

# Community Assessment



## **Joint Lee County and the Cities of Leesburg and Smithville 2026 Comprehensive Plan**



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### **GENERAL MAPS**

LEE COUNTY EXISTING LAND USE

LEESBURG EXISTING LAND USE

SMITHVILLE EXISTING LAND USE

LEE COUNTY CHARACTER AREAS

LEESBURG CHARACTER AREAS

SMITHVILLE CHARACTER AREAS

LEE COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES

LEESBURG NATURAL RESOURCES

SMITHVILLE NATURAL RESOURCES

# *Community Assessment*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the *Community Assessment* is to present a factual and conceptual foundation upon which the rest of the Joint Lee County and Cities of Leesburg and Smithville 2026 Comprehensive Plan is built. A thorough understanding of what exists now in our community will enable effective planning for the future.

### **Preparation**

The *Community Assessment* was prepared through a collaborative effort of staff from Lee County and the Cities of Leesburg and Smithville, community participation from the steering committee, interviews with stakeholders and the Southwest Georgia Regional Development Center (SWGARDC). Several resources were used for data collection including the Census Bureau, Georgia County Guide, and stakeholder interviews.

### **Content**

The *Community Assessment* contains four basic components as identified in the State Planning Recommendations:

1. Identification of Potential Issues and Opportunities related to population, economic development, housing, natural and cultural resources, community facilities and services, intergovernmental coordination and transportation
2. Analysis of Existing Development Patterns, Character Areas and Land Use
3. Analysis of the community's consistency with Quality Community Objectives
4. Analysis of supporting data and information to check validity of potential issues and opportunities, and character areas ( supporting data and information is located in the Appendices)

Due to severe time constraint in preparation time for the *Community Assessment*, the information presented is strictly preliminary and is meant to generate discussion for the finalized Community Agenda.

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## **II. STATEWIDE PLANNING GOALS**

The State Department of Community Affairs has established the following goals to guide communities in developing and implementing their Comprehensive Plan. These goals will serve as a guide for the development of the Joint Lee County and the Cities of Leesburg and Smithville 2026 Comprehensive Plan.

- Economic Development  
To achieve a growing and balanced economy, consistent with the prudent management of the state's resources that equitably benefits all segments of the population
- Natural and Cultural Resources  
To conserve and protect the environmental, natural and cultural resources of Georgia's communities, regions and the State
- Community Facilities and Services  
To ensure the provision of community facilities and services throughout the State to support efficient growth and development patterns that will protect and enhance the quality of life of Georgia's residents
- Housing  
To ensure that all residents of the state have access to adequate and affordable housing
- Land Use and Transportation  
To ensure the coordination of land use planning and transportation planning throughout the State in support of efficient growth and development patterns that will promote sustainable economic development, protection of natural and cultural resources and provision of adequate and affordable housing
- Intergovernmental Coordination  
To ensure the coordination of local planning efforts with other local service providers and authorities, with neighboring communities and with state and regional plans and programs

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### **III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES**

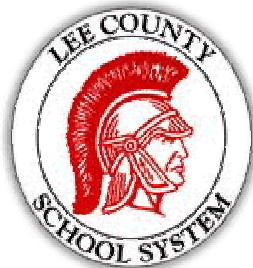
The following is a list of typical issues and opportunities provided in the State Planning Recommendations that may be applicable to Lee County and the Cities of Leesburg and Smithville. This initial list will result in a comprehensive list of **potential** issues and opportunities for further research. Stakeholder and Steering Committee input will modify this list during preparation of the *Community Agenda*.

The **potential issues** and **opportunities** are categorized by eight community elements.

#### **Population Issues**

##### **(a) Increasing population**

Based on existing trends, the population of young and middle-aged families with children will continue to increase from about 31,000 in 2005 to an estimate of 90,122 by 2025. Currently, the largest population group is comprised of: 25-44 year olds representing 34% of the population, 45-64 year olds representing 21% of the population and 14 or younger representing 25% of the population. This population increase presents a challenge in that most young families have school-age children and may require more community services including education, healthcare, recreation, and transportation along with housing.



##### **(b) Migration of younger population to other areas**

Although Lee County has a wonderful K-12 education system with “Schools of Excellence” recognition, most young people leave the area for post-secondary education and in search of employment opportunities.

##### **(c) Animal Control**

As the population increases, household pet populations of dogs and cats increase causing more Animal Control incidents with complaints of “animal at large,” “dog bites and attacks on humans or other animals,” etc. Houses may be adjacent to a farmer’s livestock, and dogs may kill calves and baby goats. This is another result of residential encroachment into rural areas. Demands on the county to control these issues have increased.

### **III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

## *Community Assessment*

### **Population Opportunities**

#### **(a) Increasing population requires services**

As population increases, the need for services increases as well. There is potential for medical-related development on Forrester Parkway and US 19 and new commercial developments to house healthcare providers, office space, and retail and service businesses.

### **Economic Development Issues**

#### **(a) Lack of Infrastructure to support Industrial/Commercial development**

Lee County should continue to address the need for existing water and sewerage service to attract new industrial and commercial business.



#### **(b) Educational Levels and Workforce Development**

Prospective industries consider educational levels and adequacy of the workforce. High School dropouts are an issue across the state and affect Lee County as well. Consider Lee County percentages compared with Statewide percentages:

% of the population 25 and older without a High School Diploma or GED-  
Lee County-18.7% vs. Georgia- 21.4%

High School graduates or GED attainment- Lee County- 35.9% GA-28.7%

Some college without a degree –Lee County- 22.3% GA-20.4%

Associate Degree- Lee County-6.1% GA- 5.2%

Bachelor’s Degree- Lee County- 11.3% GA-16.0%

Graduate or Professional Degree- Lee County- 5.7% GA-8.3%

#### **(c) Bedroom Community of surrounding counties**

The community has limited job opportunities for skilled and unskilled labor, professional and managerial. Government agencies including the School system and Agriculture are the major employers along with limited retail and industrial jobs. 85% of the community’s residents work in neighboring counties, predominantly Dougherty County.

### **III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

## *Community Assessment*

### **(d) Lack of comprehensive greenspace plan**

An organized greenspace and natural resource conservation comprehensive plan that would interconnect a system of trails and natural areas for walking, biking and wildlife viewing throughout the county along creek buffers, forests and natural wetlands, neighborhood greenspace, rails to trails areas, and county conservation areas (such as Pirates Cove, Leesburg Central Park, flood mitigation parcels, and future county parks) will make Lee County unique and add immense economic value by attracting business, tourism, recreation, research and education facilities, and very high quality development.

## **Economic Development Opportunities**

### **(a) Potential for 20 acre Commercial Development**

The Development Authority owns 16 acres adjacent to Wal-Mart and Fairway Toyota on Ledo Road. Fairway owns an additional undeveloped 4 acres. There is great potential for commercial development in this location, currently zoned C-2.

### **(b) Development of Existing Industrial Properties**



**Governor Sonny Perdue  
at the Dedication of  
Oakland Meadows Business Park**

74 acres with infrastructure exists in Oakland Meadows Industrial Park with potential to attract additional industry.

### **(c) Targeted Industrial Sites Study**

An Economic Development Study completed June 2006 by the Georgia Institute of Technology identified 6 sites suitable for industrial development.

### **(d) County-Owned Golf Course**

The county has several options to consider for the 140 acre property: continue current use as golf course, tennis courts and clubhouse, develop it as a commercial site or dispose of it through sale of property.



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### **III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

**(e) Completion of US 19 four lane from Leesburg to Atlanta**

Georgia Department of Transportation will complete the project in the future, and this will afford opportunities for tourism and commercial development. US 19 represents the “Historic Dixie Highway,” a travel route from Georgia through Florida.

**(f) Construction of Agricultural/Business Conference Center**

The Flint River Equestrian and Livestock Association, a 501(c)3 non-profit regional collaborative, proposes to seek funding for the construction of an Agricultural/Business Conference Center to include barns to house regional livestock shows and a multi-purpose building for trade shows.

**(g) Protection of Natural Areas**

Lee County protects riparian buffers on its creeks and the Flint River, protects natural wetlands and requires natural areas and native trees to be preserved in all new neighborhoods. Additionally, Lee County has some county-owned conservation areas (including Pirates Cove, Leesburg Central Park, and flood mitigation properties along the Kinchafoonee Creek). A comprehensive county-wide greenspace plan that interconnects currently protected natural areas along with future nature preservation areas will make Lee County unique and add immense economic value by attracting business, industry, tourism, recreation, research and education facilities, and very high quality development.



**Pirates Cove**



# Community Assessment

## **III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

### **Housing Issues**

**(a) Residential growth has been charted by Developers instead of being Planned by the community**

The Future Land Use Map does not reflect development during the last decade. The community has not clearly designated areas where new residential neighborhoods should be built and where there should be preservation of natural areas. In the past, development has been based only on developer proposals rather than long-range community planning. Neighborhoods constructed in inappropriate areas create very expensive problems for county taxpayers to solve. For example, after the flood of 1994, Lee County spent millions of dollars of taxpayer monies to buy out flooded housing that should have never been allowed in flood-prone areas.



### **Housing Opportunities**

**(a) Controlled residential growth in specified areas with clearly understandable guidelines**

Traditional neighborhood development should be encouraged, including use of more human-scale development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity. Architectural styles should blend with traditional regional architecture.

## *Community Assessment*

### **III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

#### **(b) In-fill development for continued residential growth**

Lee County should continue residential development in areas with existing infrastructure and minimize the conversion of undeveloped land at the rural perimeter by encouraging development of sites closer to the downtown or traditional residential core of the community.

#### **(c) Neighborhood greenspace**

New neighborhood development is required to preserve a portion of the land to remain in its natural state with native trees. This greenspace requirement helps make Lee County neighborhoods very attractive and adds immense economic value to the housing. Additionally, greenspace credit is given for developers preserving flood-prone areas in their natural state such as areas that buffer wetlands and creeks.

### **Natural and Cultural Resources Issues**

#### **(a) Need for Cultural Community Center**

No facility exists outside of the Lee County High School Auditorium for arts and cultural activities, and the community needs a place to house art exhibits, perform musicals or theatre and teach classes.

#### **(b) Preservation of Plantations and Agricultural land**

Lee County needs to preserve the rural character of the area through preservation of dirt roads and prime agricultural/forestry land from encroaching residential development.



#### **(c) Acknowledgement of Native Americans**

Lee County should establish permanent markers that recognize the history of Native American tribes and acknowledge their influence on this community.

**III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

**(d) Protection of Flint River, Streams, Creeks and Aquifers**

Lee County needs to protect and preserve the waterways through wetland and stream buffer protection ordinances and comprehensive erosion and sedimentation rules. Lee County should continue to follow the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Environmental Protection Division's recommended protection guidelines restricting building and development in environmentally-sensitive areas and encouraging the creation of conservation/greenspace. Additionally, greenspace and density credits are given to developers for the preservation of land in its natural state.



**Flint River**

**(e) Preservation and Creation of Greenspace**

Lee County should encourage the preservation and creation of greenspace beyond “use as a playground for kids” to include open space, walking trails, nature and forested areas for wildlife.

**(f) Limit growth in floodplain area**

An ordinance exists restricting building and development in the floodplain. Additionally, greenspace credits are given to developers for preservation of land in its natural state and density credits are awarded for the designated greenspace.

**(g) Continue support of High School Theatre and expand program**

Lee County should support the award-winning High School Theatre and expand it into a community theatre, possibly celebrating the history and heritage of Lee County similar to “Swamp Gravy” in Miller County.

## *Community Assessment*

### **III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

#### **Natural and Cultural Resources Opportunities**

**(a) Promotion of Fishing/Hunting/Outdoor Activities to attract Industry/Employers**

Lee County should partner with the Albany Fall Feather Hunt or host similar events that highlight community outdoor activities to entice industrial development. The area is renowned for quail hunting and has a high population of both deer and turkey. Water activities including boating, skiing, swimming and fishing are abundant throughout the community with the Flint River and various creeks. Lee County should consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service to obtain an inventory of natural resources in the community.

**b) Tourism Opportunities**

Lee County should support cultural heritage tourism by promoting its pre-Civil War railroad which runs through Lee County. Grant funding has been acquired to renovate the Leesburg Depot which will provide the perfect rest stop for travelers. Lee County should also encourage agri- and eco-tourism with roadside produce, farm tours, and promotion of hunting and fishing.



**Leesburg Depot**

**(c) Creation of Bike/Pedestrian/Equestrian trails**

Lee County needs to encourage participation in “Rails to Trails” projects and complete a bike trail around Pirates Cove. Lee County should also encourage sidewalk development in neighborhoods by adopting the SW GA Regional Development Center’s Bike/Pedestrian Recommended Routes and by educating the community of its existence.

**(d) Possible Community Cultural Center-Auditorium in Historic High School**



Lee County should utilize the historic High School Auditorium (which is currently under renovation) for performing arts and cultural events within the community.

**III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

**e) Promote and protect the necessity of Agricultural/Forestry and Wildlife Management Practices**

Lee County should educate the community on the economic and intrinsic values of agriculture, utilizing “Farm-City Tours” and other tools available through the USDA, NRCS, UGA Extension, and Farm Bureau. Lee County should work to foster mutual respect between residents and farmers through the education of agricultural/silvacultural practices like controlled burns, irrigation, planting, chemical applications by tractor or airplane crop dusters, and moving tractors and equipment along the highways.

**(f) Develop educational tool for use in schools highlighting local history**

It is important to educate youth about the community’s history for future preservation. Lee County should develop an educational tool that encompasses the history of indigenous Native Americans, railroad depots, Smithville’s Rosenwald School and other significant historical facts.



Rosenwald School-Smithville



Chehaw Indian Marker



Historic Church

**(g) Possible access to Lake Blackshear**

Lee County should collaborate with UGA and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on the feasibility of providing a boat ramp to Lake Blackshear from northern Lee County. Currently, there is no direct access to the waterway within the community.

**(h) Possibility of additional access to Kinchafoonee and Muckalee Creeks**

Lee County should collaborate with the DNR on the feasibility of providing boat ramp(s) to Kinchafoonee and Muckalee Creeks on county-owned land.

## *Community Assessment*

### **III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

#### **Community Facilities and Services Issues**

**(a) Increased residential growth and requirement for community facilities and services**

The cost of community services for residential land use is more expensive than other types of land uses like agricultural, commercial or industrial. Residential growth is far exceeding commercial and industrial growth which continues to erode the tax base in the community.

**(b) Board of Education Challenges-**  
**Lack of teachers to accommodate expanded enrollment**  
**Lack of classroom space**  
**Lack of funding for technology**

25% of the community's population is 14 years or younger, and student enrollment continues to increase, exceeding physical facility capacity, number of teachers and technology requirements.

**(c) Lack of communication between community facilities, services, local governments, boards and authorities**

All community facilities, services, local governments, boards and authorities need to plan for the future utilizing the same population projections and communicating at regularly scheduled intervals.

#### **Community Facilities and Services Opportunities**

**(a) New Infrastructure installation expanding coverage area**

Currently, an Employee Incentive Program Grant for \$400,000 was used to install sewer lines in Oakland Meadows Industrial Park, and sewer and water lines were installed in Haley-Byne Development at Forrester Parkway, Old Leesburg Road and US Hwy 19.

**(b) New Library Branch**

This summer, a new library branch has opened in the Redbone District, in addition to the other two libraries in the community, the Main Branch in Leesburg and the library in Smithville. Oakland Properties will donate land for a new main library in the future. The Lee County Library is very innovative and housed the first "self check-out" capability in the region. The Library serves many purposes including the provision of technology for online education classes, resume preparation tools, software instruction and other workforce development.



## *Community Assessment*

### **III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

**(c) Capital Improvement Program**

Lee County has established a Capital Improvement Program to aid in planning future investments.

**(d) Consolidation of Services and/or facilities**

The opportunity exists for the consolidation of county and city facilities and services such as water/sewer and Fire, Police and Sheriff's Office services to provide increased efficiency of service delivery and facility use.

**(e) Shared cost of providing public services and community facilities for new development**

An Impact Fee Study has been completed and is awaiting government decision on implementation. Lee County should consider a special assessment ad valorem tax for new development depending on type and cost of services and facilities required.

**(f) Creation of Tax Districts based on Fire Service provision**

Lee County should determine an ad valorem tax millage rate based on fire district service ISO Ratings. The millage rate is the greatest for property receiving the highest level of fire service resulting in a better ISO rating and savings on insurance premiums.



**Century Fire Station**

**(g) Adult Recreation facilities**

Opportunities for youth recreation exist through the Parks and Recreation Department and YMCA with softball, baseball, tennis, golf, tumbling, gymnastics, etc. A new YMCA is expected in the future, affording more opportunities for adult, family and youth recreation. Lee County should determine the need for recreation and implement the desired programs.

**III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

**Land Use and Development Issues**

**(a) Concentrate on In-Fill Development**

Lee County should maximize the use of existing infrastructure, minimize the conversion of farm/forestry land and clearly designate areas for different types of development based on a natural resources inventory.



**(b) Preservation of Rural Character, Farmland, Forests and Wetlands**

Lee County should preserve character areas including canopy dirt roads, prime agricultural land, forests and wetlands. No clear boundary exists between cities and county. Residential growth continues to sprawl into the rural portions of the county. Areas should be established to clearly differentiate urban and rural growth identifying placement and type of urban growth while preserving the rural character of the area.

**(c) Unattractive new subdivisions**

The typical “cookie cutter” subdivisions built on clear-cut land continue to be developed, most often in the moderately-priced range, where there is the greatest demand for housing. Lee County should consider the preservation of natural resources and strengthen new development landscaping requirements, promoting attractive subdivisions with unique homes exhibiting local architectural styles.

**Land Use and Development Opportunities**

**(a) Increase Tax Base by encouraging Commercial Growth**

Residential growth is far exceeding commercial and industrial growth and erodes the tax base in the community. Lee County should encourage mixed-use developments to include commercial businesses, recruit



“big box investments” like department stores to serve as anchors in shopping centers, providing space for small businesses and continue the process of becoming an “Entrepreneur Friendly Community.”

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**III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

**(b) Sense of place- enhance the unique character of the community**

Lee County should determine what type of character to pursue and protect and highlight the unique character areas of the community so visitors “know when they have arrived,” avoiding an “Anyplace USA” image. Lee County should also consider the community’s heritage and culture, “Schools of Excellence,” natural resources and rural character and develop a marketing campaign accordingly.



**(c) Revitalization needed for some areas**

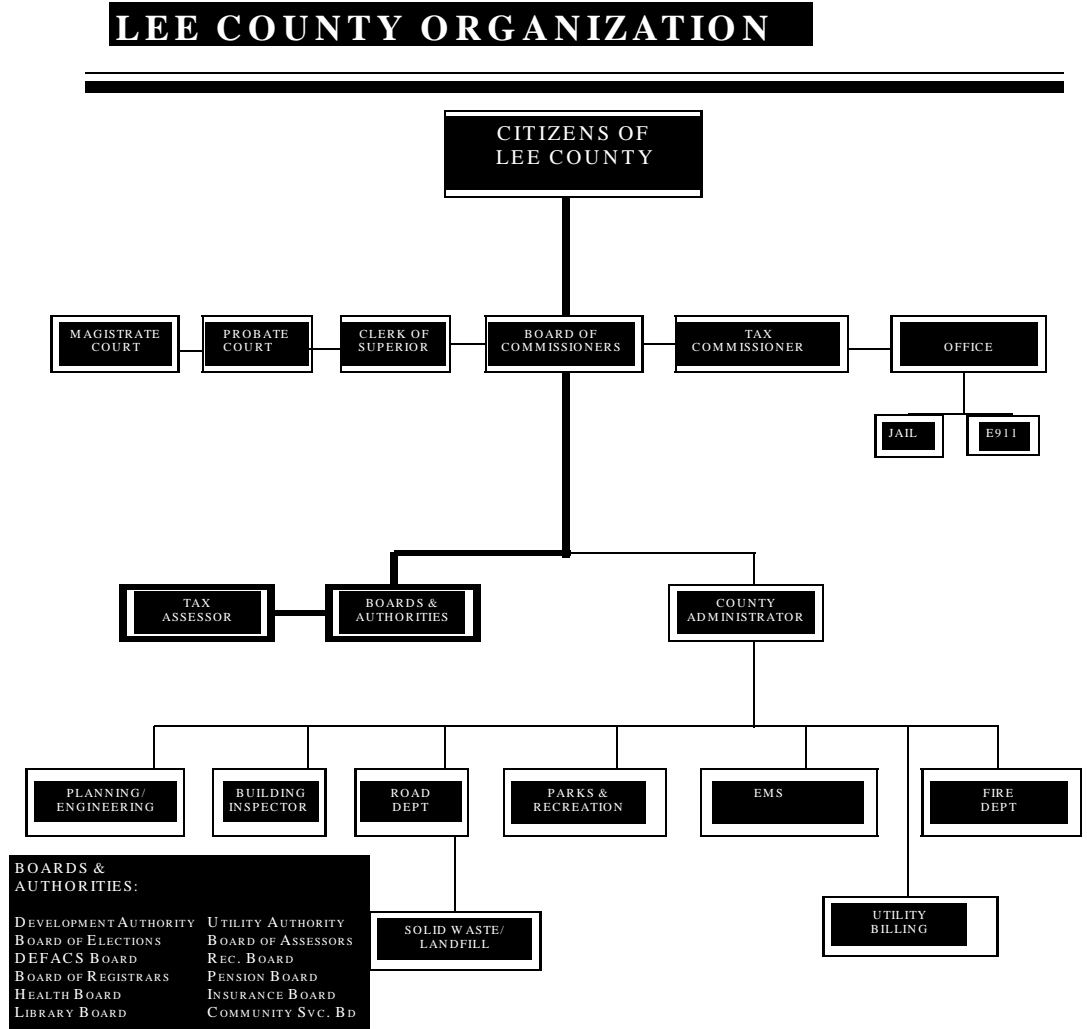
The majority of the community is experiencing new development or effectively maintains existing development resulting in minimal vacant or blighted areas. However, portions of the community including Smithville’s commercial district and surrounding neighborhood along with one Leesburg neighborhood are identified on the character area map as traditionally declining neighborhoods and in need of revitalization.

**III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

**Intergovernmental Coordination Issues**

**(a) Increase communication between Cities, County and local government Boards and Authorities**

The Cities, County and local government Boards and Authorities should increase communication and collaboration and utilize the same information (i.e. population projections) in decision making to increase effectiveness.



## *Community Assessment*

### **III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

#### **Intergovernmental Coordination Opportunities**

- (a) Communication between Cities and County concerning Water, Sewer and other Community Services-utilize population projections**  
Cities and County should collaborate on common issues like infrastructure.
- (b) Regional or Multi-Jurisdictional Cooperation**  
House Bill 489 requires inter-governmental agreements and increases collaborative opportunities between cities, counties and entities. Lee County should consider collaboration within County as well as with neighboring communities for economic development and sharing of infrastructure.
- (c) Consolidation of County and Cities**  
The Service Delivery Strategy reflects most community services and facilities are provided at the County level. Lee County should consider consolidation into one county government for cost effectiveness and service provision.

#### **Transportation Issues**

- (a) Lack of Comprehensive Transportation Plan for the County**  
Lee County should participate in strategic planning for transportation within the county and consider alternatives to transportation by automobile including mass transit, bicycle and pedestrian ways and traffic needs and safety. Lee County should collaborate with the Rural Transit Advisory Committee for planning and implementation.
- (b) Gap in Public Transportation for Northern Lee County, specifically Smithville**  
Mass Transit exists in southern Lee County. However, Smithville and the northern part of the county has the greatest need for Mass Transit considering the high poverty level, low educational level and high unemployment level of the area's population.

**III. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

**(c) Few alternatives to automobile transportation**

The community has few options beyond automobile transportation with limited availability for mass transit, bicycles and pedestrians. A Georgia Department of Transportation Ride/Share is located in Leesburg to encourage carpooling. Efforts are underway to implement “Rails to Trails” and adopt other bike/pedestrian routes. Six recreation/exercise trails currently exist in the community with plans for two more in the future. No airport exists, however, and air service is available in Albany and Dawson.

**(d) Increased Traffic**

As growth continues in the community, traffic increases as well. Continued growth will increase traffic congestion, especially around Leesburg as children are driven to and picked up from the schools. Greater attention should be given to the impact individual developments will have on the transportation system.

**Transportation Opportunities**

**(a) Expansion of Public Transportation**

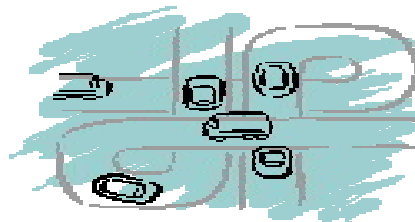
Lee County should consider expanding public transportation into Smithville and northern Lee County.

**(b) Establishment of alternatives to automobile transportation**

Lee County should continue to promote a bike and pedestrian-friendly environment with existing walking trails and implementation of “Rails to Trails” and future projects. Lee County should encourage mixed-use development within easy walking distance to facilitate pedestrian activity.

**(c) Strategic Comprehensive Transportation Planning**

Lee County needs to conduct strategic planning to address increased traffic challenges and determine future transportation needs and ways to control traffic flow and mitigate congestion.





## *Community Assessment*

### **IV. EXISTING LAND USE and DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS**

There must be a clear understanding and analysis of current development patterns to effectively plan for the future of Lee County and the Cities of Leesburg and Smithville. This section includes existing land use maps, identification of areas requiring special attention, and recommended character areas. This information helps in identifying current development trends while planning for future growth issues including protection of natural and cultural resources and the provision of appropriate infrastructure for community facilities and services.

#### ***1) Existing Land Use Maps***

**Maps 1-3** detail the existing use of land in Lee County and the Cities of Leesburg and Smithville. The existing land use maps include the following categories:

#### **LAND USE CATEGORIES**

**Agriculture/Forestry** - Land dedicated to farming (fields, lots, pastures, farmsteads, specialty farms, livestock production, etc.) agriculture, or commercial timber or pulpwood harvesting.

**Commercial** - Land dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, office, service and entertainment facilities, organized into general categories of intensities. This category also includes office and professional uses.

**Industrial** - Land dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction activities, or other similar uses.

**Parks/Recreation/Conservation** – Land dedicated to active or passive recreational uses. These areas may be either publicly or privately-owned and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, golf courses, recreation centers or similar uses.

**Public/Institutional** – Land dedicated to certain state, federal or local government uses and institutional land uses.

**Residential** – Predominate uses are single-family and multi-family dwelling units organized into general categories of net densities

## *Community Assessment*

### **IV. EXISTING LAND USE and DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS (continued)**

**Transportation/Communication/Utilities** – Land used for major transportation routes, public transit stations, power generation plants, railroad facilities, radio towers, telephone switching stations, airports, or other similar uses.

**Undeveloped/Vacant** – Land served by typical urban services (water, sewer, etc.) but not developed for a specific use or developed for a specific use that has since been abandoned.

## *Community Assessment*

### **IV. EXISTING LAND USE and DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS (continued)**

#### **2) Areas Requiring Special Attention**

After evaluating the existing land use patterns and trends within Lee County and the Cities of Leesburg and Smithville, the following areas were identified as requiring special attention:

- Areas of **high-quality farmland/forest with relatively large amounts of prime or unique farmland, forest and wetlands**, particularly where they are likely to be intruded upon or otherwise impacted by developments, such as **Oak Hill Dairy, farms, forests and wetlands along US Highway 19, Palmyra Road, Century Road, State Highway 32, Pinewood Road, Jordan Road, State Highway 195, Graves Springs Road, Middle Road, Philema Road, State Highway 377 and other large tracts of land for conservation or wildlife management;**
- Areas of significant natural resources including **old growth forests, habitat for endangered and threatened species, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, Flint River, Kinchafoonee Creek, Muckalee Creek and other bodies of water**, particularly where they are likely to be intruded upon or otherwise impacted by development;
- Areas where rapid development or change of land uses is likely to occur such as **US Highway 19 Corridor, US Highway 82 Corridor, State Highway 32 Corridor and Robert B. Lee Road;**
- Areas where the pace of development has and/or may outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation facilities such as **Robert B. Lee Road; and other City of Leesburg streets;**
- Areas with significant infill development opportunities (scattered vacant sites) and areas with existing infrastructure such as **southern part of county and downtown Smithville;**
- Areas representing rural character such as **canopy dirt roads** including **Turner Road, Laramore Road, Griffith Road, Gray Moss Road, Dan Green Road, Courthouse Road, Larsen Road, Batts Road, Carter Place Road, Crowder Road and Wright Road;**

## *Community Assessment*

### **IV. EXISTING LAND USE and DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS (continued)**

- Areas of significant disinvestments, levels of poverty, and/or unemployment substantially higher than average levels for the community as a whole such as the **designated neighborhood revitalization areas in Leesburg and Smithville;**
- Areas of historic value, communities designated by local names such as **Neyami, Starksville, Palmyra, Redbone and Chokee.**

*These areas requiring special attention will be incorporated into the depicted Character Areas for future planning purposes.*

#### **3) Recommended Character Areas**

A character area is defined as a specific geographic area within the community that:

- Has unique or special characteristics to be preserved or enhanced (such as a Downtown, a historic district, a neighborhood, or a transportation corridor);
- Has potential to evolve into a unique area with more intentional guidance of future development through adequate planning and implementation (such as strip commercial corridor that could be revitalized into a more attractive village development pattern); or
- Requires special attention due to unique development issues (rapid change of development patterns, economic decline, etc.)

Each character area is a planning sub-area where more detailed, small-area planning and implementation of certain policies, investments, and/or incentives may be applied in order to preserve, improve, or otherwise influence its future development patterns and ensure consistency with our community's vision.

On the following pages is a list of **potential** character areas. This list will be modified, added to, or subtracted from during the *Community Agenda* development process based on steering committee and stakeholder perspectives about current and future development patterns.

**Maps 4-6** reflect the recommended boundaries of these potential character areas and also the areas requiring special attention identified in the previous section. This map is still in *draft* form and will be finalized during the *Community Agenda* development process.

## *Community Assessment*

### **IV. EXISTING LAND USE and DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS (continued)**

#### **General Areas:**

- **Conservation/Greenspace** – Undeveloped natural lands and environmentally-sensitive areas not suitable for development, e.g., flood plains, wetlands, watersheds, wildlife management areas and other environmentally-sensitive areas
- **Agriculture/Rural areas:** Primarily open or cultivated pastures, farmlands, or woodlands including plantations

#### **Residential Areas:**

- **Rural Residential** – Rural, undeveloped land likely to face development pressures for lower density (one unit per two+ acres) residential development
- **Traditional Neighborhood** – Residential area in older part of the community typically developed prior to WWII. Neighborhood-scale businesses scattered throughout the area
- **Traditional Established Neighborhood** – Neighborhoods with relatively well-maintained housing possessing a distinct identity through architectural style, lot and street design, and has higher rates of home ownership
- **Traditional Declining Neighborhood** – Area that has most of its original housing stock in place, but housing conditions are worsening due to low rates of home ownership and neglect of property maintenance. Revitalization may be appropriate for this area

#### **Activity Areas:**

- **Downtown** – Traditional central business district and immediately surrounding commercial, industrial or mixed-use areas
- **Regional Activity Center** – Concentration of regionally-marketed commercial and retail centers, office and employment areas, sports and recreation complexes. Characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic, on-site parking, and large tracts of land
- **Historic** – Historic district or area containing features, landmarks, civic or cultural uses of historic interest

## *Community Assessment*

### **IV. EXISTING LAND USE and DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS (continued)**

- **Light Industrial** – Area used in low intensity manufacturing, wholesale trade, and distribution activities that do not generate excessive noise, particulate matter, vibration, smoke, dust, gas, fumes, odors, radiation, or other nuisance characteristics.
- **Special Area of Interest** – Special characteristics not likely to be replicated elsewhere in the community

#### **Corridors:**

- **In-Town** – Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a street or highway in town that is already or likely to experience uncontrolled strip development if growth is not properly managed
- **Gateway** – Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that serves as an important entrance or means of access to the community
- **Scenic** – Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that has significant natural, historic, or cultural features and scenic or pastoral views
- **Major Highway** – Developed or undeveloped land on both sides of designated high volume transportation facility, such as arterial roads and highways



## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES**

The Department of Community Affairs adopted the Quality Community Objectives (QCOs) as a statement of the development patterns and options that will help Georgia preserve its unique cultural, natural and historic resources while looking to the future and developing to its fullest potential.

The Quality Community Objectives Local Assessment will be used to evaluate the progress of Lee County and the Cities of Leesburg and Smithville in developing their Comprehensive Plan to provide sustainable and livable communities.

The Quality Community Objectives are divided into four elements of community development:

- Development Patterns
- Resource Conservation
- Social and Economic Development
- Governmental Relations

SWGA RDC, Lee County and the Cities of Leesburg and Smithville staff have evaluated current policies, activities, and development patterns for consistency with these Quality Community objectives using the Assessment tool provided by DCA. Results of this Assessment will be added to the list of Potential Issues and Opportunities outlined in Section III.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (continued)**

#### **1) Development Patterns**

##### **(A) Traditional Neighborhood Objective**

Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged, including use of more human-scale development, compact development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity.

#### **Zoning Ordinances:**

##### **Assessment:**

- The County and both Cities have their own unique zoning code, which, for the most part, separate commercial, residential and retail uses.
- Our community does not have ordinances in place that allow neo-traditional development “by right” so that developers do not have to go through a long variance process. The Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners have authority for all development approval or disapproval.

##### **Recommendation:**

- Review each community’s zoning ordinance to increase the quality and creative factors of new development compatible with the traditional features of the community and protecting natural and cultural resources while also encouraging in-fill development.

#### **Tree and Landscape Ordinances:**

##### **Assessment:**

- Lee County requires new development to plant shade-bearing trees suitable for the area and has an organized tree-planting campaign in public areas to provide a more comfortable walking environment. Lee County preserves old growth trees of a certain caliper size in its tree ordinance. Regular maintenance for cleanliness and safety of public areas and parks is provided by the County utilizing employees and Inmate labor. Trees and Landscaping have been planted along US Highway 19 Corridor and throughout the City of Leesburg and US Highway 32 Corridor providing a scenic drive with a Gazebo and park area adjacent to the Courthouse. The annual Christmas parade travels US Highway 32 Corridor.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (continued)**

#### **Recommendation:**

- Continue landscaping of the county providing a scenic environment.
- Expand landscaping requirement for new development to include only “native, non-invasive” plants to protect prime forest and agricultural land.
- Improve preservation efforts of native old growth trees unique to area such as the Live Oak and Long Leaf Pine.
- Apply Georgia Forestry standards to measure tree caliper size at (DBH) diameter at breast height. Review caliper size requirements for protection of existing trees.

#### **Bike and Pedestrian Accessibility:**

##### **Assessment:**

- Lee County has recently adopted a sidewalk requirement for new developments. Sidewalks exist adjacent to Highway 32 and are used by High School students who reside close by to walk to school safely.
- Walking Trails in Lee County is an Albany-area brochure published by the Lee County Library, Schools, YMCA, County Commission, and Public Health through grant funding from MetLife Foundation. Trails include Pirates Cove, Leesburg Central Park, Kinchafoonee Sports Park, Spring Lake Park, and School trails. Trails are planned for development in the new Callaway Lakes Neighborhood Park and Lee Branch YMCA. “Rails to Trails” project will be completed through Oakland Plantation.
- Schools are centrally located in the County Seat, and the majority of students require transportation, either by bus or automobile.
- There are few areas throughout the community where errands can be made on foot should that be desired, with the exception of strip commercial centers.

##### **Recommendation:**

- Work to accomplish implementation of “Rails to Trails” project and continue efforts to establish bike/pedestrian trails within community.
- Adopt Southwest Georgia Regional Bike and Pedestrian Plan suggested routes.
- Encourage mixed-use new development with user-friendly sidewalks to provide opportunities for walking.

#### **(B) Infill Development Objective**

Communities should maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the conversion of undeveloped land at the urban periphery by encouraging development or redevelopment of its sites closer to the downtown or traditional urban core of the community.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES** (continued)

#### **Assessment:**

- Minimal brownfield or grayfield sites exist within the community.
- Our community does not allow nodal development or small lot development.

#### **Recommendation:**

- Continue residential development in areas with existing infrastructure to minimize the conversion of undeveloped land, especially prime agricultural/forestry land.

#### **(C) Sense of Place**

Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment.

#### **Assessment:**

- If someone dropped from the sky into Lee County, he or she would not know immediately where he or she was, based on our distinct characteristics.
- To some degree, we have delineated the areas of our community that are important to our history and heritage and have taken steps to protect those areas.
- We have ordinances to regulate the aesthetics of development in our highly visible areas- example, buildings in commercial zoning areas are not allowed to have metal facades facing the road.
- We have ordinances to regulate the size and type of signage in our community.
- Our community does not offer a guidebook that illustrates the type of new development we want in our community.
- The Future Land Use Map is a plan to protect designated farmland, conservation usage and wildlife management areas.

#### **Recommendation:**

- The community should determine what “sense of place” it would like to portray and determine how to achieve that feeling and environment. Development should reflect the “sense of place” distinctive qualities the community wants to exhibit.
- Concentrate on preserving and designating those elements important to the history and character of our community, eg. railroads, Native Americans, etc.
- Continue to preserve the rural character of our community and promote the protection of designated farmland-a designated rural space and farmland protection should be established based on American Farmland Trust guidelines.
- Continue to preserve forests and wetlands that provide native plant and wildlife habitat.
- New development should blend with local and regional historic architectural styles, particularly in the cities of Leesburg and Smithville.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (continued)**

#### **(D) Transportation Alternatives Objective**

Alternatives to transportation by automobile, including mass transit, bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities, should be made available in each community. Greater use of alternate transportation should be encouraged.

#### **Assessment:**

- Public transit is available for Medicaid patients and citizen transport in the southern part of Lee County. No service exists in the Northern part of Lee County where the greatest need is considering the high poverty levels, low educational attainment and high unemployment rate.
- Our community has recently adopted ordinances requiring interconnectivity between developments with roadways within 500' of each other.
- Our community does not have a good network of sidewalks to allow people to walk to a variety of destinations.
- Our community requires sidewalks for any new development with .75 acre lot size.
- There is no requirement for sidewalks to connect to existing sidewalks wherever possible.
- A plan for bicycle routes does not exist for our community.
- We allow commercial and retail development to share parking areas wherever possible.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Determine feasibility of expanding public transportation into northern part of county, specifically Smithville.
- Promote implementation of "Rails to Trails" Project.
- Board of Education Transit System could participate in Department of Transportation's "Safe Routes to School" program.
- The Southwest Georgia Regional Development Center has adopted a Regional Bike and Pedestrian Plan; however, no local plan has been established. Consider adoption of recommended routes identified in the regional plan.
- Encourage mixed use development providing retail stores and facilities within easy walking distance.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (continued)**

#### **(E) Regional Identity**

Each region should promote and preserve a regional “identity,” or regional sense of place, defined in terms of traditional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.

#### **Assessment:**

- Our community is characteristic of the region in terms of architectural styles and heritage.
- Our community is connected to the surrounding region for economic livelihood through businesses that process local agricultural products.
- Our community does not encourage businesses that create products that draw on our heritage.
- Our community promotes tourism opportunities based on the unique characteristics of our region-e.g. hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Promote businesses that process agricultural products and identify “spin-off” businesses to be developed.
- Promote agri-tourism, development of Agricultural Barn/Conference Center for local and regional livestock shows and business conferences. Partner with Georgia National Fairgrounds to house regional livestock shows.
- Promote Cultural Heritage Tourism highlighting Railroad, US 19/Old Dixie Highway, indigenous Native Americans, Chehaw Park, etc.
- Promote eco-tourism for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking and other activities highlighting the abundant natural resources of the community.
- Attract hospitality businesses like hotels, motels, and restaurants to accommodate tourists.
- Collaborate with “Georgia on my Mind Tourism” regional representative, Jeff Stubbs, for marketing and guidance in establishing tourism opportunities.
- Collaborate with University of Georgia and Department of Natural Resources to pursue access to Lake Blackshear from Larsen Road property. Pursue possibility of education/research/recreation for this site.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (continued)**

#### **2) Resource Conservation**

##### **(A) Heritage Preservation**

The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural features that are important to defining the community's character.

##### **Assessment:**

- A complete survey of Lee County's historic resources has never been conducted. In 1980, the Southwest Georgia Regional Development Center's preservation planner conducted a preliminary historic survey of Leesburg. The survey contains basic information, such as architectural descriptions, photographs, and identification of potential nominations. The 1980 survey found 57 historic resources built in 1930 or earlier; however, buildings from as late as 1956 would now be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
- The Lee County Courthouse, in the center of downtown Leesburg, is the only building in Lee County on the National Register of Historic Places. A half-mile radius surrounding the Lee County Courthouse contains numerous residential, commercial, and institutional structures that date from the late 1890s-1950s. Within this area, the Old Southern Railroad Depot (1896) is maintained by the City of Leesburg, and the Old High School (1920-1922) is currently being restored by the County. Other efforts to preserve buildings in the area come from interested private individuals.

##### **Recommendation:**

- Solicit funding and assistance from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the University of Georgia, and the Southwest Georgia Regional Development Center to conduct complete surveys of historic resources.
- Seek listing of this area in the National Register of Historic Places. Listing in the National Register provides: recognition of a community's unique heritage; eligibility for federal and state tax benefits, such as federal and state tax credits and preferential property tax assessments; eligibility for federal and state grant assistance; and technical assistance from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources-Historic Preservation Division.
- Adopt a local historic preservation ordinance to designate a certain area as a local historic district and establish a historic preservation commission. In turn, the ordinance would provide design guidelines for new construction and protect properties against inappropriate alterations.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES** (continued)

#### ***(B) Open Space Preservation***

New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors.

#### **Assessment:**

- Our community has a greenspace plan, actively preserving greenspace through direct purchase and encouraging set-asides in new development.
- Our community does not have a local land conservation program or work with state or national land conservation programs to preserve environmentally-important areas. However, we recently adopted ordinances to more stringently protect stream and wetland buffer areas. Conservation/greenspace creation is encouraged in environmentally-sensitive areas.
- Our community does not have a conservation subdivision ordinance for residential development that is widely-used and protects open space in perpetuity.
- Our community follows Department of Natural Resources guidelines restricting growth and encouraging conservation/greenspace in environmentally-sensitive areas.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Continue to establish a strong conservation/greenspace program for the county, pursue possible partnership with state or national land conservation programs like United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), Georgia Forestry Commission and others.



## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (continued)**

#### ***(C) Environmental Protection***

Environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or quality of life of the community or region. Whenever possible, natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area should be preserved.

#### **Assessment:**

- Our community does not currently have a comprehensive natural resources inventory; however, the necessary “Part V” environmental ordinances have been adopted and are enforced.
- A tree preservation ordinance is enforced, “any tree 24” in caliper or larger is protected.”
- A tree-replanting ordinance is enforced for new development, “requiring a tree to be planted for every 30’ of road frontage.”
- The “Blue Book” Volume 1 and 2 of the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual guidelines (to some degree) have been adopted for all new development.
- Our community has land use measures to protect the natural resources in our community.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Complete a natural resources inventory to identify the defining natural resources in the community to steer development away from environmentally-sensitive areas.
- Review Georgia’s Best Management Practices for Forestry in regards to Stream Management Zone guidelines and possibly provide stricter requirements for “buffer zones.”
- Collaborate with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service on environmental issues beyond Erosion and Sedimentation reviews.
- Strengthen tree-replanting ordinance with requirements for Georgia Forestry standard measurement, size, type of trees and perpetual maintenance.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (continued)**

#### **3) Social and Economic Development**

##### **(A) Growth Preparedness**

Each community should identify and put in place the pre-requisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These might include infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired, or leadership capable of respond to growth opportunities and managing new growth when it occurs.

##### **Assessment:**

- Population projections are available; however, the information is not always used in making infrastructure decisions.
- Local governments, school board, and other decision-making entities work independently without collaboration and communication. Supporting data varies according to entity and may or may not be used in making decisions.
- Development regulations and zoning ordinances have been reviewed recently and contribute to the accomplishment of QCO goals.
- Community has not designated specific areas where they would like to see growth based on a natural resources inventory.
- Community has guidelines for new development.
- The community does not have a citizen-education campaign to allow all interested parties to learn about development processes.
- The community utilizes newspaper advertisements, postings of property re-zonings, county websites, and public hearings to keep the public informed about land use issues, zoning decisions, and proposed new development.
- Public awareness and participation is an integral part of the community's comprehensive plan process.

##### **Recommendations:**

- Local governments, authorities and boards should utilize common data, such as population projections, to make future decisions and ensure consistency with planning. Regular communication between entities should be encouraged for consistent and effective planning.
- Clear, understandable guidelines for development should be prepared and utilized.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES** (continued)

#### ***(B) Appropriate Businesses Objective***

The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, long-term sustainability, linkages to other economic activities in the region, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher-skill job opportunities.

#### **Assessment:**

- The Chamber of Commerce/Development Authority considers the community's strengths, assets and weaknesses, and has created a business development strategy based on them.
- The Chamber of Commerce/Development Authority has evaluated the types of businesses already in our community, and has a plan to recruit compatible business, specifically "big-box investments" to serve as anchor tenants allowing small businesses to "piggy back."
- Chamber of Commerce/Development Authority recruits firms that provide or create sustainable products.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Continue recruitment efforts of "big box investments" and promotion of both commercial and industrial development.
- Continue recruitment efforts for commercial development, pursuing designation as an "Entrepreneur Friendly Community."
- Work with area employers to determine necessary workforce skills and provide education and training through school system and post-secondary institutions like Albany Technical College, Darton College, and others.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (continued)**

#### **C) Employment Options**

A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.

#### **Assessment:**

- Lee County has been in the process of becoming an “Entrepreneur Friendly Community” for more than a year.
- The community has limited job opportunities with 85% of the residents working outside the county.
- The community participates in the Southwest Georgia Regional Certified Literate Community Program (CLCP) to improve literacy levels of children, families and workers.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Receive designation of “Entrepreneur Friendly Community” to recruit commercial business entrepreneurs into the community providing jobs.
- Sustain the quality of life in the community highlighting the “Schools of Excellence,” rural character and other assets to attract and keep educated, trained, skilled workers in Southwest Georgia. Educate the community on the connection of essential workforce development and economic development.
- Increase literacy levels and workforce skills of community by encouraging high school graduation, GED attainment, continuing post-secondary education and learning essential workforce skills.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES** (continued)

#### **(D) Housing Choices**

A range of housing size, cost, and density should be provided in each community to make it possible for all who work in the community to also live in the community (thereby reducing commuting distances), to promote a mixture of income and age groups in each community, and to provide a range of housing choices to meet market needs.

#### **Assessment:**

- Accessory units like garage apartments or mother-in-law units are allowed within our community.
- Majority of residents work outside the county, adequate housing exists for people who work in the community.
- For southern Lee County, residential growth has been rapid and involved housing for each income level. Moderate income housing has been the most popular, and many new “cookie cutter” subdivisions have been developed to meet demand. Smithville lacks affordable, safe housing and downtown neighborhoods are in need of revitalization. A Housing study was completed, and USDA grant funding received to assist low- to moderate-income families with home ownership.
- Multi-family housing exists in the community in the form of duplexes, apartments and condominiums. The downtown area does not have options available for loft living or neo-traditional development.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Promote and encourage utilization of USDA Housing Grant to promote home ownership for low- to moderate-income households with new construction and renovation of blighted area in surrounding downtown neighborhood. Opportunity to renovate downtown Smithville into “loft living” with retail building on ground floor and living quarters above the commercial business. Old school house has potential of conversion to “artist lofts” or other housing usage.
- Traditional neighborhood design should be encouraged in designated areas with consideration of natural resources conservation and preservation of prime agricultural/forestry land.
- Encourage mixed use development to solicit commercial growth within neighborhoods and allow for safe bike and pedestrian activities with interconnecting sidewalks. Commercial buildings should reflect the neighborhood architecturally and include landscaping of native trees and plants with perpetual maintenance beyond initial plantings.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (continued)**

#### **(E) Educational Opportunities**

Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community to permit community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.

#### **Assessment:**

- The Lee County School System offers Vocational and College Preparatory tracks for high school students offering workforce development with “hands-on” classes. Dual enrollment is offered in conjunction with Darton College and Albany Technical College to promote post-secondary education.
- Lee County Library serves some functions of a workforce development center, providing technology for online classes, resume preparation and other tools for entrance into the workforce.
- Although Lee County has a wonderful K-12 education system with “Schools of Excellence” recognition, most young people leave the area for post-secondary education and in search of employment opportunities.
- Community participates in the Southwest Georgia Certified Literate Community Program (CLCP), partnership to improve literacy levels of children, families and workers.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Greater collaboration between educational institutions, workforce training programs, and economic development programs to assist in attracting and keeping an educated, skilled workforce.
- Increased support for the Southwest Georgia CLCP and their objectives to increase high school graduation, GED attainment, continuation of education including post-secondary, and workforce skills.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (continued)**

#### **4) Governmental Relations**

##### **(A) Regional Solutions**

Regional solutions to needs shared by more than one local jurisdiction are preferable to separate local approaches, particularly where this will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer.

##### **Assessment:**

- Our community participates in regional economic development organizations.
- Our community participates in regional environmental organizations and initiatives, especially regarding water quality and quantity issues.
- Our community works with other local governments to provide or share appropriate services, such as public transit, libraries, special education, tourism, parks and recreation, emergency response, E-911, homeland security, etc.
- Our community thinks regionally, especially in terms of issues like land use, transportation and housing, understanding that these go beyond local government borders.

##### **Recommendations:**

- Improve communication and cooperation between Cities and County for greater efficiency and cost effectiveness. Governments should utilize the same data for decision making, example-population projections.
- Increasing the number of joint community facilities and services may increase service delivery efficiency and be more cost effective.

## *Community Assessment*

### **V. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES** (continued)

#### **(B) Regional Cooperation**

Regional cooperation should be encouraged in setting priorities, identifying shared needs, and finding collaborative solutions, particularly where it is critical to the success of a venture, such as protection of shared natural resources or development of a transportation network.

#### **Assessment:**

- The Cities of Leesburg and Smithville and Lee County are preparing a Joint Comprehensive Plan with technical assistance from Southwest Georgia Regional Development Center to coincide with the Regional Plan.
- The Service Delivery Strategy will be updated during the planning process. Most community facilities and services are provided through the county; Cities of Leesburg and Smithville have separate utilities, fire and police services.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Increase collaborative efforts between Cities and County with improved communication, especially on common issues like water and sewer, land use, housing, economic development and transportation.



## *Community Assessment*

### **VI.SUPPORTING ANALYSIS of DATA and INFORMATION**

The validity of the identified Issues and Opportunities and recommended Character Areas was checked by evaluating data and information pertaining to the following seven elements:

- Population
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Natural and Cultural Resources
- Community Facilities and Services
- Intergovernmental Coordination
- Transportation

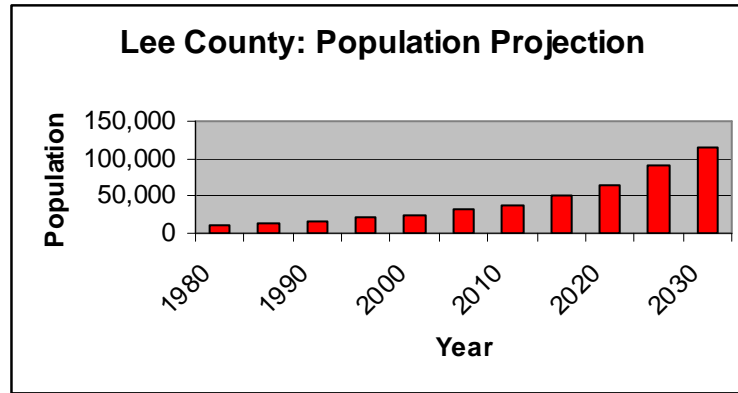
A 20-year planning time frame was used when evaluating these data and information items. Many sources of information were used to accumulate data including Census information, interviews with County and City representatives and review of past trends.

When evaluating this data and information, the focus was on:

- Whether it verifies potential issues or opportunities identified above
- Whether it uncovers new issues or opportunities not previously identified
- Whether it indicates significant local trends that need to be brought to the attention of decision-makers
- Whether it suggests adjustment of recommended character areas (e.g., to avoid intrusion into environmentally-sensitive areas, etc.)

In order to ensure a concise and readable *Community Assessment* report, only evaluations, data, or maps necessary to substantiate or illustrate potential issues or opportunities, to document significant trends affecting the community, or to support character area delineation will be included.

## Community Assessment



Lee County: Population											
Category	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
<b>Total population</b>	11,684	13,967	16,250	20,504	24,757	31,294	37,830	50,903	63,976	90,122	116,268

Source: Department of Community Affairs

Lee County: Population by Age											
Category	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
<b>0 – 4 Years Old</b>	1,011	1,116	1,220	1,514	1,807	2,205	2,603	3,399	4,195	5,787	7,379
<b>5 – 13 Years Old</b>	2,067	2,581	3,095	3,725	4,355	5,499	6,643	8,931	11,219	15,795	20,371
<b>14 – 17 Years Old</b>	949	925	901	1,164	1,427	1,666	1,905	2,383	2,861	3,817	4,773
<b>18 – 20 Years Old</b>	620	666	711	884	1,057	1,276	1,494	1,931	2,368	3,242	4,116
<b>21 – 24 Years Old</b>	824	837	849	949	1,048	1,160	1,272	1,496	1,720	2,168	2,616
<b>25 – 34 Years Old</b>	2,190	2,615	3,039	3,339	3,638	4,362	5,086	6,534	7,982	10,878	13,774
<b>35 – 44 Years Old</b>	1,442	2,192	2,942	3,760	4,577	6,145	7,712	10,847	13,982	20,252	26,522
<b>45 – 54 Years Old</b>	982	1,234	1,485	2,558	3,630	4,954	6,278	8,926	11,574	16,870	22,166
<b>55 – 64 Years Old</b>	842	897	951	1,300	1,648	2,051	2,454	3,260	4,066	5,678	7,290
<b>65 and over</b>	757	907	1,057	1,314	1,570	1,977	2,383	3,196	4,009	5,635	7,261

Source: Department of Community Affairs

Lee County: Racial Composition											
Category	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
<b>White alone</b>	8,845	10,926	13,007	16,684	20,361	26,119	31,877	43,393	54,909	77,941	100,973
<b>Black or African American alone</b>	2,779	2,957	3,135	3,487	3,838	4,368	4,897	5,956	7,015	9,133	11,251
<b>American Indian and Alaska Native alone</b>	22	27	31	46	60	79	98	136	174	250	326
<b>Asian or Pacific Islander</b>	24	35	46	129	211	305	398	585	772	1,146	1,520
<b>other race</b>	14	23	31	159	287	424	560	833	1,106	1,652	2,198

Source: Department of Community Affairs

## Community Assessment

<b>Lee County: Hispanic Ethnic Composition</b>											
<b>Category</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
<b>Persons of Hispanic origin</b>	79	96	112	206	300	355	411	466	521	576	632

Source: Department of Community Affairs

<b>Lee County: Per Capita Income (in dollars)</b>											
<b>Category</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
<b>Per Capita Income</b>	6,354	8,730	11,106	15,502	19,897	23,283	26,669	30,054	33,440	36,826	40,212

Source: Department of Community Affairs

<b>Lee County: Employment by Industry</b>											
<b>Category</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
<b>Total Employed Civilian Population</b>	5,155	6,257	7,359	9,674	11,989	13,698	15,406	17,115	18,823	20,532	22,240
<b>Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, hunting &amp; mining</b>	440	421	401	304	206	148	89	31	0	0	0
<b>Construction</b>	417	465	513	681	848	956	1,064	1,171	1,279	1,387	1,495
<b>Manufacturing</b>	1,131	1,205	1,278	1,474	1,670	1,805	1,940	2,074	2,209	2,344	2,479
<b>Wholesale Trade</b>	268	377	485	510	535	602	669	735	802	869	936
<b>Retail Trade</b>	795	977	1,158	1,408	1,658	1,874	2,090	2,305	2,521	2,737	2,953
<b>Transportation, warehousing, and utilities</b>	341	434	526	638	750	852	955	1,057	1,159	1,261	1,364
<b>Information</b>	NA	NA	NA	NA	230	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Finance, Insurance, &amp; Real Estate</b>	221	271	320	513	706	827	949	1,070	1,191	1,312	1,434
<b>Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services</b>	153	224	294	475	655	781	906	1,032	1,157	1,283	1,408
<b>Educational, health and social services</b>	769	1,020	1,271	1,884	2,496	2,928	3,360	3,791	4,223	4,655	5,087
<b>Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services</b>	178	114	50	293	535	624	714	803	892	981	1,071
<b>Other Services</b>	123	258	393	454	514	612	710	807	905	1,003	1,101
<b>Public Administration</b>	319	495	670	928	1,186	1,403	1,620	1,836	2,053	2,270	2,487

Source: Department of Community Affairs

## Community Assessment

<b>Lee County: Employment by Industry</b>			
Category	1980	1990	2000
<b>Total Employed Civilian Population</b>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, hunting &amp; mining</b>	8.5%	5.4%	1.7%
<b>Construction</b>	8.1%	7.0%	7.1%
<b>Manufacturing</b>	21.9%	17.4%	13.9%
<b>Wholesale Trade</b>	5.2%	6.6%	4.5%
<b>Retail Trade</b>	15.4%	15.7%	13.8%
<b>Transportation, warehousing, and utilities</b>	6.6%	7.1%	6.3%
<b>Information</b>	NA	NA	1.9%
<b>Finance, Insurance, &amp; Real Estate</b>	4.3%	4.3%	5.9%
<b>Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services</b>	3.0%	4.0%	5.5%
<b>Educational, health and social services</b>	14.9%	17.3%	20.8%
<b>Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services</b>	3.5%	0.7%	4.5%
<b>Other Services</b>	2.4%	5.3%	4.3%
<b>Public Administration</b>	6.2%	9.1%	9.9

Source: Department of Community Affairs

<b>Lee County: Personal Income by Type (in dollars)</b>		
Category	1990	2000
<b>Total income</b>	178,530,007	488,004,700
<b>Aggregate wage or salary income for households</b>	150,105,559	396,258,200
<b>Aggregate other types of income for households</b>	2,336,841	9,700,400
<b>Aggregate self employment income for households</b>	8,413,352	24,819,600
<b>Aggregate interest, dividends, or net rental income</b>	4,573,248	19,801,200
<b>Aggregate social security income for households</b>	5,545,119	15,103,200
<b>Aggregate public assistance income for households</b>	1,030,948	1,541,000
<b>Aggregate retirement income for households</b>	6,524,940	20,781,100

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (SF3)

## Community Assessment

<b>Lee County: Types of Housing</b>											
Category	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
<b>TOTAL Housing Units</b>	3,877	4,707	5,537	7,175	8,813	11,281	13,749	18,685	23,621	33,493	43,365
<b>Single Units (detached)</b>	2,571	3,020	3,469	4,688	5,907	7,575	9,243	12,579	15,915	22,587	29,259
<b>Single Units (attached)</b>	80	74	68	104	140	170	200	260	320	440	560
<b>Double Units</b>	125	188	251	350	448	610	771	1,094	1,417	2,063	2,709
<b>3 to 9 Units</b>	143	156	169	339	509	692	875	1,241	1,607	2,339	3,071
<b>10 to 19 Units</b>	38	32	25	45	64	77	90	116	142	194	246
<b>20 to 49 Units</b>	0	0	0	27	53	80	106	159	212	318	424
<b>50 or more Units</b>	42	21	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Mobile Home or Trailer</b>	878	1,198	1,517	1,599	1,680	2,081	2,482	3,284	4,086	5,690	7,294
<b>All Other</b>	0	19	38	24	9	14	18	27	36	54	72

Source: Department of Community Affairs

<b>Lee County: Condition of Housing</b>		
Category	1990	2000
<b>Total housing units</b>	5,537	8,813
<b>Complete Plumbing Facilities</b>	5,488	8,690
<b>Lacking Plumbing Facilities</b>	49	123
<b>Complete kitchen facilities</b>	5,503	8,762
<b>Lacking complete kitchen facilities</b>	34	51

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (SF3)

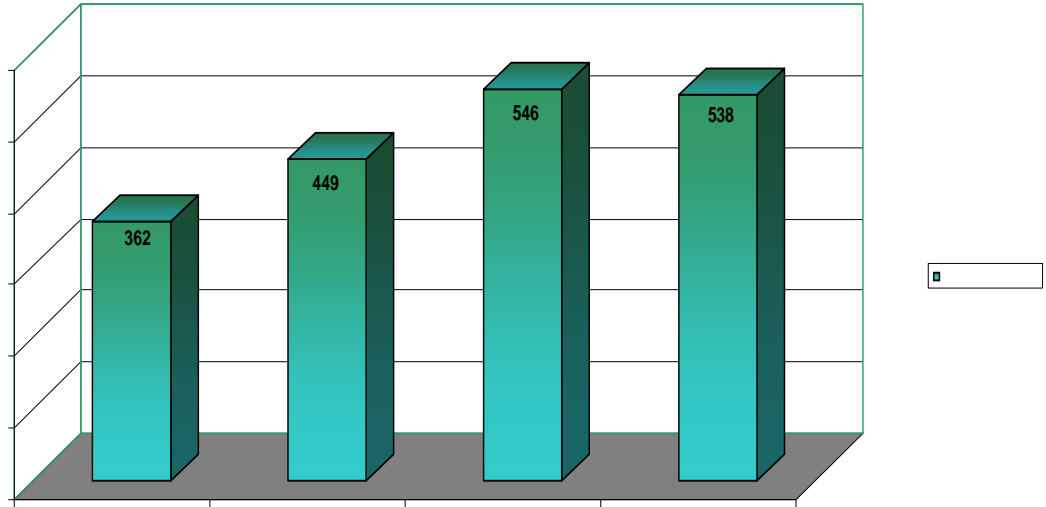
<b>Lee County: Occupancy Characteristics</b>		
Category	1990	2000
<b>TOTAL Housing Units Built</b>	5,537	8,813
<b>Housing Units Vacant</b>	338	584
<b>Housing Units Owner Occupied</b>	4,048	6,443
<b>Housing Units Renter Occupied</b>	1,151	1,786

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (SF3)

<b>Lee County: Housing cost (in dollars)</b>		
Category	1990	2000
<b>Median property value</b>	64,900	102,900
<b>Median rent</b>	389	587

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (SF3)

## Community Assessment



Source: Lee County Tax Assessor

Lee County: Cost Burdened		
Category	1990	2000
30% - 49%	657	749
50% and greater	NA	459
Not computed	179	199

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (SF3)

Natural and Cultural Resources: see attached Natural Resources Maps

Community Facilities and Services: The Service Delivery Strategy is under review and appears consistent at this time; however, revisions and updates will be made as needed during the development of the Community Agenda.

*Community Assessment*

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