



Fanning the Flames


**The Community
Assessment Portion of
the Ten Year
Comprehensive Plan**

**Grady County and the cities
of Cairo and Whigham**



Credits

**Colin Maycock
Barbara Reddick
Shane Kelsey
Rozanne Eubanks
R. Emerson Chew Jr.
Paul Forgey**



Contents

Issues and Opportunities Grady, Cairo, Whigham	1 – 4
Population and Economic Development	5 – 8
Community Facilities	8 – 11
Housing	11 – 18
Natural Resources	18 – 21
Historic Resources	21 – 23
Quality Community Objectives	23 – 26
Character Maps	27 – 29
Existing Land Use Maps	30 – 33

Issues and Opportunities

Grady County, City of Cairo and City of Whigham

Issues:

Grady County

Absence of comprehensive Land Use Regulations

Legal issues arising from existing land use regulations

Haphazard development/unchannelled development in southern portion of the county, particularly in the vicinity of Calvary

Level of Development likely to increase over planning period as Floridians move into southern Georgia

Incompatible neighboring land uses

Resource protection and conservation issues arising from unregulated development

Water resource protection

May need to construct additional Nursing Home and Assisted Living Facilities

Potential for school building upgrades/replacement over planning period

Protection of Plantation/Old South Area/Red Hills

Low Wages

High percentage of Mobile Homes in housing stock (32%)

Need to develop Public Transportation options

High levels of poverty; 36% of Households earn less than \$20,000

Graying population; 13.2% 65 and older in 2000

Low levels of educational achievement; 30% not completing High School in 2000

The City of Cairo:

Gateways could be more clearly defined

Abandoned and unused industrial buildings in Rail Corridor are an eyesore

Infrastructure Challenges

- i. Roads need improving particularly in low income areas
- ii. Water system

Need for contemporary sign ordinance

Enforcement of nuisance ordinance

Landfill space may be exhausted within the planning period

Absence of sidewalks particularly along Hwy 84 the primary retail strip of the city

Deteriorating Public Housing

The City of Whigham:

Streetscape could use improvement and the commercial center needs to be reinvigorated

Water system may need upgrading over planning period

No waste water treatment facility

Enforcement of local ordinances

Lack of available rental properties

Need for high quality cable TV and internet access

Opportunities:

Grady County

The opportunity to proactively guide future development through innovative land use regulations and close consultation with city governments

Tired Creek Dam and Development project

Attraction to and suitability for industrial plant

Tourism, particularly ecological and agricultural, promoting Birdsong Nature Center and agrarian heritage

City of Cairo:

Improve the financial position of the city through the adoption of creative management practices

Increased promotion of Antique Car Rally in May

Streetscape improvement in historic core

Becoming a bedroom community for neighboring employment centers

Positioning the city as an attractive alternative for retirees

Potential for adaptive reuse of existing industrial structures

Technical College Annex on Hwy 84

City of Whigham:

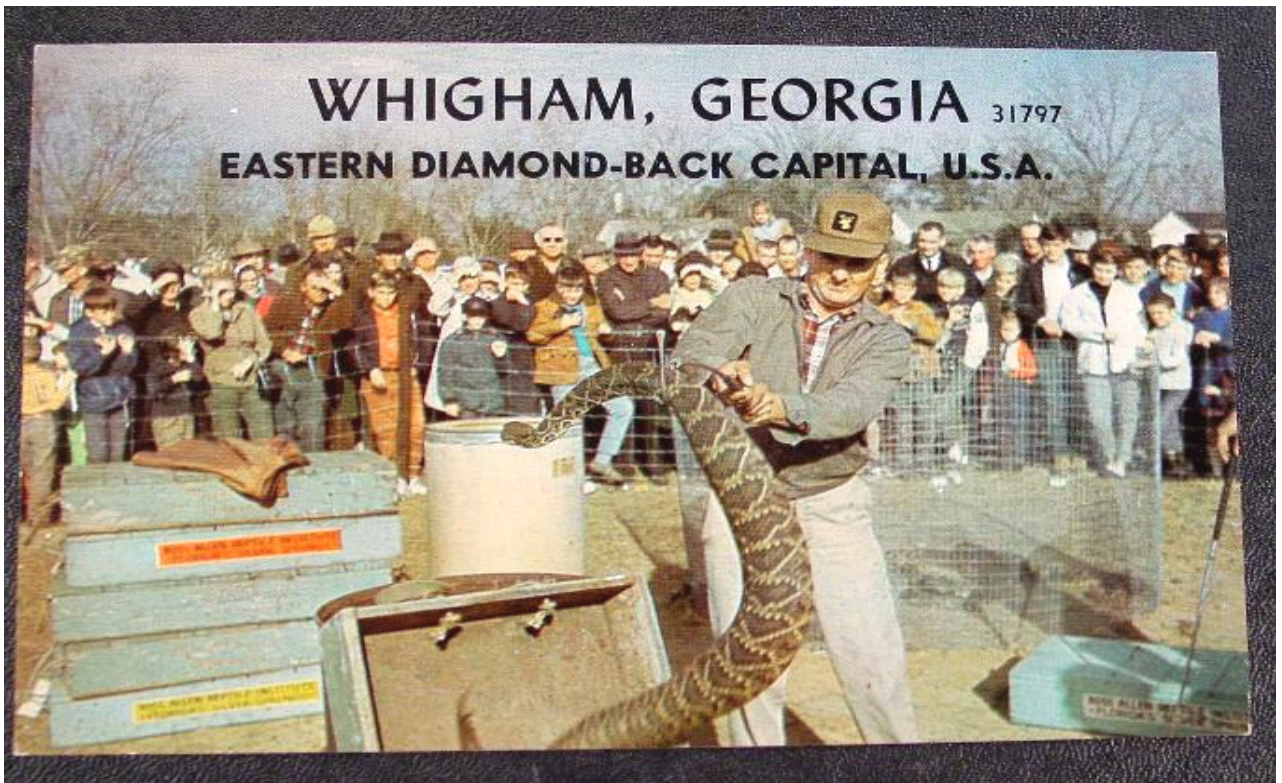
Branding opportunity with Rattlesnake Roundup

Ideal location for Bed and Breakfast operations

Develop a business growth & retention program

Development of cable and internet infrastructure

Improving electrical system



Who wouldn't want to see a big snake getting milked?

May be able to tie onto the city of Cairo's sewer system over the planning horizon

Character Areas:

Prime Agricultural Land

Forested

Residential

Industrial

Rail Corridor- Industrial

Rail Corridor-Warehouse

Downtown Development

Future Residential and Industrial annexation areas

Ochlocknee River Corridor

Hwy 84 Commercial Corridor

Unincorporated townships:

Calvary, Spence, Pinepark, Reno, Nickelville, Gradyville, Beachton,

Midway

High Street

Red Hills

**Old South
Rattlesnake Round Up Grounds**

Executive Summary

The preeminent issue facing Grady County, the City of Cairo and, to a lesser extent, the City of Whigham is the prospect of residential development at a level hitherto unknown by the respective governments. Currently the County lacks a mechanism to effectively channel activity within the unincorporated territory. If this situation remains unchanged, the current conflicts between incompatible land uses will be exacerbated. Provided that the national housing market and overall economy doesn't collapse over the planning period, then it's likely that the County and Cities could face serious challenges to their infrastructure, agricultural land base, community facilities (including the school system, public safety system and healthcare provision) and overall quality of life.

Population and Economic Development

Bordering Florida to the south, Thomas County to the east, Decatur County to the west and Mitchell County to the north, the 458 square miles of Grady County was home to 23,659 people in 2000. (Currently the total estimated population for the County is 24,613). The County Seat, Cairo, is about 30 miles north of Tallahassee, Florida and 255 miles south of the Georgia's Capital, Atlanta. The climate is temperate with long warm summers and short cool winters. It lies within an area that receives approximately 53 inches of rainfall per year with an average temperature of 67 degrees.

If current demographic trends continue the total population in Grady County will



Downtown Whigham

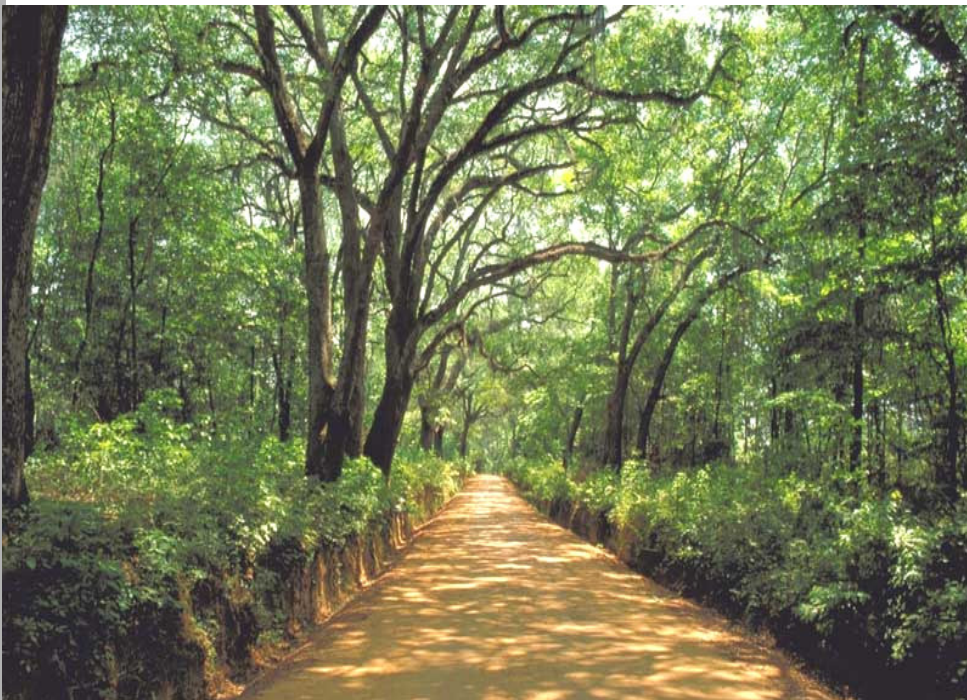
top 27,000 by 2020 and would maintain the current racial profile of roughly 65% Caucasian, 30% African American and 5% Hispanic. Although this racial profile mirrors that of the State in general, other aspects of the County's demography more closely matches those of neighboring counties, particularly in the realms of the income distribution, poverty rates and educational attainment.



Cairo's Commercial Corridor

A full 36% of the County's households survive on less than \$20,000 per year. In addition, African Americans suffer from an unemployment rate that is twice that of Caucasians and as a consequence, the poverty rate among African Americans is more than double than that of whites. The fact that African Americans are almost twice as likely to drop out of High School further heightens the disparity of lifetime income expectations of Caucasians and African Americans. Exacerbating, and to some extent reflecting, these trends is the fact that the average weekly wage in the county in 2000 was \$403, a full \$219 below the State average.

While the existing disparities between African American and Caucasian residents certainly need to be addressed over the planning horizon, a larger issue is overshadowing the others. The presumption that current demographic trends will continue unchanged throughout the planning horizon is, at best, misguided and may result in incoherent and scattershot development across the county. The problems arising from improperly managed development are far harder to mitigate after the fact, and relatively easy to avoid with the appropriate planning. At the moment there is no surefire method for modeling the extent of potential in-migration; however given the clear push factors weighing on Florida residents such as the threat of severe weather, high insurance costs, high taxes and significant development regulations such as the statewide equivalency requirement, (which demands the provision of all necessary infrastructure before allowing residential development to move forward), there are incentives for current residents to seek less expensive environments close by. Furthermore, given the nation's aging baby boomer



A Plantation Highway in the Red Hills

population and the popularity of the southern states as retirement sites, clearly there is the potential for a dramatic increase in the region's total population. (One further example of that is the proposed construction of a 700 unit subdivision in neighboring Thomas County.)

It seems prudent for the County and the respective city governments to develop plans that accommodate the prospect of significant population increases. It is imperative that the County Government adopt land use regulations that will focus future development on the cities, protect existing natural resources and minimize the overall community costs of rapid residential expansion. The governments of Cairo and Whigham, in turn, should review their existing ordinances and determine whether or not they need to be updated, particularly in a manner that could encourage infill development.

An examination of the residential development in the unincorporated areas reveals a 'leap frog' pattern following both the minor and major thoroughfares. Piecemeal development in this fashion, if allowed to continue unabated will result in residential sprawl along the County's corridors. On the surface this may not appear to be a serious issue, however, as more landowners offer small roadside subdivisions for residential development it becomes increasingly difficult to locate more substantial and denser developments. In addition, corridor sprawl dramatically increases government service costs, particularly those associated with education and the transportation of small numbers of students ever increasing distances.

The County's economic structure is more diverse than some others in the region, with the service, retail and manufacturing sectors making up almost 65% of the total economic activity. There is, however, a significant

public sector which includes the hospital, local government, social services and the school system. Implicit in the possibility of a rapidly increasing population is the potential for raising the level of economic activity in all sectors. The area's two industrial parks are underutilized and currently can offer 267 fully serviced acres for prospective clients.

While the County's economic structure is more diverse than that of its neighbors, out of a working population of 10,068 some 3,169 or 31% are employed outside of the county. Not only does this represent a loss of tax income for the county overall, it also indicates a need for further economic diversification. In addition to revealing the need for an increased range of economic activities, it highlights the area's role as a bedroom community.

Community Facilities

'Community Facilities' is an umbrella concept that covers hard infrastructure such as roads, water treatment plants, schools, nursing homes as well as public safety organizations like police departments, sheriff's departments, jails, Emergency Medical Treatment providers, fire departments and others. Overall, Grady County and the Cities of Cairo and Whigham are currently well served with the existing facilities, however, planning to meet future demand is vital to maintaining current service delivery standards.

Grady County contains 108 miles of State Highways and 615 miles of County Roads. Currently there are 262 miles of unpaved roads in the county as a whole.

Unfortunately for the residents of Whigham and in the unincorporated territory, the vast majority of the community facilities are headquartered in the City of Cairo.

Grady General Hospital is the primary healthcare facility in the County and won a Regional Benchmark for Success Award as one the top three hospitals in the South Atlantic region in 1999. Although the number of physicians per 1,000 of population was a much lower than the State average of 1.9 per 1,000, currently the hospital has 50 physicians affiliated with it and offers 60 beds. Enjoying a low 42.6% occupancy rate, Grady General should possess sufficient excess capacity to absorb predicted demand increase over the planning horizon.

Health Department

The Grady County Public Health Department is located in Cairo across from the hospital and provides many services for child and adult health including: immunizations, women's health, chronic disease prevention and

treatment, communicable disease detection and treatment, environmental, sanitarian and community education. Hours of operation are Monday thru Friday from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm. Staff includes 13 full time positions with a Director, 2 Environmentalists (located on the 3rd floor of the County Courthouse), 3 RNs, 1 LPN, 1 Administrative Coordinator, 4 Clerks and 1 Interpreter. The Department contracts with a Primary Care Clinic for Hispanics on Tuesdays from 4:00pm – 8:00pm. The physical building does not provide adequate space to meet the service requirements and the county is applying for a 2006 Community Development Block Grant to modify existing building and add an additional building to house the clinical/treatment areas.

The Nursing Home in Whigham has a 142 bed capacity and has an average occupancy rate of 70%, which implies that provision of additional nursing home and assisted living facilities may be needed over the planning period. Magnolia Place is an assisted living facility located in Cairo providing 35 apartments

Sewerage

The city of Cairo operates a sewerage system that contains a wastewater treatment plant, whereas the city of Whigham and Grady County rely on individual on-site sewerage systems (septic tanks and drain fields). After a few initial challenges the City of Cairo's waste water management system has an excess capacity of over 1.5 million gallons per day which should prove sufficient to absorb foreseeable population increases. The total capacity of the Cairo system is 3 million gallons per day with a current use of 1.2 million gallons per day. This reserve capacity is enough to meet the projected growth in Cairo throughout the planning period. It is recommended that when the reserve capacity of the sewerage system of Cairo reaches 2 million gallons per day that improvements are initiated to maintain an adequate reserve capacity. The city relies on 8 lift stations to route wastewater into the sewer plant. Adding extra filters and other improvements to the existing wastewater treatment facility prior to planning for a new facility is recommended.

Public Safety

Public safety is comprised of law enforcement, fire protection and emergency medical services. Since the early 1990s, the 911 emergency response dispatch is multi county with Decatur and Grady counties and housed in Bainbridge. Emergency Medical Services have one permanently staffed station in the City of Cairo and employs 13 FT Paramedics, 3 PT Paramedics, 6 FT Emergency Medical Technicians and 3 PT EMTs and the average response time is between 14-15 minutes.

The City of Cairo Police Department employs 21 sworn officers. There is a current need for 4 additional officers and within the next 5 years an additional 6 officers. Recruitment and retention of officers is a challenge due to lower pay rates than contiguous counties and state law enforcement agencies and the retirement system mandate of 30 years service or minimum age of 62. Due to the physical demands related to the job, officers should be given the opportunity to retire at the age of 55. Current budget allows for the acquisition of 2 patrol cars per year which is adequate to meet equipment needs.

The Sheriff's office employs 39 people with 1 Sheriff, 2 Investigators, 10 Deputies, 4 Clerks and 22 jail employees. To be adequately staffed, there is a need for an additional 8 Deputies. The jail capacity is 120 prisoners with an average occupancy of 75 to 88 prisoners which is adequate for current and future needs. The Sheriff's office and Jail were constructed in 1996 and provide adequate physical space. Current budget allows for the acquisition of 2 vehicles per year which does not meet the need for transportation. 4 vehicles have more than 115,000 miles and the replacement cycle averages about 7 years per vehicle.

The county is served by 10 volunteer Fire Department stations. Cairo has a staffed fire station.

Emergency Medical Services averages 250 calls per month including medical, cardiac, trauma, obstetrics, psychiatric and industrial/residential. Transportation is provided by 3 ambulances: 1997 Dodge; 2004 Ford and 2005 Ford; all fully equipped per DHR/State Standard guidelines, and 1 fully equipped 2005 Ford rescue truck.

Each of the local governments have active building inspection and code enforcement divisions. Currently the City of Whigham uses the four county staff when necessary while the City of Cairo employs two inspectors and a secretary.

Schools

The Grady County School System operates 7 schools with an enrollment of 4550 students K-12 with a dropout rate of 6 % compared to the state average of 5.5% according to the Georgia Board of Education 2003-2004 school year. 71% of the schools achieved adequate yearly progress compared to the state average of 64 %. Revenues were provided accordingly: Federal 10.1 %; State 71.0 % and Local 18.9 % for a total of \$30,905,043. Grady County Schools have been chosen to receive funding from the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's Next Generation



One of Cairo's traditional neighborhoods

School Partnership Program.' This program awards school systems that are innovative and committed to excellence. Parents and educators are implementing TQM as partners in Grady County through VOICE: Volunteers Organized and Involved in Community Education. TECH PREP offers high school students an opportunity to develop skills that will work in the job market. The 15:1 student teacher ratio promotes one on one learning experiences. The school's acclaimed gifted program has been recognized as one of the best in the state. Cairo High School received the designation of a "Georgia School of Excellence" and has the only high school athletic program in the nation that is so blatantly commercial that it's named for an industry. More than half of the teachers have an advanced degree beyond their Bachelors.

Library

The Roddenberry Memorial Library serves Grady County and is located in Cairo. Staff consists of the equivalent of 13 full time employees and had 66,076 patron visits in 2002-2003.

Housing

This analysis of local housing characteristics is important to the comprehensive planning process in that it serves to evaluate the composition and quality of the current housing stock of Grady County and the cities of Cairo and Whigham. This analysis seeks to identify current and future

housing trends and the nature of barriers to the adequate provision of housing for all sectors of the current and future population.

The dramatic increase in the number of Hispanic-headed households is a significant demographic trend in Grady County. While a majority of Hispanic households live in metropolitan areas, their growth is proportionally increasing in rural areas. Another important demographic shift affecting housing in Grady County is the progression of the baby boom generation into old age. Elderly households are already more prevalent in much of Grady County, and it will take planning for rural areas to meet the housing challenges that accompany the aging of so many households into senior status.

A home is the most valuable asset many Americans, and in particular low- and moderate-income households, will ever own. Good housing – safe, decent and affordable – is the bedrock of a strong community. Nothing sends a message of deterioration and despair like dilapidated or vacant housing, and nothing creates hope and opportunity like attractive, well-built and well-tended homes and apartments.

According to the 2000 Census, a total of 9,991 housing units were recorded in Grady County with 3,909 units and 221 units in the cities of Cairo and Whigham, respectively. 59% of all housing units were located in the County.

The number of residences in Grady County has been increasing for the last 20 years at rates above the State Average. Total housing units in Georgia increased 39% between 1980 and 2000. Between 1980 and 2000 the number of housing units in Grady County increased by 40%. Simultaneously, total number of housing units in the cities of Cairo and Whigham increased by 23% and 25% respectively.

Grady County housing statistics show the overwhelming attraction of Single Family Homes over all other types. Over 60% of the homes in Grady County are Single family homes. In addition, Single Family Units make up 72% in Cairo and 68% in Whigham. Multi-family dwellings represented only 5.7% of the total dwelling units in Grady County and 15.6% of the city of Cairo's units and 2% of the city of Whigham. By contrast, across the state of Georgia, multiple family dwellings comprised 21% of the total units in the state.

The most outstanding trend recognized in the analysis of housing type is the notable increase in the number of manufactured homes from 1980 to 2000. In 2000, manufactured homes represented 32% of the county's housing stock. This is almost triple the percentage recorded in 1980 (11%). Mobile homes continue to make up one of the fastest growing housing

segments in the U.S., particularly in rural areas. The cities of Cairo and Whigham have recorded significant increases in the number of manufactured homes in their respective housing stocks over recent decades. Between 1980 and 2000, the number of manufactured homes increased from 4% to 11% in Cairo and from 12% to 29% in Whigham.

According to the Georgia Manufactured Housing Association, in 2004, Georgia was the fifth-leading producer of manufactured homes in the United States. Georgia has ranked in the top five for seventeen years. Obviously, manufactured home ownership emerged as an affordable housing choice across America. The rapid growth of the mobile home industry reflects the need for home ownership opportunities for low to moderate income families.

The predominance of manufactured homes also affects the tax base and the housing stock in the long term. Decision makers in areas with a large percentage of manufactured housing 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 often lower than from traditional single or multi-family units. This situation puts local government at a disadvantage in providing services because of the reduced tax base, especially with regard to funding for education.

Currently within the Southwest Georgia Region, a majority of the local governments require the owners of manufactured homes to only pay a personal property tax based upon a schedule which reflects continuing depreciation. However, it is not necessary that communities tax manufactured homes in this manner. Grady County now taxes any manufactured home that qualifies for the homestead exemption as real property. This will generate taxes based on the homes' true value and not according to the depreciating motor vehicle schedules. (*Manufactured, Modular and Mobile Homes by Steven M. Fincher*).

The City of Cairo Housing Authority operates public housing complexes in Cairo and Whigham. There are a total of 185 units of one, two, three, four and five bedroom apartments. Only two of the units are currently available for rent and there is a waiting list. The occupancy rate is normally 100%. The three and four bedroom units are the most popular.

The City of Cairo has two apartment housing complexes, Longleaf and Windwood Villas, catering to low to moderate income families through Section 8 subsidies. Longleaf has a total of 36 one and two bedroom units. Currently all of the units are occupied. Windwood Villas has a total of 53 units, with 51 of the units rented. The influx of Latins and the growing elderly population increases the demand for accessible housing. These

populations are more likely to encounter affordability issues and renting accommodation rather than buying it.

Two standard measures are used by the census to determine housing condition. These traditional indicators of housing quality include the percentage of housing built in a community prior to 1939 and the percentage of units which lack complete plumbing facilities. According to these indicators, the state of Georgia has made substantial progress in improving housing conditions over the past two decades.

Examining these housing factors in Grady County reveals that housing conditions here have substantially improved over the past decade. Between 1990 and 2000 the County's housing stock built prior to 1939 decreased slightly. In 1990, 1.7% of the County's housing units lacked complete plumbing, whereas in 2000 the percentage dropped to .8%. The 1990 census data collected for the cities of Cairo and Whigham indicated that 9.7% and 25% of the total housing units were built before 1939 and .6% and .05% of the units lacked complete plumbing, respectively. In 2000, total housing units for the cities of Cairo and Whigham built before 1939 increased to 8.8% and 17%, respectively, indicating the weakness in data collection during the 1990 Census, and the number of units lacking complete plumbing was reduced to .15% and 0%, respectively.

Substandard housing units,--ie those built before 1939 and those lacking indoor plumbing--according to the Census definition, are a poor indicator of overall housing quality in an area. Leaking roofs, rotting floors, poor insulation and other major problems indicate low housing quality. These issues and other structural and substructural problems imply reduced livability and property value, but homes with these conditions do not appear in the Census figures. The quality of housing is generally lower in rental and rural housing stock due in part to the landlord's disinterest in maintenance, the elderly population's inability to manage the upkeep of their homes, increased minority populations, the migration of younger residents leaving family homesteads to deteriorate, and the poverty and low per capita income levels throughout the Southwest Georgia.

Between 1990 and 2000 the total number of vacant dwelling units available in Georgia decreased from 10% to 8%, despite a 32% increase in the total number of owner occupied units and an 18% increase in rental units. In Grady County the percentage of vacant units rose from 10% in 1980 to 12% in 1990 and 2000. Census reports for the cities of Cairo and Whigham show fluctuations in the percentages of vacant dwelling units at 7% and 13% in 1990 and 10% and 15% in 2000. Simultaneously, the number of owner occupied and rental units increased by 20% and 18% respectively during the same period.



Blighted Cairo Streetscape

Over the past ten years, the disparity between the median values of homes in Grady County compared to the State of Georgia has increased dramatically. Houses in Grady County maintained much lower values. In

actual dollars, the median value grew from \$42,600 to \$74,900 in Grady County. By contrast, in Georgia, the overall increase in value was from \$70,700 to \$111,200. Median housing values in the city of Cairo increased from \$39,700 to \$62,300 and in Whigham values grew from \$34,600 to \$54,400.

Although there is a definite need to improve housing conditions in the City of Cairo, little non-traditional assistance is available within the community. Local lenders provide home financing, but there are few non-profit organizations in the community focused on the pursuit of the many other types of low income housing assistance available from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) programs, as well as other low interest loan programs.

An active condemnation/demolition program targeting the removal of dilapidated structures and housing condition standards has been in place in Cairo, Whigham and Grady County. The City and County have adopted the State Building and Construction Codes. The continued enforcement of building codes will be necessary to preserve current and future housing stock.

Housing costs and quality issues continue to be problematic for low-income rural households. One measure of affordability is the percent of gross income paid for housing costs. This is known as the housing cost burden. Families who pay more than 30% of their income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such

as food, clothing, transportation and medical care. According to the 2000 Census, in Grady County, 919 households were cost burdened and 637 households in the City of Cairo were paying more than 50% of their income in rent and were considered severely cost burdened.

The age distribution of the population and its changes have important implications for the formation of new households, the demand for new housing units as well as the need for age-related housing and services. Elderly persons frequently require special housing in combination with supportive services, whereas working families with small children often need child care. These demographic shifts will require architectural and structural changes throughout the residential structure such as no step entrances, bathrooms, and a host of safety features. Compared to the rest of Georgia, Grady County and the cities of Cairo and Whigham have a higher proportion of households with elderly adults and minor children.

The diversity of a community with respect to racial and ethnic composition may affect the demand for housing since minorities; especially new immigrants tend to form households at a later age than whites. As recorded by the Census, the County's Latin population has increased by 322% from 1990 to 2000. This increase in Latin population outpaced the state rate.

The Latin population of southwest Georgia typically finds employment as field laborers with employers who offer no benefits such as housing, health insurance and paid sick leave. Therefore, the increasing Latin population is creating a greater need for affordable health care and social services. The lack of health insurance among the Latin population in essence forces the citizens to further subsidize the agricultural industry and may have a negative impact on the local economy by causing medical care costs to increase.



Housing subdivision on the State and County Border

Furthermore, minorities may have access to fewer housing choices since they are more likely to face discrimination and segregation which adversely affects not only housing choices but also affordability. These obstacles include not only the economic challenges that affect all low-income households but also language barriers that may complicate access to housing assistance programs.

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 contributing factor in commuting patterns. Long commutes may be due to the poor quality of housing or the lack of housing options. High housing prices near the industry or the business center in a community also contribute to increased travel time to work.

Household income is used to calculate housing affordability, one of the most important indicators of housing needs. A high poverty rate translates into an increased need for housing assistance and other state and federal aid programs such as food stamps and cash welfare programs. Collectively, more than half of the households in Grady County had incomes of \$34,000 or less.

More than ever, the formation of partnerships between private sector housing developers, financial institutions, the public sector, non-profit organizations and social service agencies will be needed to promote the development of prosperous and healthy neighborhoods, since the local government's capacity to implement housing initiatives and programs is limited by small staffs and resources.

Several significant housing problems have been identified in the housing inventory particularly in the City of Cairo. 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 new residents can select, lack of moderately priced units available for sale or rent, the occurrence of blighted neighborhoods, and vacant dilapidated structures.

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

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.

Additional efforts to tap into federal and state rehabilitation programs, loans or grants will be needed as the cities of Cairo, Whigham and Grady County



A veritable riot of glittering vegetation

meet these housing challenges. Community knowledge on the available programs and methods of leveraging grant and loans will be necessary to compete for funding. Decision makers will need to work collaboratively with state agencies and other communities to address these unique housing opportunities.

Natural and Historic Resources

The county is rural, with about nine-tenths either covered in forest or farm land. A number of land use regulations have been adopted in the county. Grady County has a building code, subdivision regulations, a mobile home ordinance and a wetland protection ordinance. The City of Cairo has a building code, a zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, a mobile home ordinance, and a flood plain ordinance. Whigham has a building code, a zoning ordinance, a mobile home ordinance and a special land use ordinance. Not one of the three governing bodies have adopted Part V Environmental Ordinances.

The Ochlocknee River and some of its tributaries in Grady County including Tired Creek and Little Tired Creek have had Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation plans prepared to identify and set targets for the reduction of pollutants. Volunteer organizations in the county concerned with water quality issues are the Agricultural Adopt A Stream Effort, Farm

Services Agency, and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Grady County is also an affiliate of the Keep Georgia Beautiful Program.

The Dougherty Plain

The Dougherty Plain is a unique coastal plain region that is distinguished by a complex limestone geology interlaced with extensive subsurface aquifers and surface wetlands. The Dougherty Plain covers most of the county and corresponds to the 82 percent of the county that drains into the Ochlocknee River. There is an abundance of wetlands which range from small isolated ponds to large expansive swamps or narrow fringes along streams and rivers. Land cover is primarily cropland and pasture, with some small areas of mixed forest. Crops such as peanuts and pecans are common, and cotton production has increased dramatically in recent years. Natural forest cover consisted of pines, including longleaf pine, red oaks, and hickories. Many shallow, flat-bottomed depressions are scattered throughout the region, caused by solution of the underlying limestone. The wetter, poorly drained depressions contain blackgum, sweet gum, water oak, and a few pines and cypress. Many of the lime sink ponds and marshes act as biological oases in the mostly agricultural landscape.

The Floridan Aquifer

The Floridan Aquifer is an extremely important natural resource in Grady County that must be protected. One of the most productive aquifers in the world, the system underlies a total area of about 100,000 square miles in southern Alabama, southeastern Georgia, southern South Carolina, and all of Florida. The aquifer is the source of drinking water for millions of people in the Southeast in addition to the source of water for the many center pivot irrigation systems that have increased agricultural productivity in Grady County in recent years.

Wetlands

The many small streams that drain the county form a dendritic drainage pattern as they pass by thousands of acres of agricultural cropland to join the Ochlocknee River. The river provides excellent fishing, canoeing, and wildlife habitat and contains beautiful wilderness areas. Many of the area's streams, however, contain significant amounts of silt because of agricultural runoff. In general, wetlands offer habitat for wildlife, flood protection, clean water and recreational opportunities.

Karst Formations

Grady County contains a wealth of geologic formations that have resulted from the solution of limestone by the rainwater that percolates down through the ground. Rainwater becomes slightly acidic as it forms carbonic acid from its contact with atmospheric carbon dioxide. Leaf litter in the

ground may also slightly increase the acidity of rainwater so that when it comes into contact with limestone, which is a base (alkaline) the limestone dissolves, leaving caverns, sinks and other features collectively referred to as "karst" formations. The abundance of dissolved minerals, often calcium carbonate, solidifies in these subterranean chambers creating an array of beautiful cave formations. These caverns contain rare anthodites or "orchids of the mineral kingdom" and dogtooth spar, which are only found in a few caves in the United States.

The karst features in the county often provide a direct conduit to the aquifer, and therefore increase the risk of groundwater contamination from agricultural residuals and bacteria from improperly maintained septic systems.

There are a number of karst formations in Grady County worth protecting and perhaps unique enough to develop into public parks.

Ochlocknee Waterfalls

Ochlocknee Waterfalls is an unusual and wonderful example of a Coastal Plains' lime sink. It is a "big sister" of Florida's Falling Waters State Park at Chipley. As it is bigger and deeper by several times that of Falling Waters- one of Florida's most popular natural wonder state parks. The waterfalls have most often been known by the name "The Water Falls." When the *Atlanta Journal* wrote several articles about the falls in the 1930s, it was referred to as "Waterfall Cave" and the same newspaper referred to it in the 1950s as "Maloy's Cave" after a former owner of the land.

This type of lime sink is extremely rare in South Georgia, with its exposed limestone walls. Most lime sinks in the region have dirt walls because the overburden of soil is very deep in most of the area. A small waterfall spills into the rocky crevice and disappears into a gaping cavern at the bottom of the pit.

Blowing Cave

Historic Blowing Cave has been a natural attraction in South Georgia since the area was first settled in the 1820s. The cave has silted up over the decades and can no longer be entered as a result. By the mid-1960s, the entrance had been closed by siltation to less than about two square feet. This cave is among several caves in the country which have small enough openings to create a "blowing" effect, caused by the air volume inside the cave responds to changes in barometric pressure outside the cave. Geologists who have investigated the area note the rare occurrence of such a feature, especially in a location where flat or level land is predominant.

The Red Hills Region

The Red Hills Region covers most of Grady County. This bioregion includes the plantation lands between Thomasville and Tallahassee, and

west into Grady County, and contains a significant portion of the native longleaf pine forests remaining in the United States. The rich red clay soils of the Red Hills support a mosaic of park-like forests, expansive natural lakes, and hardwood hammocks. Known for its rolling hills and red clay soils, the region is rich in biological diversity, historic resources, and scenic beauty.

As the largest concentration of undeveloped plantation lands in the country, the Red Hills has been identified for special conservation efforts. The Nature Conservancy has designated the Red Hills as one of America's "Last Great Places."

The national organization, Scenic America, identified the Red Hills canopy roads as one of the ten most scenic corridors in the United States in 1997. More than 300 miles of paved and unpaved public roads wind their way through the plantation lands of the Red Hills, providing travelers with a close-up glimpse of an American landscape that has remained virtually unchanged since the late 1800s.

The region's fertile soils, abundant lakes, and rolling hills have for centuries attracted diverse cultures. The imprint left by those cultures is reflected in the wealth of historic of potential Native American and Spanish archaeological sites along side the antebellum plantation mansions, tenant farms and other reminders of the area's history. Many of these sites and districts are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and are open to the public.

Housing sprawl is the number one threat, fragmenting this beautiful landscape and degrading the quality of life of its inhabitants. Over the last few decades, Tallahassee's sprawling growth has consumed thousands of acres of forestlands in the Red Hills. For example, the percentage of Leon County's population living outside of Interstate 10 and Capital Circle has increased from 21 percent in 1970 to 49 percent in 2000.

National Historic Sites

There are six properties on the National Register of Historic Places, including one historic district. The Evergreen Congregational Church and School, Pebble Hill Plantation, Sasser Farm Susina Plantation and Dickey Birdsong Plantation, along with scenic farms, canopy roads and elements of the traditional Old South in the southeast corner of the county form a unique character area.

Cairo Commercial Historic District was added 1994 and is roughly bounded by Broad St., Railroad Ave. and Martin Luther King Ave., with adjacent properties on 2nd Ave. and 1st St, Cairo.

Dickey Birdsong Plantation also known as **Birdsong Nature Center** located off Georgia 93 west of Beachton was founded as a non-profit nature preserve and education center in 1986, Birdsong is dedicated to preserving and maintaining its lands in a manner that is most beneficial to wildlife, and

to fostering in the public a greater understanding and appreciation of nature.

Evergreen Congregational Church and School located on Meridian Road in Beachton. The church is a rare example of congregational churches that were built in Georgia during the first half of the 20th century. The original church was organized in 1903 and was a frame building. It was demolished in 1925, and the new church was completed in 1928. It is built of concrete block and wood lath, and is distinguished by a gable-roofed portico and cupola. The church's sanctuary seats 250 people, and the one-classroom school is located in a separate building next to the church on a two-acre site.

Pebble Hill Plantation straddling the Grady and Thomas County line four miles southwest of Thomasville on US 319. Thomas Jefferson Johnson, founder of Thomasville built the first house on Pebble Hill about 1827. Julia Ann, his daughter, married a local planter named John W.H. Mitchell and inherited the plantation after her parents died. The current buildings date from the 1930s. Pebble Hill has the largest population of Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers on private lands in the world.

Susina Plantation, also known as **Cedar Grove** is located west of Beachton on Meridian Road.

Recreation

Grady County has a number of natural attractions open to the public for recreational purposes: The Birdsong Nature Center, Cairo Country Club, Dogwood

Hunting Preserve, the Hickory and the Nut Hill Hunting Preserve.

The City of Cairo maintains four parks within the city limits for year-round enjoyment and recreation.

Grady County



Cairo Traditional City Center looking south

operates and maintains Barber Park Recreation Department Ball Fields, tennis courts, and playgrounds.

Quality Growth Objectives

Heritage Preservation

Over the majority of the 20th Century, the cities of Cairo and Whigham and the unincorporated County faced declining populations and disinvestment. These trends helped protect the agricultural land, traditional neighborhoods and city centers from incompatible development patterns. While the City of Cairo had adopted development regulations in the 1960s, the City of Whigham developed zoning regulations in 1989, it wasn't until 2004 that any significant development regulations were adopted in the unincorporated county. As a result of the County Government's satisfaction with the status quo, the protection for existing natural resources, agricultural land and unincorporated townships is limited to a list of 18 specific controlled uses. The absence of sufficient regulations to protect existing agricultural land, unincorporated townships and natural resources has fostered a landscape dominated by roadside residential development.

Sense of Place

While the City of Cairo's land use regulations protect their remaining historic districts and structures to some extent, the traditional city center has undergone some less-than-context-sensitive redevelopment in the 1970s and 1980s. The central rail corridor that functions as the spine of the city is home to a number of abandoned industrial buildings, however, there are also new industrial businesses locating in this area.

The City of Whigham is bisected by State Hwy 84, and while there are very few businesses currently occupying the older buildings along the main street, the traditional architecture has been retained. As an adjunct to and a reflection of the relatively slow growth of population in the city, the existing neighborhoods maintain their appealing traditional forms and standards.

Environmental Protection

As noted above, Grady County and the Cities of Cairo and Whigham have not adopted the Part V environmental protection ordinances.

Growth Preparedness

While in the past some efforts have been taken to identify and channel growth within the cities, growth preparations in the county territory are conspicuous by their absence. Sprawling residential development is evident along even the most minor of county road. The County Government

along with vocal citizen groups are opposed to any kind of land use regulation. The County Commissioners defeated a motion to develop a county wide zoning ordinance in April 2006.



Appropriate Businesses

Cairo’s Central City Industrial Rail Corridor

In the unincorporated county agricultural and horticultural activities are dominant. Economic activities in the cities are more diverse and focus on retail and service provision with some manufacturing and primary processing. Efforts are underway to attract more diverse businesses to the region.

Educational Opportunities

Construction will soon begin on a technical college annex on the inside edge of the city limits. There are colleges and universities within 50 miles of the City of Cairo, in Thomasville, Tallahassee and Bainbridge, along with technical and other kinds of educational establishments.

Housing Opportunities

While both public and private housing stocks are limited and consistently strained, efforts have been made to upgrade and improve the existing housing stock and to minimize rental properties slide into disrepair.

Local Self Determination

County and City Governments maintain cordial relations with one another and have developed intergovernmental partnerships to deal with specific issues such as waste collection and disposal.

Regional Cooperation

The governments, both individually and collectively are considered to be active participants in developing the regional agenda and working with other governments, on projects such as their shared e911 service.

Shared Solutions

All of the governments actively participate with neighboring

jurisdictions to solve specific issues a primary example is the Multi County E911 dispatch operation that is housed in the DeKalb county.

Regional Identity

As a primarily agricultural county, the identity of Grady County is being diminished by the spread of residential structures into the unincorporated county. If the county wanted to develop an identity that differs from its primarily rural agricultural one, it may want to consider embracing the controversial development of motocross race tracks and developing an ordinance that limits the racetracks negative impacts on residential uses. It must be said that the county's Development regulations were specifically drawn up in response to the creation of a number of race tracks in the area. The cities are actively pursuing and promoting brand images based on existing activities.

Employment Options

Current statistics show that 31% of the county's residents work outside of the county, indicating that there is room to improve the range of economic opportunities available to residents.

Infill Development

The Cities of Cairo and Whigham are pursuing infill development options.

Traditional Neighborhoods

In many sections of the cities traditional neighborhoods exist as a product of long periods during the last century of slow to no growth.

Open Space Preservation

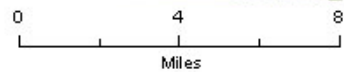
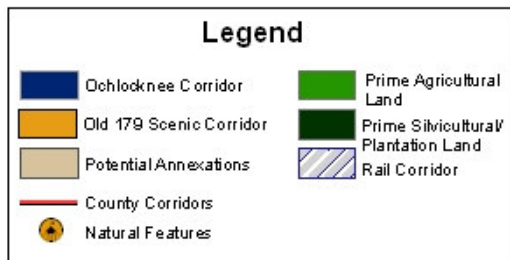
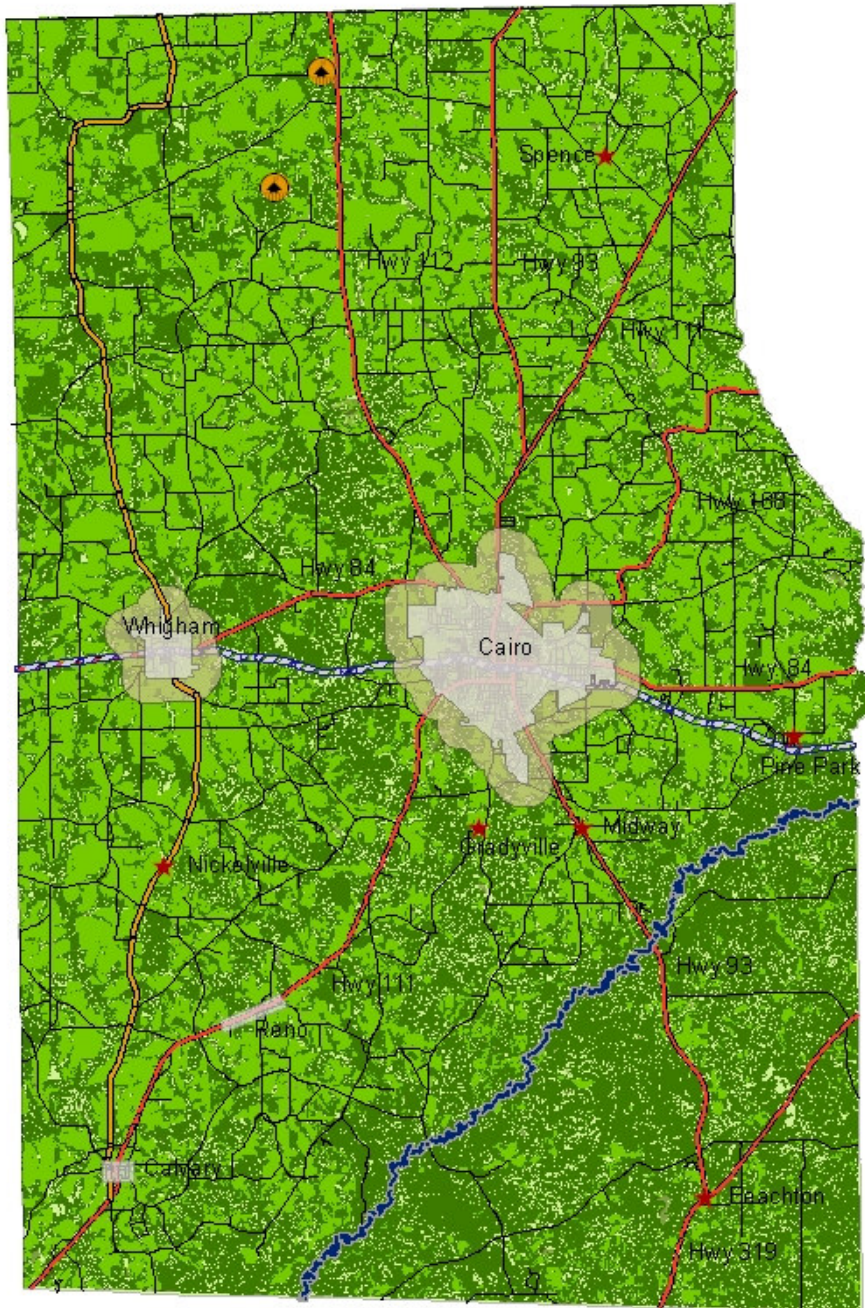
Neither city has an Open Space Preservation element in their subdivision regulations. As noted above the County, has no provision for preserving agricultural land.

Transportation Alternatives

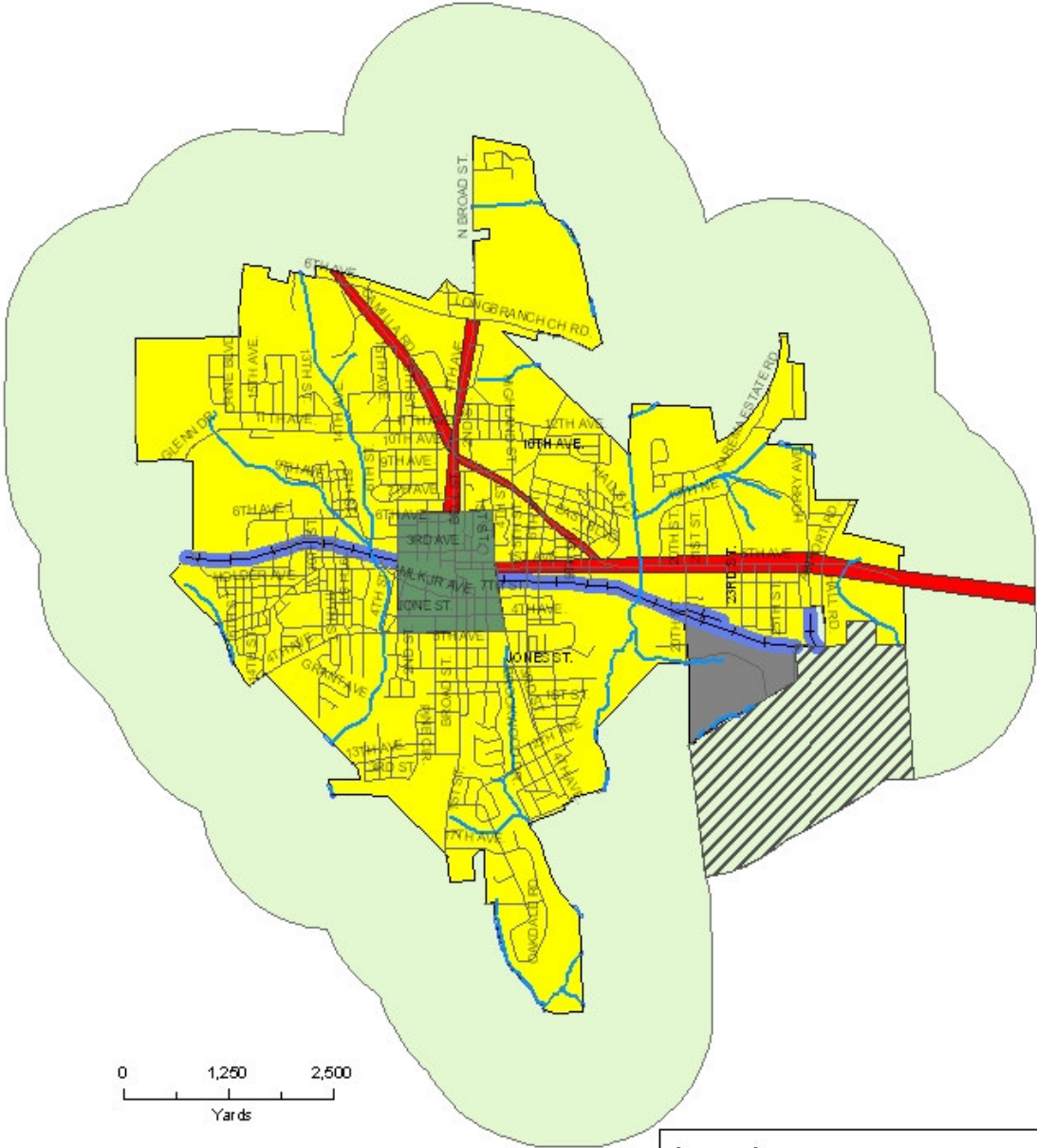
Aside from the region wide transportation system that is coordinated by the South West Georgia Regional Development Center, there isn't any viable alternative means of transport other than motor vehicle.

The Service Delivery Strategy was not consulted in the preparation of this document.

Grady County Character Areas



Cairo Character Areas



0 1,250 2,500
Yards

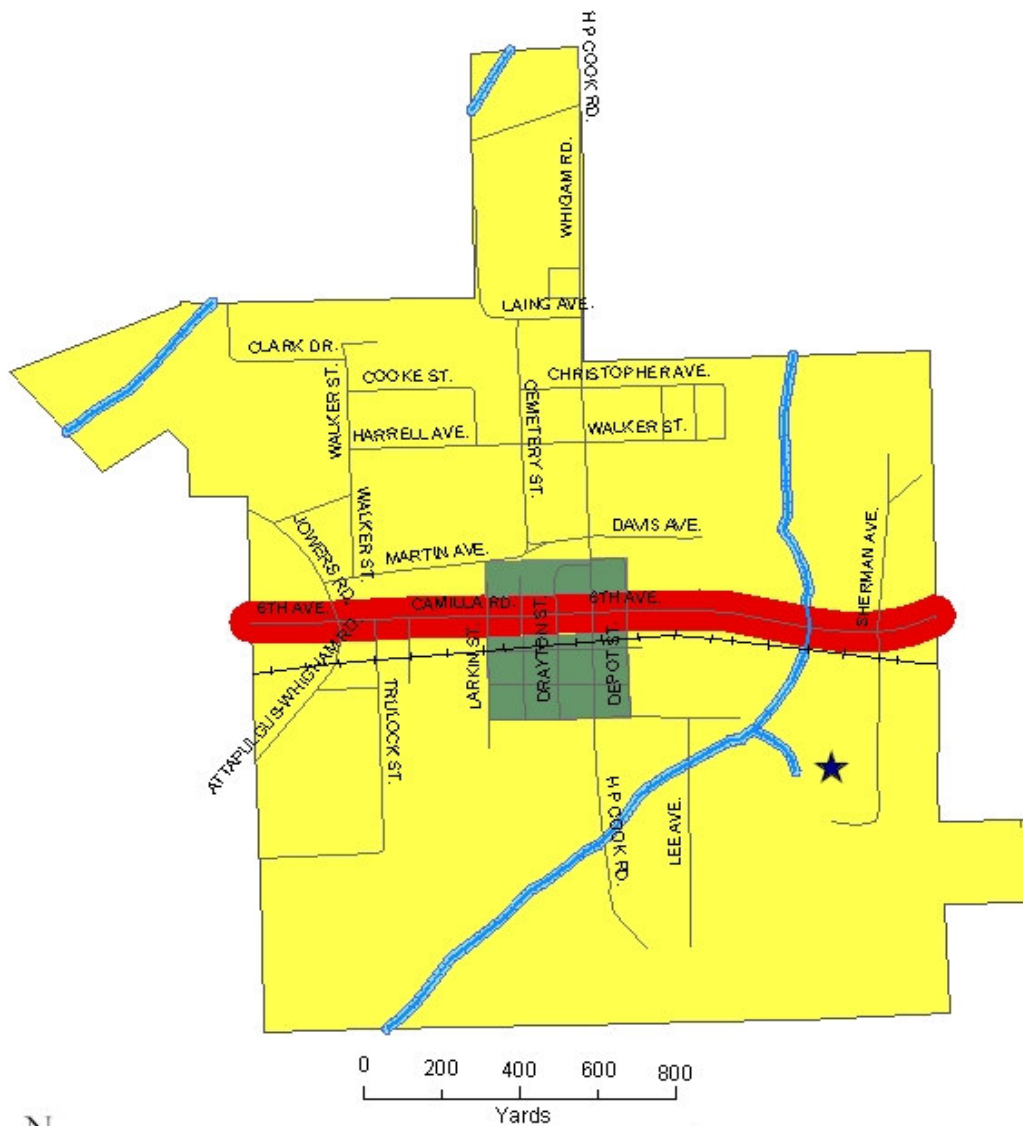


Legend

Historical Redevelopment	Creek Corridors
Commercial Corridor	Possible Annexation
Industrial	Rail Corridor
Residential	Industrial Annexation

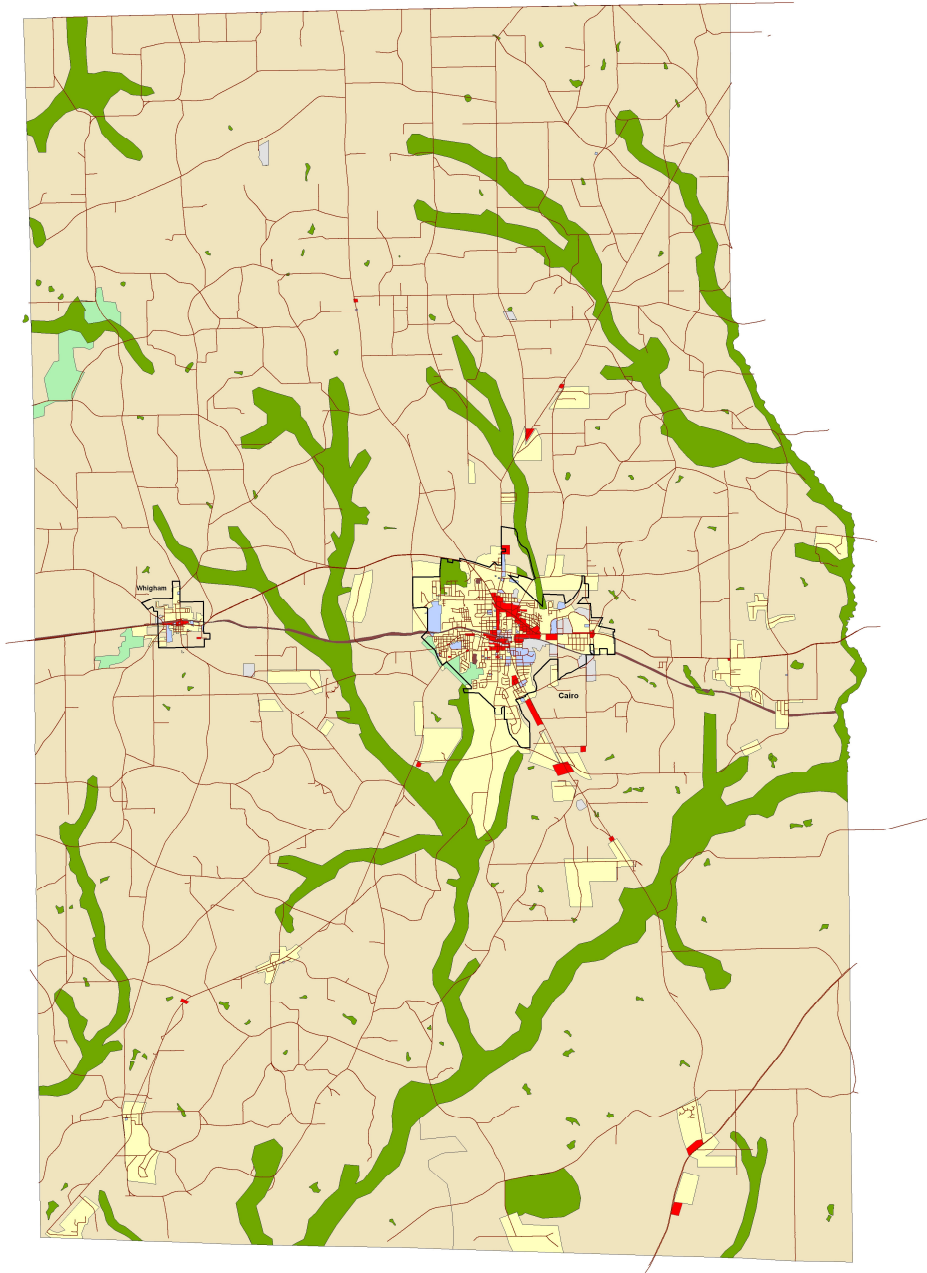


Whigham Character Areas



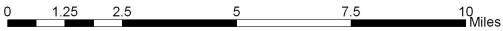
Legend	
	Rattlesnake Roundup
	Rail Corridor
	Creek Corridors
	Commercial Corridor
	Traditional Neighborhood

GRADY COUNTY EXISTING LAND USE

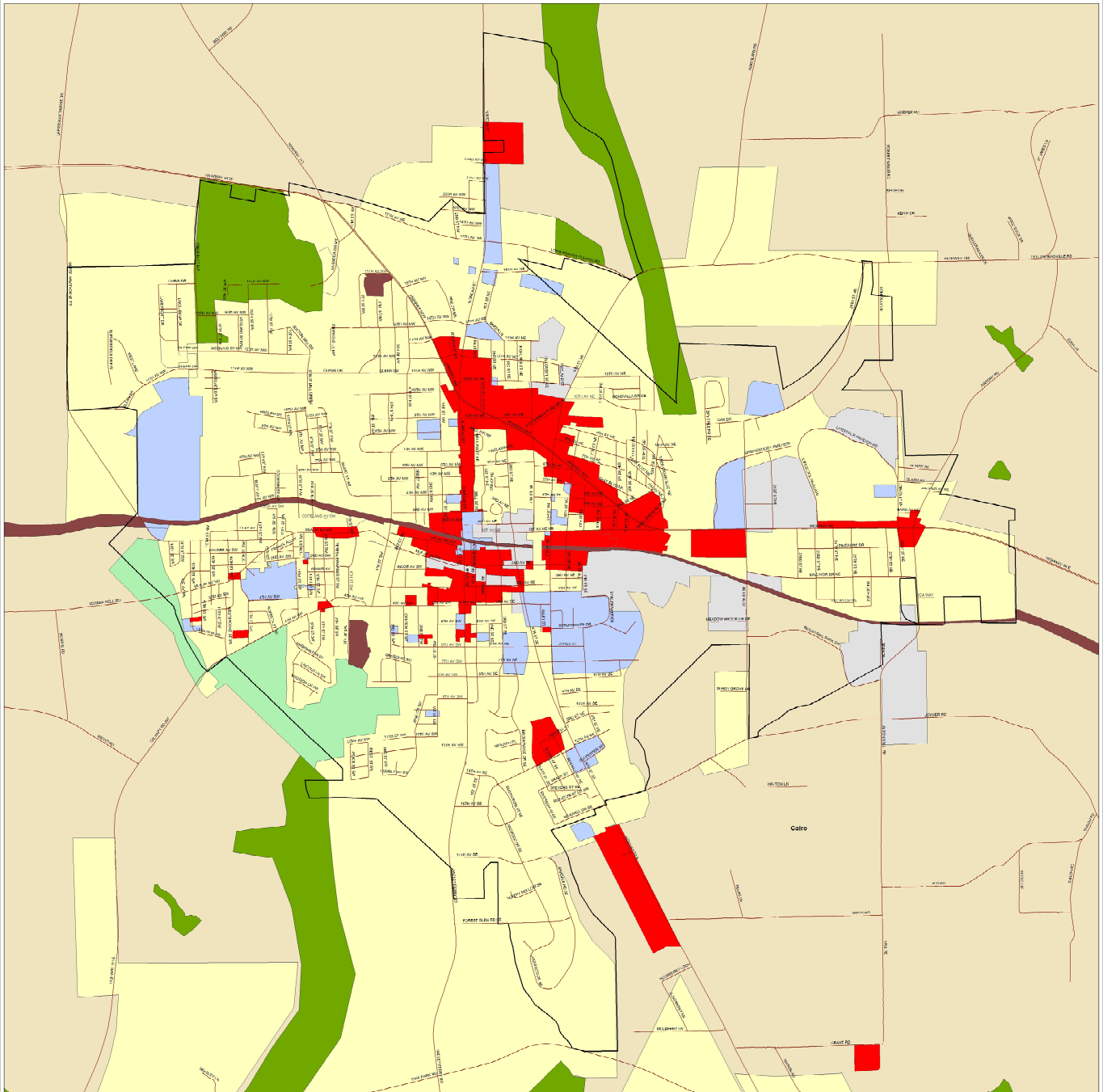


Legend

- CITIES
- ROADS
- Forestry
- Industrial
- Park_Recreation_Conservation
- Public_Institutional
- Residential
- Commercial
- Transportation_Utility_Communica
- Agricultural



CITY OF CAIRO EXISTING LAND USE

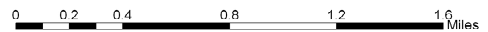


Southwest Georgia
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

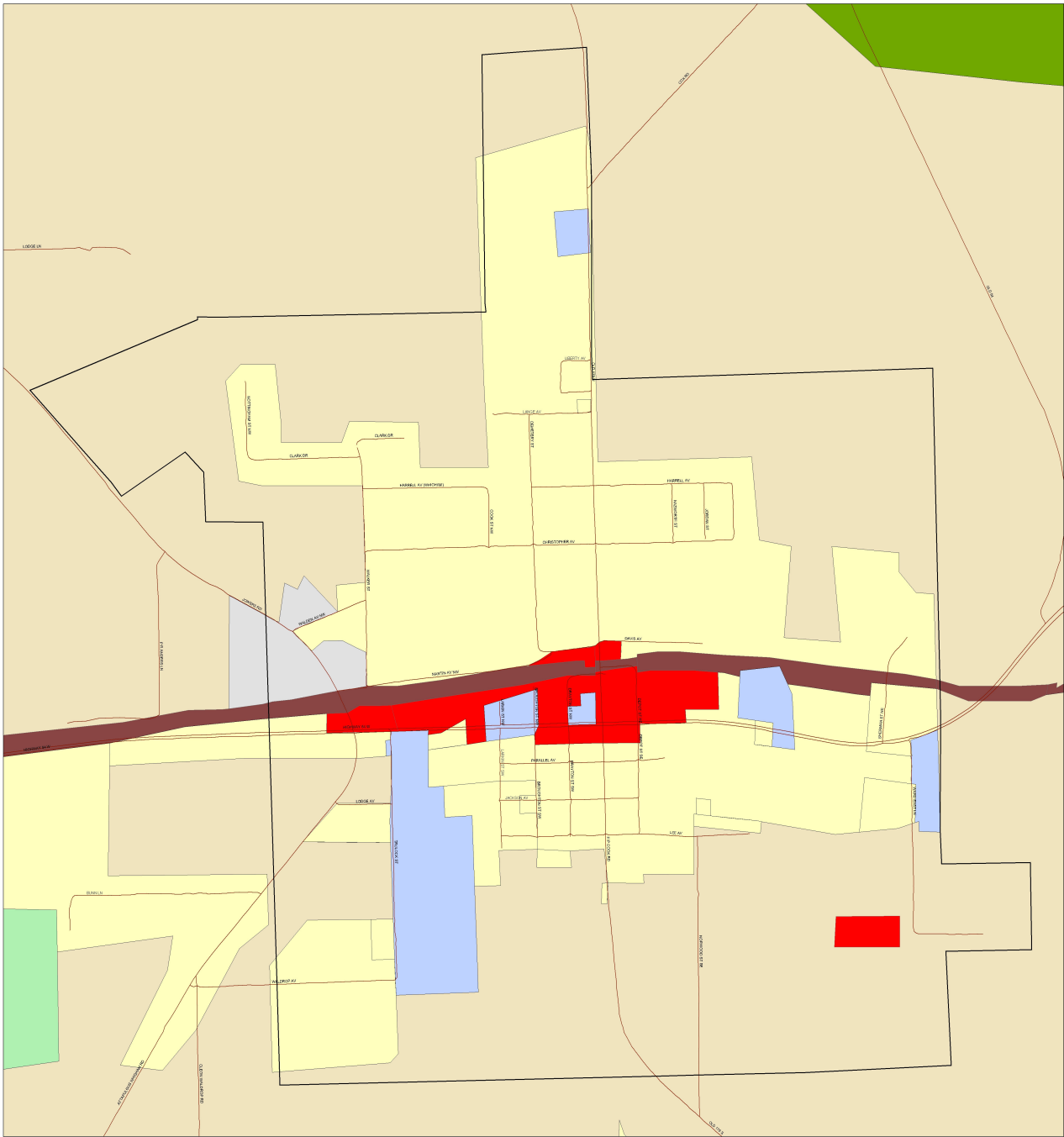


Legend

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| CITIES | Forestry |
| ROADS | Industrial |
| LAND_USE | Park_Recreation_Conservation |
| Land_Use | Public_Institutional |
| Agricultural | Residential |
| Commercial | Transportation_Utility_Communications |



CITY OF WHIGHAM EXISTING LAND USE



- Legend**
- CITIES
 - ROADS
 - LAND_USE**
 - Land_Use**
 - Agricultural
 - Residential
 - Commercial
 - Forestry
 - Industrial
 - Park_Recreation_Conservation
 - Public_Institutional
 - Transportation_Utility_Communica

