

**JOINT CITY-COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2005-2025**

**COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT**

**for**

**OGLETHORPE COUNTY**

**And the cities of**

**ARNOLDSVILLE, CRAWFORD, LEXINGTON, AND MAXEYS**

**DRAFT – DECEMBER 2005**

Prepared by the Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0 Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Purpose .....	3
Scope .....	3
Methodology .....	5
<b>2.0 Issues and Opportunities .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Population.....	4
Economic Development .....	4
Housing .....	4
Natural Resources .....	5
Cultural Resources .....	5
Community Facilities and Services.....	6
Intergovernmental Coordination .....	6
Transportation .....	7
Land Use .....	7
<b>3.0 Analysis of Existing Development Patterns .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Existing Land Use .....	8
Areas Requiring Special Attention.....	11
Preliminary Character Areas .....	13
<b>4.0 Analysis of Supportive Data and Information.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Compliance with Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria .....	29
Analysis of Consistency with Service Delivery Strategy.....	31

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose**

This report lays the foundation for the revisions to the joint city-county Comprehensive Plan for Oglethorpe County that will create an agenda to manage growth over the next twenty years. Specifically, the report outlines a set of issues and opportunities related to each of the Comprehensive Plan's elements that are based on an analysis of the existing conditions and historical trends.

The report is designed to meet the Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and adopted on May 1, 2005.

### **Scope**

The report is written in executive summary format to provide an overview of the major findings. Detailed information on existing conditions, historical trends, and future forecasts are included in the Technical Addendum posted on the Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center's (NEGRDC) website.

The report contains four key components addressing the findings in the Technical Addendum including; a list of issues and opportunities resulting from an analysis of the available data; an analysis of existing development patterns; an evaluation of the community's existing policies and development patterns for consistency with DCA's Quality Community Objectives (located in the Technical Addendum); and an analysis of supportive data and information illustrating conformance with the Department of Natural Resources Environmental Planning Criteria and the Service Delivery Strategy.

### **Methodology**

The report is a product of a review of the community's plans, policies, regulations and development patterns by the NEGRDC and encompasses Oglethorpe County and the cities of Arnoldsville, Crawford, Lexington, and Maxeys.

The Community Assessment is the first step in the revision of the Comprehensive Plan. The Assessment will be submitted to the Georgia DCA for review and approval and will form the basis for developing the Community Agenda. The Community Agenda represents the community's vision, goals, policies, key issues and opportunities that the community chooses to address, and an action plan highlighting the necessary tools for implementing the plan.

## II. ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Population

#### 🕒 Issues

1. The county has experienced an annual growth rate in population over the past 15 years that has surpassed the statewide rate. This trend is expected to continue over the next twenty years with the population forecasted to nearly double by 2025.

### Economic Development

#### 🕒 Issues

1. There is a lack of available employment opportunities in Oglethorpe County for the expanding labor force.
2. The county needs to increase the amount of economic activity to offset the increasing tax burden on homeowners.
3. The available capacity of the existing wastewater treatment plant (located in the City of Crawford) is insufficient to accommodate prospective business and industry.
4. The skills of the existing labor force are mismatched with the locally available jobs increasing the outflow of commuters.

#### 🕒 Opportunities

1. The county has an abundance of pristine natural areas that could be utilized as a tool to promote eco and agri-tourism as an economic development strategy.
2. Revitalize the municipal downtowns to take advantage of their historic resources and redirect small business activity to the cities.
3. Focus economic recruitment initiatives on businesses matching the skill-set of the local labor force and requiring minimal infrastructure needs.
4. Capitalize on Oglethorpe County's expanding agricultural economy through a focus on recruiting agribusiness into the county.
5. Focus economic growth in areas that can be most easily served by both traditional (water, sewer, and roads) and neo-traditional (telecommunication) infrastructure networks to take advantage of Oglethorpe County's proximity to Athens-Clarke County and the University of Georgia. The better equipped the county is to handle economic growth the greater the opportunity to attract business and industry that does not require location in an urban environment.

### Housing

#### 🕒 Issues

1. Residential development on the fringe of the county increases the investment required in infrastructure expenditure (roads, water, schools, public safety) and provides greater proximity to employment and shopping opportunities outside of the county.

2. The majority of housing is moderately priced. Lower values for owner-occupied housing reduces the taxable revenue accrued from residential development and places financial burdens on local governments to provide the necessary services.
3. Single-family detached and manufactured units dominate the stock of available housing. The lack of diversity in the housing supply limits options for low-to-moderate income and elderly households.

🕒 **Opportunities**

1. Invest in the necessary infrastructure to allow for a greater diversity of housing types, sizes, and values to be developed within, and surrounding the municipalities. Without access to water and sewer residential development is limited to low-density, single-family housing.

**Natural Resources**

🕒 **Issues**

1. Preservation of agricultural resources and open space/greenspace.
2. Water quality degradation in Town Creek watershed as development increases.
3. Protecting the groundwater recharge area in the Crawford-Arnoldsville corridor as this is a prime development area that will require public water service in order to limit sprawl.
4. Uniform enforcement of Environmental Ordinances by all jurisdictions.

🕒 **Opportunities**

1. Implement greenspace protection plan – an average of 1,050 acres annually.
2. Prioritize areas for greenspace acquisition/designation.
3. Limiting impervious surface cover to <25 % within the Town Creek Watershed as this part of the county continues to develop.
4. Focus infrastructure in the Arnoldsville-Crawford corridor to facilitate development that will protect the area’s groundwater recharge area.

**Cultural Resources**

🕒 **Issues**

1. The county’s cultural resources are thoroughly documented through formal surveys and other local initiatives. The county’s most significant properties are also recognized through National Register listing. Crawford, Stephens, Maxeys and Arnoldsville are, however, not formally recognized as historic communities.
2. The county has a unique collection of historic resources. Information and educational materials about these resources exists in numerous forms, but little coordination exists in using this information to promote economic development opportunities.
3. A significant number of historic properties are not being improved and exist as unused and deteriorated buildings.
4. Vacancy among historic properties is widespread, both for commercial and residential properties. Rehabilitation of these properties is slow in progressing.

5. Management plans and feasibility studies for historic properties are needed to determine potential uses and rehabilitation costs.
6. Historically appropriate changes in historic areas are required in Lexington but elsewhere are voluntary.

🕒 **Opportunities**

1. Recognize appropriate historic areas through listing in the National Register of Historic Places to promote preservation and offer program benefits.
2. Create and/or participate in formal programs using state or national models to promote cultural resources and foster economic development opportunities through the increase in cultural tourism.
3. Promote the use of state, federal, and local financial incentives for rehabilitating historic properties.
4. Seek preservation grants to assess the reuse potential of government and non-profit owned buildings.
5. Continue participation and enhancements to the Certified Local Government Program (CLG) in Lexington and improve planning tools used in preservation planning (e.g., design guidelines, surveys, preservation studies, and training).

**Community Facilities and Services**

🕒 **Issues**

1. Public Sewerage service is at capacity with limited opportunities to accommodate new customers.
2. The water network is limited in the county and does not provide adequate pressure throughout the service area to provide full fire protection.
3. All new development is anticipated to utilize septic tanks for on-site wastewater treatment, which increases the potential for tank failure and environmental degradation.
4. The joint Athens-Clarke and Oglethorpe counties landfill reports a 15-year waste disposal capacity, which will require additional space to accommodate the projected growth.
5. Projected age distribution of the population illustrates an increase in school-aged children that will exceed existing capacities of the school system.

🕒 **Opportunities**

1. Explore inter-jurisdictional opportunities for infrastructure expansion maximizing the efficiency of financial investment.
2. Include school site planning in growth management decisions addressing the location of new facilities in relation to residential growth.

**Intergovernmental Coordination**

🕒 **Issues**

1. Oglethorpe County is now a part of the Athens Metropolitan Area but not a part of the regional transportation planning authority.

2. Intergovernmental coordination will be required to provide adequate infrastructure capacities to accommodate the projected growth.

🕒 **Opportunities**

1. Work closely with the Madison-Athens-Clarke-Oconee-Regional-Transportation-Study (MACORTS) to address the increasing transportation needs for Oglethorpe County.
2. Continue to address inter-jurisdictional water supply through the Service Delivery Strategy.

## **Transportation**

🕒 **Issues**

1. Increased truck traffic and congestion within downtown Lexington and Crawford along U.S. Highway 78.
2. The increase in residential development in conjunction with the increase in commuter labor force can be attributed to the increase in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) on local roads that are not designed to accommodate increased levels of traffic.
3. Low-density, rural development reduces opportunities for accommodating alternative modes of transportation, specifically bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
4. Over X% of local roads are unpaved.

🕒 **Opportunities**

1. The location of the planned U.S. Highway 78 bypass will alleviate truck traffic through the downtown corridors in Lexington and Crawford.
2. Address Athens Metropolitan Area transportation issues through regional planning efforts identifying facility needs.

## **Land Use**

🕒 **Issues**

1. New development is occurring within the unincorporated areas disconnected from existing municipalities.
2. Residential development is encroaching into active agricultural areas increasing the potential conflicts between farms and subdivisions.

🕒 **Opportunities**

1. Encourage reinvestment and redevelopment opportunities within existing municipalities.
2. Reserve land for commercial/industrial growth on the Future Land Use map to accommodate economic development initiatives.
3. Create public/private partnerships that identify financially feasible opportunities for preserving greenspace.

### III. ANALYSIS OF EXISTING DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

#### Existing Land Use

The existing land use information and map is used to illustrate the issues and opportunities in relation to the existing development patterns. Analyzing the existing land use map in conjunction with the historical trend data can help to illustrate how the development patterns were formed.

The land use map is an illustration of what of what is currently on the ground and includes the cities of Arnoldsville, Crawford, Lexington, and Maxeys. It is based on a compilation of tax assessor’s data in comparison with aerial photography, and field surveys to determine what the predominant land use is for every parcel of land throughout the county.

Table 1 defines the types of land uses found in Oglethorpe County, and Table 2 breaks down the existing land use by category and total acreage. Figure 1 illustrates the existing countywide land use map.

**Table 1: Land Use Definitions**

<b>Land Use Category</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	These establishments grow crops, raise animals, harvest timber, and harvest fish and other animals from a farm, ranch, or their natural habitats.
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	These establishments operate facilities or provide services for a variety of cultural, entertainment, and recreational functions.
Education, public administration, health care, and other institutions	This is an aggregation of all public and institutional facilities.
General sales or services	Comprise the vast majority of establishments typically associated with commercial land use.
Manufacturing and wholesale trade	Manufacturing establishments are located in plants, factories or mills and employ workers who create new products by hand; wholesaling is an intermediate step in the distribution of merchandise. Wholesalers either sell or arrange the purchase of goods to other businesses and normally operate from a warehouse or office.
Mining and extraction establishments	These establishments refer to all activities that extract solid, liquid, or gaseous minerals or perform other preparations of these materials at a mine site.
Residence or accommodation functions	Comprise all establishments offering residence or accommodation, such as homes, apartments, elderly housing, and hotels.
Transportation, communication, information, and utilities	Establishments that serve passengers and cargo movements; produce or distribute information; or provide utility services.

All land use categories are based on the Land Based Classification System Land Classification Categories, as developed by the American Planning Association.



**Table 2: Oglethorpe County Existing Land Use**

Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	239,397	86.15%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	671	0.24%
Educ., public admin., health care, and other institutions	1,967	0.71%
General sales or services	418	0.15%
Manufacturing and wholesale trade	386	0.14%
Mining and extraction establishments	1,193	0.43%
Residence or accommodation functions	33,615	12.10%
Transportation, communication, information, and utilities	249	0.09%
<b>Total</b>	<b>277,896</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

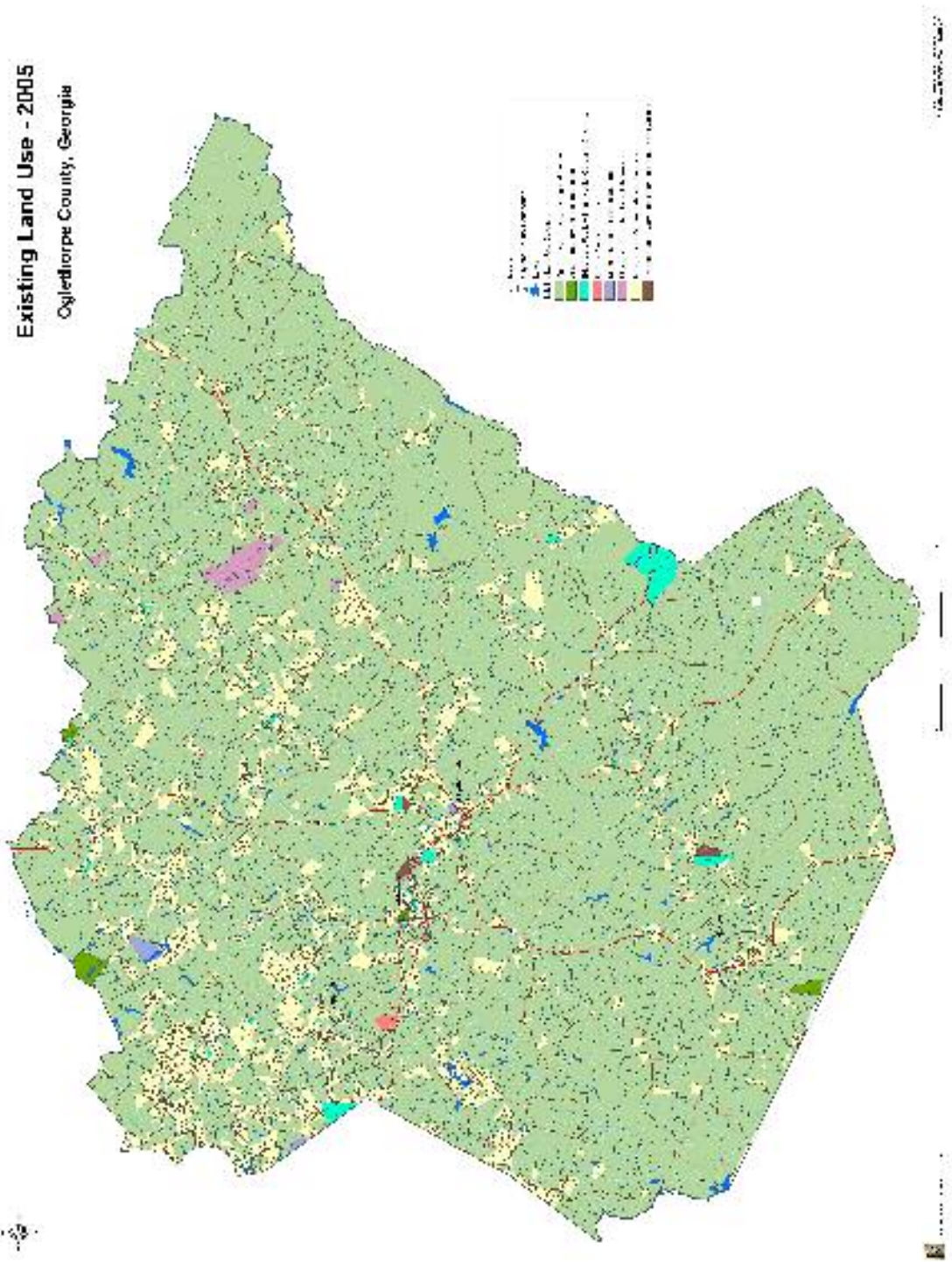
Although development has increased in the county over the past decade, over 86% of the county remains in a rural or agricultural state and nearly 15% of the residential acreage is on lots greater than 40 acres.

The majority of residential development is outside of the city limits and represents 97.4% of total residential acreage. Opportunities do exist for development within the city limits, particularly within Arnoldsville and Maxeys where 75% and 59% of land respectively is classified as Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting. Crawford and Lexington have significantly less land area for new development but do present opportunities for reinvestment and redevelopment within their downtowns.

Commercial and industrial areas do not account for much of the developed land in the county, representing a total of less than 0.3%. This is a reflection of the lack of employment opportunities that was discussed within the issues and opportunities section.

Figure 1 presents an illustration of the countywide Existing Land Use patterns for Oglethorpe County. The map represents a first draft of the existing land use and will be refined throughout the public participation process to correct any inaccuracies that may exist on the map.

Figure 1: Oglethorpe County Existing Land Use



## **Areas Requiring Special Attention**

As growth continues there are inevitably going to be impacts to the existing natural and cultural environment as well as the community facilities, services and infrastructure that are required to service existing and future development. This section outlines areas where growth should be avoided, where growth is likely to occur, and where growth could potentially be stimulated. Figure 2 provides a map of all Areas Requiring Special Attention.

- **Areas of significant natural or cultural resources**

The map illustrates the presence of a variety of environmentally sensitive areas located throughout the county. The environmental areas include wetlands, floodplains, streams, groundwater recharge areas, steep slopes, and the small water supply watershed for the Crawford reservoir.

The Lexington, Philomath and Smithonia Historic Districts, each of which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, illustrate the significant cultural resources. Additionally, there are eight individual structures listed on the National Register that are identified on the map.

- **Areas where rapid development or change of land uses is likely to occur**

Existing development patterns have indicated that the northwestern area of the county has experienced the most rapid rates of growth. The presence of an expanded water system originating in Arnoldsville and the proximity to the increasing employment opportunities in Athens-Clarke County indicates that this area is likely to continue to experience residential growth over the next twenty years under the existing conditions.

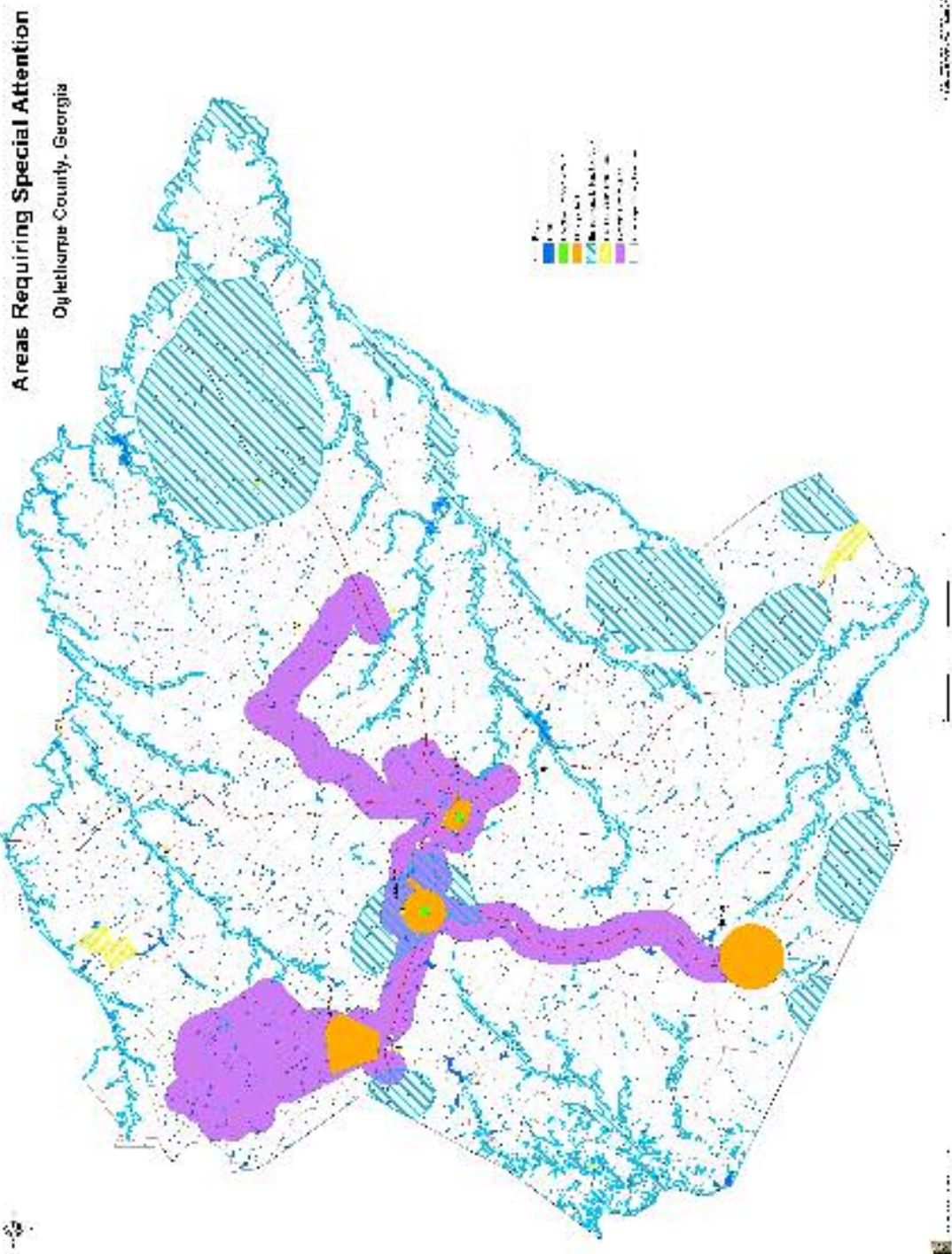
- **Areas where the pace of development has or may outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation**

The City of Crawford is the only jurisdiction in the county that has a wastewater treatment system and it has already reached its capacity with limited opportunity to accommodate any additional users. Existing conditions in the northwestern area of the county have already led to inadequate fire protection and as development continues in this area additional investment will be required in fire personnel, facilities, and equipment. As development continues there will be impacts to all community services and infrastructure networks, including schools, water service, and law enforcement without continued investment in personnel, facilities and equipment.

- **Areas with infill and/or redevelopment opportunities**

Infill/redevelopment opportunities do exist within the municipalities, specifically within downtown Lexington's historic district, which contains a number of historic structures that represent opportunities for the rehabilitation of existing historic structures for economic development purposes.

Figure 2: Areas Requiring Special Attention



## Preliminary Character Areas

Character areas are defined as geographic areas of a community that share unique characteristics or have the potential to evolve as a unique area. Character areas can be used to illustrate existing patterns of development and also as guidelines for desired development patterns based on a community vision.

The following character areas are based on existing conditions and the information contained in the section on Areas Requiring Special Attention. As the public participation process evolves and a community vision emerges the character areas will be revisited to make the map compatible with the vision, goals and objectives of the community.

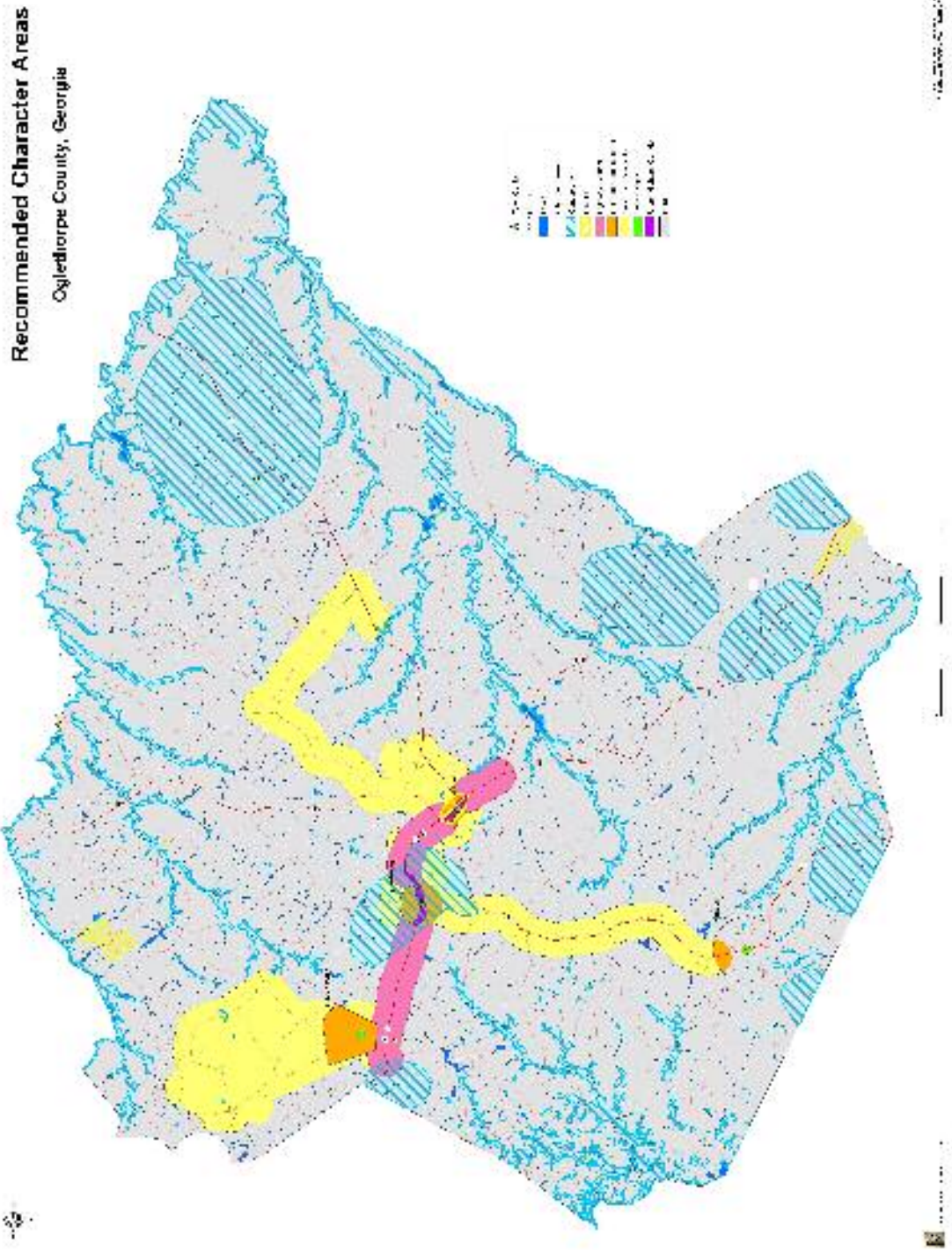
Table 3 provides a list of defined character areas that are illustrated in Figure 3.

**Table 3: Character Areas**

<b>Character Area</b>	<b>Description</b>
Rural	Consists primarily of pastures, woodlands, and farmlands as well as large-lot and estate residential areas.
Conservation	Areas of protected open space including wetlands, floodplain, groundwater recharge areas, watershed, and steep slopes.
Historic	Includes all national register listed properties and districts throughout the county.
Suburban Residential	These are areas that contain conventional subdivisions and are within proximity to a public water network.
Highway Corridor	This includes area along Highway 78 outside of municipal limits that are within proximity to public water and adjacent to the county's major thoroughfare and intended to accommodate commercial and industrial development.
Urban Highway Corridor	This represents the Highway 78 corridor through the cities of Crawford and Lexington and illustrates the desire to maintain a commercial presence along the corridor to a smaller scale more compatible with the existing development within the cities.
Neighborhood Residential	Illustrates the opportunity for increased residential development within each of the municipalities.
Town Center	Identifies a commercial center of the municipalities and illustrates a downtown concept within walking distance of the city residents.



Figure 3: Preliminary Character Areas



#### **IV. ANALYSIS OF SUPPORTIVE DATA AND INFORMATION**

##### **Compliance with Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria**

Oglethorpe County has adopted the following ordinances as required to meet the Environmental Planning Criteria set forth by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources:

- Section 200: River/Stream Corridor Protection District
- Section 300: Water Supply Watershed Protection District
- Section 400: Wetlands Protection District
- Section 500: Groundwater Recharge Area Protection District

The City of Crawford has adopted the following ordinances as required to meet the Environmental Planning Criteria set forth by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources:

- Section 300: Water Supply Watershed Protection District
- Section 400: Wetlands Protection District
- Section 500: Groundwater Recharge Area Protection District

The City of Maxeys has adopted the following ordinances as required to meet the Environmental Planning Criteria set forth by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources:

- Section 400: Wetlands Protection District

Neither Arnoldsville, nor Lexington is required to adopt any of the Environmental Planning Criteria.

##### **Analysis of Consistency with Service Delivery Strategy**

The county and each of the municipalities have recently undergone a revision to the Service Delivery Strategy, as approved by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs by Memorandum on October 13, 2005.

The revision reflects the county's adoption of a zoning ordinance, building codes, subdivision regulations, and road and driveway ordinances. Arnoldsville and Maxeys have adopted the same set of regulations as the county and Crawford and Lexington have only adopted the building codes.

Additionally, the strategy was updated to reflect the current conditions relating to changes in service provision, specifically the extension of water lines into the unincorporated areas and the addition of a code enforcement officer that will issue building permits and enforce the county's building code countywide.