

# ADVANCING AN EXCEPTIONAL RURAL COMMUNITY



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



July, 2016

# **Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community**

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

A Joint Comprehensive Plan for Bleckley County and the City of Cochran, Georgia, in accordance with the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 and the Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs with an effective date of March 1, 2014



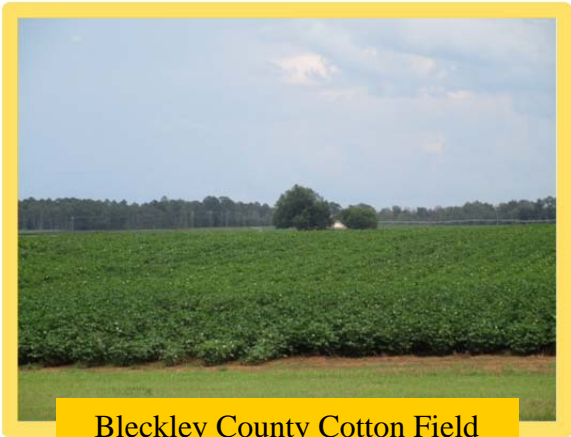
Prepared By:

The Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan Coordination Committee  
City of Cochran and Bleckley County Governments

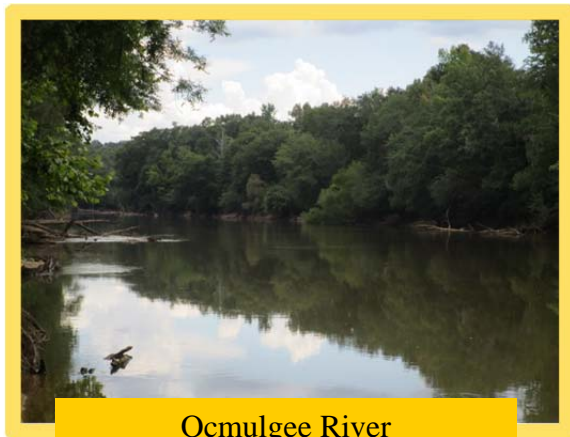
Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission

July, 2016





Bleckley County Cotton Field



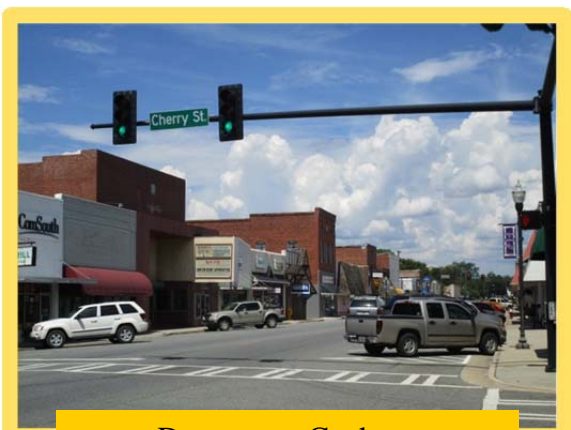
Ocmulgee River



Cochran First United Methodist Church



Cochran-Bleckley Cotton and Peanut Museum



Downtown Cochran



Bleckley Memorial Hospital

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## INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community -- The Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan** is a comprehensive plan prepared under the current Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures of the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 adopted by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) first with an effective date of January 1, 2013, and after minor changes, an effective date of March 1, 2014. It is a joint plan for Bleckley County and the City of Cochran.

Bleckley County is a small, progressive rural county of about 13,000 persons located in Middle Georgia. It is located less than an hour south of Macon along U.S. Highway 23 and Georgia Highways 26 and 112 with access to I-16 in the northeast corner of the county. The community is an exceptional small town with the City of Cochran as its only incorporated municipality. There is a long community history and association with education, leadership, and culture not usually expected in a rural, smalltown. Today, the community is home to a campus of Middle Georgia State University, the only university campus within the Region. Bleckley's fields and forests have provided much past economic influence, and continue to do so today. Agriculture contributes over \$30 million in direct farm gate impacts to the local economy annually, and has been another avenue of local leadership and exceptionalism. The community has experienced some economic setbacks in recent years, but its location, outstanding quality of life, and economic influence from the nearby Robins Air Force Base, have allowed for continuing growth. Its fields, forests, and verdant natural resources including the Ocmulgee River, and the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area and Public Fishing area provide an appealing scenic backdrop and outlets for outdoor fun and adventure which only add to the exceptional quality of life enjoyed by the community.

Although Bleckley County is one of Georgia's youngest counties, having been created through impetus of local leadership in 1912, the area has a long history dating to early 1800s frontier days. Early settlers in the county of the Longstreet Community on the old Milledgeville-

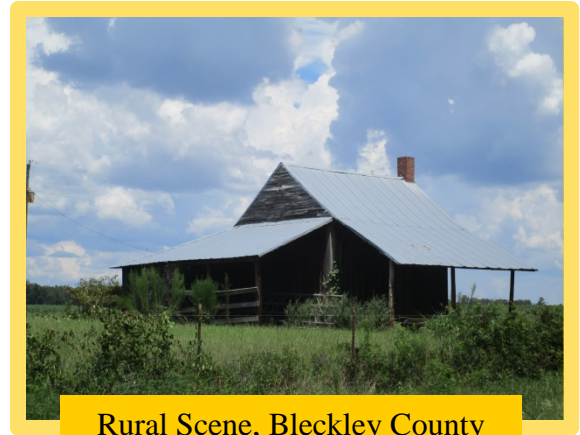
Hartford postal route helped bring the Macon and Brunswick Railroad to the community (still functioning today as a Class I railroad operated by the Norfolk Southern System), and establish Cochran as a municipality in 1869. These same leaders helped establish an early local school, and Ebenezer College, an early Regional postsecondary college. It was this college campus which later transitioned into a district-wide agricultural and mechanical school (over the competition of much larger cities), and then into Middle Georgia College. Middle Georgia College, until its late 2010s transition into a four-year college and now university campus, was for many years recognized as the oldest two-year college in the U.S. Cochran leaders constructed an early opera house, and the community was also the center of early agricultural leadership in purebred hog breeding and black angus cattle raising.

Bleckley County continues to build today on its extraordinary history of leadership, education and culture unique to a rural smalltown. The community boasts of not only the campus of Middle Georgia State University but an awarded, high quality local school system; an outstanding adult learning center; a modern library; a well-managed local hospital; a general aviation airport; many active and involved civic clubs; an arts alliance; two local golf courses with 45 total holes; and many other amenities. There is a local museum, two local potters, an annual biking event, a fall fest, and an annual Christmas parade. All of these community activities and family-friendly events take place in a tapestry of true Southern Charm of well-manicured and lovingly preserved homes and churches, an involved and caring populace, and a surrounding and comforting environment of unmatched natural beauty and outdoor splendor. Cochran-Bleckley County is without doubt an exceptional rural smalltown community and a haven of education, culture, and leadership unexpected in such a small rural place. The community does enjoy an extraordinarily high quality of life as a result, and this, combined with its other advantages of location, transportation resources, and natural and cultural appeal, provides much to offer the entrepreneur, resident, or visitor alike. This community comprehensive plan provides the guide and framework by which the local governments, citizens, and others plan to continue “advancing an exceptional rural smalltown community.”

While there is much to celebrate and be optimistic about future growth and development within the community, there are issues requiring attention. With the closing of Acuity Brands



Middle Georgia State University  
Cochran Campus



Rural Scene, Bleckley County



Ocmulgee River



Old Cotton Warehouse and Jail,  
Downtown Cochran



Cochran Police Department,  
Historic School



Historic Residence, Cochran



Cochran lighting plant, which once employed over 1,000 persons, in 2012, the community was left with no major industry. Over seventeen (17) percent of Bleckley Countians are 65 or older, compared to about 13 percent in Georgia. Almost a fourth (23.2 percent) of the population lives in poverty, compared to 18 percent in Georgia. Incomes overall are low. Per capita money income in the county, as measured by the Census Bureau from 2010-2014, (\$19,191) is about 76 percent that of Georgia (\$25,427). The county median household income for the same period (\$35,507) is only 72 percent that of Georgia (\$49,342). Unemployment in the county was 9.1 percent, as an annual average in 2015, relatively high when even compared to the surrounding area, and much higher than Georgia's 5.9 percent. Such statistics have resulted in Georgia ranking Bleckley County as a 2016 Job Tax Tier 1 county. While this ranking is for Georgia's bottom 40 percent or so of counties needing an economic boost, it has the advantage of offering Georgia's largest tax breaks for job creation within Bleckley County, and thus a big incentive for business job creator entities and further economic improvement. The issues also somewhat hide the fact that Bleckley County may have more to offer than many of its surrounding counties.

The future Bleckley County will continue to take advantage of its assets and opportunities, and address its issues. It will continue to be at the forefront of rural family-centric living and a high quality of life with progressive leadership, and a recognized haven of rural education, culture, and life. The community will be a desired address for both business and residential growth, and an outstanding place to live, raise kids, work, recreate, or visit. Growth will be well managed and guided to locate near the existing infrastructure and services of Cochran, and will be respectful and protective of existing character, and the community's fields, forests, open spaces, and its unique and special natural and cultural resources. The community will truly be recognized as a special place and unexpected bastion of rural development and life known for its enviable and coveted quality of life, its involved and caring citizenry, its progressive leadership, its educational, cultural, and outdoor adventure opportunities. Many will enjoy the welcoming Southern hospitality and charm, and living, working, playing, or doing business in Bleckley County.

The current DCA planning standards reduced and simplified requirements seeking to engender local plans more attentive to individual needs and generating more local pride,

ownership, and use. This Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan was developed with this as an overarching objective. It was intended to be a locally driven plan principally addressing local needs and cultivating widespread community interest, support, and buy-in, while meeting state standards. Even the title of this plan was chosen carefully to stimulate and encourage interest, reading, and implementation. “Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community” widely captures reference to Bleckley County’s rich history and heritage of education, culture, and leadership; numerous natural and cultural resources, its advantageous location, and transportation resources, its overall high quality of life, and to its future aspirations. This certainly should generate more curiosity and interest, and hopefully, more ownership and utilization, than the more bland “The Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan.” The Bleckley County community wants to protect its heritage, rural character, and smalltown charm; enhance its economy; conserve its fields and forests and natural splendor; improve its infrastructure; support the university and other educational venues; attract new residents and retirees; locate businesses and compatible jobs; celebrate its heritage; and grow tourism, among its guiding aims and principles outlined herein. The community truly wants to be a recognized as an exceptional rural smalltown widely known for its many attributes, its educational, cultural, and business opportunities; and its celebrated balance and overall quality-of-life.

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

Data. The emergence of the world wide web with its vast data repositories accessible through free search engines allows anyone easy access to significant amounts and a wide variety of data, and profiles of any jurisdiction, including Bleckley County and Cochran. For this reason, this comprehensive plan includes only limited data to depict or illustrate points. The current DCA planning standards actually encourage such non-inclusion of data. Almost any data depicted at a moment in time quickly becomes dated, and maybe irrelevant. The world wide web offers the opportunity of more relevant and up-to-date data at the time of access.

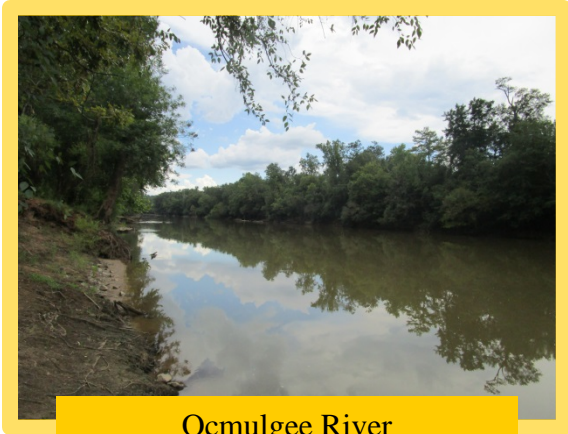
There are a variety of reliable public and private sources of data. Of course, the traditional source of official community data is the U.S. Census Bureau. Data on Cochran or Bleckley County, or any other jurisdiction is quickly accessed at [census.gov/quickfacts](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts) which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

Population Projections. As noted earlier, the official 2010 Census population of Bleckley County was 13,063, up by about 12 percent from 2000's 11,666. This growth was slightly less

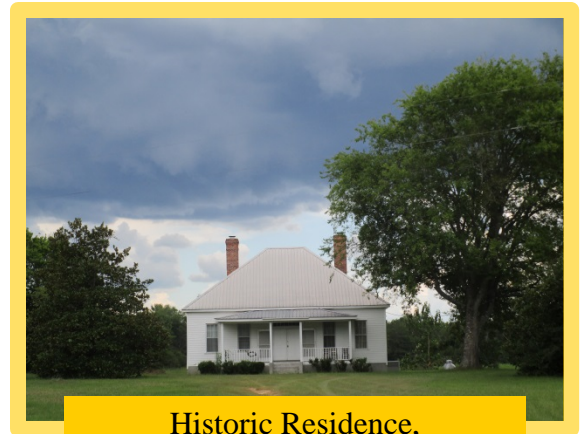


than two-thirds that of Georgia's 18.3%, but significantly above that of the national U.S. rate of 9.7%. This growth shows that despite economic difficulties, Bleckley's location and attributes are allowing for sustained, if somewhat slow, growth. Bleckley County's location, transportation access, Middle Georgia State University, the nearby influence of Robins Air Force Base, outstanding natural and historic resources, its family-friendly attitude and venues, its heritage of progressive and adaptive leadership, its cultural opportunities and overall high quality of life portend well for the future. The U.S. Census Bureau estimate for 2015 Bleckley County population is 12,243, down by more than six (6) percent from 2010. This suggests, as does the current unemployment rate, significant damage from the closing of Acuity and the great recession of the late 2000s than many rural places, and current economic difficulties and concerns. The high mark of population in Bleckley County was that recorded in 2010, and there has only been a short period of declines from 1920 to 1930 and 1980 to 1990 in county history, with general stability from 1930-1960. Bleckley County's location, its rich history, community spirit, abundant and outstanding natural resources, many working fields and forests, Middle Georgia State University, its overall high quality of life, and easy access to larger metro areas and Georgia's ports are positive factors and influences for continued future growth and development, and a rebound in population. The 2015 Census population number is only an estimate.

While past and present population levels are readily available on the world wide web, population projections are not so easily accessed. The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) is responsible for generating official state population projections for Georgia counties. Current OPB projections for Bleckley County from 2015 are 13,073 persons in 2030 and 13,462 persons in 2040. The Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission (HOGARC) also prepares population projections which have proven to be relatively accurate in the past. HOGARC's population projections for Bleckley County, as noted in the 2013 Regional Assessment of its Regional Plan, show significantly higher projection population levels than the current OPB or Regional Commission projections. More recent Regional Commission projections, which take into account lower 2015 Census estimates, are relatively close to the current OPB projections until 2025. These latest Regional Commission projections include



Ocmulgee River



Historic Residence,  
Longstreet Community



Jones Bridge, Bleckley County



Norfolk Southern Railroad, Cochran



Campground Home of Hillside  
Bluegrass Festival



Cochran Community House

14,406 in 2030 and 15,538 in 2040. All of these projections indicate continued relative slow, but steady, expected population growth.

### **Population Projections, Bleckley County**

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>	<b>2035</b>	<b>2040</b>
<b>OPB, 2015</b>	13,063	12,817	12,894	12,946	13,073	13,261	13,462
<b>HOGARC Regional Plan</b>	13,063	13,817	14,616	15,463	16,358	17,305	18,306
<b>Regional Commission</b>	13,063	12,243	13,356	13,871	14,406	14,961	15,538

Sources: State Office of Planning and Budget, 2015, Meaghan Ryan email, 2016; Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission Regional Plan, Regional Assessment, 2013; Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission staff projection, 2016.

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

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



Regional Water Plan and Environmental Planning Criteria Consideration. Bleckley County is part of the Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council. The adopted regional water plan, *Altamaha Regional Water Plan* (2011), was considered by the Bleckley County Local Plan Coordination Committee and the local governments in preparation of this plan. This local comprehensive plan's objectives to maintain viable agriculture/forestry uses, protect/conservate natural resources, to enhance intergovernmental coordination and government/efficiencies, and upgrade local infrastructure all help implement, and maintain consistency with, the regional water plan. The vision of the regional water plan, "to wisely manage, develop and protect the region's water resources...to enhance quality of life..., protect natural systems..., and support the basin's economy," is inherent in this comprehensive plan's community vision and goals. In the Regional Water Planning Council's 2014 implementation report, Cochran's CDBG for water improvements was specifically cited as a supportive implementation activity. Other water/sewer improvements would also be supportive implementation.

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

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

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

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

Community Involvement. As noted earlier, the Bleckley County local governments clearly wanted to take advantage of the new DCA planning standards to develop a broad-based community plan which would involve and excite all concerned, both public and private, with the future growth and development of Cochran and Bleckley County. To accomplish this, they created a steering committee, the Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan Coordination Committee, of all local stakeholders who could be envisioned to help guide this plan's development, and make the community a better place to live, work, recreate, and learn. This committee did include elected and appointed members from the governing authorities, local economic development practitioners, and local government staff, as well as many others concerned with community and economic development and other issues within the entire community. This Coordination Committee had notable participation; was actively involved in the development of all facets of this comprehensive plan; and had numerous opportunities to both help develop, review, and revise all components. The first orders of business at any Coordination Committee meeting were review of any revisions to previous elements based on committee input, and chances to return to and modify earlier elements, if desired. The initial meeting of the Local Plan Coordination Committee included a formal identification of strengths and weaknesses of the community, including opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis). This identification was utilized in developing all plan elements. The general public was offered the chance to participate at the two required public hearings (and with the Coordination Committee, if desired, after the initial public hearing). These hearings were advertised through unique wording to specifically generate interest and participation. The initial public hearing was held near the beginning of the plan development process to explain the process, offer opportunity for further participation, and solicit input on an improved community vision and local issues/opportunities. It also received record participation. Drafts of the committee approved community vision, and issues and opportunities, were placed on community websites for feedback and input. The final public hearing was held after a plan draft was developed and reviewed by the Coordination Committee to allow citizen review, solicit any final input, and inform of pending submittal. A more detailed summary of community involvement is included in an appendix.

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



# COMMUNITY GOALS

The Community Goals Element is described in the State Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive planning as the most important part of the comprehensive plan. It is a concise summary of future community desires and wishes, and is an easily referenced roadmap for community leaders and all concerned with growth and development of the community and its future. The Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan includes three of the four possible components detailed in the Minimum Standards for the required element. These include: a general Community Vision, separate municipal descriptions/visions, listing of Community Goals, and a description of Long Term Community Policies. These components seek to paint a picture of the desired future community, and answer the planning question, “Where does the community wish to go?” To some degree, the Long Term Community Policies also outline guidance strategy of, “How are we going to get where we desire to go, and also, what do we desire for other development parties to pursue?”



## COMMUNITY VISION

Bleckley County is a growing, progressive county with much promise and opportunity located in Middle Georgia less than an hour south of Macon along U.S. Highway 23 and with access to I-16 at its northeast corner. The community is an exceptional small town place of education, charm, culture, industry, arts, and learning. Bleckley County is one of Georgia's youngest counties, created in 1912 from portions of Pulaski and Laurens counties, and was the 147<sup>th</sup> established, and yet has an old heritage and impressive history of leadership, education, and culture. Bleckley County was named for Confederate veteran and chief justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, Logan E. Bleckley, while Cochran's namesake was Judge Arthur E. Cochran, a noted jurist and former president of the Old Macon and Brunswick Railroad. The city had previously been called Dykesboro to honor the wealthy landowner, who originally owned the land upon which the community developed beginning in the early 1830s. As in most of the counties throughout the region, the area grew and prospered largely due to its vast yellow pine forests and related turpentine production and expansion of the railroads. Even today, agriculture and forestry remain mainstays of the local economy with over two-thirds of the total land area in those rural land uses. Agriculture contributes over \$34 million in direct farm gate impacts to the local economy. An annual festival, the October Country Fest, is celebrated by the community in recognition of local agriculture and the quality of life given the rural status. The community's many locational advantages are augmented by the facts that the Macon and Brunswick railway still remains and provides Class I rail service through the Norfolk Southern system, and that the community owns and manages a general aviation airport.

Despite the relative youth of the county itself, the community and area can trace its beginnings to early 1800s settlement after early Creek Indian cessations, and the establishment of the federal post road between Milledgeville and Hartford. The old Longstreet community, near the Twiggs-Bleckley county line, was established along this postal road, providing pivotal early leadership which later led to establishment of the college, which became Middle Georgia College, and the county itself. Mt. Horeb Church was established there, which later led to the

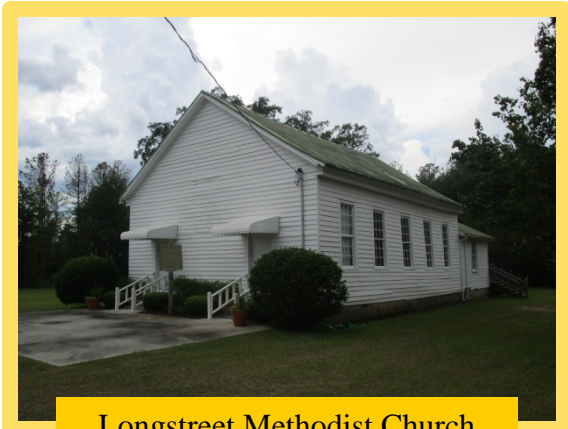
establishment of Evergreen Baptist Church. The Walker family of Longstreet played principal roles in establishing an early school, the Longstreet Academy; the routing of the Macon and Brunswick Railroad east, rather than west, of the Ocmulgee River through Coley Station and Cochran; Cochran itself; and the new Ebenezer College, which later transformed into Middle Georgia College, and now Middle Georgia State University. Cochran itself was incorporated in 1869 as Station #15 on the Macon and Brunswick Railroad, long before Bleckley County was created from Pulaski County.

Today Cochran-Bleckley County is a rural community of whispering pines and stately oaks, which promotes itself as full of Southern hospitality, charm, and grace. The exceptional small town is the home of a campus of Middle Georgia State University. Middle Georgia State College was created in 2012 with the merger of the hometown Middle Georgia College and Macon State College, and was promoted to university status in 2015. The community has been associated with a college from early in its beginnings. This association has been positive in fostering an excellent sense of community; a vitality and vibrancy in social and economic life; a motivated and civically involved populace; and enhanced educational and cultural opportunities. The rural nature of the town and the small college size has helped Cochran-Bleckley County avoid the negative effects of noise, traffic congestion, parking, or housing often found in college towns. As a result, the community has long been an exceptional bastion of leadership, education, culture, arts and learning almost unexpected in a rural area. This uniqueness continues to transform and help the community stand out today.

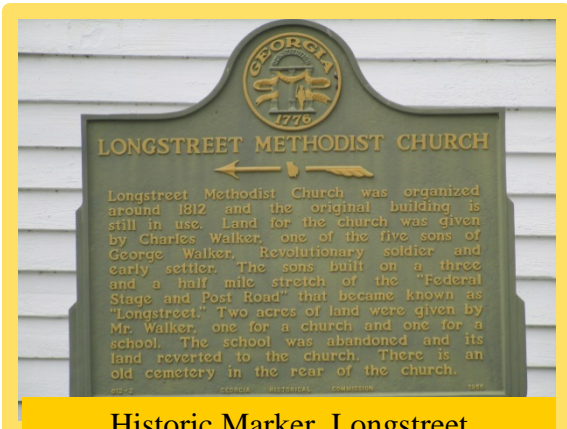
The community stands out today as an unexpected haven in a rural setting offering Southern charm, a genteel pace of living, and urban-like amenities and cultural opportunities, all in a comfortable, relaxing, and caring atmosphere. There are many churches of numerous faiths, an impressive array of civic clubs, and a truly close community of motivated, involved populace. There is a rich tradition of progressive attitudes, inspired leadership, family-friendly attitudes, and a caring community-wide support system. There is much to offer the entrepreneur, artist, resident, or visitor alike.

While located off the hectic path in a tranquil, pastoral setting, Cochran-Bleckley County is located less than hour away from both Macon and Warner Robins and its Robins Air Force Base. There is easy access to I-16 and I-75, which connect the town to Atlanta and its busy, international airport, and to Savannah and its bustling seaport. The community does have a local general aviation airport as well. The community has upgraded its water/sewer service, offers natural gas, has built new schools and recreational facilities, and has a local general aviation airport. Unusual for a community its size, there are two local golf courses offering a total of 45 holes (Uchee Trail-18 and The Woods-27), and local access to many other outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities from the mysterious, historic, and scenic Ocmulgee River to the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management and its associated Public Fishing Area. The community has several available industrial buildings, excellent educational offerings outside of Middle Georgia State University campus, a local library with a long history, and a vibrant local hospital.

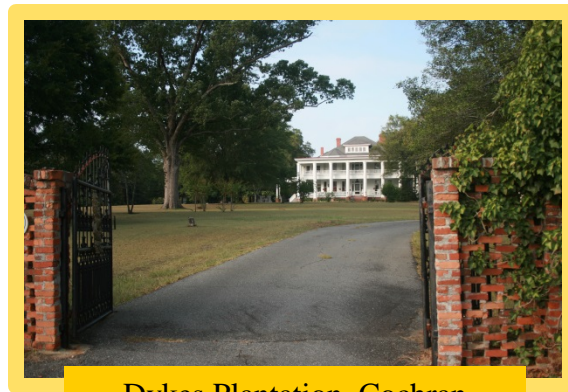
The Cochran-Bleckley County community has a long history of valuing education for its youth from an early age, not just at the college level. As noted earlier, the Longstreet Community leaders established the Longstreet Academy well before the War Between the States, and provided the leadership which led to the establishment of a college in Cochran. At the time of Cochran (Dykesboro's) establishment, Burrell Dykes donated an acre of land on Dykes Street in 1872 for public school purposes. The frame school erected was called Martha Ann Academy in honor of Dykes' daughter. It was later renamed the Cochran Elementary School. The original high school was completed in 1913. Today, the community has modern, state-of-the art local educational facilities which continue to attract local commitment and garner outside recognition for their excellence. Local schools consistently perform above average and have as their motto, "expect excellence." The community owns the Dr. Peyton Williams, Jr. Adult Learning Center which offers GED classes and other post-secondary offerings through the Oconee Fall Line Technical College. The quality of the local school system, Pre-K-12, has been cited as the reason many families relocate to Cochran-Bleckley County. Cochran-Bleckley County is truly an exceptional rural community with much to offer in many aspects which contributes to an extraordinary quality of life. This remarkable quality of life is enriched by the community's outstanding educational offerings for persons of all ages. The community is indeed a haven of education, culture, business, and leadership.



Longstreet Methodist Church



Historic Marker, Longstreet Methodist Church



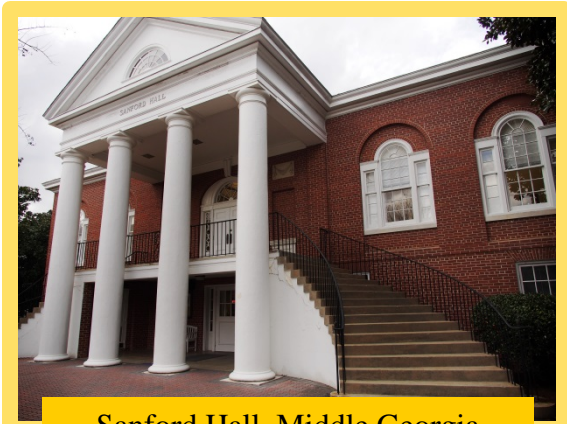
Dykes Plantation, Cochran



Ocmulgee River Cypress



Historic Ebenezer Hall, Middle Georgia State University



Sanford Hall, Middle Georgia State University



As mentioned earlier, the Longstreet community leaders, who provided the impetus for Bleckley County, were responsible for the New Ebenezer Baptist Association of Laurens, Telfair, Dodge, and Pulaski counties establishing New Ebenezer College in 1885-1887. The college was created to service the educational and cultural needs of the growing area, which exploded after the completion of the Macon and Brunswick Railroad in 1871. Although New Ebenezer closed in 1898, local leaders convinced the Georgia legislature to create the 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Agricultural and Mechanical School on the same campus during World War I. The A&M School opened in 1919, and in 1927 its name was changed by the legislature to Middle Georgia Agricultural and Mechanical College. This name was shortened in 1929 to Middle Georgia College. Middle Georgia College has its own legacy of leadership. Before the recent consolidation, it was recognized as the oldest junior college in the United States. It was also one of the original units of the University System of Georgia, and was the first junior college to receive Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation in the 1950s. It is not without reason that its stated mission as Middle Georgia College was “to provide an accessible, comprehensive learning, and cultural environment for its students and community.” Middle Georgia State University today is Georgia’s only public college or university with a campus primarily devoted to aviation, avionics, and aerospace (Eastman Campus), but traces its involvement to Middle Georgia College’s pilot-training programs in Cochran for the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army Air Force during World War II.

Exceptional community leadership and the pursuit of arts and culture are not limited to the university. The establishment of the county is also testament. Despite fierce opposition from Hawkinsville and Pulaski County, persistent local efforts to form Bleckley County eventually succeeded. Judge Arthur B. Cochran, for whom Cochran is named, was instrumental as a Georgia legislator in chartering the Macon and Brunswick Railroad after recognizing the area need for development. He was named the railroad’s first president in 1857. Soon thereafter, he became the first superior court judge of the Brunswick Judicial Circuit, but left the bench to again become a State Senator and convince the Georgia Legislature to pass state-backed bonds in 1858 to finance the railroad, and bring it to fruition. The county is unique in the fact that both its county seat and the county itself are named for jurists. Bleckley County was named for the well-respected Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice Logan E. Bleckley. Rather appropriately, Judge

Logan Bleckley was known for eccentrically crafting his passions of poetry, philosophy, and mathematics into his opinions and speeches.

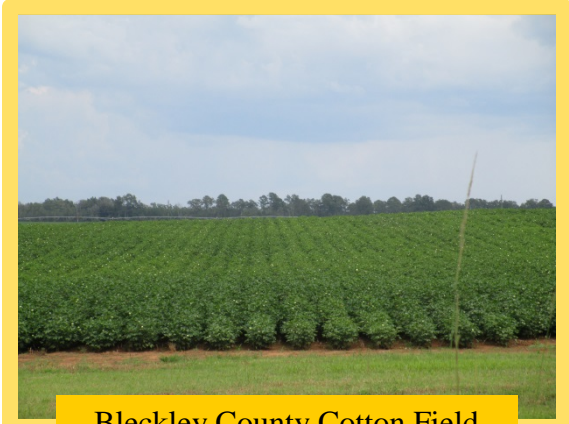
Community engagement and leadership have surfaced elsewhere. Thomas Lee Bailey purchased the two year old local newspaper, the *Cochran Journal*, in 1910 primarily with the intention of using it to promote the formation of a new county. After the boll weevil devastated the significant local cotton economy which had developed following the lumber and turpentine industries, local farmers were among the leaders in establishing purebred hog farming in Georgia and the U.S., particularly with Duroc and Hampshire breeds. The county produced an unheard of two early International Champion boars, first Cotter's Choice, a Hampshire, in 1917, and Orion Cherry King, Jr., a Duroc, in 1919. Orion may have been the highest priced boar ever raised in the United States as he was sold for \$16,500 in 1919 (over \$200,000 in today's dollars). The county received nationwide recognition for its purebred hog farming in the November, 1921 issue of "Farming, The Business Magazine." Col. Ernest B. Weatherly (1882-1946) left the practice of law to develop a 5,000 acre farm near the Bleckley-Twiggs border, and became the largest breeder of Black Angus cattle in the Southeast. He is a prominent member in the Georgia College of Agriculture Hall of Fame. This local innovation and leadership in agriculture continues today. A local farmer/entrepreneur, Ginger Butts, has established "Back to the Basics 101" which grows and mills organic whole wheat into exceptional whole grain products. One of Back to the Basics 101's products, banana bread, was a finalist in the University of Georgia's 2016 Flavor of Georgia contest.

Arts and culture have long been a local passion. The community established an Opera House in Cochran in the early 1900s which served both to promote culture and community engagement. Early meetings to promote Bleckley County's establishment were held there, as well as the first court sessions after county establishment prior to courthouse construction. The community was a Native-American oasis, watering and gathering place with at least three known Indian wells. Dykes Street in Cochran is said to be located on the Uchee Indian Trail between the Oconee and Ocmulgee rivers, and may be a progenitor of the county's mysteriously named "Chicken Road." The community has a Masonic Lodge, which continues today dating its beginnings from the 1870s, and which has been long involved with community improvement and

state leadership. Civic involvement was not limited to men and the Masons. Cochran women, after the formal establishment of Bleckley County in 1912, formed the Civic League, which became the Cochran Woman's Club in 1924. These ladies were instrumental in establishing an early circulating library operated out of City Hall. In 1937, the group was actively involved in securing Works Progress Administration (WPA) assistance for local library operations, including a "rolling library" on wheels. The current Tessie W. Norris/Cochran-Bleckley Library was constructed in 1986. The Tessie W. Norris Library today is a member of the Ocmulgee Regional Library System, and continues its heritage of cultural enrichment by offering many services and accessible technology for all, including one of the few 24 hour public Wi-Fi service locations in Cochran.

Lucy May Stanton, a world acclaimed and pioneering Georgia woman artist, taught art at New Ebenezer College from 1884-1885. In the 1940s and 1950s, three native sons achieved music fame as "The Georgia Crackers," also known as "The Newman Brothers," for western swing music in the style of the Sons of the Pioneers. Today the community has a vigorous and active Cochran-Bleckley County Arts Alliance, is home to two potters (Copper Top and Possum Pottery), hosts several cultural festivals and family fun events, and the university is home to two programs for motivated high school students, the Georgia Academy in math and sciences, and the Post-Secondary Readiness Enrichment Program. Bleckley County is very much an exceptional, progressive place, an unexpected rural bastion of Southern hospitality, education, charm, culture, industry, arts, and learning.

Bleckley County's 2010 Census population is 13,063 for the County and 5,150 for Cochran, significant increases from 2000 Census figures of 11,666 and 4,455, respectively. Bleckley County's 12 percent population growth from 2000 to 2010 was greater than the United States' 9.7 percent, but significantly less than Georgia's overall growth of 18.3 percent. This growth occurred despite the gradual decline of its once largest industry, Lithonia Lighting. This industry, which came to Bleckley County in 1973, was once one of the Region's largest industries, employing over 1,000 persons at its peak. Lithonia employment had reduced to about 400 in 2010, before finally shuttering in 2012. Despite this setback, the community is expected to



Bleckley County Cotton Field



Bleckley County Pine Forest



Bleckley County Courthouse



Cochran-Bleckley Welcome Center/  
Chamber of Commerce, Historic School



Tessie W. Norris  
Cochran-Bleckley Library



Downtown Cochran



continue growing at a modest, steady pace in the future due to its excellent educational resources, transportation access, diverse employment opportunities, its agricultural/forestry base and natural scenic beauty, its community and cultural amenities, and importantly, its location and overall high quality of life.

Cochran-Bleckley County will continue in the future to be a modern, forward-thinking community with big town amenities, where Southern hospitality and charm is the way of life. It truly will be well-known as an exceptional small town place of education, charm/culture, industry, arts, and learning, a true rural haven. There will be a highly skilled work force and ample well-paying jobs available to all who seek them. The Industrial Development Authority will successfully implement its aggressive plan for industry recruitment, and the industrial park will provide the latest in innovative facilities and technology. The regional I-16 Corridor Alliance will continue to be a major player in attracting supportive, compatible industry to the area. Local entrepreneurs and Cochran's downtown will flourish. Bleckley County schools will continue to rank among the highest in the state academically and have state-of-the-art facilities and technology available. There will continue to be overwhelming community support for education. Middle Georgia State University, having successfully completed its transition to a four-year institution and university status, will continue to attract top quality faculty and students to its nationally recognized aviation, nursing, education, business, criminal justice, and other programs. Oconee Fall Line Technical College and the community's Dr. Peyton Williams, Jr. Adult Learning Center will offer much expanded post-secondary practical and technical adult education opportunities. The community will truly be a modern, forward-thinking, well educated and culturally responsive small town, but with much more diverse economic opportunities. The community will continue to develop innovative leadership, solutions, and noted public/private partnerships. It will retain its small town character, rural charm, active agricultural/forest entities, and much natural beauty.

Bleckley County's abundance of scenic natural resources, including the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Ocmulgee Public Fishing Area (PFA) with its man-made lake, will attract nature-based tourism visitors to the community. Facilities upgrades at Dykes Landing will make it one of the most popular and well used landings along the Ocmulgee

River Water Trail, which encompasses a partnership of Ocmulgee River bordered counties from Bibb to Jeff Davis. The Water Trail was created to promote canoeing/kayaking along the Ocmulgee and to tie in with larger statewide and possibly even national events. A well-developed system of bike trails linking the landing, WMA, PFA, and other points of interest throughout the county and within Cochran will be available to cyclists. Biking Bleckley will grow to become one of the premier cycling events in the Southeast.

The City of Cochran will be a bustling, but idyllic small town. It will remain the economic, educational, social, cultural, and government center of the community. Cochran will have a vibrant downtown revitalized with loft apartments, restaurants, and businesses, which attract local residents, students, and visitors alike. Middle Georgia State University will be a mainstay of the fabric and life of the town. There will be local attractions, cultural events, and entertainment available for those who wish to stay in Cochran-Bleckley County on the weekends. The city's residential areas and historic neighborhoods will be well-maintained and preserved, and will represent the community as the safe, clean and comfortable family-friendly environment it is.

Cochran-Bleckley County will have attractive gateways reflecting community pride and local beautification efforts. Appropriate planning and growth management regulations will help guide and encourage compatible development respective of significant natural and historic resources to further enhance the community's appearance. Most future development is expected to continue to concentrate in the southern part of the county near Cochran (primarily residential), adjacent to the Cochran Bypass (highway-oriented commercial, residential subdivision, and public-institutional), along I-16 (commercial interchange development and industrial), and scattered infill development within Cochran. Both the County and City governments would provide efficient and cost effective services through functional consolidation, as needed. A community recycling program will also be implemented to reduce the amount of solid waste. Infrastructure (water, sewer, airport, hospital, schools, public safety, etc.) upgrades and expansions will be undertaken as appropriate and needed to serve the growing population, the tourist trade, and expanded economic development.

As Bleckley County advances its second century, the county and City of Cochran are poised for continued progress which further expands its amenities, enhances its livability, and provides new economic opportunities while retaining its Southern hospitality and charm, and respecting its pastoral landscapes and natural and cultural environments. The community will continue to be an exceptional rural haven, an outstanding small town place of education, charm/culture, industry, arts, and learning. Cochran-Bleckley County will be an enviable place to live, raise a family, do business, work, visit, or play.



Dykes Plantation House, Cochran



2014 Biking Bleckley



Downtown Cochran



U.S. 23 Bypass, Cochran

# Cochran

## Description

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

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

Before the railroad, the Cochran area was on the Indian frontier and settled in the early 1800s after Creek Indian cessations. Cochran was actually located on the Uchee Indian Trail, and truly was an oasis for the Native Americans as it was the known location of several Creek Indian wells/watering holes. The nearby Longstreet Community of early settlers along the federal postal road between Milledgeville, when it served as the state capital, and Hartford on the Ocmulgee River frontier, played pivotal roles in Cochran's establishment, and its educational and cultural leadership. These settlers, particularly the Walker family, helped first establish an early school, the Longstreet Academy; then facilitated routing the railroad through Coley's Station and Cochran; and later championed the town, and the development of a postsecondary school, Ebenezer College, in Cochran. Cochran was formally incorporated as a town in 1869 as Station #15 on the Macon and Brunswick Railroad soon after its completion. The Town of Cochran was reorganized as the City of Cochran in 1904. Ebenezer College later transitioned in to the 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Agricultural and Mechanical School on the same campus in World War I, and then to Middle Georgia College in 1929. For many years, this school was recognized as the oldest junior college in the United States. Local leadership was also evidenced in the establishment of Bleckley County itself when the newspaper was purchased primarily to campaign for separate county status. Leadership in the agricultural sector has also been quite evident within the community. Cochran was the center of early 1900s establishment of purebred hog breeding, and later the breeding of Black Angus cattle. A 1950s history noted the community was well-known then as the "Home of the Champions" as the city and county could boast of several all-time high records in the farm production of cotton and corn. This community agricultural leadership continues today with the "Back to Basics 101" organic whole wheat farm and business which garnered 2016 Flavor of Georgia recognition.

The City of Cochran currently carries on its rich tradition with an awarded and honored local school system, a modern library, a self-sufficient community hospital, the Middle Georgia State University campus, a local facility of the Oconee Fall Line Technical College, churches of many faiths, an impressive array of civic clubs, an involved populace, and many other amenities. The City of Cochran truly is an unexpected haven and bastion of Southern charm and culture with an extraordinary high quality of life which rivals many urban areas,

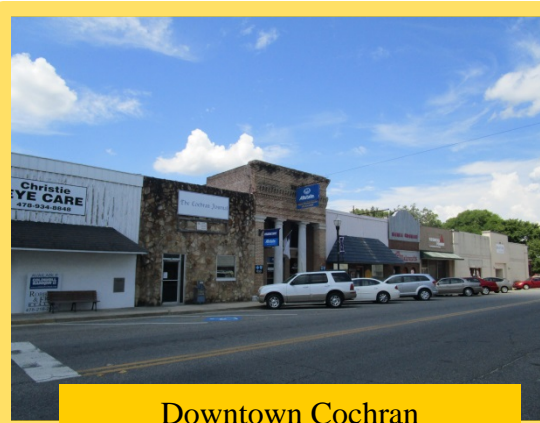




Cochran First United Methodist Church



Cochran First Baptist Church



Downtown Cochran



Downtown Cochran



Historic Cochran Residence



Marthann 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Baptist Church, Cochran

while being located in a bucolic and pleasing rural environment. The City has many advantages and much appeal to the entrepreneur, resident, or visitor alike.

## **Vision**

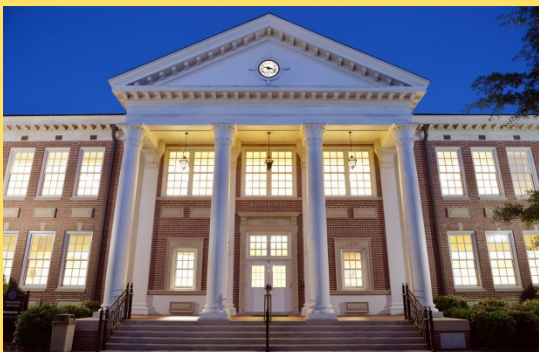
The City of Cochran wishes to continue to cultivate and nurture its image and reality as a unique and special place where Southern hospitality and charm is a way of life and which continues to exhibit progressive leadership, extraordinary educational and cultural opportunities, and an outstanding quality of life. The community will continue to exhibit a comfortable, caring, and involved family atmosphere and cooperative civic pride which celebrates, protects, and improves its heritage and rural environment. Cochran will continue to build on its many social and economic strengths; and to modernize and improve its infrastructure, facilities, and amenities. The community will remain vibrant and interesting as its transportation corridors improve, its downtown is revitalized and teeming, the University, Oconee Fall Line Technical College, and local school system expand and improve, and other opportunities for economic growth are realized. The City of Cochran will enjoy an expanded reputation as a pleasing and enviable haven located in a bucolic backdrop of an appealing and comforting rural countryside. A Cochran address will be a much desired and coveted badge of honor for businesses, residents, and visitors alike.

## **Needs**

- Economic development/jobs
- Downtown revitalization
- Water and sewer infrastructure improvements
- Transportation improvements
- Recreation/park improvements
- Housing stock improvements

## Opportunities

- Location
- U.S. Highway 23
- Middle Georgia State University
- Oconee Fall Line Technical College
- Involved citizenry and civic clubs
- Robins Air Force Base
- Cochran Municipal Airport
- Biking Bleckley



Walker Hall, Middle Georgia State University



Bleckley County High School, Cochran

## Community Goals

### Economic Development

- Nurture existing businesses/industries/entrepreneurs
- Utilize/support Cochran-Bleckley Chamber of Commerce, local Industrial Development Authority, and other local/regional/state agencies
- Develop detailed economic development marketing strategy/community branding
- Develop/extend/maintain infrastructure to facilitate/guide development
- Seek diversified economic development
- Attract new businesses/industry/jobs
- Support entrepreneurial/small business development
- Address continuing education/job skills improvements
- Retain local graduates
- Improve adult literacy rate
- Support Oconee Fall Line Technical College/local Dr. Peyton Williams, Jr. Adult Learning Center and expanded offerings
- Continue support for Middle Georgia State University
- Upgrade local school system infrastructure/facilities/services, as needed
- Improve transportation access/quality
- Continue to develop/maintain existing sites and new industrial park through technological, infrastructure, and other enhancements
- Enhance/grow tourism
- Support continued downtown revitalization of Cochran
- Maintain economic viability/support/enhance agriculture/forestry land uses
- Seek additional enterprises/venues/markets supportive of agriculture/forestry
- Guide/direct appropriate development along U.S. 23/Cochran Bypass
- Promote location on I-16/facilitate desired GA 112 interchange development
- Proactively manage/guide growth and development through coordinated planning

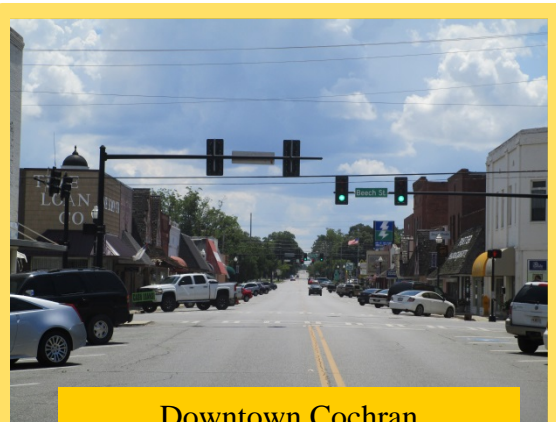
- Seek compatible development supportive of community's rural character and quality of life
- Promote appropriate infill development
- Improve community appearance/aesthetics
- Seek county-wide broadband/fiber availability upgrades



Historic Farmhouse, Bleckley County



Middle Georgia State University,  
Cochran Campus Aerial View



Downtown Cochran



U.S. 23 Cochran Bypass Intersection  
with E. Dykes St. (Ga. 26)



## Natural and Cultural Resources

- Protect significant natural resources of Bleckley County
- Conserve/protect Ocmulgee River and its corridor
- Seek compatible utilization/recreational development supportive of existing rural character/quality of life
- Conserve existing agricultural/forestry land uses
- Address growth management/natural and cultural resources protection
- Utilize existing and new public infrastructure to guide desired growth and development
- Conserve/protect Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area and Ocmulgee Public Fishing Area
- Maintain/utilize/preserve/promote/adaptively use historic resources/heritage of Bleckley County
- Continue downtown revitalization of Cochran
- Support existing/encourage development of new nature-based, heritage, recreation, and agri-tourism opportunities
- Improve community's appearance/aesthetics through countywide planning and appropriate regulation





## Housing

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



## Historic Residences

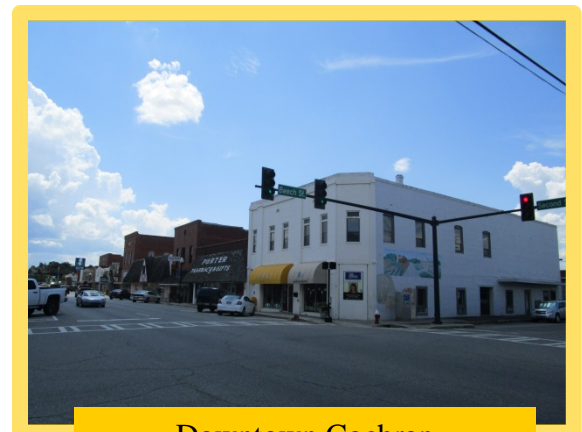


## Land Use

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



Rural Scene, Bleckley County



Downtown Cochran

## Community Facilities and Services

- Develop long range Recreation Master Plan and utilize to enhance/promote existing and develop new parks/recreation facilities/activities
- Improve public access to Ocmulgee River
- Guide/direct appropriate development along U.S. 23/Cochran Bypass
- Improve/promote transportation access/quality
- Continue to improve fire/public safety/emergency medical facilities/services countywide
- Continue to support/maintain Bleckley Memorial Hospital's status as critical access hospital
- Provide/maintain adequate governmental facilities/services
- Maintain/upgrade/expand water/sewer and other infrastructure facilities and service, as needed
- Utilize existing and planned infrastructure location to guide growth/development
- Upgrade countywide solid waste/recycling services/facilities/initiatives in conjunction with improving community appearance
- Continue support for Tessie W. Norris/Cochran-Bleckley Library
- Maintain/upgrade quality educational facilities/programs
- Improve countywide broadband technology/fiber access availability
- Continue support for and enhance cultural facilities/programs/events



Bleckley Memorial Hospital, Cochran



Tessie W. Norris Library, Cochran



## Intergovernmental Coordination

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



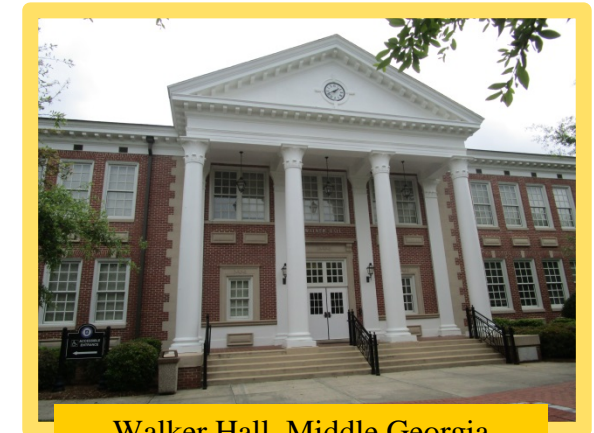
Cochran-Bleckley Welcome Center/Chamber of Commerce



Cochran Municipal Airport Sign



Cochran Bleckley Recreation Department



Walker Hall, Middle Georgia State University

## **Long Term Community Policies**

### Economic Development

The community will support and promote programs for the retention of existing local industries and entrepreneurs in its support and quest of business/industry retention and additional job opportunities

The community will utilize and support the Cochran-Bleckley Chamber of Commerce, Bleckley-Cochran Industrial Development Authority, and other existing local, regional, and state agencies to improve all of Bleckley County

The community will work with the Chamber of Commerce and Industrial Development Authority to develop a detailed economic development strategy and enhanced marketing to attract business/industry

The community will work to develop, extend, and maintain the necessary infrastructure to facilitate, guide, and accommodate future development

The community will seek diversified economic development with jobs and wages of all levels

The community will continue to actively recruit new industry and commercial/retail development compatible with, and supportive of, the resources, infrastructure, existing economy, and the natural environments of the county

The community will work to support entrepreneurial/small business development to promote job diversification

The community will work together to improve educational and skills levels to ensure a better qualified workforce for existing and future employers

The community will work together to develop, support, and promote programs which will enhance opportunities for local graduates to both live and work in the community upon graduation

The community will collaboratively support efforts to improve the county's adult literacy rate through cooperative efforts with the Oconee Fall Line Technical College at the local Dr. Peyton Williams, Jr. Adult Learning Center and other educational outreach programs

The community will continue to support Middle Georgia State University and its future expansion, as needed, through infrastructure upgrades, increased program offerings, and other means

The community will continue to support and encourage Oconee Fall Line Technical College to expand course offerings and programs to better serve existing and future students

The community will collaboratively support efforts to continuously improve the local school system as needed through infrastructure (technology and otherwise) upgrades and/or additions, the development of a local Career Academy, and other means

The community will continue to seek transportation improvements (highway, airport, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian) to enhance and support economic development efforts

The community will work to develop and maintain the necessary infrastructure and other industrial park improvements to facilitate and accommodate desired economic growth

The community will work cooperatively to increase promotion and marketing of tourist facilities/services and attractions located in the community, and otherwise grow tourism as an important component of the local economy

The community will continue downtown revitalization efforts in Cochran through the use of the Main Street or similar program, Downtown Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce, and local, state, and federal incentives, as appropriate

The community will maintain agriculture/forestry as viable economic land uses through traditional and alternative enterprises, such as agri-tourism and nature-based tourism

The community will seek to conserve, protect, and keep viable its valuable agricultural lands and timberlands, and will work to pursue additional public and private supportive enterprises, venues, agribusinesses, or markets

The community will work to guide and direct appropriate development along the U.S. 23/Cochran Bypass

The community will increase promotion of its location on I-16 and facilitate desired interchange development at GA 112 interchange

The community will support the continuing improvement and utilization of the Cochran Municipal Airport

The community will proactively manage and guide its future growth and development through coordinated planning, and will seek development which protects its existing rural character and quality of life

The community will cooperate to promote appropriate infill development; upgrade gateways, commercial areas and substandard housing; and otherwise improve the appearance and aesthetics of the county and Cochran



## Natural and Cultural Resources

The community will seek to conserve and protect the Ocmulgee River Corridor, the county's significant groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, other important natural and cultural resources and the open spaces and landscapes of the county while promoting compatible utilization and recreational development

The community will work to conserve its existing prime farmland and forest areas while seeking development compatible with its existing rural character and quality of life

The community will manage its growth and development, and protect and conserve its important natural and cultural resources, through public infrastructure location/community investment and county-wide land use planning and appropriate regulations

The community will seek to conserve and protect the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area and Ocmulgee Public Fishing Area, and will work to pursue additional public and private outdoor recreation or nature venues

The community will maintain, utilize, promote, and preserve its heritage, and will seek to encourage public and private adaptive use/reuse of its historic buildings, historic districts, and landmark structures and pursue listing in the National Register of Historic Places and/or in local historic district(s), as appropriate

The community will work to utilize and promote the county's historic, natural, and agricultural sites and venues for compatible, appropriate heritage, nature-based, and agri-tourism development

The community will work to improve its appearance and aesthetics through county-wide planning and appropriate regulation

## Housing

The community will encourage the use of state and federal programs to improve availability of quality housing for all residents, and to encourage home ownership

The community will address substandard housing and concentrations of blight, including manufactured housing developments, and will cooperatively upgrade their quality and appearance through rehabilitation, removal, code enforcement and regulation

The community will seek to encourage a diverse mix of safe, quality housing, including affordable, rental, elderly, starter homes, and compatible workforce housing

The community will provide guidance to and for location of compatible housing developments through planning, infrastructure location, and regulation

The community will upgrade its appearance and the quality of its housing developments through coordinated and comprehensive land use planning/subdivision/manufactured housing/code enforcement regulations

### Land Use

The community will plan, manage, and guide its future growth and development, and encourage growth compatible with its existing rural, small town character and quality of life

The community will cooperate to develop, implement, and enforce county-wide land use regulations, subdivision/manufactured housing regulations, growth management/nuisance/environmental regulations, and housing and building codes

The community will continue downtown/central business district revitalization efforts in Cochran through use of the Main Street or similar program, Downtown Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce, and local, state, and federal incentives, as appropriate

The community will work together to explore the feasibility of annexation into Cochran where appropriate and desired

The community will seek to conserve and protect the county's significant natural and cultural resources through their compatible development/utilization

The community will work to encourage appropriate infill development through planning, infrastructure location, and regulation

The community will encourage growth which preserves and maintains forestry and agriculture as viable, functioning land uses and promotes the preservation of the county's open space

The community will seek to improve its appearance and aesthetics, including enhancing gateways/entranceways through litter control, landscaping/beautification, and other means

### Community Facilities and Services

The community will enhance and promote existing parks/recreation facilities and work to establish additional such facilities and activities to serve existing and future populations, and to further cultivate/support tourism in accordance with the development of a long range Recreation Master Plan

The community will continue to seek to provide improved access to the Ocmulgee River

The community will work to guide and direct appropriate development along the U.S. 23/Cochran Bypass

The community will continue to seek transportation improvements (highway, airport, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian) to enhance and support community and economic development efforts, future growth, and quality of life

The community will continue to seek resources to maintain existing roads/streets and to pave additional dirt and connector roads

The community will continue to improve local roads and improve traffic flow through paving, resurfacing, and other means

The community will work to improve fire, emergency medical, and public safety services county-wide, including equipment maintenance and upgrades, adequate training of personnel, and facility improvements as needed

The community will continue to work together to maintain and upgrade its health care facilities and services, including future services/equipment/facilities improvements and additional physician recruitment

The community will continue to support and maintain its local critical access hospital, Bleckley Memorial, through facility, service, personnel, and equipment improvements/upgrades, as needed

The community will provide and maintain adequate government facilities, including city and county administrative facilities

The community will maintain, upgrade, and expand its existing infrastructure and services to enhance the quality of life, and to attract/guide desired, compatible growth and development

The community will guide growth and development to areas of existing infrastructure and will plan and develop expansions to help bring about desired patterns of growth

The City, with community support as appropriate, will continue to plan for, and support the extension of, water/sewer and natural gas services to all feasible areas of the existing incorporated limits, and to any areas proposed to be annexed to the City

The community will work to upgrade county-wide solid waste/recycling services/facilities/initiatives, in conjunction with other efforts to improve community appearance/aesthetics

The community will continue to support the Tessie W. Norris/Cochran-Bleckley Library through facility, equipment, staffing, program, and other improvements/expansion, as needed

The community will seek to enhance local educational and technological opportunities by continuing to support, maintain, and upgrade its local educational system facilities and programs

The community will encourage and support the maintenance, enhancement, and promotion of existing local and regional cultural facilities and opportunities, and will further develop cultural facilities and assets to pursue and promote additional venues/activities

The community will support the educational, social, and transitional services afforded by such organizations as Bleckley RSAT, Promise of Hope, and others

### Intergovernmental Coordination

The community will cooperate in coordinated growth management/nuisance/environmental regulation and code enforcement to manage and guide its future growth and development

The community will continue to cooperate locally, regionally, and on the state level to improve, develop, and plan for the desired future of Cochran-Bleckley County expressed and outlined in its comprehensive plan

The community will continue to seek ways to cooperate and coordinate efforts in the delivery of services, and will investigate the possibility of shared and consolidated services where appropriate and feasible

# **NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The Needs and Opportunities Element is required of all local governments by the Minimum Standards and Procedures. The community needs are those weaknesses or liabilities which have to be addressed, changed, or mitigated to help achieve the desired community future. The community opportunities are strengths and assets which can be utilized as starting points and foundations to easily accentuate or capitalize on to move the community forward on its desired future path. The Needs and Opportunities Element generally answers the planning question, “Where are we currently?” The answers can provide the compass point guidance necessary to begin and advance along the improvement journey. The Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan identifies each community goal as an issue for improvement, and further identifies local needs and opportunities, as appropriate, for each issue.



## Needs and Opportunities

### Needs:

- Existing business/industry/entrepreneur support (Economic Development (ED), Natural and Cultural Resources (NCR), Community Facilities and Services (CFS), Intergovernmental Coordination (IC) )
- Continued utilization/support of and enhanced cooperation with Cochran-Bleckley Chamber of Commerce, local Industrial Development Authority, and other local/regional/state agencies (ED, NCR, Housing (HO), Land Use (LU), CFS, IC)
- Completion of detailed economic development marketing strategy by Chamber and Industrial Development Authority (ED, IC)
- Development of community branding (ED, IC)
- Completion of Guaranteed Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) designation and maintenance of GRAD compatible industrial sites (ED, CFS, IC)
- Reactivation of Ocmulgee Regional Joint Development Authority (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Continued development/extension/maintenance of infrastructure to facilitate/guide growth (ED, CFS, IC)
- Infrastructure and other desired improvements at I-16/GA 112 interchange, including extension of natural gas service and increased marketing of interchange location (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Diversified economic development (ED, CFS, IC)
- New business/industry/jobs attraction/creation (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- Continued support for entrepreneurial/small business development (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- More local restaurants and entertainment options (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Creation of Small Business Incubator (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- Support existing local public and private detention/transition centers, such as Bleckley RSAT and Promise of Hope (ED, CFS, IC)
- Continuing education/job skills improvements (ED, CFS, IC)

- Local graduate retention (ED, IC)
- Adult literacy rate improvements (ED, CFS, IC)
- Support for Oconee Fall Line Technical College/local Dr. Peyton Williams, Jr. Adult Learning Center and expanded offerings (ED, CFS, IC)
- Continued support for Middle Georgia State University (ED, CFS, IC)
- Ongoing upgrades to local school system infrastructure/facilities/services (ED, CFS, IC)
- Development of a local Career Academy (ED, CFS, IC)
- Transportation access/quality improvements (ED, CFS, IC)
- Widening of U.S. 23 to Eastman to four lanes (ED, CFS, IC)
- U.S. 23/GA 87 Cochran Bypass widening to four lanes (ED, CFS, IC)
- Appropriate development, signage, and landscaping along Cochran Bypass (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Completion of Cochran's Gateway project (ED, CFS, IC)
- Construction of west truck route to link with East Cochran Bypass (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Continuing improvements to Cochran Municipal Airport, including perimeter fencing (Phase II), runway extension, and T-hangar construction (ED, CFS, IC)
- Rail access-side tracks for industry (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Continue development/maintenance of existing industrial sites and new industrial park through technological, infrastructure, and other enhancements (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Widening and resurfacing of entranceway to new Industrial Park (ED, CFS, IC)
- Continue promotion of old industrial spec building area as community industrial park (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Development of industrial park at I-16/GA 112 interchange (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Local tourism enhancement/growth, including agri-tourism, nature-based, recreation, and heritage tourism, through increased promotion/marketing of facilities/services, community events, and attractions (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- Continued downtown Cochran revitalization through participation in Main Street Program (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Designation of local downtown Cochran historic district (ED, NCR, CFS, IC)

- Reactivation of Cochran Downtown Development Authority (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Support/enhancement of agricultural/forestry land uses economic viability through traditional and alternative enterprises (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- Managed growth and development through coordinated planning (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Compatible development supportive of community's existing rural character/quality of life (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Appropriate infill development (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Community appearance/aesthetics improvements (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Adoption/enforcement of vacant/dilapidated buildings ordinance (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Development/enforcement of manufactured home/park regulations countywide (ED, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Initiation of demolition/land bank program for vacant/condemned housing (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Utilization of Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) program for increased housing rehabilitation opportunities (ED, HO, CFS, IC)
- Broadband/fiber availability upgrades county-wide (ED, CFS, IC)
- More sustainable/environmentally responsible growth (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- Continuing protection of Bleckley County's significant natural resources (ED, NCR, LU, IC)
- Ocmulgee River and corridor conservation/protection (ED, NCR, IC)
- Growth management/natural and cultural resources protection (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Utilization of existing/new public infrastructure to guide desired growth/development (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- Continued conservation/protection of Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area and Ocmulgee Public Fishing Area (ED, NCR, IC)
- Historic resources preservation/adaptive use (ED, NCR, HO, CFS, IC)
- Rehabilitation of historic former Bleckley County Jail (NCR, CFS, IC)

- Reglazing of windows and doors of National Register-listed Bleckley County Courthouse (NCR, CFS, IC)
- Nomination of eligible properties to National Register of Historic Places (NCR, IC)
- Usage of state and federal programs to improve availability of quality housing and encourage homeownership (HO, IC)
- Improved housing quality/appearance through rehabilitation, removal, code enforcement, and regulation (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- More diverse housing mix, including affordable, multi-family, rental, elderly, starter homes, and compatible workforce housing (ED, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Development of County subdivision regulations (HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Adoption of Cochran subdivision regulations (HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Completion of update to Cochran's zoning ordinance (LU, IC)
- Existing residential area preservation within Cochran (NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Growth management/nuisance/environmental regulations (NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Utilization of future land use plan/map when reviewing planned development (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Loft apartment development in downtown Cochran (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Possible annexation of land from unincorporated Bleckley County into City of Cochran (LU, CFS, IC)
- Extension of water/sewer and natural gas services to all feasible areas within existing Cochran incorporated limits and to any areas proposed for annexation (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Development of long range Recreation Master Plan and its utilization to plan improvements to existing and development of new facilities/programs/activities (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- Recreation access improvements, especially for youth activities (CFS, IC)
- Improved public access to Ocmulgee River (ED, NCR, CFS, IC)
- Upgrade of basketball court and playground construction at Peyton Williams Center (ED, CFS, IC)
- Potential bicycle path, nature/walking trails, or rails to trails development (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)

- Completion of 2010 TIA Band 2 and implementation of Band 3 Local Projects (ED, CFS, IC)
- Repair/replacement of 1,000 feet of sidewalks in Cochran annually (CFS, IC)
- Replacement of Hendricks Road Bridge (CFS, IC)
- County motor grader replacement (CFS, IC)
- Continued improvement of fire/emergency medical/public safety facilities/services countywide, including more stations in unincorporated county (CFS, IC)
- Renovation or replacement of Cochran Police Station facility (CFS, IC)
- Upgrade/purchase of police equipment, including bulletproof vest, radios, and other (CFS, IC)
- Installation of emergency warning sirens for citywide notifications in Cochran (CFS, IC)
- Upgrade/purchase of turnout gear for Cochran firefighters (CFS, IC)
- Continued support/maintenance of Bleckley Memorial as critical access hospital (ED, CFS, IC)
- Continued local healthcare facilities, services, and equipment enhancement as well as physician recruitment (CFS, IC)
- Continued provision of adequate local government facilities/services (CFS, IC)
- Purchase of land for County annex development (CFS, IC)
- Renovation of existing Cochran City Hall or construction of new facility (CFS, IC)
- Rehabilitation of Cochran's elevated water tank, including painting, sandblasting, lining (CFS, IC)
- Installation of auto water meter reading system throughout Cochran (CFS, IC)
- Phase II repair/replacement of water lines and fire hydrants in Cochran (CFS, IC)
- Water, sewer, and drainage rehabilitation on Railroad Street and Porter Road in Cochran (CFS, IC)
- Phases I and II sewer rehabilitation (CIPP) citywide in Cochran (CFS, IC)
- Rehabilitation of sewer line along Hospital and Ann streets in Cochran (CFS, IC)
- Paving of roadway to Cochran's water treatment plant (CFS, IC)
- Dredging/cleaning of blue streams within Cochran city limits (CFS, IC)



- Upgrade of solid waste/recycling services/facilities/initiatives in conjunction with improving community appearance (CFS, IC)
- Long term waste disposal site selection (CFS, IC)
- Continued support for Tessie W. Norris/Cochran-Bleckley Library through facility, equipment, staffing, programs, other improvements/expansion (CFS, IC)
- Support for continued enhancement/promotion of local/regional cultural facilities/programs/events and further development (ED, CFS, IC)
- Continued sharing/cooperation/consolidation and improved efficiency in service delivery (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)

## Opportunities:

- Existing businesses/industries (ED, NCR, CFS, IC)
- Cochran-Bleckley Chamber of Commerce and existing events, such as Country Fest (ED, CFS, IC)
- Cochran-Bleckley Industrial Development Authority (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Ocmulgee Regional Joint Development Authority reactivation (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Continued development/extension/maintenance of infrastructure (ED, CFS, IC)
- Location near Macon, Robins Air Force Base (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- I-16/GA 112 interchange in Bleckley County (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Availability of natural gas service (ED, CFS, IC)
- Continued support for entrepreneurial/small business development (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- Excellent, award-winning local schools, including facilities, technology, and programs and ongoing upgrades (ED, CFS, IC)
- Oconee Fall Line Technical College/local Dr. Peyton Williams, Jr. Adult Learning Center existing programs and potential expanded offerings (ED, CFS, IC)
- Heart of Georgia Altamaha Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program (ED, IC)
- Middle Georgia State University and its programs including Georgia Academy in math and science and Post-Secondary Readiness Enrichment Program (ED, CFS, IC)
- Transportation improvements, such as Cochran Bypass (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Cochran's Gateway project nearing completion (ED, CFS, IC)
- Ongoing Cochran Municipal Airport upgrades, including completion of Phase I perimeter fencing (ED, CFS, IC)
- Active Class I Norfolk Southern Railroad (ED, CFS, IC)
- Existing industrial sites, including spec building and abandoned manufacturing structures (ED, CFS, IC)
- New industrial park, including completion of Phase I roadway paving (ED, CFS, IC)

- Freeport Exemption available (ED, IC)
- Population growth (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Nature-based and recreation tourism venues/events, including Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area, Ocmulgee Public Fishing Area, Ocmulgee River Water Trail, local campgrounds, RV parks, Biking Bleckley (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- Downtown Cochran revitalization (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Potential local historic district in downtown Cochran (ED, NCR, CFS, IC)
- Existing agricultural/forestry land uses/businesses, such as Back to the Basics 101 and its organic whole grain products (ED, NCR, LU, IC)
- Successful Bleckley County 4-H program (NCR, IC)
- Rural character/quality of life (NCR, LU)
- Attractive community appearance/curb appeal (ED, NCR, LU, CFS, IC)
- Affordable housing (ED, HO, CFS, IC)
- Relatively very low cost of living (ED, HO, CFS, IC)
- Georgia Initiative for Community Housing program (ED, HO, CFS, IC)
- Cochran Urban Redevelopment Plan (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Ocmulgee Water Trail Partnership participation and new signage at Dykes Landing (ED, NCR, IC)
- Continuing protection of County's significant natural resources (ED, NCR, LU, IC)
- Ocmulgee River and corridor (ED, NCR, IC)
- Local cultural/historic resources and events, such as Bleckley County Courthouse, former Bleckley County Jail, downtown Cochran, Hillside Bluegrass Festival, and others (ED, NCR, CFS, IC)
- State and federal programs to improve availability of quality housing/encourage homeownership (HO, IC)
- Joint Cochran-Bleckley codes enforcement (ED, NCR, HO, CFS, IC)
- Cochran subdivision regulations developed (HO, LU, CFS, IC)
- Local retirement facilities (ED, HO, CFS, IC)
- Possible annexation of land from unincorporated Bleckley County into City of Cochran (LU, CFS, IC)
- Availability of excess wastewater treatment capacity (ED, CFS, IC)

- Strong local Recreation Department with updated facilities (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- Two local golf courses, Uchee Trail with 18 holes and The Woods with 27 (ED, LU, CFS, IC)
- 2010 TIA funded improvements, including completion of Band 1 Local Projects (ED, CFS, IC)
- Low crime rate (CFS, IC)
- Mutual aid agreement between County and Cochran for fire protection (CFS, IC)
- Organization of certified Bleckley County Fire Department (CFS, IC)
- Bleckley Memorial's designation as a critical access hospital (ED, CFS, IC)
- Strong senior services (CFS, IC)
- Well-used Tessie W. Norris/Cochran-Bleckley Library with 24-hour Wi-Fi service available (CFS, IC)
- Active Cochran-Bleckley County Arts Alliance (CFS, IC)
- Copper Top and Possum Potteries (CFS)
- Historic Cochran Auditorium (CFS, IC)
- Outstanding Public-Private partnerships (ED, NCR, HO, LU, CFS, IC)

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic prosperity is a key to community improvement. A community's comprehensive plan seeks at its core to make the community a better place to live, work, and recreate. To improve quality of life, there is a need for income and an increased tax base to help enhance the ability to afford needed and desired improvements, and afford better housing and a higher standard of living. Commerce and economic development have a major influence on overall population growth and development. The relationship is quite evident in Bleckley County and has been throughout its history. The Ocmulgee River and the forested lands of Bleckley provided avenues of exploration and access to life sustaining wildlife populations and water resources both to Native Americans and European explorers long before the county's formal establishment. The county's settlement in the early 1800s related to Indian treaties and land lotteries for persons seeking new lives and fortunes. The first county development related to river commerce, ferries, and the opening of stagecoach routes and early public roads. The completion of the Macon and Brunswick Railroad in the mid-1800s led to the establishment and growth of Cochran. The railroad also opened up markets and fierce competition over the county's abundant yellow pine forests and lumber resources. Significant economic influence ensued for Bleckley County. As forests were cut and cleared, farming operations developed, and Bleckley became a center of early purebred hog and Black Angus cattle breeding. The community also established itself as an educational and cultural center. Maintaining an aura of leadership in agricultural row crop production led to the community becoming known as "home of champions." Being an economic, educational, and cultural center led to outside recognition and local desire to showcase its influence and exert local control of its destiny. This led to early 20<sup>th</sup> century formal county establishment, and facilitated the location of Middle Georgia College. For many years, the college was cited as the oldest two-year college in the U.S. The college has been a major influence in the local economy and has now transitioned into a campus of Middle Georgia State University, the only university campus in the Region. The college/university has helped the community maintain its reputation and status of exceptional leadership in education and culture. These attributes continue to serve the community well. The location of the community along

U.S. 23, its proximity to Macon and Robins Air Force Base, and continuing agricultural prominence have all been economic attractors and exerted positive influences. The railroad remains as an active Class I rail line of the Norfolk Southern system. The community also owns and manages a local general aviation airport important for community access and economic development.

These impressive attributes, and many assets, accentuated by the scenic countryside and significant natural resources, including the Ocmulgee River and the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management and Public Fishing areas continue to serve the county well. They contribute to an unexpected high quality of life in a relaxing, tranquil setting, attracting families and business alike. The overall family-friendly quality of life within the county, the university and other educational and cultural opportunities, the community's location, remain key factors and attractors in future growth and development. Because of its economic history and successes, its educational and cultural advantages, its cooperative spirit and involved citizenry, its significant and celebrated natural and cultural resources, and its high overall quality of life, Cochran-Bleckley truly is an "exceptional rural smalltown community." As a result, the community continues to enjoy slow, but steady growth and development, even absorbing a major industry closing, Acuity Brands Lighting, which employed over 1,000 persons at its heyday, with only slight hiccup.

Bleckley County is a small, progressive rural county of about 13,000 persons located in Middle Georgia. It is located less than an hour south of Macon along U.S. Highway 23 and Georgia Highways 26 and 112 with access to I-16 in the northeast corner of the county. The community is an exceptional small town with the City of Cochran as its only incorporated municipality. The community promotes itself as a haven of Southern Charm where hospitality is a way of life, with much appeal to the young and the young at heart. There is a long community history and association with education, leadership, and culture not usually expected in a rural, smalltown. Today, the community is home to a campus of Middle Georgia State University, the only university campus within the Region. Bleckley's fields and forests have provided much past economic influence, and continue to do so today. Agriculture contributes over \$30 million in direct farm gate impacts to the local economy annually, and has been another avenue of local



leadership and exceptionalism. The community has experienced some economic setbacks in recent years, but its location, outstanding quality of life, and economic influence from the nearby Robins Air Force Base, have facilitated continuing growth. Its fields, forests, and verdant natural resources, including the Ocmulgee River, the Ocmulgee River Water Trail, and the Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area and Public Fishing Area, provide an appealing scenic backdrop and outlets for outdoor fun and adventure which only add to the exceptional quality of life enjoyed by the community.

Bleckley County continues to build today on its extraordinary history of leadership, education and culture unique to a rural smalltown. The community boasts of not only the campus of Middle Georgia State University but an awarded, high quality local school system; an outstanding adult learning center; a modern library; a well-managed local hospital; many active and involved civic clubs; an arts alliance; two local golf courses with 45 total holes; and many other amenities. There is a local museum, two local potters, an annual biking event, a fall fest, and an annual Christmas parade. All of these community activities and family-friendly events take place in a tapestry of true Southern Charm of well-manicured and lovingly preserved homes and churches, an involved and caring populace, and a surrounding and comforting environment of unmatched natural beauty and outdoor splendor. Cochran-Bleckley County is without doubt an exceptional rural smalltown community and a haven of education, culture, and leadership unexpected in such a small rural place. The community does enjoy an extraordinarily high quality of life as a result, and this, combined with its other advantages of location, transportation resources, and natural and cultural appeal, provides much to offer the entrepreneur, resident, or visitor alike.

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

There are certainly continuing needs for Bleckley County's economic development. The closing of Acuity Brands Lighting in 2012 left the county without a major local industry. The unemployment rate averaged 9.1 percent in 2015 compared to 5.9 percent in Georgia. The per capita money income in Bleckley County as reported by the Census Bureau for 2010-2014 is \$19,191, about 76% that of Georgia as a whole (\$25,427). Median household income is \$35,507, about 72% that of Georgia (\$49,342). Almost one-fourth of Bleckley County citizens are in poverty (23.2%), compared to only 18.3% in Georgia as a whole. This high poverty has persisted for a number of decades. There are needs for more jobs. Unemployment in the county at an annual average of 9.1% in 2015 is not only significantly higher than the state, but is the highest in the Bleckley Labor Market (tied with Twiggs County). Only about 55 percent of county workers do work inside Bleckley County, although another almost 16 percent work in Houston County (home of Robins Air Force Base) and nearly 9 percent in neighboring Dodge County. As a testament to the local quality of life, almost three-fourths of the local Bleckley jobs are filled with Bleckley residents. Job skills of local residents are somewhat of a concern, although less so than many surrounding counties; about 18% of local residents are without a high school diploma compared to 15% statewide. Transfer payments represent almost 30% of total personal income compared to about 17% statewide. On the positive side, there is more home ownership in the county (70.2%) than Georgia (64.2%), and housing costs are cheaper as well. The median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2010-2014, was \$85,500 in Bleckley County as compared to \$148,000 in Georgia, and median gross rents, 2010-2014, were \$636 in the County as compared to \$874 in Georgia. Compared to the rest of the country, Cochran-Bleckley County's cost of living is 18.2% lower than the U.S. average.

There are opportunities and cause for optimism for future economic development in Bleckley County as well. Employment within the county does remain concentrated within the government and services sectors, and agriculture also provides relative stability as well. There remain many unrealized opportunities related to the abundant fields and forests, outstanding natural resources of the county, and the educational and cultural advantages afforded by Middle Georgia State University. The cost of living in Bleckley County is relatively very low, and the crime rate is low making it even more attractive as a place to live for families and new residents

and retirees. Relatively stable population growth is anecdotal evidence that the overall outstanding quality of life, educational opportunities, local culture, outdoor fun, and community location are contributing to continuing success, and portend well for the future. The county's location, its verdant landscape punctuated by outstanding natural and cultural resources, the almost limitless outdoor recreation opportunities, the low cost of living, the family-friendly atmosphere, the involved community spirit, citizenry, and leadership, and the extraordinary quality of life present locally provide even more opportunities for success.

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

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

Bleckley County has a long history of educational leadership beyond Middle Georgia State. The community has an awarded quality local school system, and constructed an adult learning center named for a noted local educator, Dr. Peyton Williams, Jr. in the early 2000s. The community hopes to utilize the center to expand Oconee Fall Line Technical College campus and programs, and to support regional Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs. The community will also develop a local Career Academy. It will further develop public/private partnerships through its Chamber of Commerce, civic groups, and continuing intergovernmental cooperation.

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

The community will support efforts to create additional markets, explore alternative crops, and seek value-added businesses which keep such uses viable and profitable. The marketing and development of agri-tourism and nature-based tourism are other means. The development of a local farmers market, and the support of existing agricultural operations, such as the Back to Basics 101 organic wheat farm, and the outstanding local 4-H program are

positive steps and tremendous assets and opportunities. The local Country Fest reinforces and highlights community support.

#### Address/Improve Infrastructure/Broadband Needs

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

#### Nurture Existing Businesses/Entrepreneurs/Industries

This has been a local hallmark critical to past successes, and will continue with passion. The Cochran-Bleckley County community will work through its Development Authorities and Chamber of Commerce, and in cooperation with Oconee Fall Line Technical College and state agencies, to meet local needs and encourage expansions and new local business and entrepreneurial development. Special efforts will be made for agricultural/forest interests.

#### Attract New Businesses/Jobs

The Cochran-Bleckley County community, through its Development Authorities, Chamber of Commerce, and intergovernmental cooperation, will seek compatible business and industrial development. The community will participate in state designation programs, and will cooperate in providing appropriate funds in making full-time economic development efforts more efficient and effective. State tax credits and local tax incentives for job creation will be marketed. Enhancing existing industrial sites and developing a new industrial park will assist. The location of I-16, U.S. 23 and of several state highways, the rail and airport facilities, the proximity to Macon and Robins Air Force Base are major assets and calling cards. The family-friendly atmosphere, many natural and cultural amenities, and overall high quality of life will attract more than people.

### Develop/Enhance Tourism

Bleckley County's extensive outdoor amenities and splendor; including the Ocmulgee River, the Ocmulgee River Water Trail, the Ocmulgee WMA, the Ocmulgee PFA; many historic structures and sites; unique existing and potential festivals; the local unique cultural attractors; as well as the many farms and scenic countryside offer much more potential to increase visitors.

### Improve Transportation Access/Quality

The Regional T-SPLOST will result in many needed local resurfacing and other road improvements, which will enhance the community as a place to live and work. The planned multi-laning of U.S. 23 would also be a major enhancement. It may open up other opportunities for job creation, as well. These and other improvements could enhance local travel and make business markets more accessible. It would also make it easier to live in Bleckley, but work in nearby urban growth centers, something which already occurs. Promotion of trails including a possible Rails to Trails; improving bicycling opportunities and facilities, including upgrading Biking Bleckley; and otherwise promoting tourism would also help quality of life and economic development. The expansion of Georgia's ports will make the Norfolk Southern Railroad even more important. The local airport and its continued improvement are also important.

### Revitalize Downtown

The historic fabric and available buildings in Cochran, already the social, cultural, educational, governmental, and economic center of Bleckley County allow for much opportunity. Their historic nature allows for development incentives, preservation of unique character, and enhanced quality of life. Community projects in historic structures create civic pride and community cooperation. They also can stimulate private investment. The many active civic clubs and involved citizenry can provide the spark and support needed to realize this potential.

### Develop/Improve Local Industrial Parks/Sites

The community has a number of available sites and buildings to market. The existing industrial park needs further improvement, and there is a need to develop a new industrial park to facilitate and encourage efforts in industrial expansion and location.

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

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

### Enhance Intergovernmental Cooperation

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

### Address Growth Management/Rural Character Preservation

A well planned community and one which appears neat, orderly, and attractive supports and encourages additional investment. The community has developed limited individual land use

and building regulations to address specific issues and nuisances, but more stronger, general, and coordinated efforts and joint code enforcement are needed. The community can also utilize infrastructure location and civic organizations and programs to assist.

#### Enhance Economic Development Marketing

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

#### Support Existing Industries/Entrepreneurs

Existing businesses, local entrepreneurs and farming operations have been principal contributors to past success and a stabilized local economic base. The community needs to be vigilant to support and ensure these pillars and foundations for other growth remain strong and vibrant. The nomination and recognition this year for the Back to Basics 101 organic wheat farm business as a 2016 Flavor of Georgia finalist shows how this strategy can bring attention and results. The outstanding natural resource outlets within the county offer similar potential for support and marketing.

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

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



people aware of the rural smalltown haven the community is and the opportunities that exist will also help.

#### Support of Middle Georgia State University

The Cochran community has been associated with a postsecondary educational institution long before Bleckley County even became a separate Georgia county. This association has been a significant contributor to the community's leadership, cultural opportunities, overall high quality of life, and local economy throughout the community's history. It is the principal fabric which ties the community together, and allows for its extraordinary status. In some sense, Cochran has always been a college town in the best aspects of the term. The community should be steadfast in its vigilance and support that this remains so, especially now that the local campus is just one of several for Middle Georgia State University.

## LAND USE

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

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

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

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

plans or options can be precluded or prevented by such uncontrolled growth, while other ill-advised consequences or burdens upon the general public can result.

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

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

would be protected and utilized for increased tourism. These rural open landscapes would be an integral component of the economy of the county, and the preservation of rural character and a quality of life supportive of open space and natural and cultural resource protection. Commercial and industrial growth would be compatible and supportive of continued agricultural/forestry uses, and would maintain the high quality of life and small-town, rural character while providing additional jobs and economic opportunity. Middle Georgia State University's local campus would remain a focal point of local opportunity, pride, and culture. All of this would be components of a concerted strategy to attract new residents, retirees, and economic development supportive and complementary to existing uses and character which further adds to the exceptional quality of life and extraordinary amenities now present.

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

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

forethought, examination of impacts and consequences, and mitigation of land use decisions on the community's growth and development and desired future patterns and community vision.

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

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

- **Residential.** The predominant use of land within the residential category is for single-family and multi-family dwelling units.
- **Commercial.** This category is for land dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, office, service and entertainment facilities, located as a single use in one building or grouped together in a shopping center or office building.
- **Industrial.** This category is for land dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction activities, or other similar uses.
- **Public/Institutional.** This category includes certain state, federal or local government uses, and institutional land uses. Government uses include government building complexes, police and fire stations, libraries, prisons, post offices, schools, military installations, etc. Examples of institutional land uses include colleges, churches, cemeteries, hospitals, etc.
- **Transportation/Communications/Utilities.** This category includes such uses as major transportation routes, public transit stations, power generation plants, railroad facilities, radio towers, telephone switching stations, airports, port facilities or other similar uses.

- **Park/Recreation/Conservation.** This category is for land dedicated to active or passive recreational and conservation uses. These areas may be either publicly or privately owned and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, other wild lands, golf courses, recreation centers or similar uses.
- **Agriculture.** This category is for land dedicated to farming (fields, lots, pastures, farmsteads, specialty farms, livestock production, etc.), agriculture, or similar rural uses.
- **Forestry.** This category is for land dedicated to commercial timber, pulpwood production, or other woodland use.

**Existing Land Use Distribution, 2016**  
(Acres)

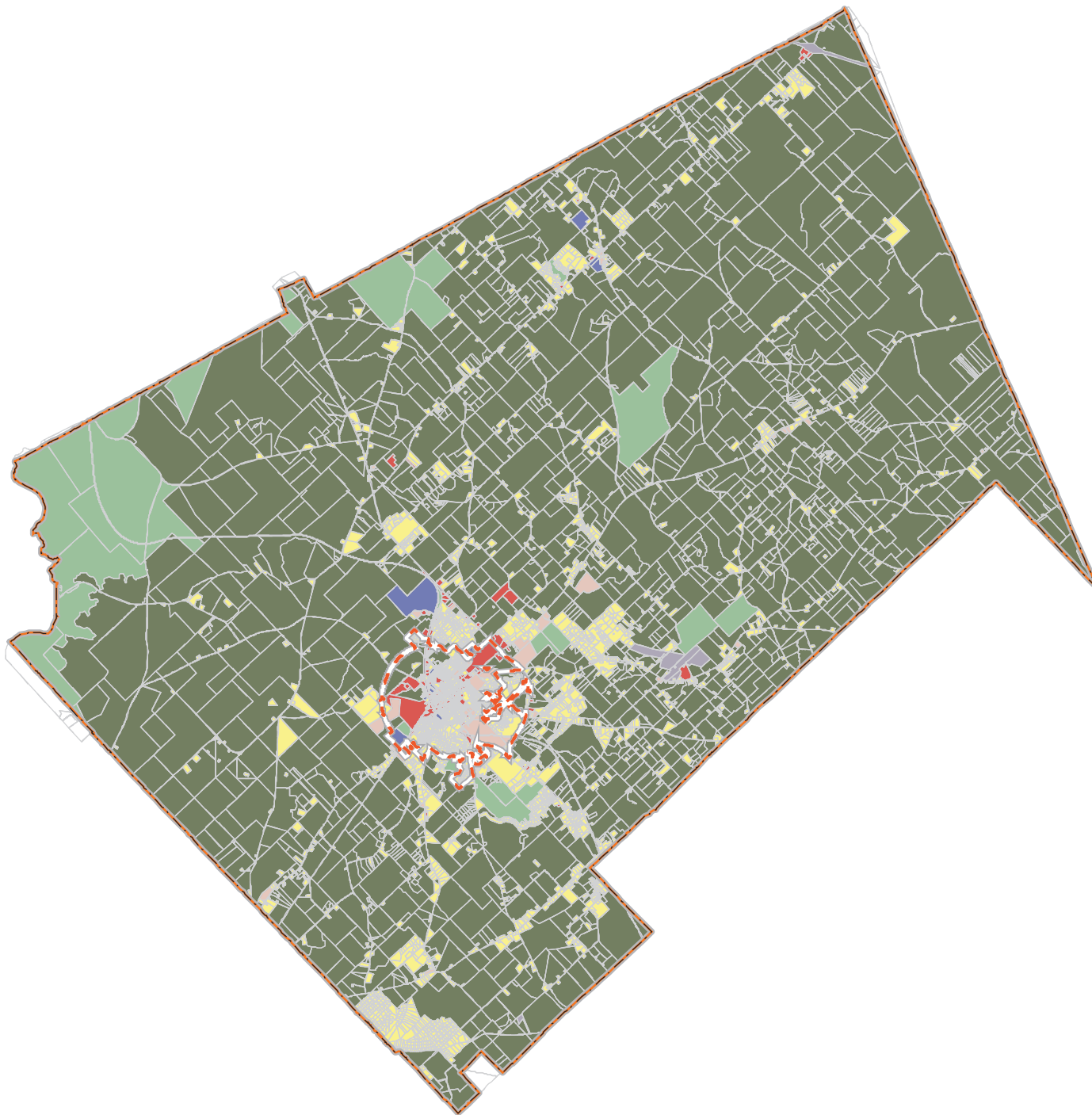
**Bleckley County**

Land Use Category	Acreage	Percent of Total
<b>Agriculture</b>	59,832	42.65
<b>Commercial</b>	793	0.57
<b>Forestry</b>	55,208	39.35
<b>Industrial</b>	447	0.32
<b>Park/Recreation/Conservation</b>	9,337	6.65
<b>Public/Institutional</b>	767	0.55
<b>Residential</b>	10,642	7.58
<b>Transportation/Communications/Utilities</b>	3,274	2.33
<b>Total</b>	140,300	100.00

Source: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission Geographic Information System, 2016.

Bleckley County is a small, rural county in central South Georgia, and although created as one of Georgia's youngest counties in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1912), it has a long history of growth and development because of its fertile fields, abundant Southern pine forests, compelling landscape, outstanding natural resources, and early frontier settlement. The county is located along the legendary Ocmulgee River, and was a resting and hunting area, and source of well

# Bleckley County Existing Land Use



## Legend

- County Boundary
- Cochran City Limits
- Tax Parcels

## Land Use

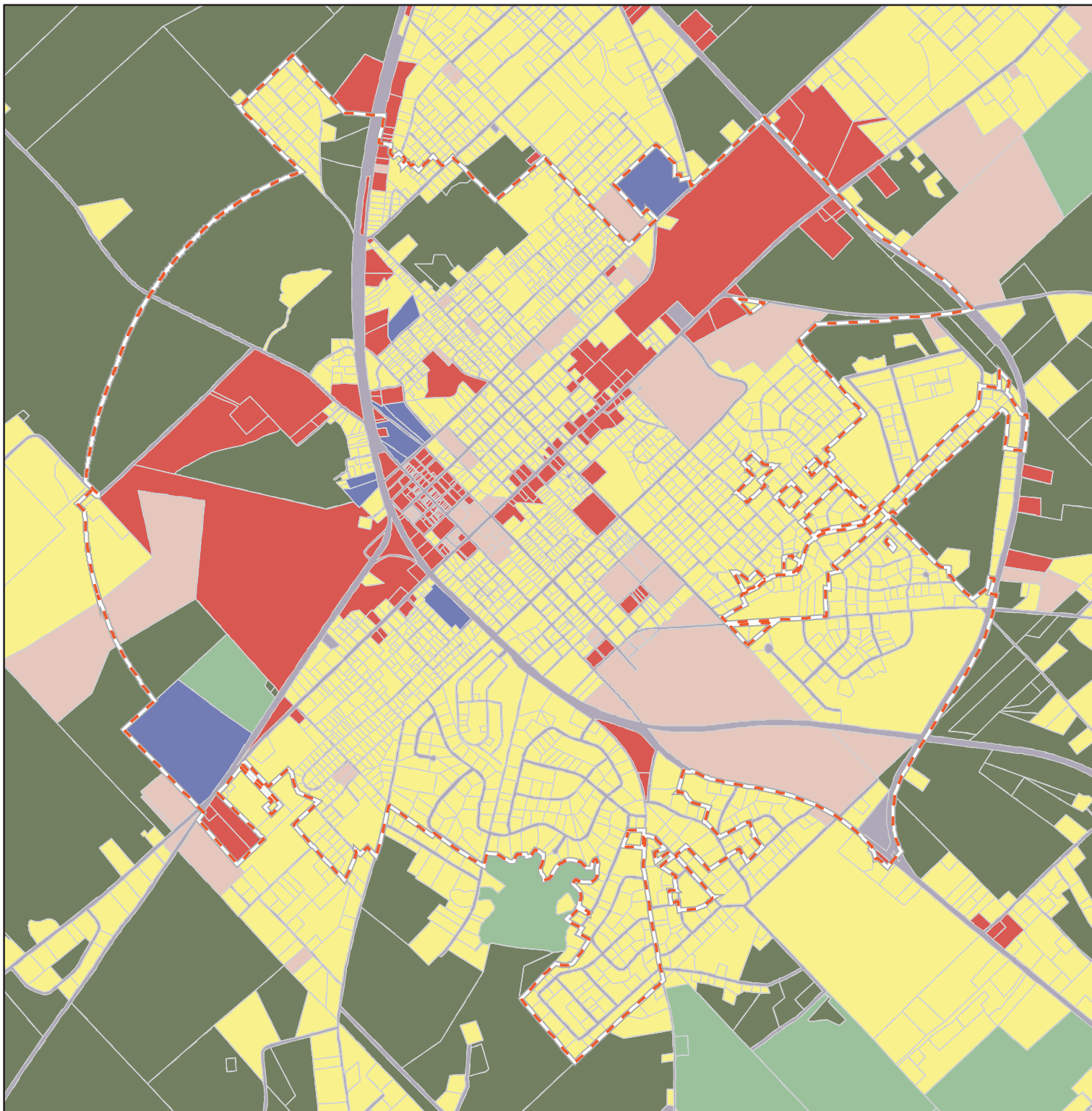
- Agriculture/Forestry
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Parks/Recreation/Conservation
- Public/Institutional
- Residential
- Transportation/Communication/Utilities



0 0.75 1.5 3 4.5 6 Miles



# City of Cochran Existing Land Use



### Legend

- County Boundary
- Cochran City Limits
- Tax Parcels

### Land Use

- Agriculture/Forestry
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Parks/Recreation/Conservation
- Public/Institutional
- Residential
- Transportation/Communication/Utilities

0 0.1 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 Miles



Source: Heart of Georgia Altamaha RC, 2016

water for Native Americans. The community was an early bastion of educational, cultural, agricultural and railroad development. The community has a long history of exceptional leadership. Bleckley County is a unique blend of agriculture, education, culture, and environment nestled amongst tranquil natural and cultural beauty, and an extraordinary quality of life unexpected for such a rural community.

Bleckley was first settled because of its forests, fertile lands, and proximity to the Ocmulgee River. The river and the old Milledgeville-Hartford postal road through the county brought early settlement of the Longstreet Community and stagecoach/steamship commerce and markets for agricultural/timber products to the county. However, it was the Macon and Brunswick Railroad construction in the late 1850s-1860s which established and developed in Cochran (then Station 15) which brought rapid growth and eventual county creation. Substantial growth soon followed as a result of the wealth of the area's timber, and following that, agricultural resources. Most growth was centered in and around Cochran during this time. The community's namesake was the noted Judge Arthur E. Cochran who helped organize and obtain financing for the railroad. Extraordinary local leadership was responsible for the creation of Ebenezer College in the community which campus later became Middle Georgia College, for many years recognized as the oldest two-year college in all of the U.S. The college has now transitioned to four-year status and to a campus of Middle Georgia State University. Local leadership was also evidenced in agriculture where Cochran/Bleckley County became widely known for early purebred hog breeding, Black Angus cattle raising, and a home of champion production of row crops. It also led to county creation.

Since the 1930s much of the force behind the county's development can be attributed to its location on U.S. 23, close to Macon and the Robins Air Force Base, the local college/university and other educational attributes, and its extraordinary quality of life. The old Macon and Brunswick railroad remains an active Class I railroad operated by the Norfolk Southern system, and an additional economic stimulus. Other critical factors have been committed leadership, an involved citizenry, a cooperative spirit, and the adaptive use of its natural assets and outdoor adventure opportunities.

These same assets and resilient traits have allowed Bleckley County to continue with remarkable slow, but steady growth despite globalization, the mechanization of agriculture, the decline of individual manufacturing concerns (particularly the loss of Acuity Brands Lighting) or recessionary periods which have devastated many rural communities. The community still has many assets for growth, including location, the university and local schools, transportation facilities, cooperative leadership, involved and caring citizenry, the culture, Southern charm, and family-oriented atmosphere, and the outstanding and abundant natural and cultural resources. The community continues to invest in its infrastructure, public facilities, and other amenities to encourage, support, and attract compatible future growth and development. Success continues to follow, although recent Census population estimates and other economic indicators do indicate a slight downturn after the 2012 Acuity Brands Lighting plant closure. The community is expected to absorb this backstep, and shortly rebound because of its many assets and advantages and extraordinary quality of life.

Continuing slow, but steady growth and development trends are expected to continue as a result. There continues to be much potential for additional residential and business growth and more diverse economic development by embracing and augmenting its backdrop of facilitating community and educational resources, committed leadership, involved citizenry, impressive heritage, abundant natural resources, and great natural beauty. The community truly does expect to continue to enjoy success and expanding growth and development by “advancing an exceptional rural smalltown community.”

Most current growth is concentrated in or near Cochran, including residential, commercial, and industrial. Recent commercial growth has concentrated along the U.S. 23 Cochran Bypass. There has been limited industrial growth and the community was effectively left with no current major industry when the Acuity Brands Lighting plant closed in 2012. The existing industrial park, located just north of Cochran with direct access to the Bypass, was the home of Acuity Brands, and would be the logical place for most new industrial and supportive commercial development. Other major/commercial growth attractors and locations would include the I-16/Georgia 112 interchange node, existing vacant commercial/old industrial sites along North Avenue and Dohl Street in Cochran, and downtown Cochran.

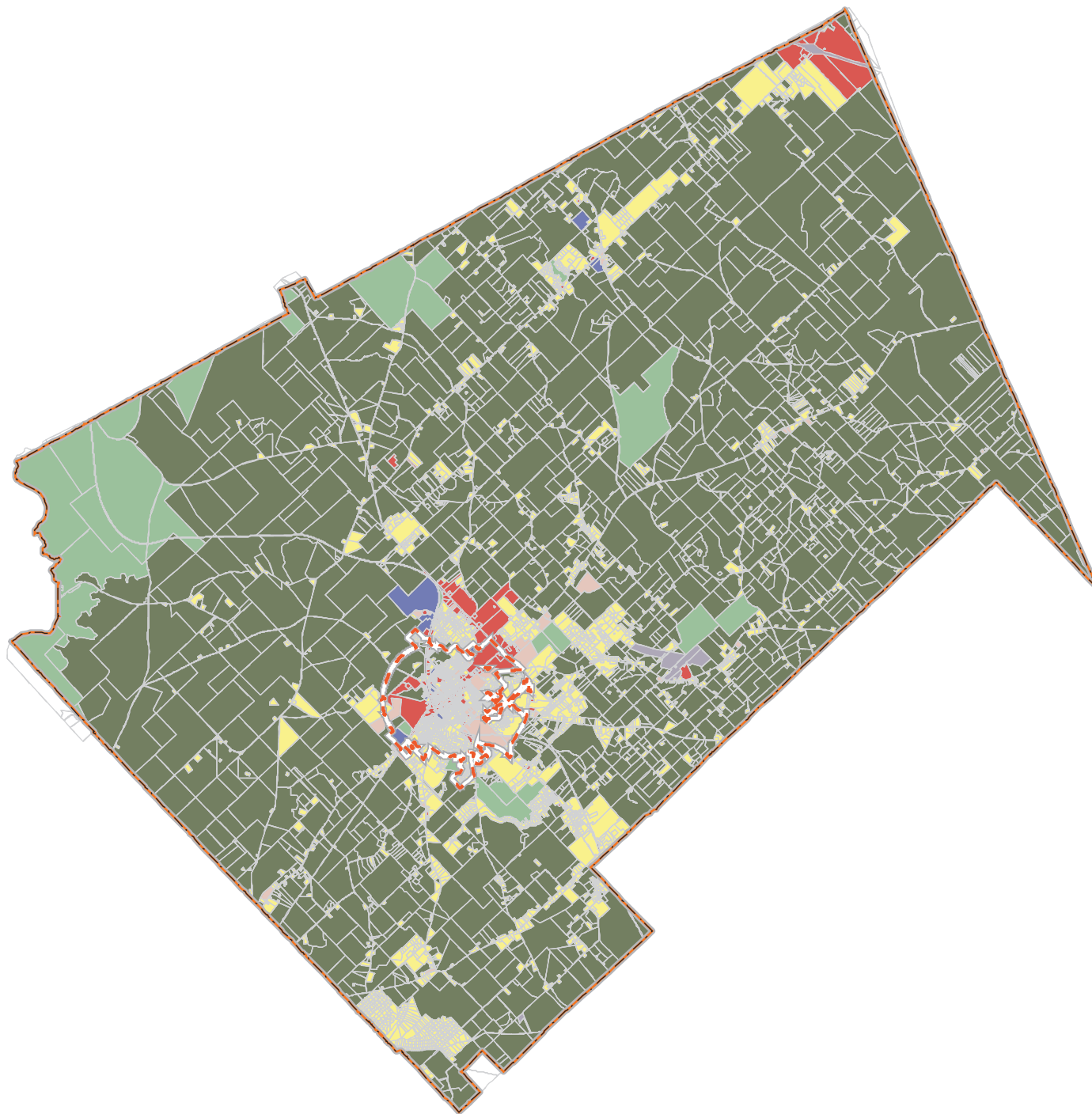
Residential growth within the county has been relatively limited, with no major concentrations, except that generally the southern/eastern area of Bleckley adjacent to Cochran and beyond has seen more growth. Middle Georgia State University, the new Bleckley County High School, and the southern terminus of the Cochran Bypass are all located in the southeast vicinity of the city. A recent subdivision, Wood Oak, located on Cook Road off the Bypass has developed in this area, and the Woods Golf Course and subdivision is also located nearby. Similarly, the Lake Linda area is located farther east in the Empire Community, and will also attract residential growth. The Cary community and Georgia Highway 112 areas north of Cochran will attract more limited residential growth. There are infill development opportunities throughout Cochran, particularly east toward the Bypass. Redevelopment neighborhood areas within Cochran include the Tree Streets, Happy Hill, Beech and Cherry streets, Flower Streets, and Railroad Avenue neighborhoods.

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

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

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

# Bleckley County Future Land Use



## Legend

- County Boundary
- Cochran City Limits
- Tax Parcels
- Agriculture/Forestry
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Parks/Recreation/Conservation
- Public/Institutional
- Residential
- Transportation/Communication/Utilities



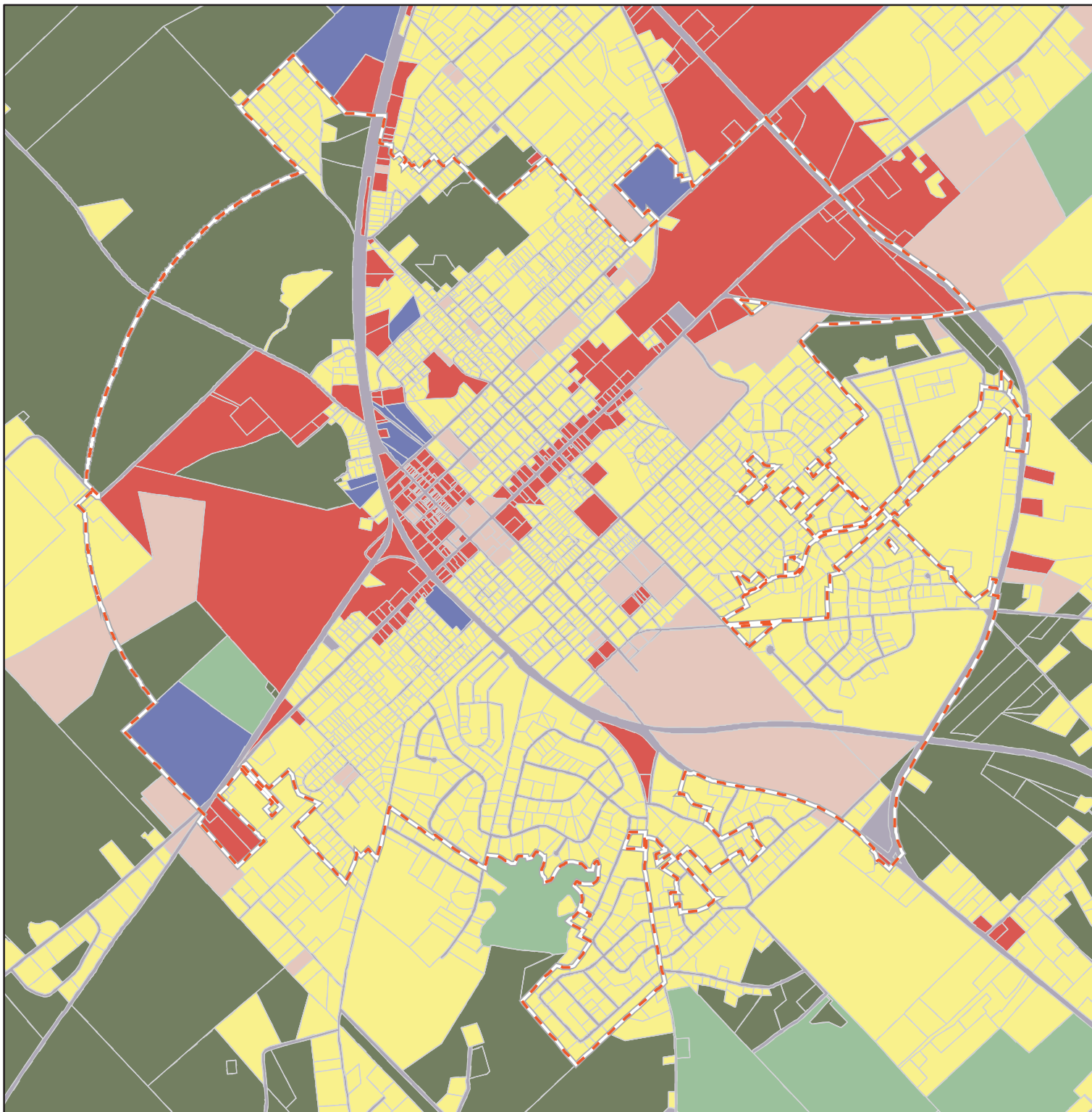
0 0.75 1.5 3 4.5 6 Miles



Source: Heart of Georgia Altamaha RC, 2016



# City of Cochran Future Land Use



## Legend

- County Boundary
- Cochran City Limits
- Tax Parcels
- Agriculture/Forestry
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Parks/Recreation/Conservation
- Public/Institutional
- Residential
- Transportation/Communication/Utilities

0 0.1 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 Miles



Source: Heart of Georgia Altamaha RC, 2016

### Address Growth Management/Guide Compatible Development

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

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

As noted above, Bleckley County has only limited land use and building regulations, road acceptance/subdivision ordinances, a manufactured home ordinance, and others to address specific issues or nuisances. Only Cochran has a zoning ordinance and both have only limited building code enforcement. These ordinances need update, expansion, coordination, and joint collaboration/code enforcement/countywide development permitting to initiate a more comprehensive and coordinated approach for land use management.

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

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



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

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

### Encourage Infill Development/Downtown Revitalization

It only makes sense to utilize lands and buildings where taxpayers and private interests have invested in providing costly infrastructure and construction in the past before extending additional infrastructure or incurring completely new construction costs. There are an abundance of available vacant commercial, industrial and residential structures within the community, as well as areas with readily available infrastructure. Available historic buildings located in downtown Cochran or elsewhere are avenues for preservation of character and heritage and opportunities for economic and community development utilizing existing served areas. Attractive and relatively low-cost historic homes are a potential attraction for retirees and families alike.

### Improve Community Appearance

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

### Seek Compatible Development/Utilization

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

# COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAMS

The Community Work Program Element is the chosen implementation strategy which the community has identified to begin its path toward improvement and its desired future growth and development. These are the immediate steps the community has chosen to address identified community issues, needs, and opportunities, and begin the journey to achieve the desired community vision. This plan element answers the questions, “How are we, as a community, going to get where we desire, given where we are?” The Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan includes a separate community work program for each local government involved, as well as a report of accomplishments on their previous work program. The Long Term Policies identified under the Community Goals element identifies implementation activities and ideals which may take longer than five years, or because of circumstances involved, including finances, are not envisioned to begin in the near future.

# **BLECKLEY COUNTY**

**Bleckley County  
Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program  
Report of Accomplishments**

Element	Initiation Year	Description	Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	Status/Comments
			Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N	
ED, IC	2012	Utilize the Chamber and Industrial Development Authority to develop a detailed economic development marketing strategy			Y	2018				Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is currently developing a marketing strategy.
ED, IC	2013	Pursue Guaranteed Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) designation and maintain GRAD compatible industrial sites to encourage/attract economic development opportunities after designation is received			Y	2017				Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is currently working on certification paperwork.
ED, CFS	2013	Pursue the widening of U.S. 23 to Eastman to four lanes			Y	2020				Right-of-Way is currently being acquired.
ED, CFS, IC	2013	Pursue the widening of the U.S. 23/GA 87 Cochran By-Pass to four lanes			Y	2018				Right-of-Way is currently being acquired. Project is scheduled to begin construction in 2017.
ED, CFS, LU, IC	2013	Seek the development of appropriate signage and landscaping along the Cochran Bypass					Y	2019		Signage and landscaping projects will begin once the Cochran Bypass widening project has been completed.
ED, IC	2012	Continue to pursue funding as needed to further develop the new Industrial Park, including expansion and additional infrastructure, as appropriate, including the widening and resurfacing of the entranceway			Y	2020				Phase 1 of construction is complete- Roadway within park is now paved. Further infrastructure expansion will take place as needed with new industry.
ED, IC	2013	Seek to develop, improve, and promote the old industrial spec building area as a community industrial park			Y	2019				Industrial Development Authority has continuously marketed spec building but have not been able find a buyer to date.

**Bleckley County  
Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program  
Report of Accomplishments**

Element	Initiation Year	Description	Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	Status/Comments
			Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N	
ED, IC	2012	Seek to reactivate and utilize the Ocmulgee Regional Joint Development Authority to assist with economic development efforts			Y	2017				The Ocmulgee Regional Joint Development Authority is currently being reactivated and anticipates being a viable entity in 2017.
NCR	2016	Pursue funding to rehabilitate the former Bleckley County Jail according to preservation standards for a compatible new use						Y	2019	No progress to date. Job Training Unlimited currently utilizes the building for a WIOA One Stop location.
NCR, CFS, LU	2012	Pursue funding to increase local recycling efforts						Y	2021	The County has currently suspended recycling collection due to commodity prices. Recycling service will be offered as it becomes economically feasible.
NCR	2012	Continue to assist in nominating historic properties to the National Register of Historic Places							Y	The County will continue to assist in the nominating of historic properties. This item will be placed in the policy section of future plans due to its nature, and to conform to plan standards.
CFS	2012	Pursue funding to establish signage at Dykes Landing concerning the Ocmulgee Blueway	Y	2014						Signage was completed with County and State (Department of Natural Resources) funding.
CFS, IC	2012	Seek to develop improved public safety mutual aid agreements for fire and law enforcement protection			Y	2017				Bleckley County and the City of Cochran are in the process of revising the public safety mutual aid agreements and is expected to be complete in 2017.

**Bleckley County  
Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program  
Report of Accomplishments**

Element	Initiation Year	Description	Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	Status/Comments	
			Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N		
CFS, IC	2016	Seek funding as needed for infrastructure and other improvements at the I-16/GA 112 interchange						Y	2021		This item has been postponed due to a lack of funding.
CFS	2014	Purchase land for the development of a county annex						Y	2021		This item has been postponed due to a lack of funding and a lack of available land for purchase.
CFS, IC	2012	Pursue the development of a long range Recreation Master Plan						Y	2018		No reportable action has been taken toward a Recreation Master plan. Due to departmental staff changes this project has been postponed.
HO, LU, IC	2013	Pursue the development of subdivision regulations						Y	2018		Development of subdivision regulations has not been politically feasible. It remains an interest to the County.
HO, LU, IC	2012	Seek to adopt and enforce construction codes countywide, and pursue the feasibility of establishing a joint codes enforcement program	Y	2011							The County now follows and enforces construction codes countywide. Building codes enforcement is jointly operated with the City of Cochran.
HO	2012	Adopt and enforce a vacant/dilapidated buildings ordinance								Y	This action item was dropped and is not viewed as a County issue.
HO, LU, IC	2012	Pursue the development and enforcement of manufactured home/park regulations countywide						Y	2019		New manufactured homes are inspected when initially set up. There has been little progress toward further regulation of manufactured homes. Park regulations remain an item to be pursued in the future.



**Bleckley County  
Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program  
2017 – 2021**

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Each Year	Beyond 2021	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Utilize the Chamber and Industrial Development Authority to develop a detailed economic development marketing strategy	X	X						X	X	Chamber, IDA	\$1,000 ( Staff Time)	X			
Pursue Guaranteed Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) designation and maintain GRAD compatible industrial sites to encourage/attract economic development opportunities after designation is received	X							X	X	DCA (OneGeorgia), USDA Rural Dev't., Chamber, IDA	\$100,000/yr	X	X	X	X
Pursue the widening of U.S. 23 to Eastman to four lanes	X	X	X	X				X		Chamber, IDA, DOT	\$33.6 Million		X	X	
Pursue the widening of the U.S. 23/GA 87 Cochran By-Pass to four lanes	X	X						X	X	Chamber, IDA, DOT			X	X	
Seek the development of appropriate signage and landscaping along the Cochran Bypass			X	X				X	X	DOT (TE)	\$100,000	X	X	X	
Continue to pursue funding as needed to further develop the new Industrial Park, including expansion and additional infrastructure, as appropriate, including the widening and resurfacing of the entranceway	X	X	X	X				X	X	Chamber, IDA, DCA (OneGeorgia), USDA Rural Dev't, DEcD	\$5 Million	X	X	X	
Seek to develop, improve, and promote the old industrial spec building area as a community industrial park.	X	X	X					X		Chamber, IDA, DCA (OneGeorgia), USDA Rural Dev't, DEcD	\$1 Million	X	X		

**Bleckley County  
Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program  
2017 – 2021**

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Each Year	Beyond 2021	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Seek to reactivate and utilize the Ocmulgee Regional Joint Development Authority to assist with economic development efforts	X							X		IDA	\$5,000	X			
Pursue funding to rehabilitate the former Bleckley County Jail according to preservation standards for a compatible new use			X	X				X		HPD	\$250,000	X	X		X
Pursue funding to increase local recycling efforts					X			X		GEFA	\$5,000	X	X		
Seek to develop improved public safety mutual aid agreements for fire and law enforcement protection	X							X	X		NA				
Seek funding as needed for infrastructure and other improvements at the I-16/GA 112 interchange					X			X	X	Chamber, IDA, DCA (OneGeorgia), USDA Rural Dev't	\$10 Million (total)	X	X	X	
Purchase land for the development of a county annex					X			X			\$150,000	X			
Pursue the development of a long range Recreation Master Plan		X						X	X	CBRD	\$20,000	X			
Pursue the development of subdivision regulations		X						X			NA	X			

**Bleckley County  
Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program  
2017 – 2021**

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Each Year	Beyond 2021	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Pursue the development and enforcement of manufactured home/park regulations countywide			X					X			\$20,000 (enforcement)	X			
Replace Motor grader				X				X		SPLOST	\$50,000	X			
Replace Hendricks Road Bridge				X				X		SPLOST	\$250,000	X			
Reglaze all windows and doors in the courthouse		X						X			\$100,000	X			
Complete Projects Listed in TIA Band 2 (Trail Branch Rd., Limestone Rd., Talmadge Coley Rd., and Irve Land Rd.)	X	X	X					X		TIA GDOT	\$1,376,600	X	X		
Complete Projects Listed in TIA Band 3 (Browning Dr., Bates Rd., Crest Dr., Cary Salem Rd., and Magnolia Rd.)				X	X		X	X		TIA GDOT	\$1,316,000	X	X		

# **CITY OF COCHRAN**

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

Element	Initiation Year	Description	Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	Status/Comments
			Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N	
ED, IC	2012	Utilize the Chamber and Industrial Development Authority to develop a detailed economic development marketing strategy			Y	2018				Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is currently developing a marketing strategy.
ED, IC	2013	Pursue Guaranteed Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) designation and maintain GRAD compatible industrial sites to encourage/attract economic development opportunities after designation is received			Y	2017				Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is currently working on certification paperwork.
ED, CFS	2012	Continue to maintain and upgrade, as needed, the Cochran Airport, including completing the construction of new T-Hangars	Y	2016	Y	2019				Phase 1 of perimeter fencing project is complete (212,000 feet of fence has been constructed).  Phase 2 of perimeter fencing project is scheduled to begin in second quarter of 2017 (Construction of 230,000 feet of fencing). Action step appropriately reworded in the new Community Work Program.  The construction of new T-hangers is scheduled to be complete in 2019. This action step has been separated into an individual step in the new Community Work Program
ED, CFS, IC	2013	Pursue the widening of the U.S. 23/GA 87 Cochran By-Pass to four lanes			Y	2018				Right-of-Way is currently being acquired with a scheduled start date of 2017.
ED, CFS, LU, IC	2013	Seek the development of appropriate signage and landscaping along the Cochran Bypass			Y	2017				No major improvements have been made; however, the City currently has a Gateway project underway to be completed in 2017.

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

Element	Initiation Year	Description	Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	Status/Comments	
			Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N		
ED, IC	2012	Continue to pursue funding as needed to further develop the new Industrial Park, including expansion and additional infrastructure, as appropriate, including the widening and resurfacing of the entranceway			Y	2020				Phase 1 of construction is complete- Roadway within park is now paved. Further infrastructure expansion will take place as needed with new industry.	
ED, IC	2013	Seek to develop, improve, and promote the old industrial spec building area as a community industrial park			Y	2019				Industrial Development Authority has continuously marketed spec building but have not been able find a buyer to date.	
ED, NCR, LU, IC	2012	Pursue the feasibility of establishing a local downtown historic district in Cochran to help encourage downtown revitalization activities						Y	2018	The City actively encourages the preservation of historic buildings and has worked with downtown business owners to begin revitalizing downtown. No historic district has been established to date but it remains an item to be revisited in the future.	
ED, CFS, IC	2016	Pursue the extension of natural gas service to the I-16/GA 112 interchange								Y	This item has been dropped due to lack of funds. Action will likely be accomplished outside of this five year planning period.
NCR, CFS, LU	2012	Pursue funding to increase local recycling efforts								Y	The City currently does not see this as economically feasible but will continue to pursue funding for increasing recycling efforts. This item will be placed in the policy section of future plans due to its nature, and to conform to plan standards.
NCR	2012	Continue to assist in nominating historic properties to the National Register of Historic Places								Y	The City will continue to assist in the nominating of historic properties. This item will be placed in the policy section of future plans due to its nature, and to conform to plan standards.

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

Element	Initiation Year	Description	Accomplished		Underway		Postponed		Dropped	Status/Comments	
			Y/N	Year	Y/N	Est. Comp. Date	Y/N	Est. Int. Date	Y/N		
CFS, IC	2012	Pursue the development of a long range Recreation Master Plan						Y	2018		No reportable action has been taken toward a Recreation Master plan. Due to departmental staff changes this project has been postponed.
CFS, IC	2012	Seek to develop improved public safety mutual aid agreements for fire and law enforcement protection			Y	2017					The City of Cochran and Bleckley County are in the process of revising the public safety mutual aid agreements and is expected to be complete in 2017.
CFS, IC	2016	Seek funding as needed for infrastructure and other improvements at the I-16/GA 112 interchange						Y	2021		This item has been postponed due to a lack of funding. It remains an interest of the City, and is a project to be reconsidered in the future.
HO, LU, IC	2012	Pursue the development of subdivision regulations			Y	2017					Subdivision regulations have been presented to the City Zoning Committee with an expected completion date of early 2017.
HO, LU	2012	Utilize the Cochran Urban Redevelopment Plan to develop revitalization programs for residential redevelopment areas								Y	This item has been postponed due to a lack of funding. The City seeks to utilize the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) for housing redevelopment.
HO, LU, IC	2012	Pursue the feasibility of establishing a joint codes enforcement program	Y	2011							Building codes enforcement is jointly operated with Bleckley County.
LU	2012	Complete the update to the City's zoning ordinance			Y	2017					The zoning ordinance is currently undergoing revisions and is expected to be completed in 2017.

**CITY OF COCHRAN**  
**Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program**  
**2017 – 2021**

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Each Year	Beyond 2021	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Utilize the Chamber and Industrial Development Authority to develop a detailed economic development marketing strategy	X	X						X	X	Chamber, IDA	\$1,000 ( Staff Time)	X			
Pursue Guaranteed Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) designation and maintain GRAD compatible industrial sites to encourage/attract economic development opportunities after designation is received			X					X	X	DCA (OneGeorgia), USDA Rural Dev't., Chamber, IDA	\$100,000/yr	X	X	X	X
Pursue the widening of the U.S. 23/GA 87 Cochran By-Pass to four lanes			X					X	X	Chamber, IDA, DOT			X	X	
Seek the development of appropriate signage and landscaping along the Cochran Bypass	X							X	X	DOT (TE)	\$100,000	X	X	X	
Continue to pursue funding as needed to further develop the new Industrial Park, including expansion and additional infrastructure, as appropriate, including the widening and resurfacing of the entranceway	X	X	X	X				X	X	Chamber, IDA, DCA (OneGeorgia), USDA Rural Dev't, DEcD	\$5 Million	X	X	X	
Seek to develop, improve, and promote the old industrial spec building area as a community industrial park	X	X	X					X		Chamber, IDA, DCA (OneGeorgia), USDA Rural Dev't, DEcD	\$1 Million	X	X		



**CITY OF COCHRAN**  
**Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program**  
**2017 – 2021**

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Each Year	Beyond 2021	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Pursue the feasibility of establishing a local downtown historic district in Cochran to help encourage downtown revitalization activities		X							X	Chamber, DDA, BHT	NA				
Pursue the extension of natural gas service to the I-16/GA 112 interchange	X								X	AGL, DCA (OneGeorgia)	\$250,000	X	X	X	X
Pursue the development of a long range Recreation Master Plan		X						X	X	CBRD	\$20,000	X			
Seek to develop improved public safety mutual aid agreements for fire and law enforcement protection	X							X	X		NA				
Seek funding as needed for infrastructure and other improvements at the I-16/GA 112 interchange					X			X	X	Chamber, IDA, DCA (OneGeorgia), GEFA, USDA Rural Dev't.	\$10 Million (total)	X	X	X	
Pursue the development of subdivision regulations	X								X		\$1,000 (enforcement)	X			
Complete the update to the City's zoning ordinance	X								X		NA				
Phase II Perimeter Fencing at Cochran Municipal Airport	X	X							X	GDOT, FAA	\$230,000	X	X	X	
Extend runway at Cochran Municipal Airport by 800 feet.			X						X	GDOT, FAA	\$180,000	X	X	X	

**CITY OF COCHRAN**  
**Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program**  
**2017 – 2021**

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Each Year	Beyond 2021	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Construct T-Hangers at Cochran Municipal Airport		X	X						X	GDOT, FAA, Cochran Airport Authority	\$230,000	X	X	X	
Rehabilitate the City's elevated water tank (Paint, Sandblast, Lining)	X								X	GEFA	\$800,000	X	X		
Install Auto Water Meter Reading System citywide	X								X	GEFA	\$800,000	X	X		
Phase I Sewer Rehabilitation (CIPP) Citywide	X								X	GEFA	\$1.3 Million	X	X		
Phase II Sewer Rehabilitation (CIPP) Citywide			X						X	GEFA	\$2.5 Million	X	X		
Water line and fire hydrant repair/replacement Phase II			X						X	GEFA	\$2.5 Million	X	X		
Sewer line Rehabilitation (Hospital and Ann streets)	X								X	GA DCA (CDBG)	\$565,000	X	X		
Sewer, Water & Drainage Rehabilitation (Railroad St. & Porter Rd.)			X						X	GA DCA (CDBG)	\$660,000	X	X		
Renovate current City Hall or construct a new building				X					X	SPLOST	\$800,000	X	X		
Renovate or replace city police station				X					X	SPLOST	\$800,000	X	X		
Pave roadway to water treatment plant		X							X		\$275,000	X			
Dredge and clean blue streams within city limits				X					X	GEMA, FEMA	\$1 Million	X	X	X	
Install emergency warning sirens for citywide notifications	X								X	GEMA, FEMA	\$50,000	X	X	X	
Upgrade/Purchase police equipment (Bulletproof Vests, Radios, Etc.)						X			X	USDA	\$20,000	X	X	X	
Upgrade/Purchase turnout gear for firefighters						X			X	USDA, FEMA	\$20,000	X	X	X	

**CITY OF COCHRAN**  
**Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program**  
**2017 – 2021**

Activity	Years							Responsibility			Estimated Cost	Funding Source			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Each Year	Beyond 2021	County	City	Other		Local	State	Federal	Private
Increase housing rehabilitation opportunities by utilizing the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) program	X	X	X	X					X	GA DCA	\$500,000	X	X	X	
Initiate demolition/land bank program for vacant and condemned housing		X							X		\$45,000	X			
Upgrade basketball court and construct playground at the Payton Williams Center			X						X	SPLOST	\$400,000	X			
Repair/replace 1000 feet per year of sidewalks						X			X	TIA GDOT	\$25,000	X	X		
Complete Projects Listed in TIA Band 2 (Railroad Ave., Beech St., MLK Blvd.)	X	X	X						X	TIA GDOT	\$245,398	X	X		
Complete Projects Listed in TIA Band 3 (Lewis St., Palm St., Crest Dr.)				X	X		X		X	TIA GDOT	\$268,546	X	X		

# **APPENDIX**

## **APPENDIX**

### **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

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

The local governments coordinated establishment of a steering committee which they called the “Local Plan Coordination Committee” approximately one to two months ahead of the scheduled first committee meeting, and invited through formal e-mail and direct contact as many stakeholders and community leaders as they could envision. Regional Commission planning staff had previously counseled the local governments to make such efforts a priority a number of times, including in a plan implementation meeting held in late October, 2015, in the letter offering Regional Commission plan preparation assistance, and in direct communication and follow-up for plan development organization. DCA’s Suggested Community Plan Stakeholder List, some specific known local candidates, and a model invitation for stakeholder participation were provided for local government use. In addition to local government direct contact, the local governments involved local media and their public meetings to notify the general public and any other interested parties to participate. The official public advertising of the required public hearing further invited all those interested to participate. Similar efforts by the local media and local governments occurred prior to the final committee meeting and public hearing to review the draft plan prior to its formal submittal.

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

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

## **Cochran-Bleckley County Stakeholder Invitation**

The Bleckley County Commissioner, in conjunction with the City of Cochran, is initiating a process to prepare a new countywide joint comprehensive plan in accordance with Georgia law. While this plan is necessary to maintain local government eligibility for state grants, loans, and permits, it is also an important blueprint for addressing local concerns, and establishing a guide for community growth and development. We need the assistance and involvement of the entire community, both public and private.

You have been identified as someone involved and important to Bleckley County and its future. You are invited and encouraged to participate on the Bleckley County Local Plan Coordination Committee which will help develop our new joint comprehensive plan. The first meeting of this Committee will be Thursday, February 25, 2016 at 10:30 a.m. at the Bleckley County Extension Office. The plan development process will involve about five (5) meetings of the Committee over the next few months.

Thank you for your willingness to assist us in this important endeavor.

Diane Smith  
Bleckley County Courthouse  
112 N. Second Street  
Cochran, GA 31014  
478-934-3200

## **PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

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

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

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

Other topics to be covered will be the ongoing preparation of an update to the countywide joint solid waste management plan, also in compliance with state law.

**PUBLIC HEARING DATE AND TIME: Monday, March 7, 2016 at 5:30 p.m.**

**LOCATION OF PUBLIC HEARING: Bleckley County Extension Office**

Please attend, voice your opinions, and be involved. Help your community be proud about its future. All persons with a disability or otherwise needing assistance should contact Bleckley County Commissioner’s Office, 112 N. Second Street, Cochran, Georgia 31014, or call (478) 934-3200.



## **PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

### **Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan “Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community”**

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

The comprehensive plan is titled “Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community” to generate interest and enthusiasm, and to summarize its aspirations. The plan outlines a community vision, identifies needs and opportunities, and delineates long term policies and a community work program to provide a guide and blueprint for future growth and development within the community. The plan is in draft finalization before submittal to the state for review.

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

**PUBLIC HEARING DATE AND TIME: Monday, August 1, 2016 at 6:00 p.m.**

**LOCATION OF PUBLIC HEARING: Bleckley County Extension Office**

Please attend and voice your opinions. Help your community achieve a better future. All persons with a disability or otherwise needing assistance should contact Bleckley County Commissioner’s Office, 112 North Second Street, Cochran, Georgia 31014, or call (478) 934-3200.

**BLECKLEY COUNTY-COCHRAN JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
LOCAL PLAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
Bleckley County Extension Office, Cochran, GA  
February 25, 2016  
AGENDA**

**Introductions**

**Background/Committee's Purpose**

**Proposed Timetable of Plan Development**

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

**Next Meeting**

**Draft Community Vision Review**

**Issues and Opportunities Input**

**BLECKLEY COUNTY-COCHRAN JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
LOCAL PLAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
Bleckley County Extension Office, Cochran, GA  
March 15, 2016  
AGENDA**

**Draft Community Vision Review**

**Issues and Opportunities Input**

**Next Meeting – Thursday, April 14, 2016, 10:30 a.m.  
Revised Draft Community Vision Review  
Draft Issues and Opportunities Review  
Goals/Policies Input**

**COCHRAN-BLECKLEY COUNTY JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
LOCAL PLAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
Bleckley County Extension Office, Cochran, GA  
April 14, 2016  
AGENDA**

**Revised Draft Community Vision Review**

**Revised Draft Issues and Opportunities Review**

**Long Term Policies Input**

**Next Meeting – Thursday, May 5, 2016, 10:30 a.m.**

**Revised Community Vision Review**

**Revised Issues and Opportunities Review**

**Revised Draft Long Term Policies Review**

**Economic Development/Land Use/Plan Coordination**

**COCHRAN-BLECKLEY COUNTY JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
LOCAL PLAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
Bleckley County Extension Office, Cochran, GA  
May 5, 2016  
AGENDA**

**Revised Community Vision Review**

**Revised Issues and Opportunities Review**

**Revised Draft Long Term Policies Review**

**Economic Development Issues discussion**

**Plan Coordination**

**Land Use Discussion**

**Next Meeting – Late June. Date to be determined. Draft Plan Review.**

**COCHRAN-BLECKLEY COUNTY JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
LOCAL PLAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
County Extension Office, Cochran, GA  
July 28, 2016  
AGENDA**

**Draft Plan Review**

**Submittal Discussion**

**Public Hearing – August 1, 2016, County Extension Office, 6:00 p.m.**

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

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

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

**Active Participants in Cochran-Bleckley Local Plan  
Coordination Committee Meetings**

Bleckley County Commissioner  
Bob Brockman, County Commissioner  
Diane Smith, County Clerk

City of Cochran  
Dr. Michael Stoy, Mayor  
Fleming Gilman, City Council  
Richard Newbern, City Administrator  
Lisa Chastain, City Clerk  
Bill Davis, Planning and Zoning  
Keith Martin, Housing Authority

Bleckley County Board of Education  
Steve Smith, School Superintendent

Middle Georgia State University  
Henry Whitfield, Director of Cochran and Eastman  
campuses

Cochran-Bleckley Industrial Development  
Nicole Ward, Director

Cochran-Bleckley Chamber of Commerce  
Nicole Ward, Director  
Jamie Sheffield

Cochran-Bleckley Tourism  
Nicole Ward, Director

Cochran-Bleckley Library  
Gina Thomas, Director

Bleckley County Cooperative Extension  
Cheryl Little

Georgia Farm Bureau  
Michael Porter

Georgia Power Company  
Jim Rhodes

Bleckley County Emergency Management Agency  
Mike Smith, Director

Heartland EMS  
Bill Cheek

Cochran-Bleckley Airport Authority  
Bill Coody, Member

Bleckley County Health Department  
Debbie Martin

Bleckley Memorial Hospital Authority  
Bill Coody, Chairman

Bleckley County Board of Assessors  
Beth Harding, Appraiser  
Alan Curtis, Chairman

Bleckley County Tax Commissioner  
Paige Baggs, Deputy

Citizens Bank of Cochran  
Matt Fordham, Vice-President

Cochran Bank and Trust  
Mary Ann Young, Vice-President

Bleckley County DFACS  
Ruth Roberson, Board Member

Bleckley County NAACP  
Doris Harris

Cochran-Bleckley Ministerial Alliance  
Jerri Tuck, Secretary

Others  
Carol Denmark, Local Downtown Business Owner  
Russell Davidson, Local Resident  
Billy Yeomans, Local Resident



## RESOLUTION

**WHEREAS**, the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 requires all local governments in Georgia to prepare a comprehensive plan; and

**WHEREAS**, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs has established "Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning," effective March 1, 2014, under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 for coordinated and comprehensive planning, including standards and procedures for the preparation of local comprehensive plans and implementation thereof, community involvement, and coordinated review; and

**WHEREAS**, Bleckley County, Georgia has participated with the City of Cochran in a coordinated and comprehensive planning process under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, and the Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning through the Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan Coordination Committee, and with the assistance of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission, to update its existing adopted comprehensive plan with a new full plan update; and

**WHEREAS**, this coordinated and comprehensive planning process has resulted in the development of a new joint comprehensive plan, *Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community*, for Bleckley County and the City of Cochran; and

**WHEREAS**, the new joint comprehensive plan has been previously submitted to the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for official review; and

**WHEREAS**, the Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan, *Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community*, has now been certified by this review as adequately addressing the Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning and meeting all requirements as established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989; and

**WHEREAS**, Bleckley County is now desirous of adopting *Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community* as its official comprehensive plan under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, and as a general policy guide to its future growth and development;

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Bleckley County Commissioner hereby approves and adopts the Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan, *Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community*, as Bleckley County's official local comprehensive plan under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, as amended, and thus replacing its previous comprehensive plan adopted in 2011.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Bleckley County Commissioner hereby instructs and directs that formal notification of said adoption be forwarded to the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and to other agencies, as appropriate.

**SO RESOLVED**, this 20 day of 107, 2016.

BY: Paul B. Smith ATTEST: James D. Smith

**RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 requires all local governments in Georgia to prepare a comprehensive plan; and

**WHEREAS**, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs has established "Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning," effective March 1, 2014, under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 for coordinated and comprehensive planning, including standards and procedures for the preparation of local comprehensive plans and implementation thereof, community involvement, and coordinated review; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Cochran, Georgia has participated with Bleckley County in a coordinated and comprehensive planning process under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, and the Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning through the Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan Coordination Committee, and with the assistance of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission, to update its existing adopted comprehensive plan with a new full plan update; and

**WHEREAS**, this coordinated and comprehensive planning process has resulted in the development of a new joint comprehensive plan, *Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community*, for Bleckley County and the City of Cochran; and

**WHEREAS**, the new joint comprehensive plan has been previously submitted to the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for official review; and

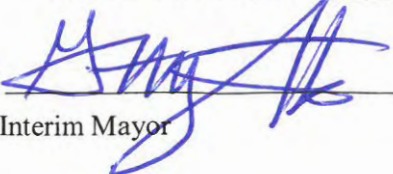
**WHEREAS**, the Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan, *Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community*, has now been certified by this review as adequately addressing the Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning and meeting all requirements as established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989; and

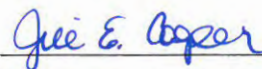
**WHEREAS**, the City of Cochran is now desirous of adopting *Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community* as its official comprehensive plan under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, and as a general policy guide to its future growth and development;

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Mayor and City Council of the City of Cochran hereby approve and adopt the Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive Plan, *Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community*, as the City of Cochran's official local comprehensive plan under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, as amended, and thus replacing its previous comprehensive plan adopted in 2011.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Mayor and City Council of the City of Cochran hereby instruct and direct that formal notification of said adoption be forwarded to the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and to other agencies, as appropriate.

**SO RESOLVED**, this 11<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2016.

**BY:**   
Interim Mayor

**ATTEST:**   
Jill Cooper, Interim City Clerk



Robert Brockman  
Bleckley County Commissioner



112 N. Second Street  
Cochran, GA 31014  
Phone 478-934-3200  
Fax 478-934-0822

August 22, 2016

Mr. Brett Manning, Executive Director  
Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission  
5405 Oak Street  
Eastman, Georgia 31023

RE: Cochran-Bleckley County Joint Comprehensive  
Submittal Plan

Dear Brett:

Bleckley County and the City of Cochran have completed preparation of a new joint comprehensive plan, "Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community" under the 2014 Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). Please consider this letter as formal submittal and request for review of this joint comprehensive plan in accordance with the Planning Standards.

As noted in the plan's "Introduction and Executive Summary," this joint comprehensive plan has been developed with appropriate public and community involvement. This community involvement included both a broad-based steering committee, and the holding of the two required public hearings, one near plan initiation, and one after completion of preparation of the plan in draft form.

We formally certify that both the Altamaha Regional Water Plan and the Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria were considered during the process of developing this comprehensive plan. This consideration process is summarized in the plan's "Introduction and Executive Summary."

Please initiate formal review for our joint comprehensive plan in accordance with the DCA Minimum Standards for both of our governments. If you have any questions concerning our submittal, please contact Diane Smith, Bleckley County Clerk, at (478) 934-3200 or [dsmith@bleckley.org](mailto:dsmith@bleckley.org), on behalf of both of us.

Sincerely,

Bob Brockman  
Bleckley County Commissioner

Michael Stoy  
Mayor, City of Cochran

Enclosure: "Advancing an Exceptional Rural Smalltown Community"