



**COMPREHENSIVE
PLANNING
ASSESSMENT
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BAKER COUNTY AND THE CITY OF NEWTON

CREDITS

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Potential opportunities

Growing Hispanic and African American populations
 Baker County and the City of Newton adopted building codes
 Opportunities for infill development
 Much of the substandard and dilapidated housing was removed during the flood
 Development of a recreational plan and corresponding creation of a Capital
 Improvement plan to realize funds for the future development of a floodplain
 recreation area
 Newly constructed governmental buildings offer room for expansion & mitigate
 replacement pressures
 The potential to merge with an adjacent county
 Obtain a scenic corridor designation for Highway 91 & Highway 37
 Development of a County wide zoning ordinance
 Development of a County Recreation Department
 Creation of more sidewalks, Bike Trails
 Could improve access to Wildlife Management Area
 Boat Ramp on Nochaway Creek at
 Rentz Bridge under promoted
 Underutilized Youth Facilities
 Rock Gym Redevelopment Plan
 Need to develop an active business
 retention and recruitment agency
 Need to develop an aggressive
 economic development and Capital
 Improvement plan
 City could develop marketing image as
 a Bird Sanctuary
 County could develop both tradesman registration and building permit programs
 Newton could develop waste water treatment plant and sewer system
 Access to the Swamp of Toa (Chickasawatchee Swamp) and Elmodel Wildlife
 Management areas could be promoted and exploited
 Need to build proper voting precinct in Newton
 Building high School wing on existing K and Middle School Facilities

Entire County/ City as Character Areas	
Plantation	Downtown Newton
Agricultural	Cross Roads Community
Forested	Residential
River Corridor	Commercial Node
Floodplain	

Character Areas

Elmodel Community
 Hawkinstown Community
 Patmos Community
 Milford Community

Areas of Special Interest

Bryant Circle
 Carver Street
 Springdale Drive
 Water Circle

City of Newton Assessment

Johnson Circle
Downtown Newton
Baker County Court House
HWY 91 North of Newton
Canopy roads
Mac Short Gardens
The Swamp of Toa (Chickasawhatchee Swamp)

Potential Issues

Continued flooding
Very limited recreational facilities
Heightened demand on public services and facilities due to increases in elderly & youth populations
No administrative protection of groundwater sources in County
Limited or no protection of natural resources and habitat
Unregulated development in unincorporated territories, lax enforcement of existing ordinance within incorporated area
Limited promotion of Public access to recreation areas such as the Wildlife Management Area
Newton buyout properties remain undeveloped for public use
Limited of Cultural Facilities
Possible Water Contamination from aging septic systems
Low levels of Educational Attainment
High Levels of Poverty
Little diversity in the Economic Base of the County
Communication difficulties within and between local governments
Absence of Recycling
Absence of a City Sewage System
Almost half of existing housing stock is made up of mobile homes and tax base continues to shrink
High cost of education
Absence of Capital Improvement and Economic Development Planning
No adoption of Part V Environmental Protection regulations by County
No distinction between communication officers and jailers

Community Assessment Of Baker County & The City of Newton

Both Baker County and the City of Newton face significant challenges in the immediate future. Currently there are roughly 4,025 people residing in Baker County, of which 839 live in the City of Newton. These numbers show a decrease from the 2000 Census figures which pegged the numbers at 4,074 and 851, or an overall decline of 1.2% and 1.41% respectively. Should this trend toward population decline continue then the total number of people living in the county will sink below 1980 levels in just over 10 years. Further, 27.5% of the population is expected to be over age 45 by 2025.

A declining population shrinks the tax base and an aging population causes a greater demand for social services. The elderly are more likely to be both poor and more dependent on State sponsored medical care than young people. The Census 2000 figures show that almost 36% of the county's population is 45 or older and 27.3% are under the age of 18. Having a large percentage of the population either too old or too young to work means that they must be supported by working adults. This is known as the dependency ratio. The ratio is calculated on the basis of per hundred of total population; that is the number of non working people that 100 working people support, and the lower the number the better. At the moment, Baker County has a dependency ratio of 69:100, which means that for every 100 people in the labor force there are 69 youth and elderly dependents. This rate is above the state average of 56.5:100 and is at the high end of regional trends. The presence of both a large youth population and an increasingly elderly one presents the County and City

administrations with conflicting demands for a variety of social services, such as education and recreation opportunities for the youth, while the aged would use medical, transportation and less vigorous forms of recreation.

Race, Poverty and Education

Race is an important factor when considering poverty and educational attainment. Overall 34% of Baker County's population over the age of 25 did not complete High School in 2000. This number marked a 6 point decline from 1990. This is 13% higher than the State rate of 21.4%. The difference in educational attainment between races is even more marked, the White non-completion rate was 24.7% while that of African Americans was 44.2%. Both are higher than the state rates of 18.2% and 27.5% respectively. Baker county residents show similarly low levels of education beyond the high school level. Census 2000 statistics reveal that in the 25 years old and over group, 16.2% of Whites completed a Bachelors degree while only 3.9% of African Americans achieved this level of education. In comparison, the state rates are 27.4% and 15.5% respectively.

It has been proven that education levels are related to earnings. There are greater numbers of impoverished African Americans in Baker County than Whites. Data for 1999 shows that the county's total poverty rate of 23.4%. When race was considered differences between the races were evident, 9.1% of Whites in Baker County were below the poverty line, compared to 36.1% of African Americans. Both of these numbers were higher than the State averages. Old people and single mothers also tend to be poor.

Census 2000 also shows that Baker County residents have a *Per Capita* income of \$16,969. This not only over \$10,000 lower than that of the State, but also significantly lower than the \$20,900 enjoyed by the state of Mississippi, which has the lowest *Per Capita* income in the nation. While Georgia has a lower *Per Capita* income than the U.S. average, Baker County is only one of nine counties in the region with a

Per Capita income lower than Mississippi. There are a relatively high number of people living on fixed incomes, including the elderly, the poor, and low-wage workers.

Development and Demographics

The potential for economic development of a given region is linked to demographic trends. An area with large numbers of poor and poorly educated people will find it difficult to attract investment. The poor and ill-educated are also more likely to be dependent on County and City services and on Federal programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and Welfare. Current national economic trends reveal that areas attracting significant private investment offer both 'quality of life' as well as traditional financial returns. Quality of life considerations include diverse aspects of social life including the standard of education available, recreational opportunities, cultural activities and population diversity.

The largest economic sector in the county is public sector. Combining educational, health, social services, and Public Administration sectors reveals that this group currently employs 434 people, or 27% of the total workforce. The next two largest sectors are Farming and Manufacturing which employs 16.8% and 16.7% of the workforce respectively. Traditionally Baker County's economy has been based on Agriculture, and over 90% of Baker County's territory is still dedicated to it. The dominance of the Public sector in the county's economy offers those workers a degree of job and economic security by protecting the workers from changes in the economy. The public sector, however, is susceptible to economic shifts, and changes in state and federal economic policies.

It appears that at both state and federal levels funding for a wide variety social welfare programs has been declining since the early 1990s. If the trend toward lower taxes and lowered social spending continues, it will result in decreased access to these programs through tighter eligibility standards. Poor people will have access to fewer



Old County Courthouse, June 2005

higher rates of unemployment and poverty lowers demand for goods and services, which in turn threatens the employment options in the service industries.

64% of county residents work outside the county resulting in a loss of sales tax revenues. The fact that such a high percentage of the economically active residents of Baker must leave the county for work further illustrates the severe absence of local jobs.

Currently there are 830 people working in Baker on a regular basis. Of those, 298 come in from another county. If we assume the majority of the public sector jobs are held by residents, then of the daytime workforce of 830 people in Baker County a full 52% are employed within the public sector.

services and will suffer. Limiting the access of the elderly and poor to Medicare and Medicaid, will be self-regulating because more people will not be eligible for needed medical treatment and medication and therefore die much sooner. The continued trend toward low tax and low social service expenditure policies at the federal and state level is likely to decrease the number of public sector jobs locally available. Additionally,

Housing

This analysis of local housing characteristics is important to the comprehensive planning process. It evaluates the composition and quality of Baker County and the City of Newton’s existing housing stock and identifies current and future housing trends and the barriers to the adequate provision of housing for all sectors of the current and future populations.

The assessment also takes into account the types of programs and policies needed to address the improvement of neighborhoods through the combined efforts of



A more elaborate version of raising the house to evade flood water



Local Response to 1994 Floods

housing will need to take into account the flood plain and future flooding.

According to the 2000 Census, a total of 1,740 housing units were recorded in Baker County and 363 units in the City of Newton. The largest share of these units, or 79%, were located in the County. The distribution of houses throughout Baker County has changed significantly in the past twenty years, primarily due to the flood of 1994.

Single family homes are the dominant type of house in Baker County (60%) and the City of Newton (49%). Multi-family dwellings represented only 3% of the total houses in Baker County and 12% of the City of Newton's units. By contrast, across the state of Georgia, multiple family dwellings comprised 21% of the total houses in the state. Again, both Baker County and the City of Newton were below the state average.

41% of residences in Baker County are manufactured homes. This is much higher than national, state and even regional averages. This trend has tremendous impact on land values and housing tax returns.

the private sector, non-profit organizations, public-private partnerships or the public sector. The quality of housing and housing stock has changed dramatically due in large part to the severe flooding which occurred in 1994. Housing, particularly in the City of Newton, suffered extensive damage. The development of new

Decision makers in areas with a large number of manufactured houses face a unique set of problems and challenges. Due to the differences in tax regulations and the cost of manufactured housing, tax revenues generated from manufactured housing are significantly lower than from traditional single or multi-family houses. This situation puts local government at a disadvantage in providing services because of the reduced tax base, especially funding for education.

The Camilla Housing Authority operates several public housing complexes in Newton. These are located at North Main/Parks Street, Water Street and Hillcrest Street. In addition, one apartment complex on Highway 91, Bates Village, is offered mainly to the elderly as subsidized housing. There is also a duplex designed especially for handicapped patients adjacent to the Farm Service Agency. Public Housing has helped thousands during times of economic crisis. Since over 57% of the households in Baker County earn \$35,000 or less, the demand for this type of housing far outstrips its availability.

The City of Newton Housing Authority owns a total of 40 apartments in three developments. These are located on Hillcrest Avenue, North Main/Parks and Water Street and the Bates Village on Hwy 91. The occupancy rate is 100% with a waiting list. A mobile home park which also rents manufactured homes serves the City of Newton with low income rental units.

24 residential sites, 13 business sites, 13 parcels and 3 public buildings were destroyed during the flood. The lack of sufficient low or moderate income replacement housing is still a problem within the City. Most residents dislocated in the flood chose to relocate outside the floodplain in Newton. Unfortunately, the flood plain encompasses over 54% of the City's land area.

Re-development of the housing stock in the post flood years has improved the overall quality of housing in Newton. The flood recovery, condemnation and property buyout programs provided clearance opportunities for long vacated dilapidated residences and the removal of junk from some of the downtown neighborhoods. This is a trend that continues to the present. Since that time, no thorough housing assessment has been completed.

Baker County leaders report there are few desirable vacant housing units to choose from for new residents or residents wishing to upgrade. In addition, it is difficult to purchase small lots in the County because large tract owners are engaged in agriculture and forestry. Many large tracts of land are kept intact in the County as well as the City of Newton as part of family or corporate holdings. The fact that 54% of the City's territory is located on a floodplain means that many lots are not suited for the placement of homes. This situation is made worse by land price inflation due to the expectation of windfall profits by some land holders which was fueled by the artificially high prices during the buyout process following the 1994 floods.

Across the nation housing prices and values have been rising significantly. However, residents in Baker County have seen little increase in the value of their homes. The difference between the median value of homes in Baker County compared to the State of Georgia has increased. In actual dollars, the median value grew from \$21,900 to \$62,700 in Baker County. By contrast, in Georgia, the overall increase in value was from \$23,100 to \$111,200. The growth of median housing values in the City of Newton was even smaller at \$34,700 to \$50,600

Although there is a need to improve housing conditions in the City of Newton, little non-traditional assistance is available within the small community. Local



The Housing supply is limited

lenders provide home financing, but Community Ventures Inc. is the only non-profit organization in the community focused on other types of low income housing assistance available from HUD programs and other low interest loan programs.

In the wake of the 1994 flood, the City has adopted the State Building and Construction Codes. The continued enforcement of building codes and floodplain ordinances will be necessary to preserve current and future housing.

According to the University of Georgia's "State of the State' Housing report, the availability of affordable housing in relation to job location is a major factor in commuting patterns. Long commutes may be due to the poor quality of housing or a lack of housing options. High housing prices near the industry or the business center in a given community also contribute to increased travel time to work. A journey to work that crosses county, regional, or state boundaries has important consequences to the health of the local economy. According to the 2002 Georgia County Guide, more than 65% of Baker County residents work outside of the county.

Several significant housing problems have been identified in the housing assessment, particularly in the City of Newton. These problems include the deterioration of the older housing stock, the unavailability of low income housing in standard condition, lack of adequate standard rental properties, few vacant units from which recent arrivals can select a residence, lack of moderately priced units available for sale or rent, the occurrence of blighted neighborhoods, and vacant and dilapidated structures. Housing in the City of Newton is in need of improvement in order to meet the current and future needs of its citizens.

Building and housing code enforcement on a countywide level is needed to aggressively combat housing stock deterioration. Currently, manufactured home settlements and neighborhoods are being created without the benefit of long term planning or subdivision regulations. This leads to poorly arranged, cluttered, and unsightly neighborhoods.

Neighborhood clean-up programs are also needed to improve the appearance of many areas of Newton. Local housing policies and special programs will be needed as the elderly population continues to increase through the planning horizon. Additional

programs for maintenance assistance, home equity conversion mortgage programs, housing rehabilitation programs, smaller affordable low and moderate income housing units and shared housing programs for those that are "house rich, income poor" will be needed. The need for group homes and nursing homes will also increase in the County.

Scattered dilapidated housing units throughout the remainder of Baker County must be dealt with or additional eyesores will develop. In addition, infrastructure improvements are needed in many neighborhoods.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

The quality and availability of community facilities and services, both public and private, are a major factor in the location of new or expanding residential, commercial and industrial development. They are also an indicator of the quality of life in a community. It is helpful to know if existing services are sufficient to meet the future needs of the community and make the most efficient use of existing infrastructure to accommodate future development in the community.

The current and future adequacy of community facilities and the level of services in Baker County and Newton are assessed based on existing needs as well as the anticipated population and economic growth. Such analysis is beneficial as the City and County schedule improvements in their capital budgets in years to come.

The population projections for Baker County and Newton do not show substantial population growth in the near future. An evaluation of existing community facilities suggests that Baker County and the City of Newton should focus on improving and expanding the range of existing community facilities to meet the needs of a slowly changing population. Provision of these services is expensive but they must be maintained to retain a sense of community well being.

Major problems facing the Newton Police Department and the Baker County Sheriff's Department as well as other law enforcement agencies in the region and state include domestic disputes, drugs, and related crimes. Both Baker County and the City of Newton have a large number of



The New County Courthouse, June 2005

persons 65 years of age and older. This group is frequently the target of criminal activity such as larceny, burglary, and confidence scams.

In 2002, The Georgia County Guide indicated that there were 7 violent and 5 property crimes reported in Baker County. During 2003, the county reported a crime index rate of 255.40 and ranked 12th (1 being lowest rank) in Georgia with regard to total arrests. The index crime rate denotes the number of 'index' crimes per hundred thousand of population (Index crimes being violent/sexual assaults, murder, burglary and other serious crimes). In 2000, Early County reported a crime index rate of 1,335.6. Immediately to the north of Baker County, Dougherty reported a crime index rate of 6,341.5 that exceeded the average Georgia rate of 4,099.3. Smaller counties nearby also reported index crime rates that far exceeded that of Baker. Calhoun reported an index crime rate of 2,231.0, Miller County reported a rate of 1833.0 and Mitchell County reported a rate of 2,344.1 Furthermore, in 2001, Baker County had the fewest DUI arrests in the State with only 34.

Accounting for the significant differences between the crime rates in Baker and adjoining counties is difficult. It is likely that the small size of the community

contributes to the low crime statistics because it often entails a high level of familiarity which is a strong deterrent. It's possible that there may be significant under reporting of criminal activity. If any evidence arises to support this then it could be a major challenge to all branches of local government because under reporting crime indicates a profound distrust by citizens of law enforcement officials and the idea of good governance.

The increased number of young people also puts a strain on the provision of public services. Currently Georgia has the 7th highest incarceration rate in the nation and decision makers have opted to formulate "get tough" programs that not only put more people behind bars but also keep more offenders in prison. This form of criminal justice activity uses resources that may instead be used for preventative programs. More intervention programs and recreational activities need to be provided for young people so that they will have positive alternatives to criminal behavior.

Currently there are 11 law enforcement personnel working in Baker County. The County Sheriff's office employs 8 people; the Sheriff, 2 full-time deputies, four dispatchers/jailers and a clerk. The City of Newton currently employs 3 full-time police officers, one of whom is the Police Chief. Both County Peace Officers and Newton police officers receive the minimum 20 hours of training per year required by the Peace Officer Standards and Training Council. The Sheriff's Department currently deploys four vehicles, two 2002, one 2001 and one 2000 model all with over 100,000 miles. The City of Newton's Police Department has three fully equipped patrol vehicles. These vehicles will need to be replaced in the latter half of the planning period. Additional patrol personnel are needed and desired in the City. Budgeting for vehicles should be made on the basis of an average replacement cycle of eight years. Ideally, in the short term, the Baker County Sheriff's department will need one replacement vehicle equipped with police equipment each year by 2010.

Currently the Sheriff's Department is housed in the new County Courthouse along with County Administrative offices. The County jail is a 2,200 square foot facility with six jail cells and the capacity to house up to 14 prisoners. Baker County provides incarceration services to the City of Newton on a per-prisoner fee system.

Due to the wide variety of potential local conditions there is no single level of Service standard for policing. The Baker County Sheriff's Department does not have a computer system with



Emergency services, June 2005

Georgia Law Enforcement Software. Presently, the Department calls the Georgia State Patrol or the Mitchell County Sheriff's Department for computerized information. This equipment should be purchased in next five years for greater efficiency. The acquisition of this equipment would involve additional training for personnel.

Basic manpower and safety standards mandate a minimum of two officers per shift for liability purposes and the protection of officers. Due to the small staff and required days off, shift coverage is a problem for both the Sheriff's and the Police Departments. During the planning horizon, the addition of supplemental officers would improve community and officer safety. Local calls to the Newton Police Department are forwarded to the Baker County Sheriff's Department for dispatching when calls are not answered in two rings. This system has, for the most part, worked well, but is not ideal.

Emergency management services have been provided in Baker County since 1977 when a volunteer service was established. Baker County is in the process of

obtaining Emergency 911 service. This will be a priority during the short term planning period. The Baker County Emergency Medical Service building is located on Hillcrest Street. This 1,700 square foot facility has two parking bays. This facility currently meets the needs of the citizens but the community would like to expand service capability to better respond to all portions of the County. The Newton location of the EMS is on the County's eastern border. The provision of services in the remote portions of the County involves traveling long distances, so in order to upgrade services, the development of at least one satellite station is desirable.

The Baker County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) currently employs 13 people, primarily on a part-time basis and operates two ambulances. The older model is a 1995 Ford. The other vehicle is a recently acquired 2001 Ford. Both vehicles are paid for and are stationed on Hillcrest Avenue in the City of Newton. The older vehicle will need to be replaced during this planning period. The Service is funded through donations, grants and County funds as well as fees. Calls to the Service are radio dispatched through the Baker County Sheriff's Department. Calls can also be directly made to the EMS office. Communication equipment is currently adequate. Within the last (5) years, the EMS Department has received nearly 2,000 calls.

All public safety agencies are dealing with increased case loads related to domestic violence. Development of the Neighborhood Watch Program is recommended for expansion through the planning horizon. In addition, it is recommended that communities study the potential for cross-training of community public safety personnel. The Newton-Baker Fire Rescue Department (FRD) consists of two fire stations covering the unincorporated County and the City of Newton. The Newton-Baker FRD is funded by city and county general funds, grants and fund-raisers.

The Newton- Baker FRD fire station is located in the City of Newton on Baker Place. The Fire Department has 18 volunteer firefighters, who have all completed the Georgia Fire Course 101 in Forsyth. There are also two unpaid full-time EMS/EMA and Coroner service personnel. The facility consists of a 2,000 square foot building with two bays and one training room. The building is in desperate need of repairs during the short term planning period. Two additional bays are being added at the station to

provide covered parking to protect the existing and brand new fire equipment. Adequate land is available for expansion of the facility. The Newton-Baker FRD has access to a burn house for training purposes.

Four vehicles are utilized by the Department. These include a brand new \$200,000 pumper truck, 1981 Ford 1,000 gallon per minute (GPM), in good condition, a 1958 500 gallon Ford pumper in poor condition, a 1982 GMC 300 GPM 1,200 gallon tanker in good condition and a Ford van-equipment truck in good condition. Currently, the 1958 and 1981 vehicles are parked in sheltered bays. New trucks are desperately needed. Communications are handled with radios, beepers and pagers. All communications equipment is in good condition. However, during the short-term planning period and as a matter of regular replacement policy, approximately three hand held walkie-talkies and two pagers must be purchased every two years. Emergency calls are dispatched through the Baker County Sheriff's Department. The Department serves all areas of the Newton and the county. The current ISO rating of the Newton-Baker Volunteer Fire Department is "Class 7" for the City and "Class 9" for the County.

The Insurance Service Office (ISO) of Georgia is responsible for evaluating the adequacy of fire departments in Georgia. The ISO rating system ranks communities from one to ten (with one being excellent service and 10 indicating no fire protection) based on nine criteria. These criteria include the fire station service areas, station staffing, the availability of water, pumping and storage capacity among others. The class in which a community is placed plays a large part in determining individual fire insurance rates. Baker County has one other volunteer fire department located in the Patmos community which was developed in 1994 to provide greater service to the western portion of Baker County. Nine volunteer fire fighters have been State certified in the Fire Safety 100 Course. Training was received at the Colquitt-Miller County VFD. This volunteer organization is trying to recruit additional personnel. A new station was built three years ago, but more trucks are needed.

The City of Newton operates a public water system with service available within the city limits. No private water systems are licensed in the city. The current number

of water customers (350) has remained steady for the past 10 years. The City of Newton's water distribution system and well system were replaced following the 1994 flood and are in good condition. Neither the City of Newton nor Baker County operates a sanitary sewage treatment system. The high number of septic tanks must be monitored carefully in the City and County due to the high pollution susceptibility and natural water recharge areas of Baker County. The minimum lot size allowable to site both septic systems and a well in highly susceptible areas is 1.5 acres.

In addition to the Head Start Program, Baker County is served by one local school located in the City of Newton on Highway 37. The Baker County Elementary/Middle School was constructed in 2003. The current student enrollment is 358 for pre-kindergarten through 8th grade. The county's 9th through 12th grade students are served by Mitchell-Baker High School.

Currently Baker County is spending \$12,338 FTE per student , 34% of which is raised from local taxes. As a comparison neighboring Calhoun County is spending



Agriculture is an important part of the County Economy

\$9,400 FTE.

Baker County's average classroom size was 18 students in the 2004-2005 school year. This is an excellent teacher-student ratio. Under the current No Child Left Behind mandate, the Baker County School System has met the general yearly progress requirements for the last two years. The past year, however, the school system failed to meet the progress requirements for Special Needs pupils and therefore was deemed not have attained adequate progress. There remains, however, high percentages of pupils that fail to meet these standards. The Georgia Department of Education shows that in the 2003/04 Baker County school year, 42% of Grade 5 students failed Mathematics tests and 32% failed English Language tests. While the student scores on Criterion Referenced Competency Tests in different grades change, there are consistently large numbers of students that fail.

The Baker County School system faces serious challenges over the planning horizon as the County's tax base declines and state funding tightens. As it struggles to meet the No Child Left Behind mandates, the system will face increased demands for quality service provision with a shrinking budget.

Located in the flood plain, the historic Courthouse contains a small library staffed by a part-time librarian, an active historical society, Family Connection and the Neighborhood Service Center. The City currently does not have any park land, but a City-owned fifty-acre parcel in the flood plain could be converted to park use. Baker County is also lacks recreational facilities and services. The County has one lighted ball field located just east of the Head Start Building off of Baker Place in Newton. Baker County also has a Youth Center staffed by the County which provides computer access, homework assistance and other activities for the children of Baker County. This facility is located in the Head Start Building in Newton. It is funded through the county's general fund. An underused playground is situated adjacent to the Head Start Building.

The development of additional recreation facilities would improve the quality of life in the City of Newton. In the short-term planning period the development of community parks and picnicking areas, along with basketball courts and children's

playgrounds is needed. The development of a countywide recreation plan to improve the quality of life for Baker County residents is recommended.

The Primary Health Care Clinic, Baker County Health Department, and Mental Health center are located on Sunset Avenue. This facility was built in the 1980s and an addition was added to the building in 1993. The Health Department provides a full array of preventative medical services including immunizations and comprehensive health exams. One full-time registered nurse (R.N.), one part-time R.N. and one full-time administrative clerk and one part-time clerk operate the Center. Additional R.N.s and clerks are needed currently and will be needed during the planning period. The Baker County Primary Health Care Clinic offers a comprehensive range of standard medical services including examinations, referrals, tests, pediatrics and have four doctors on the staff. Other public offices include the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFACS), and the County Farm Service Agency (FSA) Extension center are all of recent construction and are in good condition. In addition to the above there are a number of other community services that have offices in the city such as the Adult Learning Center, the Senior Center, the Neighborhood Service Center, Family Connection and Family Preservation. DFACS is a state agency that serves children and families in the realm of adoption, foster care, Child Protective Services and Adult Protective Services. Family Preservation is an agency that contracts with DFACS to provide select customers mental health services. Family Connection is an umbrella organization that consists of a coordinator and community partners that serve to assess specific needs within the community and steer individuals towards agencies that offer relief. The Neighborhood Service Center is operated by the South West Georgia Community Action Council and deals with surplus commodities, administers the Energy Assistance program for DFACS and other social services based on income. The development of an organized maintenance plan is needed to ensure that the buildings are adequately cared for over the planning horizon. The old high school gymnasium will need to be restored over the short-term planning period.

Both the City of Newton and Baker County would benefit from the development

of a short and long range capital improvement budget program to finance construction of new facilities, maintenance and replacement of community facilities and other activities required over the planning horizon.

Baker County is very sparsely populated and agriculture is the dominate land use. It is home to several large land holdings, or plantations, that control nearly 50% of the county's territory. Many of these plantations have active farming and forestry operations, although a significant portion is in conservation use, including the large tract that is home to the J. W. Jones Ecological Research Center. These holdings are seldom subdivided and serve to protect the county from unsuitable development. There is limited pressure on the county for residential development due to the lack of public services and cultural and entertainment attractions. The demand is further diminished due to the concentration of large land holdings within the growth area of the City of Albany.

The County is home to two significant water bodies, the Flint River and the Ichawaynochaway Creek. Both have been designated as River Corridor Protection Areas by the DNR, although only Newton has adopted protective measures. However, the majority of the Ichawaynochaway Creek is effectively protected as fourteen miles runs through the J. W. Jones Ecological Research Center. Protection of the creek from environmental degradation is a key objective and necessary to support the ecological research of the Center. Most of the developed land along the Flint is located in the City of Newton. Due to adopted floodplain, wetland and river corridor regulations, new development is tightly regulated leaving little opportunity to impact the River within the City. In the unregulated rural areas however, agriculture may degrade the water quality.

Both governments were required to adopt all three of the Part V Environmental ordinances common to this part of the state. The three ordinances are: groundwater recharge, wetland and river corridor protection. Newton adopted all three, while the county postponed adoption with the Department of Community Affairs' knowledge. This was due, in part, to the wait on changes to the river corridor protection standards. These regulations are being revised by DCA and the Department of

Natural Resources. These regulations didn't entail significant restrictions but rather were designed to make local governments aware of applications currently being considered by the Corps of Engineers.

Both the city and county are subject to frequent flooding. A minor flood event occurs approximately every five years. 54% of Newton's total land area lies in the 100-year floodplain. Floodplain ordinances were adopted by the City in 1976 and then by the county in 1994. Both localities participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. Wetlands accounted for approximately 6% of the county's land area. More than half of Newton's territory is within a wetland.

The Swamp of Toa is located in the northern portion of the county and is a regionally significant wetland area that was recently acquired by the state of Georgia. The swamp covers 280,800 acres in parts of Baker, Calhoun, Dougherty, Terrell and Worth Counties. The swamp was designated an Important Bird Area, a program of the National Audubon Society. The purpose of the program is to identify and conserve key breeding and feeding sites for birds across the country. Additionally, the county is home to a significant number of threatened and endangered plant and animal species.

The unincorporated areas have no zoning or subdivision regulations, and construction in these areas is not subject to building inspections or any kind of regulatory oversight. Consequently, land owners can do what they like with their land regardless of the effects on neighbors. The primary development oversight comes through County Health Department regulations that require a minimum lot size based on septic tank use. The entire county is considered a "significant recharge area" and almost all of it has a "high" susceptibility to pollution. Only small areas along the Flint River have a "medium" susceptibility. Minimum lot size (without sewer service) in an area of high pollution susceptibility is 1.5 acres. In areas of medium pollution susceptibility, minimum lot size is 1.25 acres. As there is no sewer service within the county, the minimum lot size for any type of development is 1.25 acres, and in most cases 1.5.

The largest threat to groundwater quality continues to be the concentration of

septic tanks in the City of Newton. To a lesser degree, this is also problem in the unincorporated communities. Agricultural chemicals and animal waste are potential threats in the rural areas.

While the minimum lot size can deter significant subdivision development, the artificially high cost of what little available land there is further compounds this disincentive. The lack of convenient amenities such as shopping options, entertainment and cultural activities further limits development pressure. As a result, nearly all residential development has taken place on scattered sites, within different small unincorporated communities, or in Newton.

Approximately 75% of the county is designated as prime farmland or farmland of state significance. Conversion of forest land to agricultural uses was cited in the 1996 plan as being a serious concern. Much of the converted land is only marginally suitable for agricultural use, potentially leading to problems in the county timber market and environmental degradation from depleted forest cover. Reforestation of cut timber was identified by the Forestry Service as being an important need in the County.

There are few designated historic resources in the County. Four properties are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These are the Old Baker County Courthouse, the Notchaway Baptist Church and Cemetery, Pine Bloom Plantation and Tarva Plantation. Several potentially eligible sites exist throughout the county, mostly associated with farms or plantations. Due to the county's historically sparse development, there are relatively few sites, and minimal potential for historic districts. The City of Newton has experienced too much demolition, particularly in the wake of the flood of 1994 to have an intact historic residential or commercial district.

Historic Resources

Historic Courthouse (listed)

Ichauway Plantation

Pine Bloom Plantation (listed)

Tarva Plantation (listed)

City of Newton Assessment

Blue Springs Plantation
Pineland Plantation
Nilo Plantation
Newberry Angus Farms
W.C. Newberry Farms
Pinegrove School and cemetery
East Baker High School
Clare Cross House

City of Newton

Baker County High school complex (main building used as County Courthouse) Some parts built by Civilian Conservation Corps.

Land Use

Baker County encompasses 347 square miles (222,080 acres) and has one of the lowest population densities in the state (156/159 in 1990). Most (77% in 1990) of the land is used for agriculture or forestry. Agriculture accounts for 28% of land use in the unincorporated areas. Nearly half (47%) of the agricultural and forestry lands are located on large plantations. A large portion of Newton is also used for agriculture or forestry (23%). Additionally, there is a large portion (27%) of the City that was previously classified as undeveloped or unused.

The second largest land use in the county is parks, recreation and conservation. The Chickasawhatchee Wildlife Management Area located in northern Baker County comprises the majority of this classification. Although split into two distinct sections, this land use classification provides a total of 8,196.2 acres or 4% of the County's total land use. Currently Baker County residents enjoy unlimited access to the Wildlife Management Area in the Elmodel Community. There is a further viewing area but this must be approached through Calhoun County. Residential use accounts for only 2.3% (5,107 acres) of the County's total land usage. Most of this is located in Newton and the unincorporated communities around the county. Commercial and Industrial land uses account for less than .1% of the unincorporated County's land use. These uses are generally concentrated around the rural communities. Industrial activities in Baker

County include two peanut mills/buying points, a sod farm/nursery, a chicken litter conversion operation and a distributor for Neem Oil. Public and institutional uses also account for less than .1%, and are comprised largely of the county buildings in Newton and the Baker County Jail on Highway 200. Commercial development in the county is concentrated at the intersection of Highways 37 and 91 in the southwest portion of the City of Newton. This area developed as a result of repeated flooding of the historic downtown core. Most of the formerly commercial downtown has been bought from private owners by the City through a flood buyout program. The buyout occurred after the flood of 1994, but the movement of commercial activity to the highways began in earnest after the construction of the bridge over the Flint in the 1970s replacing the bridge leading into downtown. This bridge was replaced to avoid the flood prone downtown. The City had intended to develop the flood buyout property in downtown as a community park. This has not been accomplished.

Quality Community Objectives

1. Heritage Protection

Long before the flood of 1994 the citizens and governments of Baker County and the City of Newton were renown for their steadfast rejection of outside interference in local affairs. Although trends in the county's population have alternated between declining and stagnant since the 1930s with minimal development and an economic history marked by more failures than successes. The traditional cross road communities such as Patmos or Elmodel have experienced a slow but relentless reduction of residents which has left these communities scattered and decentralized and suffering from haphazard development patterns.

2. Sense of Place

The 1994 flood, the subsequent rapid relocation of citizens, the passing of development ordinances, however loosely enforced, has razed the traditional core of the City of Newton and effectively ended all potential opportunities to meet the quality growth principles posited by the Department of Community Affairs. There are significant numbers of empty lots and a few derelict buildings in the city, particularly in the previously inhabited floodplain. Aside from the Flint River that marks the

boundary of the City and County, there are no clear edges to the city, which further undermines distinctions between incorporated and unincorporated territory.

3. Housing Opportunities

While there is a demand for housing, the land market in the city is restricted due to the floodplain/wetland designation and the resistance of large land owners to subdivide their holdings. This combination of influences has led to scattered neighborhood development in the city. Current land use patterns in the city and county favor single family units on large lots. Large lots are a necessity to avoid contamination of wells by septic systems.

4. Appropriate Businesses

The city and county possess a single commercial area, at the crossroads of Hwy 37 and Hwy 91, which contains two gas stations, a liquor store, a hardware store, a phone store, an auto parts dealership, an insurance office, a restaurant, and a grocery store, the majority of which were constructed after the new bridge across the Flint River was opened in the early 1970s. There are a few other commercial enterprises alongside highway 91 within the city limits, however there is only one commercial cluster.

5. Growth Preparedness

Arguably, the absence of virtually any kind of development regulations and the lax enforcement of those that have been adopted by the City, lends the County and City a haphazard atmosphere. Unregulated development in the past has given way to a unstructured present and foretells a disordered future for the residents of Baker County and the City of Newton.

6. Local Self-Determination

Both City and County Governments value their independence, but should explore the possibility of merging to save on administrative costs and avoid service duplication.

7. Regional Cooperation

Both governments are active water resource protection groups and other regional initiatives.

8. Shared Solutions

City and County actively participate in the South West Georgia Annual Regional Work Plan.

9. Environmental Protection

The absence of development regulations in the unincorporated territory limits environmental protection, however, the amount of land taken up by Plantations affords a level of defense. The City has passed both Part V Environmental protection ordinances.

10. Educational Opportunities

There are number of Universities and Community Colleges within easy commuting distance in Albany and Bainbridge.

11. Employment Options

Over half the working population are employed outside the County indicating that local employment options are very limited.

12. Infill Development

There is little opportunity for infill development within the City of Newton due to the extent of the floodplain territory in the city. The unincorporated communities offer no infrastructure other than roads which further limits infill opportunities.



Old Elementary School, potential for revovation and reuse?

13. Traditional Neighborhoods

Along with the destruction of the Flood in 1994, the necessity of 1.5 acre lots and the absence of development regulations encourages scattered and disorderly development along the county roads.

14. Open Space Preservation

Because 54% of the City has been designated a floodplain and roughly 50% of the County's territory is made up of Plantations, there is a great amount of undeveloped and open spaces.

15. Regional Identity

The basic profile of the County and City is one of lots of agricultural land, lots of poor, poorly educated people with limited housing options and fewer employment opportunities. An identity that Baker shares with many of its neighbors.

16. Transportation Alternatives

There are few sidewalks within the city, none at all in the unincorporated area and no real practical alternative to automobile transport. The City and County participate in an innovative Community Transportation system administered by the South West Georgia Regional Development Center and funded through the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Transportation

The transportation system in Baker County is sparse. Baker County has 361 miles of road roughly half of which are paved. 78 miles of the road system are State Highway while the county maintains 272 miles of road, of which 175 miles are unpaved. The county's major federal and state routes are:

GA 91

Georgia Route 91 is a two lane, north-south artery traveling from the Miller County Line in the southwest to the Dougherty County Line in the north.

GA 37

Georgia Route 37 is a two lane, east-west route from the Mitchell County Line, to the east, to the city of Elmodel where the road travels north to the Calhoun County



Water Walls to Ward off Future Floods

Line.

GA 216

Georgia Route 216 is a two lane, east-west route from the unincorporated community of Elmodel to the Early County line.

GA 200

Georgia Route 200 is a two lane east-west route from the City of Newton that traverses southwest to the Early County line and the City of Damascus.

GA 253

Georgia 253 is a two lane north-south route that travels south from Hwy 91 to the Decatur County line.

The annual average daily traffic (AADT) in Baker County is moderate on the most used roads in Baker County. These roads are GA 91, GA 37 followed by GA 216, GA 200, and GA 253. The rest of the roads in Baker County do not experience much

traffic. Maintenance of the Roads is handled by the Road Department. The Currently, the City is working on a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to get Springdale and Water Streets paved.

Sidewalks

The only sidewalks in Baker County are located on Broad Street in the city of Newton. These sidewalks are poorly maintained. Newton needs adequate sidewalks. People are consistently seen walking alongside GA Route 91 which is one of Baker County's busiest roads.

Signalization and Signage

There are caution lights on Georgia Route 91 and 37 and at the intersections of Sunset Avenue and Clear Lake Road. Stop signs are located at every major intersection in Baker County.

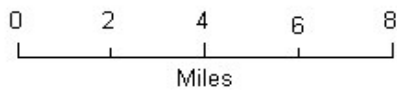
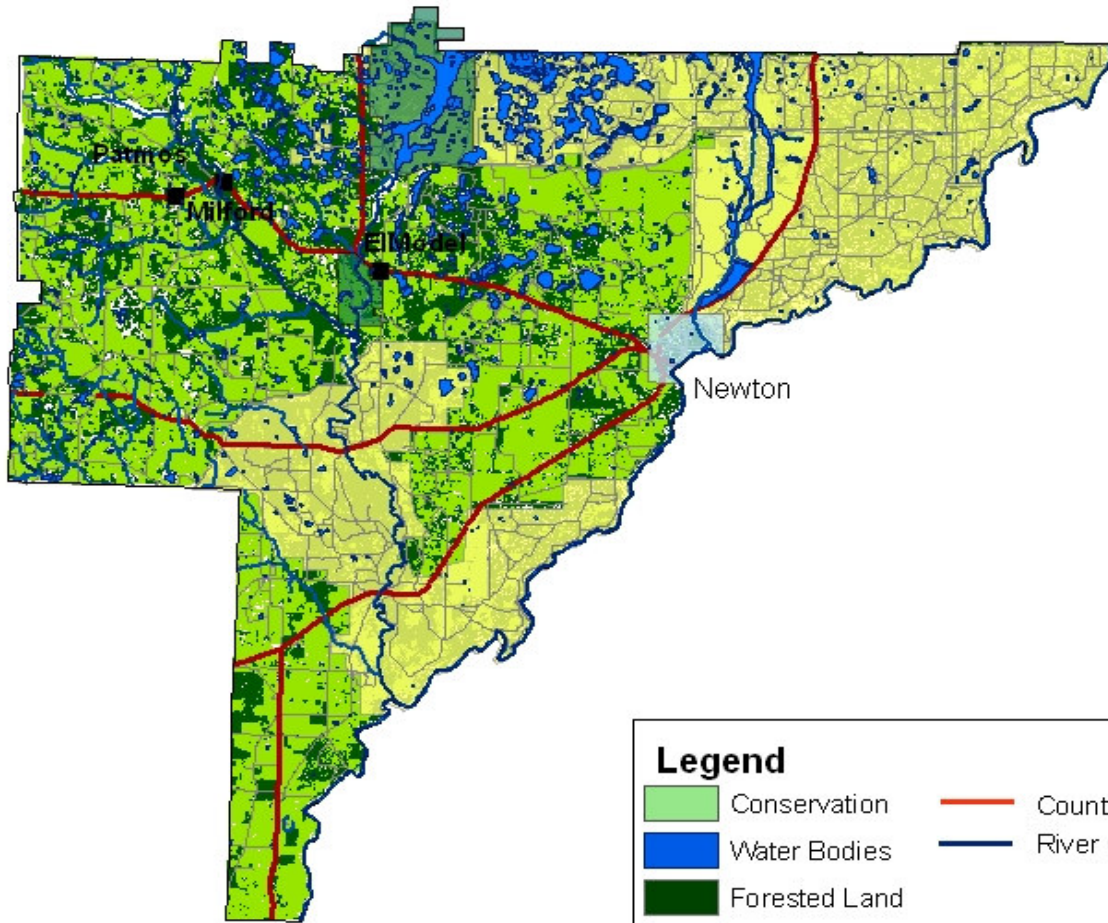
Public Transportation

Public Transportation provides the only means of transportation for some people within this county. The existing public transportation system, however minimal the service, enables people to travel to many commercial, medical, and residential locations.








The Southwest Georgia Rural Transportation System provides demand responsive services to 14 counties in Southwest Georgia. This system serves human service agencies and the general public in Baker County from 6 am to 8 pm Monday to Friday. These service agencies belong to the Department of Human Resources (DHR). Currently, the Southwest Georgia Rural Transportation System operates one bus out of the Baker County area. From the months of November and December of the year 2004, the bus made 520 trips, 4 of which were public trips. Access to some form of public transit is already and will remain a significant issue for residents of both Baker County and the City of Newton.

The current service delivery strategy was not consulted in the preparation of this document.

Baker County Character Areas

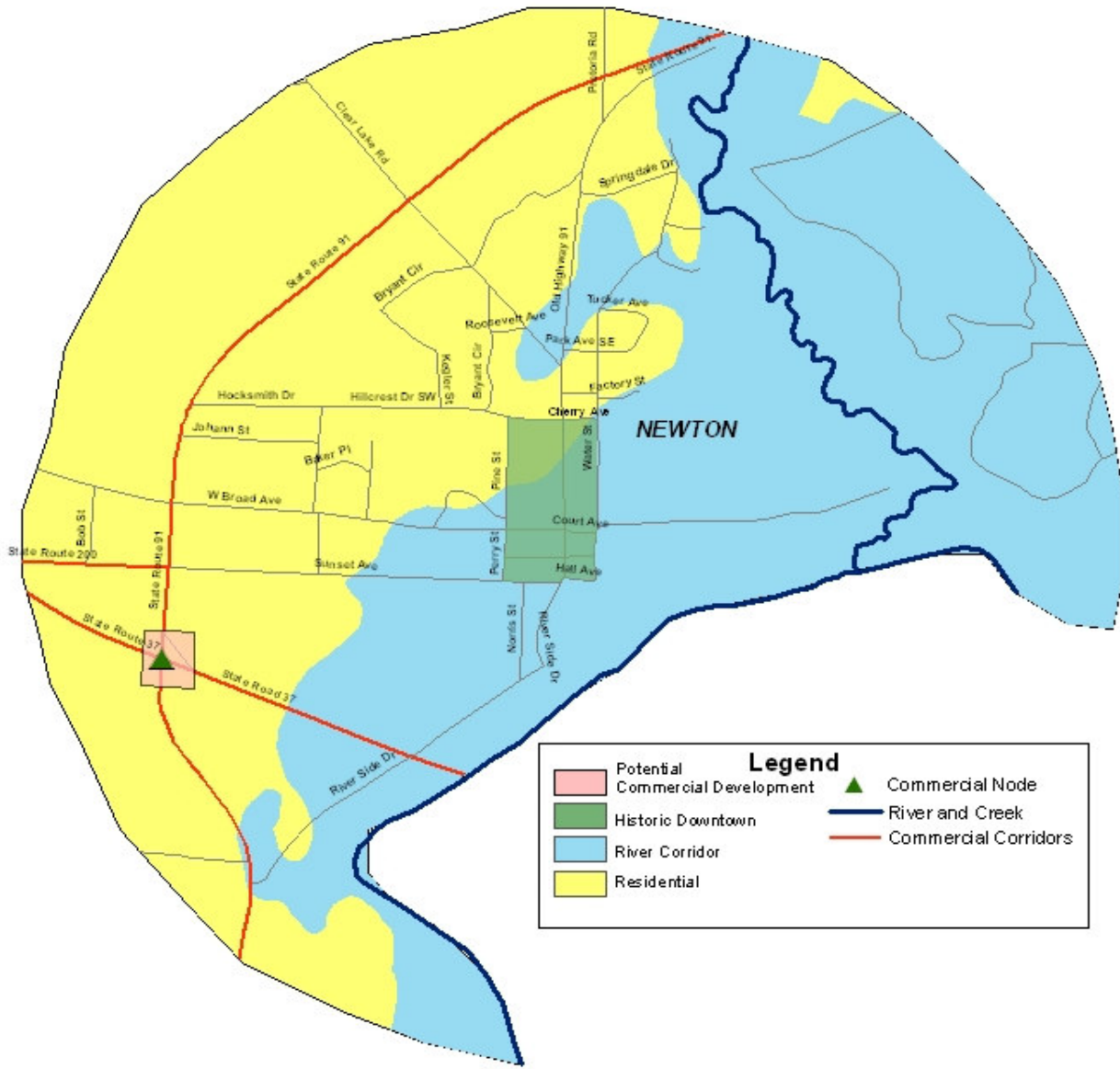


Legend

 Conservation	 County Corridors
 Water Bodies	 River Corridors
 Forested Land	
 Prime Agricultural Land	
 Plantation Land	

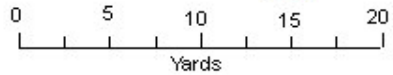


Town of Newton Character Areas

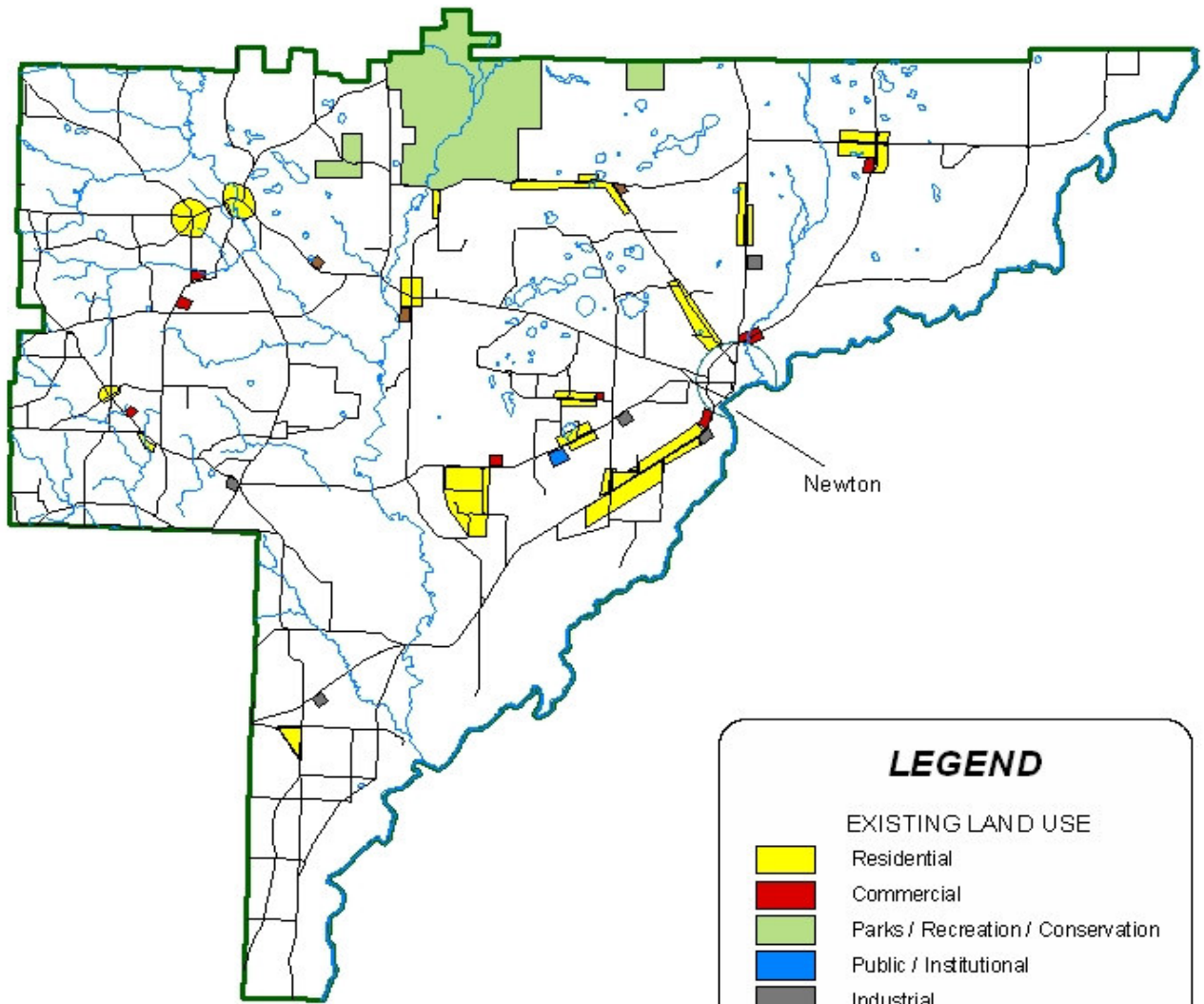


Legend

	Potential Commercial Development		Commercial Node
	Historic Downtown		River and Creek
	River Corridor		Commercial Corridors
	Residential		



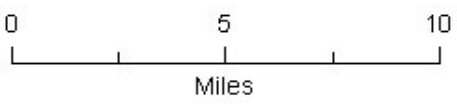
Baker County Existing Land Use

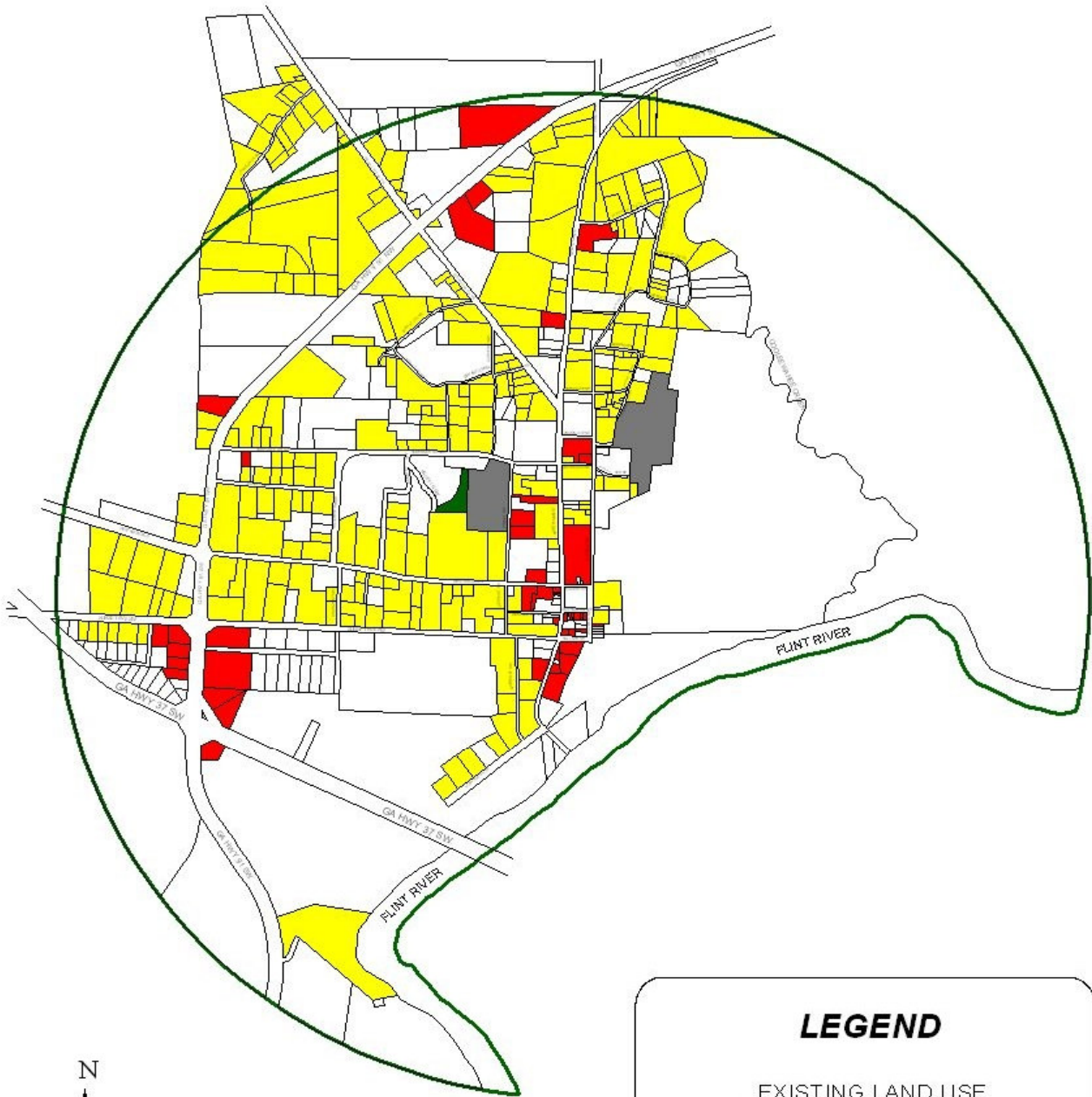


LEGEND

EXISTING LAND USE

- Residential
- Commercial
- Parks / Recreation / Conservation
- Public / Institutional
- Industrial
- Transportation / Utility / Conservation
- Agricultural / Forestry





LEGEND

EXISTING LAND USE

- Residential
- Commercial
- Parks / Recreation / Conservation
- Public / Institutional
- Industrial
- Transportation / Utility / Conservation
- Agricultural / Forestry



SOUTHWEST GEORGIA
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CENTER

EXISTING LAND USE

CITY OF
NEWTON