



CITY OF VALDOSTA

URBAN REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

MARCH 2009

Prepared by the Community Development Department, Planning and Zoning Division

VALDOSTA
A City Without Limits



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Introduction

At their annual retreat in February 2008, the Mayor and City Council adopted eighteen short term goals for the City based upon citizen and staff input. Included in these goals was the preparation of an Urban Redevelopment Plan in accordance with the Georgia Urban Redevelopment Act (O.C.G.A. 36-61-1 et. seq.) and the adoption and implementation of Enterprise and Opportunity Zones where applicable.

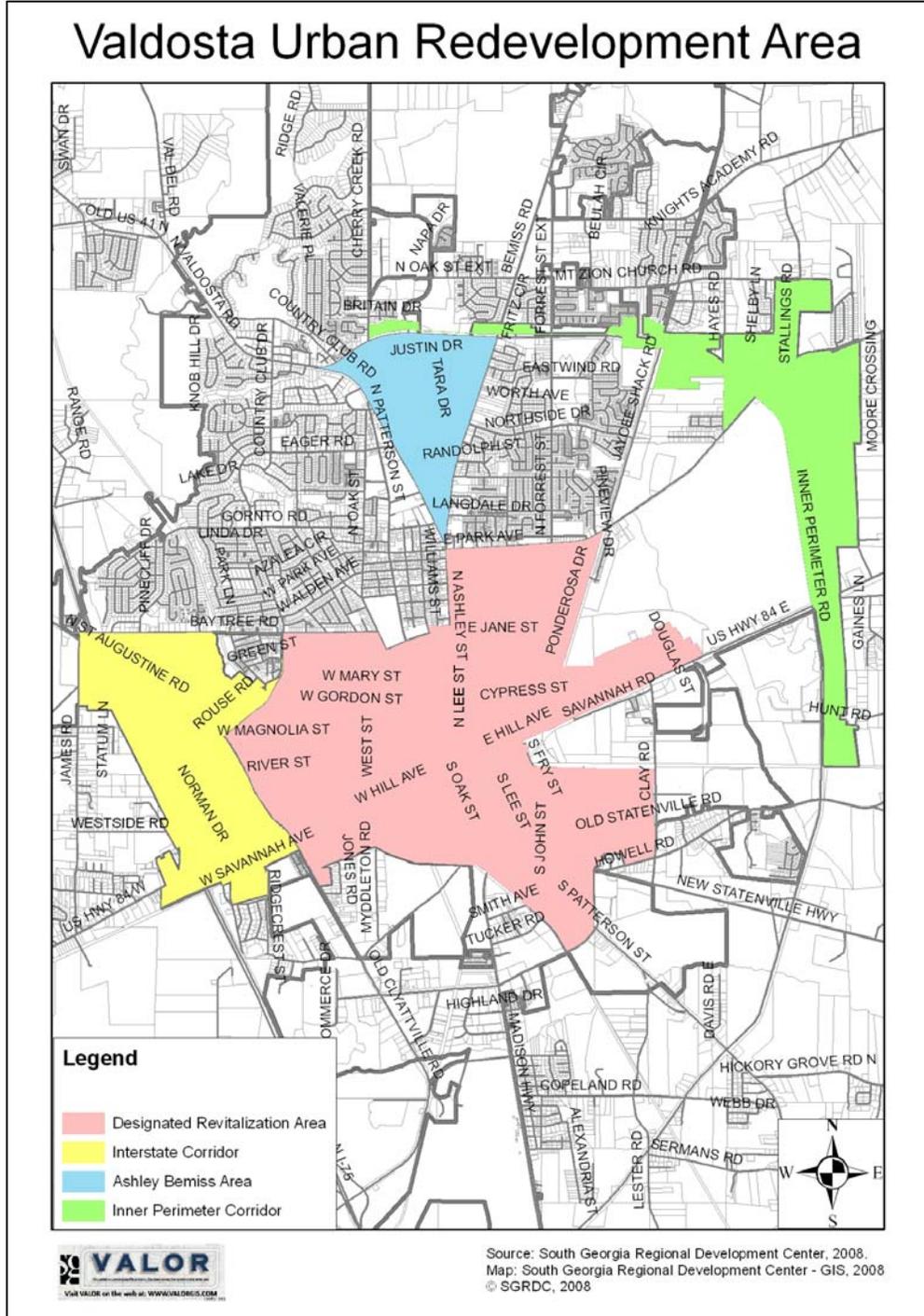
An Urban Redevelopment Plan is a first step towards revitalizing specific areas within the City of Valdosta. This Plan, in conjunction with other State legislative redevelopment tools and the Greater Lowndes 2030 Comprehensive Plan, will be used to revitalize faltering commercial corridors, recruit and nurture small businesses, rehabilitate older homes and neighborhoods, ensure architecturally compatible infill development, and generate new adaptive uses for old commercial, industrial, or agricultural facilities.

The Urban Redevelopment Plan contains four elements vital to assessing redevelopment areas and determining the necessary steps towards achieving successful redevelopment results. The first element is determining specific areas of the city which qualify as “blighted” as defined by the Urban Redevelopment Act. These areas are designated as the proposed Urban Redevelopment Area. The second element is a windshield survey of the Urban Redevelopment Area, the purpose of which is to assess current conditions, verify land use, and determine those parcels in the greatest need of revitalization. This survey provides further support for the delineation of the Urban Redevelopment Area, and prompts a resolution by the Mayor and City Council declaring the need for an Urban Redevelopment Plan. The survey results, along with demographic, economic, social, and development data, are collected, analyzed, and integrated into the written narrative of the Urban Redevelopment Plan. The third element is the creation of an Enterprise Zone by a resolution that clearly illustrates how the negative conditions found in the Urban Redevelopment Area meet the definition of poverty, underdevelopment, general distress, slum, and blight as outlined in the Georgia Urban Redevelopment Act (O.C.G.A. 36-61-1). The final plan element is the designation of Opportunity Zones by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs in order to encourage business growth and expansion by allowing properties within the zones to receive the maximum Job Tax Credits allowable by law. Through implementation of this plan, the City of Valdosta will encourage residential and business redevelopment in cooperation with the Valdosta Housing Authority, the Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, commercial lending institutions, and other private, governmental, and non-profit entities.

Beginning in June 2008, areas within the City of Valdosta were evaluated for having the greatest potential for urban redevelopment. Staff from the Planning and Zoning, Neighborhood Development, and Economic Development Divisions, along with the Assistant to the City Manager, compiled poverty statistics and geographic information to create a proposed Urban Redevelopment Area (“URA”). Four specific areas within the overall URA were targeted: (1) Designated Revitalization Area: this area encompasses a large part of downtown Valdosta and the residential neighborhoods immediately surrounding it; (2) Interstate Corridor: this area encompasses the Interstate 75 corridor between Highway 84/Hill Avenue to St. Augustine Road and stretches east to the western edge of the Designated Revitalization Area; (3) Ashley-Bemiss Triangle: this area encompasses mostly residential and community commercial uses in the triangular area between Ashley Street, Bemiss Road, and Inner



Perimeter Road; (4) Inner Perimeter Road Corridor: this area encompasses generally the parcels on either side of Inner Perimeter Road between N. Oak Street and the Georgia and Florida Southern Railroad. These areas are depicted on the map below:





From September through October 2008, a windshield survey of the majority of buildings and parcels within the designated Urban Redevelopment Area was performed, noting the existing land use, building conditions, building occupancy, and environmental factors. This survey was enhanced and validated by comparison of tax information and property ownership as derived from the Lowndes County Tax Assessor database, the zoning database and other GIS data layers available through the Valdosta-Lowndes Regional Geographic Information System (VALOR-GIS). The overall goal of this survey was to identify blocks of land conducive for redevelopment, buildings eligible for rehabilitation, and tracts of land classified as potential Brownfields and/or Greyfields; the windshield survey provided a basis for understanding the overall property condition in the neighborhood, and consequently future development and redevelopment opportunities. In addition, the survey provides the legal framework for confirming the study area contains ‘slum and blight’ as defined by the official State of Georgia Urban Redevelopment Act.

City staff evaluated dwellings in the URA by using commonly recognized “windshield” survey techniques. This was completed by traveling through the URA and observing and documenting building and lot conditions. First, the current use of the property was documented. The types of land uses identified were: residential, multi-family residential, office professional, commercial, industrial, public/institutional, transportation/communication/utilities, park/recreation/conservation, agriculture/forestry, and undeveloped/unused. Next, the condition of the property was noted, either improved (containing a built structure) or vacant (empty lot). If the property was improved, the building condition was noted as follows:

- (1) Sound – building is in good, stable condition; no obvious repairs needed
- (2) Deteriorating – building is in need of maintenance and/or minor repairs
- (3) Dilapidated – building is in need of major repairs and/or structurally unstable

If possible, occupancy of the building was also noted; as well as the existence of any Brownfield or Greyfield conditions.

This survey method is designed to quickly gather as much information as possible. It is by no means completely thorough and comprehensive, but serves as a strong starting point to identify properties needing immediate attention, or those that offer opportunities for infill. The inventoried properties are those identified by the City of Valdosta for inclusion in the redevelopment initiative. Additional inventories may be conducted as the redevelopment program progresses and evolves.

Using appropriate private and public resources, the objectives of this Urban Redevelopment Plan are to:

- Revitalize blighted, deteriorating areas within the City of Valdosta
- Allow the City of Valdosta to reduce or abate local property taxes and regulatory fees (through the use of an Enterprise Zone)
- Expand the City of Valdosta’s access to job credits (through the use of an Opportunity Zone)
- Encourage compatible infill development and define architectural character
- Facilitate affordable housing
- Allow for sidewalks, safer streets, and improved pedestrian accessibility
- Allow for the creative financing of public facilities and/or infrastructure
- Clean up environmental hazards and enable the reuse of Brownfields



- Adaptively reuse vacant and/or historic structures and obsolete facilities
- Create a mixed-use, entertainment, or other special use district
- Revitalize declining commercial strip centers, abandoned big-box sites, or Greyfields
- Support the effective enforcement of Valdosta's existing nuisance ordinances in order to facilitate conditions favorable for redevelopment

The changes incorporated in the City's recently adopted Land Development Regulations have been taken into consideration while developing this Urban Redevelopment Plan, ensuring that Plan objectives and goals are easily implemented. Additionally, the City's future development goals were examined to ensure that this Urban Redevelopment Plan complies with other existing regulations and the Greater Lowndes 2030 Comprehensive Plan. Public input on the Urban Redevelopment Plan was solicited and comments and recommendations were incorporated as appropriate.



The Urban Redevelopment Act

The Urban Redevelopment Act (O.C.G.A. 36-61-1 et. seq.) was adopted in 1955 by the Georgia General Assembly. The 1950s was a period when many Federal resources were focused on improving living conditions and addressing poverty and blight in American cities. Most states, including Georgia, created state enabling legislation to access Federal Housing and Urban Renewal funds. Much has changed since O.C.G.A. 36-61-1 was adopted. Fewer federal funds are now available for community redevelopment, and over the last five decades many lessons have been learned about the economics of adaptive reuse and historic preservation, creating livable communities, and the positive and negative social impacts of physical design. Still, for Georgia cities and counties embarking on community revitalization projects, the Urban Redevelopment Act remains the most powerful, flexible and easy to use legislative tool governing the use of eminent domain and bond financing to support successful public/private revitalization partnerships.

The Urban Redevelopment Act (the “Law”) gives cities and counties in Georgia specific powers to rehabilitate, conserve or redevelop any defined geographical area that is designated as a “slum area.” As a prerequisite to exercising these powers, the city council or county commission must adopt a resolution finding that the area constitutes a “slum area” as defined by the Law and that redevelopment of the area is “necessary in the interest of the public health, safety, morals, or welfare” of the residents of the jurisdiction. In addition to designating by resolution an “urban redevelopment area” appropriate for redevelopment projects, the Law requires adoption by the local government of an urban redevelopment plan for the target area.

The word “urban” in the title is actually misleading, since the Law is applicable to, and can be especially useful in, very small rural communities and even suburban settings. In fact, rural counties were among the first governments to use the Law for the purpose of rehabilitation of deteriorating neighborhoods or increasing their supply of affordable housing. Unfortunately, there is no actual record of how many urban redevelopment plans have been implemented using this statute, since the Law does not require local governments using the Urban Redevelopment Act to report to or seek approval from a state agency. Additionally, the Law should not be confused with the similarly titled Urban Redevelopment Powers Act (O.C.G.A. 36-44-1), which authorizes tax allocation districts. Although both laws have community development as their primary goal, the Urban Redevelopment Powers Act is more procedurally complex, more difficult to implement, and has a much narrower focus and applicability.

The Law may be used alone, or in combination with many of Georgia’s other legislative redevelopment tools, to support local comprehensive planning, revitalize faltering commercial corridors, recruit and nurture small businesses, rehabilitate older homes and neighborhoods, ensure architecturally compatible infill development, and generate new adaptive uses for old industrial and agricultural facilities. O.C.G.A. 36-61-1 offers solid support for innovative and thoughtfully crafted development strategies needed to solve the problems of these designated target areas.

The Urban Redevelopment Act is relevant for a variety of reasons. First, some sectors of the population (especially aging baby boomers, younger singles, and couples without children) are becoming increasingly interested in moving from the suburbs, which require long commutes to work, back into neglected section of large cities or relocating to small, charming towns. Real estate prices are



appreciating and housing demand is strong near reinvigorated town centers and “village” commercial nodes. Second, the supply of affordable housing is aging and shrinking while the population needing this type of housing is growing; many governments are looking to provide moderate income residents with viable options other than manufactured housing. Third, at the state policy level, legislators and state agencies are encouraging cities and counties to be more strategic and creative in combining the state’s wide array of legislative, programmatic and funding tools for community revitalization. Accordingly, adopting an urban redevelopment plan pursuant to the Law has now been added as a threshold criterion for accessing some important development incentives. Communities are encouraged to focus multiple resources and tools in economically disadvantaged target areas or in areas that are held back by impediments that discourage private sector investment.

Changes to Georgia’s Brownfield regulations and new streamlined programs created by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) now reduce liability for innocent investors (private or governmental) seeking to redevelop Brownfield sites and offset site cleanup costs through tax incentives. These proactive changes should help Georgia attract private investors to sites that were previously not economically viable, many of which are in or near downtowns and older neighborhoods. The Law is a promising tool for Brownfield redevelopment because it simplifies land acquisition and allows the public sector to help finance infrastructure or related improvements.

Additionally, several programs created or administered by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) have been modified based on refinements to state planning statutes. Progressive communities that adopt urban redevelopment plans (especially in combination with other innovative redevelopment tools) may now be eligible for incentives such as higher job tax credits. These program initiatives were designed to enable both urban and very rural communities to create more effective strategies to address pockets of poverty.

Compared to some of Georgia’s other planning and community development statutes, the Urban Redevelopment Act is straightforward, flexible and free from unnecessary red tape. The Law also does a good job of balancing the community’s need to remove the barriers to its overall economic development created by slum and blight with protection of the rights of property owners and low income residents in particular.



Consistency with Comprehensive Plan

In order to ensure that the Urban Redevelopment Plan maintains compatibility with the Greater Lowndes 2030 Comprehensive Plan, components of the Comprehensive Plan's Community Agenda, specifically the Community Vision Statement, Future Development Strategies, and Implementation Goals, were used to guide the development of this Plan.

The Community Vision Statement provides a general framework for the Comprehensive Plan; therefore, specific concepts from the Vision Statement were used to steer this Urban Redevelopment Plan. These concepts are:

- The Greater Lowndes area will serve as a leader in the South Georgia-North Florida region
- The area will experience substantial growth while maintaining an unsurpassed quality of life
- A progressive and entrepreneurial spirit will be nurtured
- The area will continue to support a diverse population and economy
- The area's natural and cultural resources will be preserved and enhanced
- The area's family-oriented, small town character will be protected
- Open communication and community involvement is vital to the area's growth and development

According to the Comprehensive Plan, future development, including redevelopment, within Valdosta is projected to occur within fifteen unique character areas. Within the Urban Redevelopment Area there exist eleven of these character areas. A description of each of these eleven character areas, along with its respective Development Strategy, is included below.

I. COMMUNITY ACTIVITY CENTER: A focal point for several neighborhoods that has a concentration of activities such as general retail, service commercial, office professional, higher-density housing, and appropriate public and open space.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: Each Community Activity Center should include a relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve a regional market area. Residential development should reinforce the town center through locating higher density housing options adjacent to the town center, targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments and condominiums. Design for each Community Activity Center should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear. Direct connections to greenspace and trail networks should be provided. The pedestrian-friendly environment should be enhanced by adding sidewalks and other pedestrian-friendly trails/bike routes linked to other neighborhood amenities such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, parks, and schools.

II. DOWNTOWN: The traditional central business district and immediately surrounding commercial, industrial, or mixed-use areas.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: Downtown should include relatively high density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve a regional market area. Residential development should reinforce the traditional town center through a combination of rehabilitation of historic buildings in the downtown area and compatible new infill development targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments, lofts, and condominiums. Design should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear. The pedestrian-friendly environment should be enhanced by adding sidewalks and other pedestrian-friendly trails/bike routes linking to neighborhood communities and major destinations, such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, commercial clusters, parks, and schools. New residential and commercial development should be concentrated in and around the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods on infill sites.



III. ESTABLISHED RESIDENTIAL AREA: Typically an older neighborhood having relatively well-maintained housing, possessing a distinct identity through architectural styles, lot and street design, and having higher rates of home-ownership. These areas are typically located closer to the core of the community and may be located next to areas facing intense development pressures.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: Focus should be on reinforcing stability by encouraging more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties. Vacant properties offer opportunity for infill development of new, architecturally compatible housing. Strong pedestrian and bicycle connections should be provided to enable residents to walk/bike to work, shopping, or other destinations in the area.

IV. INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITY AREA: Area used in manufacturing, wholesale trade, distribution activities, assembly, and processing activities. Uses may or may not generate excessive noise, particulate matter, vibration, smoke, dust, gas, fumes, odors, radiation, or other nuisance characteristics.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: Development or, where possible, retrofitting should occur as part of planned industrial parks having adequate water, sewer, storm-water, and transportation infrastructure for all component uses at build-out. Incorporate landscaping and site design to soften or shield views of buildings and parking lots, loading docks, etc. Incorporate signage and lighting guidelines to enhance quality of development. Also incorporate measures to mitigate impacts of external impacts on the adjacent built or natural environments. Encourage greater mix of uses such as retail and services to serve industry employees to reduce automobile reliance/use on site.

V. INSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITY AREA: Concentration of public or private large-scale institutional uses such as hospitals, schools, colleges, and universities. These areas may be characterized by high degrees of access by vehicular traffic, large amounts of on-site parking, low degrees of internal open space, high floor-area-ratios, and large tracts of land, campuses, or unified development.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: Uses supporting the area's primary institution should be supported and clustered around such institution when feasible. Institutionally compatible architecture should be encouraged over "franchise" or "corporate" architecture. Design should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between the institution and supporting uses. Direct connections to nearby networks of greenspace or trails, available to pedestrians and bicyclists should be provided.

VI. NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITY AREA: A neighborhood focal point with a concentration of activities such as general retail, service commercial, professional office, higher-density housing, and appropriate public and open spaces uses easily accessible by pedestrians and bicycles.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: Each neighborhood center should include a mix of retail, services, and offices to serve neighborhood residents' day-to-day needs. Residential development should reinforce the center by locating higher density housing options adjacent to the center, targeted to a broad range of income levels, including multi-family town homes, apartments, and condominiums. Design for each Center should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. Road edges should be clearly defined by locating builds at roadside with parking in the rear. Direct connections to greenspace and trail networks should be provided. The pedestrian-friendly environment should be enhanced by adding sidewalks and other pedestrian-friendly trails/bike routes linked to other neighborhood amenities such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, parks, and schools.

VII. PARK/RECREATION/CONSERVATION AREA: Undeveloped, natural lands with significant natural features including floodplains, wetlands, watersheds, wildlife management areas and other environmentally sensitive areas not suitable for development of any kind.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: The natural, rural character should be maintained by not allowing any new development and promoting use of conservation easements. Roadways in these areas should be widened only when



absolutely necessary. Roadway alterations should be carefully designed to minimize the visual impact. These areas should be promoted for passive-use tourism and universally designed recreational destinations.

VIII. REGIONAL ACTIVITY CENTER: Concentration of regionally marketed commercial and retail centers, office and employment areas, higher-education facilities, sports and recreational complexes. These areas are characterized by high degrees of access by vehicular traffic, large amounts of on-site parking, low degrees of internal open space, high floor-area-ratios, and large tracts of land, campuses, or unified development.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: These areas should include a relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve a regional market area. They should also include a diverse mix of higher-density housing types, including multi-family town homes, apartments, lofts, condominiums, affordable and workforce housing. Design should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. Direct connections to nearby networks of greenspace or trails, available to pedestrians and bicyclists for both tourism and recreation purposes, should be provided. Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at roadside with parking in the rear. “Franchise” or “corporate” architecture should be discouraged.

IX. SUBURBAN AREA: Area where typical types of suburban residential subdivision development have occurred or pressures for such type of development are greatest due to availability of water and/or sewer service. These areas are characterized by low pedestrian orientation, high to moderate building separation, predominately residential uses with scattered commercial or civic uses, and varied, often curvilinear, street patterns.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: Moderate density should be promoted in these areas with a greater focus on Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) style residential subdivisions; where possible, existing development should be retrofitted to better conform to traditional neighborhood development principles. These principles include creating neighborhood focal points by locating schools, community centers, or well-designed small commercial activity centers at suitable locations within walking distance of residences. New development should be master-planned with mixed-uses; blending residential development with schools, parks, recreation, retail businesses and services. Strong connectivity and continuity between each master planned development should exist along with internal street connectivity, multiple site access points, and good vehicular and pedestrian/bicycle connections to retail/commercial services. Street design should foster traffic calming such as narrower residential streets, on-street parking, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities. Compatible architecture styles are encouraged to maintain the regional character; these should not include “franchise” or “corporate” architecture. Where possible, there should be connections to regional networks of greenspace and trails, available to pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for both tourism and recreational purposes. The permit of accessory housing units or well designed, small-scale infill multifamily residences will increase neighborhood and income diversity.

X. TRANSITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD AREA: An area that has most of its original housing stock in place but housing conditions may be worsening due to low rates of homeownership and/or decline of property maintenance. There may be a lack of neighborhood identity and gradual invasion of different type and intensity of uses that may be incompatible with the neighborhood residential use. These areas are typically located in the older, core areas of the community.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: Focus should be on strategic public investments to improve conditions, allow appropriate infill development on scattered vacant sites, and encourage more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties. Public assistance and investment should be focused where needed to ensure that the neighborhood becomes a more stable, mixed-income community with a larger percentage of owner-occupied housing. Vacant properties offer an opportunity for infill development of new, architecturally compatible housing. Strong pedestrian and bicycle connections should be provided to enable residents to walk/bike to work, shopping, or other destinations in the area.

XI. TRANSPORTATION/COMMUNICATION/UTILITIES: Areas used in providing public transportation, communication, or utility services. Also includes areas supporting some type of industrial uses but not the principle use. These areas may include public or private facilities for wastewater treatment, land application of effluent, landfills, energy generation, resource recovery, or similar uses which may require environmental permits.



DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: Development of these areas should be in cooperation with established or planned industrial areas. Or, where not feasible, such areas should be well buffered from surrounding residential and commercial properties for both aesthetics and quality of life.

Strategies and improvements recommended in the Urban Redevelopment Plan will complement the development strategies of each unique Character Area. Additionally, the planning and implementation goals of this Urban Redevelopment Plan are consistent with the overall goals, policies, and objectives of the Greater Lowndes 2030 Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, the following Comprehensive Plan goals and policies were used to guide the vision of this Urban Redevelopment Plan:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOAL: To support a growing and balanced economy that bolsters the community's position as a regional economic engine offering high-wage jobs, by ensuring a high-level of workforce adequacy.

POLICIES:

- The need for additional high-wage jobs shall be addressed through greater collaboration of community resources. The issue of declining workforce adequacy shall be addressed through greater collaboration among businesses, educational institutions, and local government regarding the knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed by the existing workforce and those that will be required by future employers.
- The community will target reinvestment in declining neighborhoods to further encourage private sector redevelopment and accommodate future growth.
- The community will encourage the development of downtowns as vibrant centers for culture, government, dining, residential, and retail diversity.

HOUSING GOAL: To ensure access to adequate and affordable housing options for all residents in all income levels.

POLICIES:

- The growing need for workforce and affordable housing shall be addressed through public-private partnerships.
- The existing housing stock shall be proactively protected and maintained, utilizing public-private partnerships when necessary.
- A mixture of housing types in varying income levels shall be encouraged and actively promoted.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES GOAL: To provide for the continued protection of our natural and cultural resources for current and future generations.

POLICIES:

- Active preservation and utilization of natural greenspaces and parkland shall be encouraged and actively supported.
- Enhanced solid waste reduction and recycling initiatives shall be supported.
- The continued protection and utilization of historic resources shall be encouraged and actively supported.
- The availability of adequate cultural facilities such as community arenas, performing arts venues, and conference/meeting center space shall be pursued through public-private partnerships.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES GOAL: To ensure the provision of infrastructure, community facilities, and public services that support efficient growth and development patterns.



POLICIES:

- Wise policy decisions shall maximize the efficient use of existing infrastructure as well as future investments in capital improvements, long term operation, and maintenance.
- Public facilities and services shall be coordinated with land use planning to promote more compact urban development, preservation of natural resources, and development of activity centers.
- The effects of new development shall be anticipated so as to maintain or improve appropriate levels of service.

LAND USE GOAL: To ensure the community's anticipated growth occurs in a well-integrated yet organized fashion, which protects our community resources, promotes efficient use of infrastructure and transportation facilities, and supports quality economic development. The Urban Service Area, based on existing and planned infrastructure improvements, shall serve as a guide for future development.

POLICIES:

- The Rural Service Area shall be protected from incompatible, dense development.
- Mixed use developments in appropriate areas shall be encouraged to promote the connection of employment and residential activity centers.
- Positive impacts on the built and natural environment shall be anticipated through only the highest standard of development throughout all parts of the community.
- Available land shall be utilized in the most efficient manner while focusing on redevelopment of land where feasible.
- A recognizable transition from the urban to the rural areas of the community shall be developed.
- Commercial development of varying sizes shall be encouraged at the intersections of major roadways.
- Innovative planning concepts shall be employed to achieve desirable and well-designed neighborhoods, protect the environment, preserve meaningful open space, improve traffic flow, and enhance our community's overall quality of life.
- Major institutions such as Moody Air Force Base, VSU, SGMC, and Valdosta Tech shall continue to be protected from incompatible land uses through appropriate and consistent land development decisions.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION GOAL: To encourage coordination of planning efforts with other local service providers and authorities, neighboring communities and state and regional planning agencies.

POLICY:

- Cross jurisdictional coordination and collaboration shall be actively pursued to promote positive impacts of growth and development across jurisdictional boundaries, which is vital to a successful economy and a high quality of life.

TRANSPORTATION GOAL: To encourage coordination of land use planning and transportation planning to support sustainable economic development, protection of natural and cultural resources, and provision of adequate and affordable housing.

POLICIES:

- A well-maintained system of rails lines shall facilitate safe and efficient movement of goods to serve the economic needs of the community and region.
- Efficient air service shall promote economic development by connecting the community with major regional centers.
- Walking, biking, and accessible public transit shall be considered viable and sustainable forms of transportation supported through appropriate land use and infrastructure decisions.
- It is recognized that design and construction of residential and non-residential streets contributes to the overall character and development pattern of the community and thus shall be considered one of the community's most important components.
- The traffic carrying capacity of existing and planned roadways shall be preserved through coordinated land use and transportation planning decisions.



TECHNOLOGY GOAL: To promote the use of existing and future technology infrastructure for community-wide economic development, education, and marketing.

POLICIES:

- Community-wide technology infrastructure shall be considered a basic community facility and as such will be adequately planned for.
- Efforts will be made to ensure all citizens have access to basic technology infrastructure.

The initiatives of this Urban Redevelopment Plan are consistent with the aforementioned goals and policies of the Greater Lowndes 2030 Comprehensive Plan.



Boundaries and Negative Conditions of the Urban Redevelopment Area

The boundaries of the Urban Redevelopment Area are included on the Urban Redevelopment Area Map in Appendix B. The entire Urban Redevelopment Area comprises approximately 6,556 acres and 9,787 individual parcels.

In September and October 2008, a windshield survey of property conditions was conducted of the property parcels within the Urban Redevelopment Area. This data was added to the previously completed Housing Inventory created for the HUD Designated Revitalization Areas. Evidence from both the windshield survey and Housing Inventory indicated that negative conditions, as defined by the Urban Redevelopment Law, exist within the Urban Redevelopment Area. Photographs documenting the existence of negative conditions within the Urban Redevelopment Area can be found in Appendix C. The negative conditions found in Valdosta's Urban Redevelopment Area are detailed below.

Slum and Blight, Including Dilapidated, Deteriorated, Obsolete, and/or Unoccupied Building(s)

The results from the property conditions survey indicated that the Urban Redevelopment Area contains numerous dilapidated and deteriorated structures that qualify as slum and blight under the Urban Redevelopment Act. Specifically, 947 *dilapidated* structures were identified in the survey. Although dilapidated structures representing all types of property uses were noted, the majority of the dilapidated structures were residential. Dilapidated structures are those that are obsolete and/or visibly decayed due to age, wear, and neglect. Dilapidated buildings usually require major repair, or are structurally unsound to the point of being a threat to public safety thereby resulting in demolition.

The Urban Redevelopment Area also includes 841 *deteriorated* structures, of which 719 were residential in use. Deteriorated structures may also be considered obsolete if the structure is over 40 years old. These structures are those that require minor repairs and/or standard maintenance in order to restore them to sound condition.

While conducting the windshield survey, 119 properties were identified as being either *unoccupied* or abandoned. In addition, several of these structures were in a dilapidated or deteriorated state. Vacant structures can present a threat to public health and safety if not properly maintained.

Dilapidated and deteriorated structures are interspersed throughout the Urban Redevelopment Area. Larger clusters of these blighted structures are located in the older residential areas immediately surrounding downtown Valdosta. In particular, the neighborhoods of Southside, Pinevale, West Side, Kill Me Quick, Tom Town, Leila Ellis, and Greer Park contain high percentages of deteriorated and dilapidated structures. Additionally, the area surrounding the Interstate 75 / Highway 84 interchange also contains several deteriorating and vacant commercial structures. Another large grouping of substandard buildings exists in the triangular area bounded by Northside Drive on the north, Bemiss Road on the east, and Ashley Street on the west.

Potential Brownfields or Greyfields

The term 'Brownfield' describes land that has the potential to be contaminated by hazardous substances or pollutants due to its previous industrial or commercial use. The expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of



Brownfields may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of such contaminants. Common Brownfields include land utilized for factories or industrial areas. Smaller sites, such as those that once contained a gas station or dry cleaning business may also exhibit Brownfield characteristics. Due to the presence of urban and industrial environments in Valdosta, the potential for several Brownfields exists within the city. Some of these sites are located within the Urban Redevelopment Area and have been identified as follows:

- **915 River Street**, 22.5 acres, located within HUD Designated Revitalization Area, in the heart of a residential neighborhood and adjacent to a newly renovated 34-acre City Park. Presents prime opportunity for residential housing or additional park land, however contamination may limit use to light commercial. Staff has completed investigations into the property, which was formerly used by Georgia Fertilizer Company dating back to at least 1905. Property listed on HIS list in 1992 for Lead, Arsenic and Barium. Staff has been in contact with Georgia Environmental Protection Division who viewed this as a viable project however project plans were placed on hold.
- **401 N. Ashley Street**, .4 acres, former gas station, located within HUD Designated Revitalization Area and Historic District. Adjacent to new Lowndes County Administration building and caddy-corner to Chamber of Commerce, in the heart of downtown. Currently under remediation.
- **2200 Bemiss Road**, 1.7 acres, former laundromat/dry cleaner, property contains a dilapidated building which has been vacant for many years. Located on major commercial/professional corridor on prime corner lot. Property has been for sale for significant amount of time.
- **406 S. Troup Street**, .17 acres, former laundromat, located within HUD Designated Revitalization Area and adjacent to Martin Luther King Corridor Project, a multi-million dollar redevelopment project in process by the City. Property contains a vacant, dilapidated building. Owner is interested in bringing property up to code and placing back on tax roles.
- **505 N. Ashley Street**– Former automotive repair shop, located in heart of downtown across from the Chamber of Commerce. Property has sat vacant and for sale for several years. Located within HUD Designated Revitalization Area and Historic District.
- **400 N. Patterson Street**, .27 acres, former gas station, located within HUD Designated Revitalization Area and Historic District. Currently under remediation by private property owner.
- **700-707 W. Hill Avenue**, .28 acres, former gas station, located in HUD Designated Revitalization Area and Historic District. Property has sat vacant for several months.

The term ‘Greyfield’ denotes a previously developed site containing large expanses of paving that is currently underused. Commonly, Greyfields are former strip shopping plazas or malls. The most prevalent Greyfield within the Urban Redevelopment Area is the Five Points Shopping Center at the intersection of North Ashley, Patterson and Oak Streets, Oak Street Extension, and North Valdosta Road. The site comprises 29.8 acres and is located in a suburban, but concentrated commercial area. Five Points is the largest underused tract in the area, as the plaza contains only a few tenants with most of the storefront spaces being vacant. While the property’s owners are not interested in selling at this time, the



City is hopeful that the incentives offered through this Plan will spur redevelopment, as it is a prime location for mixed use development or a major civic use.

Constitutes an Economic or Social Liability

In general, the deteriorated, dilapidated, and vacant or abandoned properties located within the Urban Redevelopment Area represent an economic and social liability to the City, as these parcels are a public safety concern, substantially underutilized, and contribute to poor community morale. These blighted properties do not promote business growth and retention or provide decent housing. Additionally, the blighted properties contribute little to the tax income of the Valdosta and Lowndes County due to their poor condition and underused state.

Detrimental to Public Health, Safety, Morals and/or Welfare

The blighted properties within the Urban Redevelopment Area are detrimental overall to public health, morals and welfare, as they do not contribute to the well-being of the community; instead, the distressed state of these structures detracts from it. The unoccupied status of several houses and large commercial buildings is also detrimental to the public's safety. The prevalence of vacant structures has led to problems with vermin harborage, garbage dumping, and occasionally arson.

Deteriorated or Inadequate Infrastructure

A few infrastructure deficiencies were noted during the windshield survey. In general, the Urban Redevelopment Area is lacking in pedestrian and bicycle access. Sidewalks and bicycle lanes are especially needed where residential and neighborhood commercial or community commercial areas are closely joined, such as the Tom Town and Brookwood neighborhoods between North Ashley and Forrest Streets. In addition, some of Valdosta's downtown streets, such as Toombs Street, and frequently used connectors, such as Oak and Lee Streets are in need of repair and/or repaving due to wear and tear. Furthermore, the addition of curbs and gutters along local and collector roads in residential areas could enhance those roads, as well as offer much needed stormwater relief. Infrastructure improvements currently planned by the City are described in greater detail in the *Public Infrastructure Improvements* section below.



Community's Land Use Objectives

Because the Urban Redevelopment Area comprises a large portion of the City of Valdosta, existing land use in the Urban Redevelopment Area is varied. The categories of land use noted while conducting the windshield survey for this Plan were based partly on the previous existing land use studies. These categories were: Residential, Multifamily Residential, Office Professional, Commercial, Industrial, Public/Institutional, Transportation/Communication/Utilities, Park/Recreation/Conservation, Agricultural/Forestry, and Undeveloped/Unused. Appendix B contains a map of Valdosta's existing land uses observed during the windshield survey.

Zoning is an integral part of redevelopment. In late 2008, the City adopted new zoning legislation as part of its new Land Development Regulations ("LDR"), which consolidated all development-related ordinances into one comprehensive appendix to the City of Valdosta Official Code. The LDR, which became effective January 1, 2009, is a substantial rewrite of the City's previous zoning and development ordinances, and incorporates new regulations to promote innovative development concepts, improved aesthetics, and quality growth in the city. The LDR also facilitates efficient code administration and the streamlining of development review by staff. With the new LDR in place, the City of Valdosta is primed to maximize the benefits of redevelopment under this Urban Redevelopment Plan. A current zoning map of Valdosta can be found in Appendix B.



Opportunities for Improving the Urban Redevelopment Area

Several City-initiated projects are currently underway or anticipated in the near future that will dovetail with redevelopment efforts to benefit the Urban Redevelopment Area. Each of these opportunities are described in more detail below:

1. **City of Valdosta Gateway Study.** Conducted in 2004 by the South Georgia Regional Development Center, this study identified four primary and four secondary gateways of the City that are located within the Urban Redevelopment Area. The primary (major) gateways are: West Hill Avenue at St. Augustine Road; Five Points at North Valdosta Road and North Oak Street Extension; East Hill Avenue near city limits; and South Patterson Street at Old Clyattville Road and Madison Highway. The secondary (minor) gateways are: West Central Avenue at West Hill Avenue; East Central Avenue at East Hill Avenue; North Patterson Street at Magnolia Street; and North Ashley Street at Magnolia Street. These gateways should be improved by adding a focal point, such as attractive signage and landscaping.
2. **City of Valdosta Historic Preservation Plan.** The creation of a stand-alone historic preservation plan for the City is anticipated to be undertaken in 2009-2010. This plan would include several key elements that connect the City's vision for future development with historic resource reuse, revitalization, and protection, including: a definition of Valdosta's historic character, a summary of the City's past preservation efforts, a summary of the contributing/noncontributing historic resources survey, an explanation of the legal basis for preservation, a discussion of the relationship between historic preservation and other land-use and growth management policies, an explanation of public sector responsibilities, the creation of and discussion of incentives, plans for educational programs and public outreach, and an agenda for future action. Adoption of such a preservation plan will reflect the wise and responsible stewardship of our City's historic buildings and neighborhoods, and act as an effective means of promoting a livable, sustainable, and economically viable community, while preserving the heritage that defines Valdosta's unique character. Approximately two-thirds of Valdosta's Historic District is included within the Urban Redevelopment Area; therefore, the development of a historic preservation plan would provide opportunities to promote sensible and sustainable redevelopment in these areas.
3. **City of Valdosta Land Development Regulations ("LDR").** New zoning districts were created as part of the LDR, effective January 1, 2009, such as the Residential Infill District (R-1) and the Mixed Use District (MXD). These new districts will encourage the reuse and creative development of urban residential lots and commercial areas. Additionally, these districts will enable vacant lots within the city's urban neighborhoods to be built upon, creating the potential for additional affordable housing. Furthermore, Overlay Districts have been established along several of the city's major traffic corridors which promote aesthetically pleasing architectural design, innovative developments, multi-modal transit patterns, and appropriate land uses.
4. **City of Valdosta Main Street Program.** The City of Valdosta joined the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program in 1984, and subsequently established the Central Valdosta Development Authority and Downtown Development Authority. Recognizing downtown Valdosta as the historic core of the community, the Central Valdosta Development



Authority manages the process of enhancing downtown's position as the governmental, cultural, and economic center of the Greater Lowndes County area by involving businesses, property owners, government, churches, and the entire community in revitalization efforts. The Downtown Development Authority

5. **Commercial and Tourism District.** In July 2008, the City adopted a Commercial and Tourism District, which spans several key transportation corridors and gateways in Valdosta. The Valdosta-Lowndes Conference Center and Tourism Authority was instrumental in proposing this District, which promotes the concentration of hospitality, tourism, and entertainment related land uses. Goals of this District are to ensure that each activity center is linked via safe and aesthetically pleasing transportation facilities for a variety of transit modes and to create a positive image that supports tourism and economic growth along the Interstate 75 corridor. Currently, the only action element within this new District is the Panhandling and Solicitation Ordinance, adopted at the same time as the District. It is anticipated that future action items will include applying for grant funds to beautify the corridors and establishing a Tax Allocation District in select areas. A map of the Commercial and Tourism District can be found in Appendix B.
6. **Dr. Martin Luther King Corridor Improvement Project.** In January 2006, the City was awarded Transportation Enhancement funding from the Georgia Department of Transportation to improve the streetscape of eight blocks of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive between S. Oak Street and S. Fry Street. The streetscape project includes aesthetic and multi-modal transportation improvements, as well as the introduction of a new monument memorializing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Additionally, the project will expand Olympic Park in order to build an urban marketplace for local produce and craft vendors. This revitalization project will stimulate neighborhood cohesiveness and economic development in and around this historic corridor, which was once the cultural and economic center for Valdosta's African-American community.
7. **EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant.** In early November 2008, the City applied for a Brownfields Assessment Grant offered by the United States Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA"). If awarded, this grant will provide funding for the City of Valdosta to inventory, characterize, assess, and conduct planning and community involvement related to Brownfield sites. Assessment and mitigation of such Brownfield sites will eventually lead to the successful redevelopment of these sites within the Urban Redevelopment Area. The EPA is expected announce grant awards in the Spring of 2009.
8. **HUD Designated Revitalization Area.** In 2002, the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development approved Census Tracts 105.00, 106.03-block 2, 108.00, 109.00, 110.00, 113.00 (excluding Block Group 1 of Tract 113), and 114.02 as a Designated Revitalization Area (DRA). This area encompasses the greatest portion of the city's low and moderate-income neighborhoods and was defined based on 2000 Census data. Based on citizen input, seventeen neighborhoods were delineated within these tracts and each neighborhood was given a name based on the unique historical association of the area. A revitalization plan for each neighborhood is currently being created following a four-year planning schedule, and all plans are expected to be completed in 2009. In addition, the City of Valdosta's Neighborhood



Development Department will complete a Consolidated Plan in 2009, which is an assessment of the developmental needs of the Designated Revitalization Area. This plan will ultimately outline a five-year strategy and establish an annual plan for the use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds administered through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

9. **Intergovernmental Coordination.** The City of Valdosta supports creative and cooperative partnerships, and endeavors to work with Lowndes County, the Valdosta-Lowndes Industrial Authority, and other government and quasi-governmental authorities to create intergovernmental agreements that will enable the maximum benefit of Enterprise Zone incentives.
10. **Public Infrastructure Improvements.** Several projects have been identified by the Engineering Department, Public Works Department, and the Valdosta-Lowndes Parks and Recreation Authority as public infrastructure improvements that would assist in supporting redevelopment within the Urban Redevelopment Area. These transportation, utilities, recreation, and aesthetic projects will enable the building and expansion of businesses and residences by providing a solid infrastructure foundation, as well as creating a pleasant environment that enhances the quality of life for citizens and visitors alike.

- a. **Transportation improvements** that promote and sustain redevelopment are those that enable a variety of transportation options such as pedestrian, bicycle, vehicle, and mass-transit. In September 2008, the City of Valdosta adopted a *Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan*, which focused on multi-modal transportation options. Included in this plan are several short-range (1-6 years) projects that will benefit the Urban Redevelopment Area. Among the projects scheduled to be completed is the Lankford Drive Extension from St. Augustine Road to Norman Drive. This project will allow another point of access to the Norman Drive and Interstate corridors from Baytree Drive, facilitating better traffic flow. The planned road widening projects include: Gordon Street from Lankford Drive to West Street; Park Avenue from Ashley Street to Northside Drive; and Fry Street from Hill Avenue to Lake Park Road. Several intersection improvements throughout the Urban Redevelopment Area are also planned.

Sidewalk and bicycle lane installation is also a major concern in revitalization areas. Within the Urban Redevelopment Area, sidewalks and bicycle lanes are planned to be added to St. Augustine Road between Norman Drive and River Street; Lankford Drive between Baytree Road St. Augustine Road; and Park Avenue from Ashley Street to Northside Drive. Sidewalk installation projects, combined with ditch piping and curb and gutter installation, are planned for 18 other streets in the Urban Redevelopment Area. In particular, ditch piping, curbing, and sidewalks will be installed along South Troup Street from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive to Griffin Avenue and also along West Street from Gordon Street to the Norfolk Southern Railroad Track.



A detailed listing of transportation improvements may be found in the *Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan* available on the City's website at: <http://www.valdostacity.com/index.aspx?page=118>.

- b. **Utilities Improvements.** Telecommunications and technology utilities should be updated and expanded within the Urban Redevelopment Area in order to recruit business and enhance the quality of life in Valdosta. The major telecom and internet service providers in the city are AT&T and Mediacom. In conjunction with the Valdosta-Lowndes Chamber of Commerce and Lowndes County, the city should work with these companies to bring the latest and most economical technologies to the Greater Valdosta area.

Valdosta presently manages and operates its own water and sewer system, which serves the community well. However, with increased development expected to occur along the Inner Perimeter Road corridor, facilities and water lines will need to be expanded to accommodate this area's anticipated growth. Currently, the Mud Creek Water Pollution Control Plant is being studied for increased capacity.

Several ditch piping, drainage, and storm water projects have been planned by the Engineering Department that will aid in water control, water quality, and flood mitigation within the Urban Redevelopment Area. In addition, the City's storm water master plan is scheduled to be updated by early summer 2009. This plan is anticipated to include normal system upgrades, as well as water quality related improvements.

- c. **Recreational Improvements.** According to the Valdosta-Lowndes Parks and Recreation Authority, upgrades are anticipated for two parks within the Urban Redevelopment Area: Lomax Park on J. L. Lomax Drive and Greer Park on Marette Avenue. These upgrades will include updating the park facilities and landscaping. Lomax Park is located within the West Side Neighborhood and Greer Park is located within the Greer Park Neighborhood.
- d. **Beautification and Aesthetics Improvements**

Streetscape improvements are listed as a short-term project in the *Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan* for West Hill Avenue and along Madison Highway from the Valdosta Regional Airport. In addition the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. corridor streetscape project is anticipated to be completed by 2010. This project will add lighting, landscaping, and an outdoor market to the Southside Neighborhood.

Across the entire Urban Redevelopment Area, the presence of overhead utilities detracts visually from redevelopment efforts. While a significant financial investment, burying utilities underground will make commercial and residential properties more aesthetically pleasing and less visually cluttered, thus promoting an environment conducive for additional economic development. Creative financing structures should be investigated as a means of covering this cost.



11. **Safe Routes to School.** As part of its Signature Community program efforts (see below) the City of Valdosta will create educational programs and events advocating walking and biking to local elementary and middle schools.
12. **Signature Community Designation.** In 2008, the Cities of Valdosta and Remerton were designated as Signature Communities by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. The Signature Community Program is intended help communities reach higher levels of community achievement and quality of life for their citizens. It is limited to communities that are serious about improving local quality of life through effective planning, implementation and taking a comprehensive approach to addressing community improvement issues. In Valdosta and Remerton, the program will assist each community in implementing key initiatives, specifically, the preservation of natural resources and promotion of community wellness. As a result of being selected as a Signature Community, the City of Valdosta will receive customized technical assistance to achieve these key initiatives, access to a Signature Community grant, assistance in identifying other financial resources for implementing the identified initiatives, and statewide recognition.
13. **Tax Allocation Districts.** In the near future, the City plans to implement a tax allocation district, which will most likely be located within the Urban Redevelopment Area, in order further expand redevelopment efforts. A tax allocation district, or TAD, is a designated area in which improvements are carried out by a local government in order to make a site a valid location for a project that developers would be interested in. The local government usually issues bonds to pay for the improvements, and the added tax revenues that the project eventually generates are used to pay off the bonds. This technique, known as tax increment financing (TIF), has been widely used around the U.S.
14. **Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization.** In April 2003, Governor Sonny Perdue officially designated the South Georgia Regional Development Center (SGRDC) as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Valdosta Urbanized Area. The MPO is responsible for carrying out transportation planning in the Metropolitan Planning Area using funding received from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation. The MPO works with these and other transportation planning partners to fulfill the requirements of various federal, state and local transportation planning laws and plans. The MPO is responsible for developing a continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative transportation planning process that includes long range planning, short range improvement programs, public involvement programs, and an annual program of work activities. In addition to these four main documents and plans, the Valdosta-Lowndes MPO works in a broad range of planning areas to ensure a comprehensive transportation planning foundation for the community. Through the MPO, quality transportation planning in the Urban Redevelopment Area will be provided.



Historic Preservation Considerations

Incorporated in 1860, the City of Valdosta contains a wealth of late nineteenth, early twentieth, and mid-twentieth century architectural resources. The City values its historic resources, and protects them through the implementation of its historic preservation ordinance by the Valdosta Historic Preservation Commission. Reflecting the city's diverse architectural heritage is the Valdosta Local Historic District, originally designated in 1981, and six National Register of Historic Places historic districts (see Appendix B for a map of these districts). The 1,113-acre Valdosta Local Historic District contains approximately 1,272 contributing structures. Contributing structures are those that are 50 years old or older, possess historical and/or architectural integrity, and are characteristic of the City's heritage and developmental history.

During the Urban Redevelopment Area windshield survey, 286 dilapidated structures and 155 deteriorated structures were identified as being located within the Valdosta Historic District. It is recommended that any contributing structure within the Valdosta Local Historic District that has been identified as dilapidated or deteriorated be rehabilitated to the extent such rehabilitation is feasible. Rehabilitation of contributing historic properties should be undertaken through both voluntary actions and the existing regulatory processes. Both public and private rehabilitation efforts should follow both the Design Guidelines for the Valdosta Historic District and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Furthermore, historic buildings should not be altered in a manner inconsistent with the technical standards for rehabilitation, nor should historic buildings be demolished unless their reuse is found to be infeasible. Where vacant lots exist in areas where the Urban Redevelopment Area and Valdosta Local Historic District overlap, infill structures should be compatible with historic buildings by following the standards set forth in the *Valdosta Historic District Design Guidelines*. Finally, all exterior material changes to buildings within the Valdosta Local Historic District should follow the standard design review process established by the Historic Preservation Ordinance and be issued an approved Certificate of Appropriateness application before work proceeds.

It is important to note that rehabilitating historic structures may have tax advantages for the private property owner. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, currently offers both an income tax credit program and a local property tax abatement program for qualified rehabilitation expenses for historic buildings. Additionally, a federal income tax credit program for qualified rehabilitation expenses is offered through the National Park Service and Internal Revenue Service. Information about these programs and applications can be found on the Historic Preservation Division's website at <http://www.gashpo.org>.



Description of Property to be Acquired

No buildings or parcels of property are to be acquired by the City of Valdosta at this time. Should circumstances change making property acquisition probable or necessary, this plan will be amended to reflect such changes.



Covenants and Restrictions to be Placed on Properties

No covenants or restrictions will be placed on properties by the City of Valdosta at this time. Should property covenants and/or restrictions be adopted in the future, this plan will be amended to include such covenants and/or restrictions.



Structures to be Demolished, Relocated, or Rehabilitated

During the creation of the Urban Redevelopment Plan, no structures in the Urban Redevelopment Area were identified to be demolished, relocated, or rehabilitated. Should the demolition, relocation, or rehabilitation of buildings be required in future phases of the Urban Redevelopment Plan, the Plan will be amended to reflect those changes.

At present, the City of Valdosta actively enforces the International Property Maintenance Code through its Community Protection Division. The City began keeping track of substandard property beginning in 1998, when the first substandard property survey was conducted. This survey resulted in the identification of approximately 250 substandard buildings. At present, there are 390 buildings listed as substandard. The City Marshals work closely with property owners to resolve maintenance and repair issues of buildings on the substandard property list, many of which are located within the Urban Redevelopment Area. Building fires and complaints also trigger the City Marshals' review of a property. Typically, property owners are given thirty (30) days to repair or demolish the structure. If the issue is not resolved within the time allotted, a court order may be issued. According to the Community Protection Division, approximately 70% to 80% of the City's substandard buildings are abandoned and/or rental properties.

For substandard structures within the Local Historic District, a historic building assessment is conducted before a building is demolished. When feasible, buildings considered contributing historic resources are rehabilitated according to Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Community Home Investment Program (CHIP) guidelines.



Strategy for Relocating Displaced Residents

The City of Valdosta has determined that the development of a relocation strategy is not necessary at this time. Revitalization efforts are currently focused on unoccupied and vacant blighted buildings and therefore, no relocation of residents is expected to occur. In the event displacement of residents becomes necessary at a later date, the Urban Redevelopment Plan will be amended to incorporate a plan for relocating displaced residents in accordance with all local and state statutory requirements.

Through its existing substandard building remediation and condemnation program, the City currently relocates citizens living in unfit conditions through assistance from local agencies such as LAMP and the American Red Cross.



Strategy to Alleviate Barriers to Affordable Housing

While significant strides have occurred in addressing Valdosta's affordable housing needs, continued neighborhood revitalization efforts cannot become a reality without anticipated HUD funds. The City has limited resources available to provide decent, safe, and affordable housing to very low-income residents, many of whom are elderly and live on fixed incomes. Fortunately, local non-profit organizations such as the Valdosta-Lowndes Habitat for Humanity have provided additional housing opportunities, which have in turn improved the surrounding areas. Additionally, through the CDBG and CHIP programs funded by HUD, the City has been able to rehabilitate and/or reconstruct housing for some of Valdosta's low income residents. The City, service providers, private sector and low-income Valdosta residents need the federal government and HUD in particular, as a major financial partner in the provision of affordable housing and revitalization of its neighborhoods. The City understands that these anticipated funds come with regulations that may present challenges to Valdosta's affordable housing efforts.

Locally, the City of Valdosta has taken considerable steps to alleviate barriers to affordable housing. The Neighborhood Development Department provides first-time homebuyer assistance through the Georgia Dream Homeownership Program and works with several non-profit organizations to provide educational and counseling services to potential homeowners. The Neighborhood Development Department facilitated a Housing Summit in 2008, which brought together local and state agencies, non-profit organizations, financial institutions, developers, and other interested parties to discuss barriers and possible solutions to obtaining affordable housing in the community. The Housing Summit is anticipated to become an annual workshop event. Lastly, the Planning and Zoning Division implemented a Residential Infill (R-I) zoning district as part of the City's new Land Development Regulations, which provides the opportunity for the development of architecturally appropriate, affordable housing units on small or irregularly shaped urban lots.

To help increase property values in urban neighborhoods, the City supports the construction of new owner-occupied infill housing. Additionally, the City will continue to support the rehabilitation of older urban homes by non-profit and for-profit developers who agree to sell the houses at affordable prices to low-income households. Furthermore, the City of Valdosta will continue to implement the recommendations made as part of the Analysis to Impediments of Fair Housing Choice, conducted in 2006. Finally, the City should push for sensible relaxation of underwriting criteria used by banks and other financial institutions that participate in the housing partnership. Other barriers will be identified, analyzed, and where appropriate changed. The City will work with local financial institutions to encourage activities that contribute to federally mandated Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) activities.



Strategy to Leverage Private Resources for Redevelopment

The City of Valdosta has identified three resources to encourage redevelopment within the Urban Redevelopment Area. First, in conjunction with the completion of the Urban Redevelopment Plan, Valdosta intends to adopt an Enterprise Zone ordinance for eligible areas.

Enterprise Zones enable the community to capitalize on potential incentives for businesses locating or expanding within the targeted areas. Within an area designated as an Enterprise Zone, the City of Valdosta may waive or reduce local regulatory fees, such as occupation taxes, license fees, and building inspection and/or permitting fees for qualifying businesses. Exemptions for ad valorem tax are also available in designated Enterprise Zones; however, such tax exemption must not exceed the schedule provided under the Enterprise Zone Employment Act. These abatements apply to residential and commercial properties, but exclude sales and use taxes and taxes imposed by the State, County, and school districts. Enterprise Zone designation remains in existence for ten years, but businesses that qualify for the tax exemption may receive the full ten year exemption schedule regardless of when the Enterprise Zone designation sunsets.

The following recommended incentives may apply to any new qualifying business that locates its primary business office/facility within a designated Enterprise Zone and increases employment by two (2) or more jobs.¹ This may be a new business or the expansion/reinvestment of an existing business, and includes retail, manufacturing, distribution, processing, telecom, tourism, research and development, new residential construction/rehabilitation businesses, finance, insurance, real estate, and other businesses listed in SIC codes 60-67, or a daycare.

I. Local Property Tax Exemption

City of Valdosta Ad Valorem Property Tax Exemption Schedule for Qualifying Businesses within an Enterprise Zone									
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
90%	80%	70%	60%	50%	40%	30%	20%	10%	0%

Qualifying businesses may receive the above exemption schedule which results in the following tax payments: for the first year, a business pays only 10% of the ad valorem tax; during the second year the business pays 20% of the ad valorem tax; during the third year the business pays 30% of the ad valorem tax; during the fourth year the business pays 40% of the ad valorem tax; during the fifth year the business pays 50% of the ad valorem tax; during the sixth year the business pays 60% of the ad valorem tax; during the seventh year the business pays 70% of the ad valorem tax; during the eighth year the business pays 80% of the ad valorem tax; and during the ninth year the business pays 90% of the ad valorem tax. In the tenth and final year, the business's ad valorem tax is paid at the full assessed rate.

¹ Persons hired for such jobs may not be married to one another according to state law.



2. Regulatory Fees

a. Business Occupational Tax Exemption.

For businesses scoring less than forty (40) points, the application fee to obtain a Valdosta business license may be waived. In addition, annual renewal fees for the first two (2) years may be exempted; however, this exemption does not include any fees associated with Georgia State licensing requirements, Valdosta Police Department permits, or Lowndes County Health Department permits that the business must obtain. Business Occupational Tax is based on anticipated gross sales of the business, so the fee (and therefore, exemption) will vary. The regular annual gross renewal fee will begin on year four (4), and will be calculated in the same manner as other business license certificate renewals.

b. Planning and Zoning Fee Reductions.

The following reduced fees may apply to any business scoring less than forty (40) points:

1. For Rezoning and Conditional Use Permit Application Fees, only the applicable legal advertising fees will be charged.
2. Sign Permit Fee – Reduced by fifty percent (50%)
3. Subdivision Plat Application Fee – Fee reduced by fifty percent (50%)

3. Building Permit Fee Reduction.

For new commercial construction or commercial rehabilitation projects with a total cost of less than \$100,000, building permit fees may be reduced by fifty percent (50%).

Qualifications for Enterprise Zone designation and documentation of need are as follows:

I. Pervasive Poverty

The City of Valdosta suffers from pervasive poverty that is widespread throughout the nominated area and is evidenced and established by the following criteria:

In the following nominated Census Block Groups, the poverty levels exceed 15% as reported by the U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 2000 Summary File 3 prepared by the U.S. Bureau of Census (2000).

Census Tract 501030, Block Group 3: 15.6% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0

Census Tract 501040, Block Group 1: 33.5% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0

Census Tract 501050, Block Group 1: 16.8% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501050, Block Group 2: 30.4% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0

Census Tract 501060, Block Group 1: 48.4% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501060, Block Group 2: 25.5% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501060, Block Group 3: 22.4% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0

Census Tract 501070, Block Group 2: 17.4% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0

Census Tract 501080, Block Group 2: 36.4% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501080, Block Group 3: 52.6% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0



Census Tract 501080, Block Group 4: 46.7% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501080, Block Group 5: 19.5% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0

Census Tract 501090, Block Group 2: 52.7% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501090, Block Group 3: 39.1% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0

Census Tract 501100, Block Group 1: 49.7% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501100, Block Group 2: 40.1% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0

Census Tract 501130, Block Group 1: 83.1% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501130, Block Group 2: 73.8% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501130, Block Group 3: 51.5% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501130, Block Group 4: 32.2% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0

Census Tract 501140, Block Group 1: 21.9% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0
Census Tract 501140, Block Group 2: 23.1% persons with income to poverty ratio <1.0

2. General Distress

The nominated areas suffer from general distress and adverse conditions as evidenced from the data collected in the City of Valdosta Urban Redevelopment Plan dated March 2009. Indicators of distress and adverse conditions are outlined as follows:

- a. The building conditions windshield survey contained within the Urban Redevelopment Plan indicates that a significant number of abandoned, dilapidated, and/or obsolete buildings exist within the nominated area.
- b. A high incidence of crime, as evidenced by crime statistics gathered for Valdosta during 2007, which indicated that the nominated areas contained 61% of the city's total crimes.

3. Underdevelopment

The nominated areas suffer from underdevelopment, as evidenced by Valdosta building permit data collected for the year 2007, which indicated that development activity in the nominated areas is 10% lower than development activity elsewhere in the City.

4. General Blight

Valdosta suffers from general blight as evidenced by an inclusion of the entire area within the designated urban redevelopment area as defined by paragraph (20) of Official Code of Georgia Annotated Section 36-61-2 for which an urban redevelopment plan will be adopted.

As a second resource to encourage redevelopment within the Urban Redevelopment Area, the City of Valdosta seeks to establish an Opportunity Zone. According to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs ("DCA"), Opportunity Zones are intended to encourage development and redevelopment in smaller geographic areas that are served by existing economic development programs. State resources are directed towards "pockets of poverty" in a way that can be supplemented by federal programs administered by DCA. Specific resources include the maximum job tax credit allowed under law, the use of tax credits against 100 percent of income tax liability and withholdings, as well as expansion of the definition of "business enterprise" to include all businesses of any nature. Valdosta's Urban Redevelopment Area is situated in twenty two (22) Census Block Groups with at least 15% or more in



poverty, making Opportunity Zones a strong possibility. Under Opportunity Zone designation, the following incentives may apply to qualifying businesses:

I. Job Tax Credit.

For any business locating or expanding within the designated Opportunity Zone that creates two or more full-time jobs (employees may not be married to each other) the business can apply for certification and may receive:

- a. An annual \$3,500 job tax credit for five years (beginning with year two through six after creation of such job).
- b. Use of job tax credits against 100 percent (100%) of income tax liability and Withholding.

Finally, a third method of promoting redevelopment is the use of funding options through the South Georgia Regional Development Center's loan programs. The loan programs available through the SGRDC work in conjunction with the banking industry to provide "gap" financing to viable businesses. Some of the programs available through the SGRDC are the Small Business Administration 504 Loan, the Small Business Administration Guaranteed 7(A) Loan, the Economic Development Administration Revolving Loan Fund, and the Rural Development IRP Revolving Loan Fund. Like banks, the SGRDC is highly regulated by federal agencies and must meet standards set by the government and the SGRDC's Board of Directors. Also similar to the banking industry, the SGRDC uses the five "Cs" of creditworthiness (character, capacity, capital, conditions, and collateral) to determine whether a loan proposal is worth considering. While eligibility of the project, loan amount, collateral requirements and other items vary from program to program, all loan programs sponsored by the SGRDC require bank participation in the loan, a down payment by the borrower, and a business plan.



Strategy for Implementing the Urban Redevelopment Plan

Implementation of the Urban Redevelopment Plan is expected to occur over two or more phases, as deemed necessary by the Mayor and City Council. Phases I and II are detailed below.

PHASE I – Formal adoption by resolution of the Urban Redevelopment Plan and Enterprise Zone; and organization and adoption of the Urban Redevelopment Commission and coordination of the Urban Redevelopment Plan’s administration.

In addition to adopting the Urban Redevelopment Plan and Enterprise Zones, the Mayor and City Council will create an Urban Redevelopment Commission, an advisory board charged with the responsibility of overseeing the Urban Redevelopment Plan’s implementation. The Mayor and City Council will create and adopt by resolution a Valdosta Urban Redevelopment Commission. Members of this Commission should be community stakeholders interested in redevelopment and economic development, and will be appointed by the Mayor and City Council. Responsibilities of urban redevelopment agencies can be found in Official Code of Georgia Annotated Sections 36-61-17 through 36-61-19, which is included as part of the Urban Redevelopment Law in Appendix G.

Next, the City of Valdosta will apply for Opportunity Zone designation through the Department of Community Affairs (“DCA”). This process is anticipated to take approximately thirty days. Once DCA approves the Opportunity Zone designation, the City will be able to offer qualifying businesses in these zones the maximum job tax credit allowed by law.

The Valdosta Urban Redevelopment Commission will also create an information package for prospective new businesses. Ideally, this would be available in multi-media format, such as a print brochure, compact disc, and/or website, and will detail the incentives available for businesses that locate or expand in Enterprise Zone and Opportunity Zone areas. Additionally, other redevelopment projects that the City is undertaking (see the *Opportunities for Improving the Urban Redevelopment Area* section of this Plan) should be highlighted in the information package. Press releases, public service announcements, and other forms of mass media communications should be pursued by the Commission in order to communicate the benefits of the Enterprise and Opportunity Zones to prospective businesses.

PHASE II – After completion of Phase I activities, the Valdosta Urban Redevelopment Commission should focus on preparing a detailed and prioritized list of properties to be redeveloped. These “targeted redevelopment properties” may encompass empty lots, or parcels containing vacant or dilapidated structures and are those identified as adversely affecting the tax base and being uninhabitable, unsafe, and unworthy of rehabilitation. At a minimum, this list should contain the following information about each property: Property Address, Property Map and Parcel Number, Property Owner Name, Property Owner Address (if different from property address), Current Assessed Value, Condition, and Zoning District. The windshield survey conducted for the Urban Redevelopment Plan should aid in preparing such a list. The purpose of the targeted redevelopment properties list is to facilitate the orderly redevelopment of those properties having a negative impact on the surrounding area. It is important that redevelopment plans for vacant lots and properties with dilapidated, unoccupied buildings are addressed before any occupied structures.



Future phases for the purpose of redevelopment as stated within this plan may be undertaken as the Mayor, City Council and Urban Redevelopment Commission see fit. Additionally, this Urban Redevelopment Plan may be amended or modified at any time by the Urban Redevelopment Commission through the use of the Amendment Worksheet provided in Appendix F, and adopted by a formal resolution of the Mayor and City Council. Furthermore, this plan is able to be expanded countywide via an intergovernmental agreement with Lowndes County, if such a need arises.

The timeline for implementing the Urban Redevelopment Plan is as follows:

Implementation Schedule

Public Hearing	January 27, 2009
Adopt Urban Redevelopment Plan	March 5, 2009
Adopt Enterprise Zone	March 5, 2009
Establish Urban Redevelopment Commission	March 5, 2009
Pursue Opportunity Zone Designation	March 2009
Receive Opportunity Zone Designation (estimate)	March 31, 2009
Offer Information Packages for New Businesses	July 1, 2009
Create Targeted Redevelopment Properties List	July-August 2009