial, natural)	73,810.51		57.8
Undeveloped / Unused	518.54		.4
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>127,700.0</b>		<b>100.0</b>

Source: 2004 South Georgia RDC Land Use database for Lanier County

### **LANIER COUNTY (Unincorporated)**

Map 6-1 graphically depicts the existing land use patterns exhibited in the unincorporated portion of Lanier County. Table 6-2 enumerates the various acreage in each category for the unincorporated area of Lanier.

As can be seen by Map 6-1, there are vast amounts of agricultural farmland spread among forested areas in all portions of the county. There are also many small clusters of urban development as well as a scattering of individual urban uses throughout the county. These clusters and individual uses may range from less than one acre to nearly 300 acres in size.

Unincorporated Lanier County consists of approximately 125,689 acres which is about 98.4% of the county. In the unincorporated portion, approximately 100,000 acres (79%) are devoted to agriculture or forestry uses. In addition, Banks Lake and the Grand Bay Wild Life Refuge area incorporate over 16,000 acres.

Lanier County's native tree stands are mostly limited to floodplains and those areas along the perimeter of floodplains. There are also large areas of commercial forestry throughout the county. The largest concentrations of these are located in the southeastern section of the county.

**TABLE 6-2  
LANIER COUNTY (unincorporated) EXISTING LAND USE ACREAGE**

<b>Land Use Category</b>	<b># Acres</b>	<b>% Developed, Non-Ag./Forest Land</b>	<b>% Total Land</b>
Residential	4,318.71	17.1	3.4
Commercial	60.65	.2	< .1
Industrial	73.15	.3	.1
Public / Institutional	2,278.54	9.0	1.8
Parks / Recreation / Conservation	16,108.49	63.8	12.8
Transportation / Communication / Utilities	2,422.43	9.6	1.9
<b>Total Developed, Non-Ag./Forest Land</b>	<b>25,261.97</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20.1</b>
Agriculture (cropland, orchard, pasture)	26,278.09		20.9
Forest (commercial, natural)	73,656.33		58.7
Undeveloped / Unused	381.81		.3
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>125,578.20</b>		<b>100.0</b>

Source: 2004 South Georgia RDC Land Use database for Lanier County

Developed non-agricultural lands in unincorporated Lanier County consist of more than 25,200 acres which is 20.1% of the total unincorporated area. This represents approximately 98% of the total 26,446.49 acres of developed non-agricultural lands in the entire county. It should be noted that a large portion of this (16,108.49 acres, 63.8%) represents parks, recreation, and conservation. Excluding this category alone, the unincorporated area contains 9,153.48 acres of developed non-agricultural land which represents about 88% of a total 10,358.5 acres for the entire county.

Of the developed lands, residential uses comprise 4,318.71 acres (17.1%). Residential uses are predominantly in the form of single-family and manufactured home units. There is very little multi-family or established manufactured home parks in the unincorporated areas. In fact, 63% of the manufactured homes in Lanier County reside in the unincorporated area. Conventional farmhouses and single mobile homes located on individual parcels of farmland, were inventoried as agricultural land use since the primary use of the land is considered to be agricultural, not residential. Most residential land uses are clustered in the old rural communities, or in several newly developing residential subdivisions. The rest are scattered along the county's main roads, particularly those roads leading outward from Lakeland. Stockton remains the unincorporated area's largest concentration of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses. Several newly developing communities can be found throughout the county, these include: Pine Acres - approximately 55% developed; Ard Road- 50% developed; Oakridge- 40% developed; and Partridge Drive- 20% developed. All of these communities have both single-family and manufactured home units represented and range from 45 to 90 acres in size.

Commercial land uses in the unincorporated area total 60.65 acres, which is only 0.2% of the developed non-agricultural land. Approximately 23.5% of this acreage is located in Stockton along US 84. Outside of Lakeland, commercial uses are typically limited to an occasional convenience/general store. Stockton maintains approximately 12.8 acres of commercial land use such as convenience/general stores, a beauty salon, and a few assorted gift and craft stores. The remaining commercial acreage is scattered as small parcels throughout the county.

Industrial uses in the unincorporated area total 73.15 acres which is .3% of the developed non-agricultural land. The largest single industrial use is the salvage yard (29 acres) located just outside the city limits on US 221. The county's remaining major industrial uses that are not agriculturally related are: Kaiser Chemicals, located off of SR 4, and Lanier Municipal Supply, located on SR 64. In addition, a honey processing plant and body shop are both located in Stockton.

Public/Institutional uses total 2,278.54 acres which accounts for 9.0% of the developed non-agricultural land. Of this total, 2,019 acres is used by Moody Air Force Base. The remaining 259.54 acres (.1% of non-agricultural land) consists mostly of churches and cemeteries in the rural communities and scattered throughout rural parts of the county. Many of these are very old and have long been a focal point for activities in the rural area. Other uses include the Alapaha Soil Conservation district, the Westside Community Club, the class 2 Post Office and volunteer Fire Department in Stockton, and the Georgia Forestry Commission watchtower. There are no active medical or educational facilities in the unincorporated areas. Several decades ago Stockton maintained its own schooling, however this facility presently remains abandoned.

Parks/Recreation/Conservation uses total 16,108.5 acres which is 63.8% of the developed non-agricultural land. About 98% of this (16,000 acres) is comprised of Banks Lake (12,000 acres), and the Grand Bay Hunting Area (4,000 acres). Other large parks include Camp Patten (180 acres), Flatlanders Park (45.15 acres), and William's Country Club (5.2 acres). These large parks total 230.35 acres which is about 1.4% of the total acreage. The remaining acreage is devoted to smaller recreational areas serving various rural communities throughout the unincorporated area.

The second largest developed land use category is Transportation/Communication/Utilities which totals about 2,422.43 acres and represents 9.6% of the developed non-agricultural lands and 1.9% of all land in the unincorporated area. Railroad and street right-of-way make up the vast majority of this land with the single largest concentration (152 acres) located in Stockton. Community water tanks, electrical substations, and radio transmission towers account for approximately 4 acres in the unincorporated area.

The Undeveloped/Unused category totals 381.81 acres which is only .3% of the total unincorporated area. However, this accounts for 73.6% of the total 518.54 acres of undeveloped/unused land countywide, including Lakeland. Most of this acreage (91.3%) consists of vacant residential lots located in the newly developing subdivisions and within the larger rural community of Stockton. Individual vacant lots are otherwise relatively few and far between. Abandoned uses total 145 acres which is 21.8% of the land use category. Over 97% of this acreage is in the form of abandoned single-family and manufactured home units throughout the entire unincorporated area. Another 4 acres consists of abandoned commercial and public institutional buildings located in Stockton.

## CITY OF LAKELAND

Lakeland is Lanier County's only incorporated city and is located near the center of the county at the intersection of several roads. It is approximately 24 miles northeast of Valdosta and 17 miles from Interstate 75. The City of Lakeland has developed around the intersections of six state and federal highways. This development has caused a confusing traffic pattern which has had a detrimental impact on its central commercial district. In addition, Lakeland's residents rely upon the commercial districts of Valdosta to satisfy the majority of their consumer needs.

In 1967, an existing land use survey was conducted for the City of Lakeland. Since that time Lakeland's percentage of undeveloped land has dropped from 9.1% in 1994 to 6.8% in 2004. Over the past several years Lakeland has developed in every land use category, which is reflected in the dramatic difference between past and present undeveloped land use percentages.

Although annexation has been a consideration in the recent past, Lakeland presently maintains its original 1 mile radial jurisdiction. Map 6-2 graphically depicts the currently existing land use patterns found in the City of Lakeland. Table 6-3 reveals the current tabulation of acreage for the various land use categories.

**TABLE 6-3  
LAKELAND EXISTING LAND USE ACREAGE**

Land Use Category	# Acres	% Developed, Non-Ag./Forest Land	% Total Land
Residential	445.63	37.0	21.0
Commercial	26.5	2.2	1.2
Industrial	19.28	1.6	.9
Public / Institutional	108.6	9.0	5.1
Parks / Recreation / Conservation	225.51	18.7	10.6
Transportation / Communication / Utilities	379.0	31.5	17.9
<b>Total Developed, Non-Ag./Forest Land</b>	<b>1,204.52</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>56.8</b>
Agriculture (cropland, orchard, pasture)	626.37		29.5
Forest (commercial, natural)	154.18		7.3
Undeveloped / Unused	136.73		6.4
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>2,121.8</b>		<b>100.0</b>

Source: 2004 South Georgia RDC Land Use database for Lanier County

Developed non-agricultural land in Lakeland consists of more than 1,200 acres, which is 56.8% of the city's total land area. This makes Lakeland the largest single mass of urban development anywhere in the county. However, Lakeland contains only 4.6% of the county's total urban development when including rights-of-way and parks,

recreation, and conservation; and only 8.1% when excluding these two categories. In addition, Lakeland contains less acreage in each land use category than that of the combined totals of each category in the unincorporated area.

Agricultural land use in Lakeland comprises 626.37 acres which is 29.5% of the total land in Lakeland. It is predominantly in the form of row crops, and is located in the Northwestern section of the city.

Forestry land use consists of about 154.18 acres which is 7.3% of the city's total land area. This is natural forest and is located in the northeastern section of Lakeland.

Residential land uses in Lakeland total 445.63 acres, or 37% of the developed land. Most of this acreage is in the form of single-family development, which accounts for 63% of the total housing units in the city. Manufactured homes total 260 occupied units and make up approximately 26% of the housing in Lakeland. The remaining 11% of the housing in Lakeland is multi-family. Residential land uses are found in all parts of the city with development spanning from east to west along Main Street, and in the southeastern quadrant. The southeastern quadrant, located east of US 221 and south of US 129, contains the majority of the older and more blighted areas of housing in the city. This section is characterized by inexpensive low quality homes, very small lots, scattered development patterns, and a considerable mixing of residential, commercial, and warehouse type uses. Abandoned residential areas consisting of both single-family and manufactured home units account for 20.9 acres in Lakeland. The most recent community development in the city occurred in the northern quadrant where 82 apartments were constructed. This area is presently 55% undeveloped and is subdivided to accommodate single-family dwellings.

Commercial land uses total 26.5 acres, which is only about 2.2% of the city's total developed land. The central business district, located in the center of Lakeland, covers approximately 8 square blocks along Main Street. This area is characterized by a mixture of commercial, residential, and industrial land uses. There are no large scale commercial uses in Lakeland and existing uses include: one grocery store, farm supply store, automobile dealership, a bank, several gas stations, a few restaurants, one funeral home, a motel, and assorted retail in the central business district. In addition, abandoned commercial locations consist of 2.1 acres and are primarily located in the central business district.

Industrial land uses total 19.28 acres, which is about 1.6% of the total developed land. Although the Lakeland/Lanier County Industrial Authority maintains two industrial districts, Lakeland's industrial development is scattered throughout the city. Lakeland's major industrial uses include: 3 cabinet companies, an apparel industry, propane gas, and an array of warehousing facilities.

Public/Institutional uses total 108.6 acres, which is 9% of the total developed land. Approximately 80% of this land is utilized by the Lanier County High School, Lanier Elementary and Middle School, and the Louis Smith Memorial Hospital. Other institutional uses include: churches, cemeteries, the Courthouse, City Hall, Post Office, Health Department, Fire Department, Department of Family and Children Services, Board of Education, and Correctional Facility.

Parks/Recreation/Conservation uses total 225.51 acres, which is 18.7% of the developed non-agricultural land. These areas include portions of Banks Lake, Lake Irma, and the roadside park located off of Mill Street.

Transportation/Communication/Utilities totals 379 acres and represents 31.5% of the developed non-agricultural land and 17.9% of the city's total land. Approximately 82% (311 acres) of this total represents street right-of-way. Local paved roads make up 63% of this, federal/state roads 29.7%, and local unpaved roads comprise the remaining 7.3%. Other land uses within this category include the city's oxidation pond located on the northeastern edge, city water tanks, sewer lift station, and electrical substation.

The Undeveloped/Unused category totals 136.73 acres which is 6.4% of the city's total land area. This is a relatively low percentage, although the city does contain over 22 acres of abandoned property. Undeveloped land is located throughout the city, with the overwhelming majority found in the southeastern quadrant east of US 221 and south of

US 129. The second largest concentration of undeveloped land can be found in the newly developing community above Lake Irma in the northern section of Lakeland.

## DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

The City of Lakeland, through the Lakeland/Lanier County Planning Advisory Commission, has an adopted zoning ordinance, building codes, land subdivision regulations, soil/sedimentation ordinance, and participates in FEMA's flood hazard management program. Also, the city has professional staff to administer and enforce these codes and regulations. Also, Lanier County has adopted enforcement of the state construction codes, land subdivision ordinance, and land development ordinance. The Lakeland/Lanier County Planning Advisory Commission has been empowered to implement the future land use plan ensuring quality development throughout Greater Lanier.

## LAND USE DEMANDS

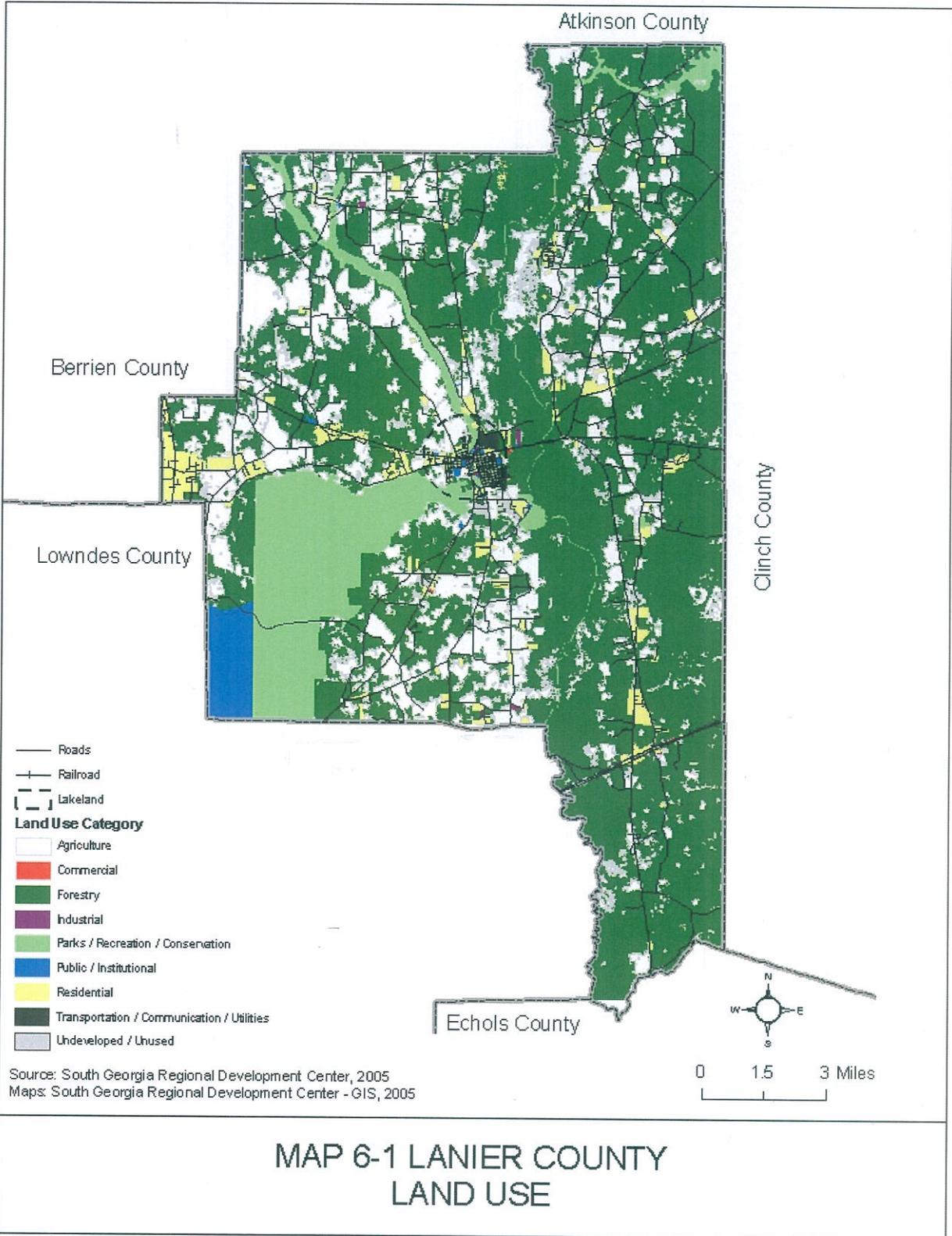
Population and housing unit projections from Chapter One for Greater Lanier indicate an aggregate growth in population and housing units for the period 2000-2025. (see Tables 1-8 and 1-9) These projections translate into land use acreage demands for residential growth, which are summarized as follows:

	H.U. Need 2000-2025	Average Lot Size	Res. Land Need 2000-2025
Unic. Lanier Co.	305	1 Ac/5 acres	305/1,525 acres
Lakeland	204	9,000 sq.ft.	42 acres

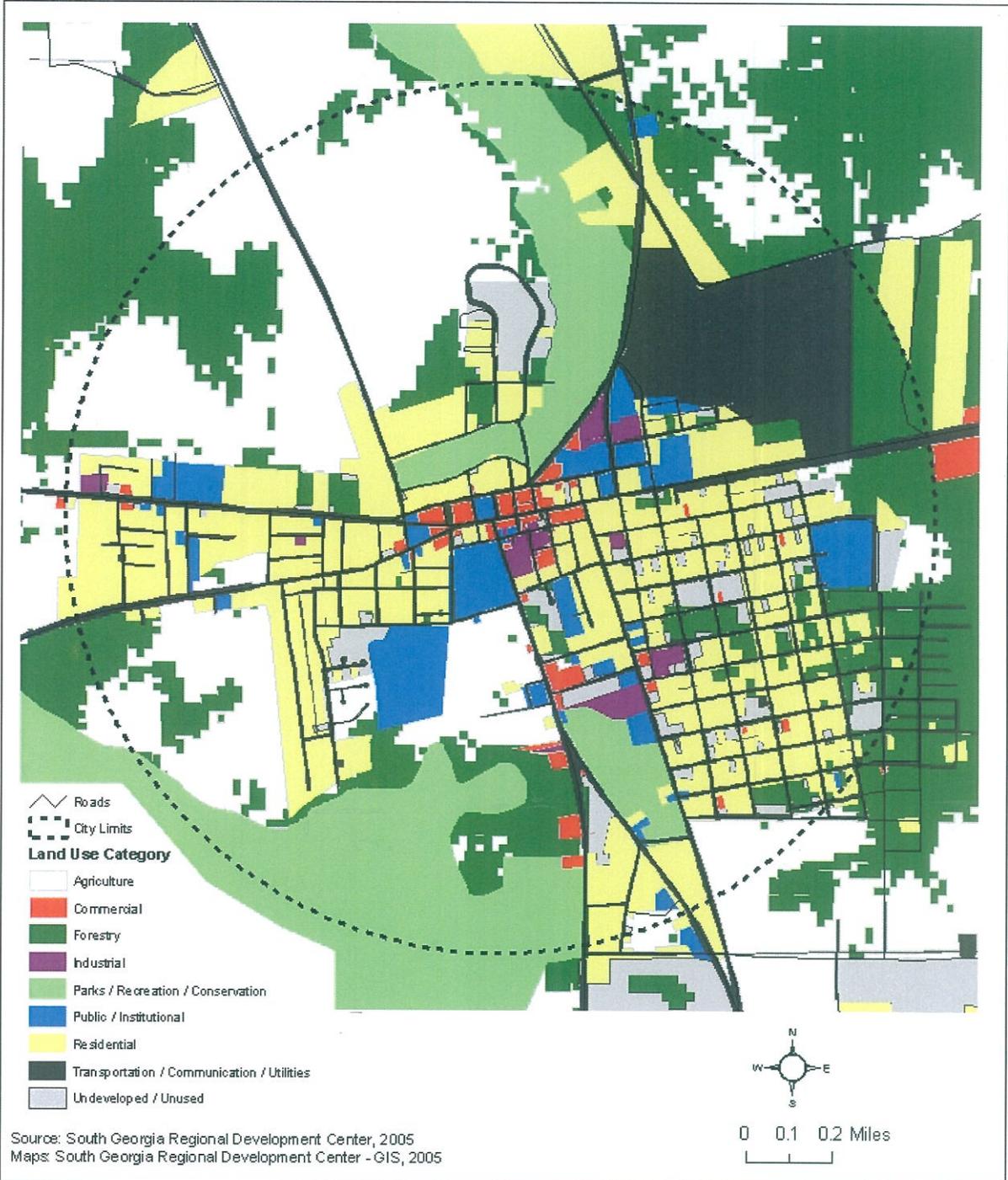
The per capita use rate method for estimating future land use acreages was utilized for all other land use categories. The net acreage needs and reductions are as follows:

	Lanier Co. Unic.	Lakeland
Commercial	4	5
Industrial	7	10
Public/Insti.	25	10
Park/Rec/Cons.	1,147	20
Agriculture	2,910	5
Forested	4,175	32
Vac/Unused	17	16

The residential and other eight land use categories net estimates of future land needs do not take into account county and city density policies, land use goals, policies, nor future land use plans and the individual choices made by each unit of local government. The Greater Lanier Planning Advisory Committee endorses these land use estimates as a point of beginning and realize that future city and county actions within the land use arena must be monitored to achieve the desired results.



**MAP 6-1 LANIER COUNTY  
 LAND USE**



MAP 6-2 CITY OF LAKELAND  
LAND USE