



Walton County Walton Industrial Park Redevelopment Plan

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COMMISSIONERS OFFICE.

Leta B. Jaluid 5/4/09
SIGNATURE DATE

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 History and Background

Like many counties in northeast Georgia, Walton County once existed as land shared by the Creek and Cherokee Indians. In the early 1800s, settlers began to occupy the land while still in ownership of Native-Americans. One of the first settlers, around 1810, was Roderick Easley who settled near Monroe in an area known as “Easley’s Cowpens.” He was expelled for a time, but later returned. Easley constructed a log home and raised cattle and various crops. Others who sought to settle and farm the new frontier soon followed him. The county was officially formed December 19, 1818 after annexation of land from Jackson County and areas ceded by the Creek Indians. The county was named for George Walton, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. By 1820, 4,192 residents occupied Walton County and its population continued to grow.

Walton County is located almost midway between Atlanta and Athens, Georgia along US Highway 78. In recent years, Walton County has benefited from its strategic location in this region and has attracted several significant industries to the area. However, in recent years growth and development in Walton County has been more robust than within the city, and Monroe lags behind the county as a whole in several indicators of economic vigor.

This document has been prepared and adopted pursuant to the procedural and planning requirements of the Georgia Urban Redevelopment Act (O.C.G.A. 36-61-1 et seq.) to allow the County to take advantage of the redevelopment powers enabled by the law. The County has established the Walton Industrial Park as a redevelopment district with a strategy based on the current and projected economic, physical and demographic conditions.

As demonstrated by the map below the Walton County Industrial Park lies adjacent to those areas outlined by the census block groups with poverty rate greater than 15% fall located primarily within the City of Monroe.



The Walton County Industrial Park is comprised of industrial sites that are less prosperous than average and unlikely to improve from private market forces alone. The Park has a direct impact on parcels that the City of Monroe has targeted for infrastructure improvements, special public projects and potential public/private partnerships. The inclusion of these boundaries into a redevelopment plan will assist in providing access to economic tools, business recruitment incentives and rehabilitation funding needed to remove slum and blight or to prevent its spread.

As Walton County continues to grow and prosper, this plan is envisioned to assist residents in blighted neighborhoods with opportunities for better access to employment.

Authority

1.2 Legislative Background

The Urban Redevelopment Act was adopted in 1955 and has been revised several times since its inception.

By adopting a Redevelopment Plan, a community can effectively use its statutory powers to improve public services and infrastructure, encourage private investment, and eliminate those conditions that have caused the area to be blighted.

The Urban Redevelopment Act allows local governments to do several useful things that would be problematic under their basic governmental powers including purchasing blighted property and reselling it to private parties for redevelopment purposes under whatever prices and terms are deemed in the best interest of the community, executing long term contracts of up to 50 years with housing authorities, downtown development authorities, urban redevelopment agencies or private entities, issuing revenue bonds or even General Obligation Bonds to accomplish the purposes of the Act, and waiving building codes and other fees within the development area to achieve the goals established in the URA Plan. The Act also strengthens the County's ability to enforce development and building codes and allows it to establish design standards that may be more stringent or specific in terms of aesthetics than typical zoning ordinances.

To access these special redevelopment powers defined in OCGA 36-71 a local government must first adopt a resolution determining that the redevelopment area qualifies as a "slum" as defined in the Act, and that it is in the best interest of the community to adopt and pursue a redevelopment plan and utilize its redevelopment powers under the Act.

The Urban Redevelopment Act defines "Slum area" as:

“an area in which there is a predominance of buildings or improvements, whether residential or nonresidential, which by reason of dilapidation, deterioration, age, or obsolescence; inadequate provision for ventilation, light, air, sanitation, or open spaces; high density of population and overcrowding; existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes; or any combination of such factors is conducive to ill health, transmission of disease, infant mortality, juvenile delinquency, or crime and is detrimental to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare. ‘Slum area’ also means an area which by reason of the presence of a substantial number of slum, deteriorated, or deteriorating structures; predominance of defective or inadequate street layout; faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness; unsanitary or unsafe conditions; deterioration of site or other improvements; tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land; the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes; by having development impaired by airport or transportation noise or by other environmental hazards; or any combination of such factors substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of a municipality or county, retards the provisions of housing accommodations, or constitutes an economic or social liability and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare in its present condition and use.” (O.C.G.A. 36-61-2)

1.3 Objectives

The primary objectives of the County in implementing this Redevelopment Plan are to:

- Remove existing blighting conditions threatening public health, safety, and welfare.
- Provide incentives and mechanisms to promote private investment in blighted and underutilized parts of the Industrial Park.
- Create new jobs and businesses within and in proximity to the Industrial Park area to provide a better quality of life to local residents and particularly low-to-moderate income households.
- Provide legally enforceable guidance to property owners and developers on building placement, greenspace requirements, pedestrian amenities, public art, sidewalks, landscaping, screened parking;
- Invest in upgrading public amenities and improving obsolete or inadequate infrastructure in the Redevelopment Area, signifying local government's long-term commitment to the revitalization of the entire County;
- Identify impediments to redevelopment such as code violations and improved infrastructure.
- Participate using the redevelopment power granted by the statute in public/private partnerships to participate in the overall redevelopment plan.
- Reduce crime and provide safer, cleaner and more attractive neighborhoods and commercial areas;
- Increase the long-term tax base of Walton County;
- Remove any impediments to recruiting new more upscale industries to facilitate marketing downtown Monroe as Walton County's cultural tourism, arts and entertainment center;

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- Meet the requirements for Walton County to apply to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for Opportunity Zone and CDBG Revitalization Area Strategy (RAS) designation.

Chapter 2 Documentation of Slum and Blight

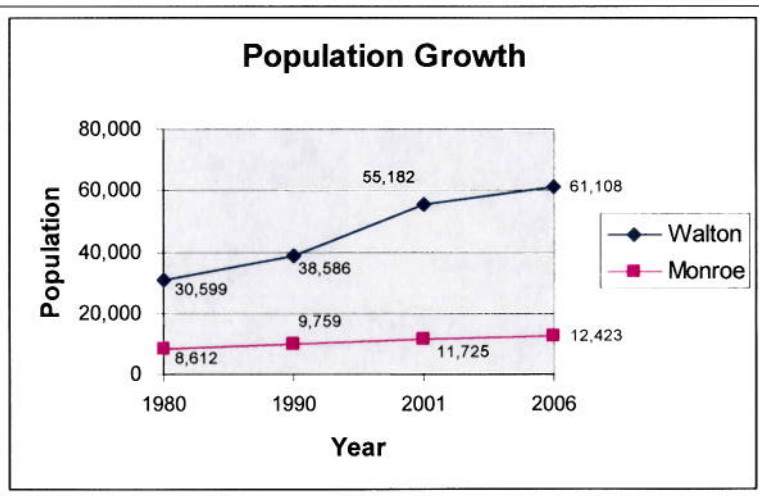
2.1 Summary of Findings

In general, due to various blighting conditions, parts of the Walton Industrial Park identified herein have experienced declining economic and social conditions that have discouraged private investment and lowered the quality of life for the surrounding community.

The Redevelopment Area is generally characterized by its economic deterioration, threatening public safety and welfare. The identification of slum and blight has been established under the Urban Redevelopment Act as a matter for local legislative determination. The County has made its determination of redevelopment area boundaries by examining the confluence of a number of economic social and physical indicators. Where data could not be precisely disaggregated for the study area, disparities between the Walton Industrial Park and comparable industrial parks both in the region and Walton County never the less establish certain trends and support the need for this Redevelopment Plan. The remainder of this section highlights some of the more important data to support a finding of slum and blight, associated with the Walton Industrial Park and it's proximity to those areas.

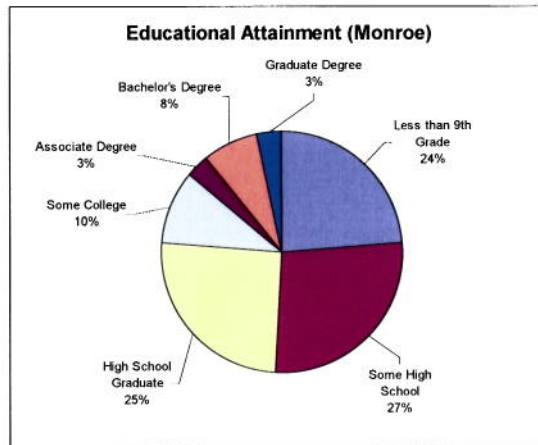
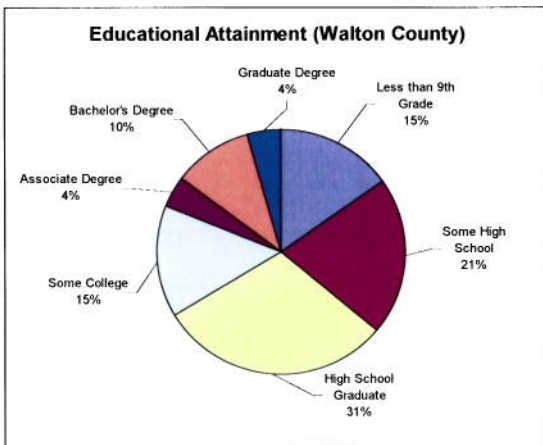
Population

Between 1990 and 2001, Walton County's Monroe's population grew by 43% while the City of Monroe's increased by 20.1%.
(2000 Census numbers indicate even more profound growth in Walton County)



Source: Claritas Inc.

Educational Attainment



Source: Claritas Inc.

The figures above represent the most recent available information on education attainment, the 1990 Census. The charts show that 21% of the County's residents greater than 25 years old are not high school graduates with a little over a quarter having never attended high school.

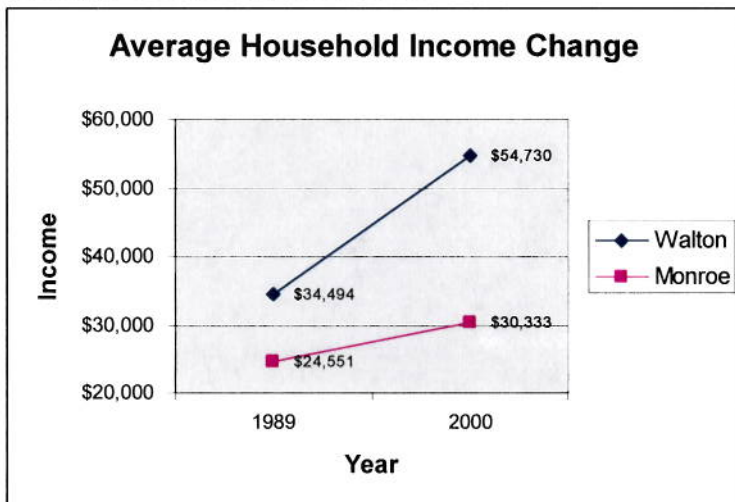
These statistics are representative of the economic and social deterioration that has existed in the area. It can safely be assumed that the figures above would be detrimental to perspective industrial businesses considering locating in Walton County.

Crime and Unemployment

Other indicators such as crime and unemployment further support the area's need for redevelopment. While unemployment figures reflect the County's overall unemployment rate of 4.2%, as compared with 7% for the City of Monroe and 5.8% statewide. The location of the Industrial Park has a direct impact on those statistics.

Poverty Levels

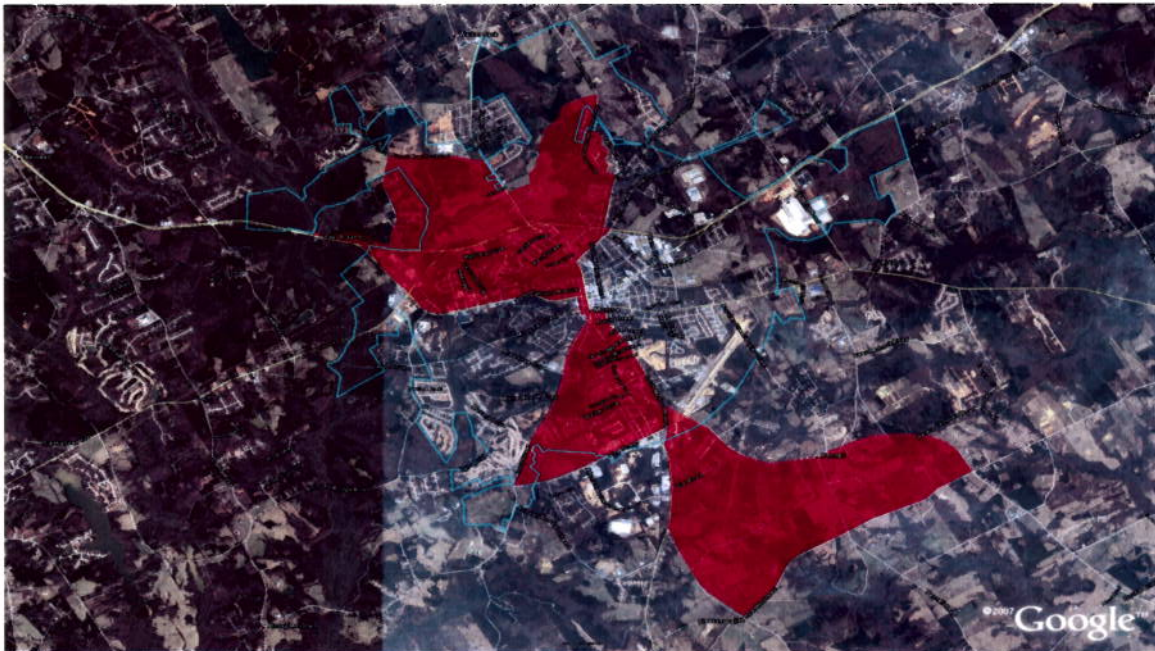
Average Household Income



Source: Claritas Inc.

An indicator of Monroe's lagging economy in relation to the region is household income. Essentially, between 1989 and 2001, Walton County's increase in household income has been double that of the City of Monroe, 58.7% versus 23.6%. In fact, 46% of Monroe's households have incomes less than \$20,000.

The map below indicates census block groups in the city in which 15% or more of the household live below the poverty level. While not every structure or home in these census blocks is in poor condition, a practical matter they correlate with the city's definition of blight. The proximity of the Industrial Park has a direct correlation to the economic disparity of those defined areas of blight within the City of Monroe.



Other Indicators of Blight

Signs of potential blight analyzed to extend redevelopment area boundaries to include the Walton County Industrial Park are:

- lower building permit activity than for the City/County as a whole;
- deferred property maintenance;
- greater number of properties and structures which do not meet current codes;
- increase in long term vacancies and foreclosures; and
- a higher percentage of delinquent property taxes than for the county in general.

Walton County has therefore determined that, due to the range of deleterious and blighting conditions outlined in this section, the proposed Industrial Park has not been subject to growth and development through private enterprise and will not reasonably be anticipated to be developed without the adoption of this Redevelopment Plan.

2.2 Statement of Conformance

This Urban Redevelopment Plan is generally consistent with the County's existing Comprehensive Plan. Specific project initiated under the URA Plan will be added to the Comprehensive Plan's Short Term Work Program each time it is updated.

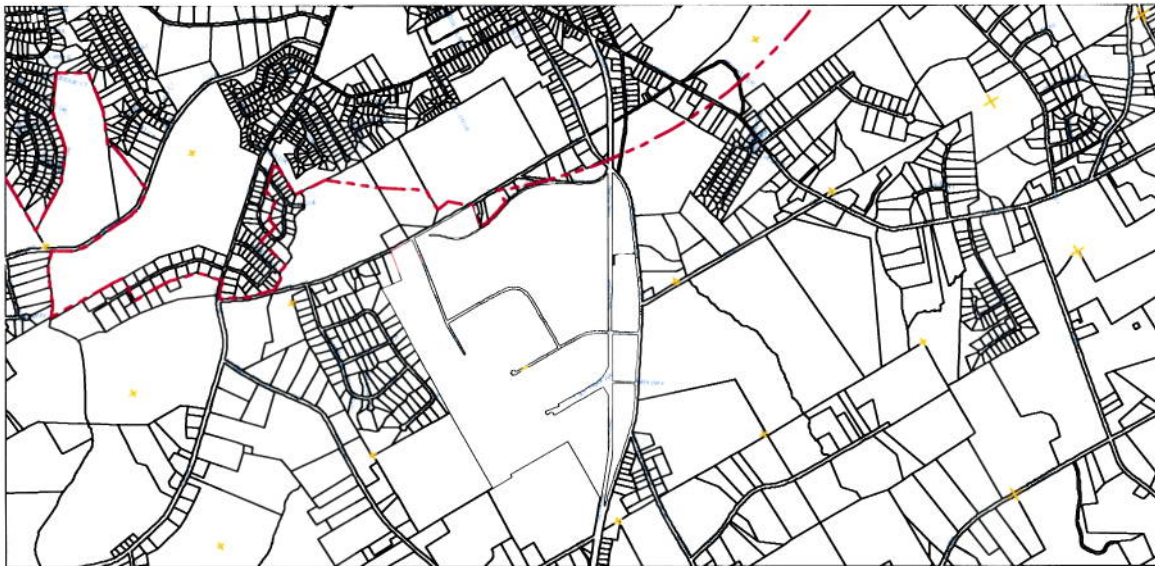
2.3 Historic Resources

There are a no historic properties or districts within the proposed Industrial Park Redevelopment Area, which are either listed on the National Register of Historic Places, eligible for listing on the National Register, within a locally designated historic district, or on the survey list of the Georgia Historic Resources Survey.

Chapter 3 Description of Redevelopment Area

3.1 Boundary Description

The boundaries of the proposed Industrial Park addendum Redevelopment Area are identified on the map below.



3.2 Current Conditions

Georgia State Code defines a redevelopment area as any urbanized or undeveloped area that is detrimental to public health, safety and welfare and whose sound growth is impaired due to a presence of any combination of the following factors:

- Predominant number of substandard, slum or deteriorating structures;
- Predominance of defective or inadequate street layout, inadequate parking, roadways, bridges, or public transportation facilities incapable of handling the volume of traffic flow into or through the area;
- Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness;

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- Unsanitary or unsafe conditions;
- Deterioration of site or other improvements;
- The diversity of ownership, tax, or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair market value of the land;
- Diversity of ownership on defective or unusual conditions of title which prevent or encumber the free alienability of land; or
- The existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes.

The Code also identifies as redevelopment areas those areas, which are substantially underutilized by:

- Containing open lots or parcels of land;
- Containing a substantial number of buildings or structures which are 40 years old;
- Containing structures or buildings of relatively low value as compared to the value of structures or buildings in the vicinity;
- Having development impaired by airport and related transportation noise or by related environmental factors; or
- An area in which there is a shortage of housing that is affordable to low and moderate-income persons.

A parcel-by-parcel survey was conducted within the Walton Industrial Park Redevelopment Area to assess conditions as they pertain to the Georgia State Code and the criteria for the definition of a redevelopment area. This survey indicated that growth and development of the Redevelopment Area is severely impaired due to the existence of many of the conditions of blight described above.

3.3 Structures

The majority of the structures within the Park district are lower end metal building construction. The attached map showing existing conditions, categorizes each parcel by standard, deteriorated, and vacant.



Standard structures are those which are in generally good condition without any significant deterioration. **Deteriorating structures** are those that are showing signs of a lack of maintenance and do not meet sections of minimum zoning codes.

As can be seen on the existing conditions map, there are numerous vacant and deteriorating properties.

Deteriorating buildings are not limited to residential areas. Almost every commercial building within the district shows its own level of deterioration such as cracked and crumbling masonry walls and foundations, broken glass, and boarded-up windows. Many of these buildings are deteriorating due to their age or simply because of neglect.

The County may consider acquiring some parcels as well as other tax delinquent properties for resale to private individuals or developers. In

such cases, deed restrictions or covenants will be filed with the property deed to ensure that the conditions of sale run with the land.

3.4 Infrastructure

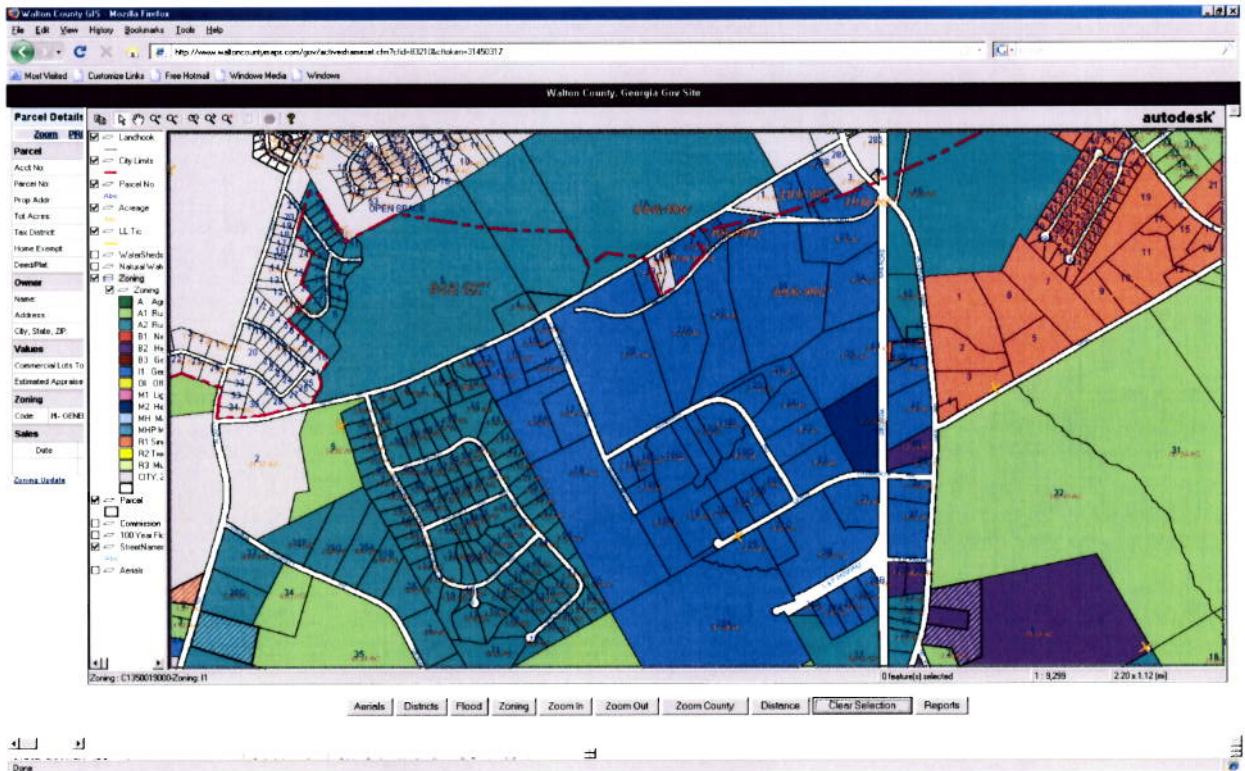
Other blighting conditions present within the area include substandard infrastructure such as **inadequate street layout, faulty lot layouts, and the deterioration of site and other improvements.**

While the overall system of roads in the Industrial Park facilitates adequate access, portions of the road have not been paved and are in a state of deterioration.

3.5 Current Land Uses

Below is the current land use map for the redevelopment area.

Walton County – Walton Industrial Park – Redevelopment Area
Zoning Map



Chapter 4 Zoning and Land Use Changes Under the Plan

The Urban Redevelopment Act require that the URA plan identify any changes in zoning or density and describe any exceptions to existing land use regulations that will be applicable within the Urban Redevelopment Area.

The current zoning on the property located within the Industrial Park is M-1 Light Manufacturing. The land use designation is Highway Corridor and Employment Center which allow for B-1, B-2, B-3, M-1, M-2, MUBP and MCMUBP zoning. The current regulations within the Walton County Comprehensive Land Development Ordinance are adequate to facilitate zoning requirements in this area.

Chapter 5 Implementation Strategy

5.1 Designation of Redevelopment Powers

5.2

According to Section 36-44-4(a) of the Georgia Code of Laws, a county may designate itself as its respective redevelopment agency as an alternative to the creation of a redevelopment agency. As the designated redevelopment agency, the county may exercise any redevelopment authority outlined in the Code for the purpose of implementing the redevelopment plan.

Walton County will serve as the redevelopment agency for the purposes of this Redevelopment Plan and will assume all powers and responsibilities outlined in State Code 36-44-5 including:

- Issuing Tax Allocation Bonds;
- Entering into any contracts, leases, mortgages, or other agreements determined to be necessary to implement the Redevelopment Plan;
- Acquiring, retaining, or disposing of property for redevelopment purposes as outlined in the Redevelopment Plan;
- Exercising any powers outlined in Chapter 61 of the Georgia Code of Laws entitled “Urban Redevelopment Law.”

Furthermore, acting as the redevelopment authority, Walton County will be responsible for all levels of implementation including:

- The coordination with other public and private agencies of any activity necessary to meet the objectives of this Plan;

- The management of projects outlined in this plan including facilitating (either directly or by securing consultant services) the planning, design, negotiations, pre-construction and construction of any project;
- Facilitating any activity associated with projects which may require zoning compliance, inspections or other municipal administrative services;
- Seeking other public and private sources of funding to implement the projects within the Plan.

While Walton County will serve as its own redevelopment agency within the Redevelopment Area, it would welcome the assistance and expertise of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The County recognizes that the participation of the DDA and other local agencies is vital to the success of this Redevelopment Plan.

Planning and Support Services

Support services will be required as needed such as planning and design services, as well as engineering, environmental, legal and administrative services.

5.3 Determining Appropriate Implementation Tools

Implementation tools for the Urban Redevelopment Plan fall into several categories including Development Incentives, Outside Funding Sources, and Statutory Revitalization Tools. These tools are described in subsequent sections. As the County moves forward in implementing various aspects of the redevelopment plan various combinations of these tools may be employed to achieve specific project goals.

5.4 Development Incentives

Land Assembly and Build to Suit RFPs

One of the biggest costs of the private developer is assembling a big enough parcel to make development cost effective. Some communities have taken on the role of acquiring land and selling it to the developer for

a reasonable profit. Another example of this technique is to assemble land and then put up for sale through a competitive RFP process with the land going to the developer with the best response to the county's Request for Proposal. The land may be sold at market rates or below appraised value, but the developer signs an agreement binding him to develop in the manner proposed including site amenities such as public greenspace, recreational facilities or space for public offices.

Tax Credits

Various kinds of state and national tax credits can be used to encourage developers to build consistent with an urban redevelopment plan. These include historic, elderly housing, affordably housing credits. Many of these credits can be layered for great profitability.

Subsidizing Site Preparation or Infrastructure Costs

Within the blighted and slum areas of the Redevelopment Area, various improvements will be made to the public infrastructure. Streetscape improvements would include paving roads, new or renovated sidewalks, street lighting, and landscaping. Other infrastructure projects will include water and sewer improvements and installation, storm drainage facilities, improved signage, and parking facilities. These improvements are often coupled with a specific redevelopment strategy proposed by the private sector allowing the local redevelopment agency the ability to provide only public infrastructure leaving the actual provision of new housing to the private sector. The public investment ends up being a "write down" to the cost of development.

Waiver of Fees and Building Requirements

The Urban Redevelopment Act allow counties to waive all sorts of building fees, impact fees, infrastructure hook up fees, and to make exceptions to their own development regulations to facilitate redevelopment projects. This can often save developers a great deal of money or make their profits higher.

Sale and Leaseback Arrangements

In cases where a local government needs more space for functional or administrative uses, it might agree to have the developer include buildings in their project and execute a long-term lease on the facility. This has the advantage of incorporating a civic component in mixed use projects, providing the developer with at least one stable long term anchor tenant and does not require financing a new facility with SPLOST funds or GO bonds.

5.5 Legislative and Statutory Tools

Enterprise Zones

In 1997, the General Assembly enacted the Enterprise Zone Employment Act, recognizing the need for revitalization in many areas of Georgia. The State Enterprise Zone program intends to improve geographic areas within cities and counties that are suffering from disinvestment, underdevelopment, and economic decline, encouraging private businesses to reinvest and rehabilitate these places.

The Enterprise Zone area must meet at least three of five criteria:

- Pervasive poverty established using the most current United States decennial census prepared by the U. S. Bureau of Census.
- Unemployment Rate (average for preceding yr.) at least 10% higher than State or significant job dislocation.
- Underdevelopment evidenced by lack of building permits, licenses, land disturbance permits, etc. lower than development activity within local body's jurisdiction.
- General distress and adverse conditions (population decline, health and safety issues etc.).
- General Blight evidenced by the inclusion of any portion of the nominated area in an urban redevelopment area.

Incentives include Property tax exemption -- OCGA §36-88-3(1), Abatement or reduction in occupation taxes, regulatory fees, building

inspection fees, and other fees that would otherwise be imposed on qualifying business -- OCGA §36-88-9(a)

Opportunity Zones

In 2004 the General Assembly passed, and the Governor signed legislation (2004 session's HB 984) to create a program within the State's Job Tax Credit Program of "Opportunity Zone" job tax credits. In 2008, the General Assembly passed, and the Governor signed an amendment (HB 1273) that streamlined the program and expanded the areas and businesses eligible for the Zones and job tax credits. The Opportunity Zone Tax Credit Program authorizes DCA to designate as a "less developed area" an area within or adjacent to a census block group with 15% or greater poverty where an enterprise zone or urban redevelopment plan exists. Opportunity Zones are intended to encourage development, redevelopment and revitalization in areas that have higher levels of poverty and are underdeveloped or suffer from blight. By combining the revitalization tools of an Opportunity Zone, the Zone's employment incentives and the State's existing economic development program within these "pockets of poverty", some of the strongest incentive programs available can be created. Opportunity Zone Tax Credit Incentives:

- the maximum Job Tax Credit allowed under law – \$3,500 per job created
- the lowest job creation threshold of any job tax credit program – 2 jobs
- use of Job Tax Credits against 100 percent of income tax liability and Withholding
- expansion of the definition of "business enterprise" to include all businesses of any nature

Tax Allocation District (TAD)

A TAD is a special district created by a local government in which bonds are issued to support public improvements associated with new development. Said bonds are retired with taxes generated by new developments. The status of TADs is now in limbo after a state Supreme

Court ruling that school taxes cannot be used for economic development. This tool could be very useful if an upcoming constitutional amendment resolves the school tax issue.

Community Improvement District (CID)

A CID is a self-imposed, self-taxing district run by a non-profit organization. A CID is charged with raising funds from commercial properties for public improvements. Such initiatives are strongly encouraged by this study.

Land Banking Authorities

A 1990 Act of the General Assembly permits cities to enter into agreements with counties to establish local “land bank authorities.” These authorities are created to acquire tax delinquent properties and return them to tax-paying status. A land bank authority has the power to sell or lease the property. It can also manage, maintain, protect, repair, alter, and insure the property. A trade or exchange for other property is also authorized.

A city and the county in which it is located enter into an interlocal cooperation agreement in accordance with the Land Bank Authorities law. A four-member board is established. Two of these four are appointed by the mayor of the city; the other two are appointed by the county commission.

If a city or county obtains a judgment against a tax delinquent property for the unpaid taxes, the property becomes subject to a tax sale. If no person bids an amount equal to the total of taxes, interests, and costs owing on the property, then the authority receives an option to acquire it from the tax commissioner.

If the authority acquires the property, it may extinguish all city and county taxes, other than school district taxes, at the time it sells or otherwise disposes of the property. Purchasers who intend to build or rehabilitate low-income housing will receive primary consideration for

tax forgiveness. The authority has full discretion in determining the sales price of properties that it may acquire. A 12-month redemption period applies to tax-sale properties that the authority acquires. This means that the original owner has the option for 12 months from the date of the tax sale to buy the property back from the authority. The original owner must pay the amount paid at the tax sale plus 10% of that amount. An additional 10% and the payment of certain administrative costs may also apply. (See OCGA 48-4-42).

5.6 Outside Funding Sources

Community Development Block Grant Funds (CDBG)

CDBG funds are channeled from the US Department of Urban Development (HUD) to local communities for housing infrastructure community facilities primarily benefiting low to moderate-income citizens. In Georgia the Georgia Department of Community Affairs administers the competitive CDBG funding. Having an Urban Redevelopment Plan in place allows a city/county to apply for a special Revitalization Area Strategy designation, which may provide bonus points on CDBG projects or allow the city/county to apply for funds more often than regular applicants.

Private Donations

Local matches could be obtained by soliciting area property owners, businesses, and residents. Private funds may also be used to fund specific “special interest” projects. For example, the PATH Foundation funds multi-use greenway trails, while the Trust for Public Land and the Blank Foundation sometimes fund park projects.

Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds

The STP provides flexible funding that may be used by localities for projects on any Federal-aid highway, including bridge projects on any public road; transit capital projects, and intercity and intercity bus terminals and facilities.

Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds

These funds from the federal government can be used to expand travel choice, strengthen the local economy, improve the quality of life, and protect the environment. Streetscape, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and gateways are some of the projects that can qualify for TE funds.