

GREATER LOWNDES 2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Community Assessment

*Lowndes County and the Cities of Valdosta, Hahira,
Lake Park, Dasher, and Remerton*



*Prepared by the
South Georgia
Regional Development Center
September 2005*



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the *Community Assessment* is to present a factual and conceptual foundation upon which the rest of the *Greater Lowndes 2030 Comprehensive Plan* is built. A thorough understanding of where we are as a community will aid effective planning for our future

1.2 Preparation

In compliance with the Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning set forth by the State of Georgia, the *Community Assessment* was prepared through a collaborative effort by staff from each community and the South Georgia Regional Development Center (SGRDC). Data was collected from various sources including the Census Bureau, personal interviews, and a review of past trends.

1.3 Content

The Community Assessment includes four basic components:

- 1) A list of potential issues and opportunities the community wants to address
- 2) An analysis of existing land use and development patterns
- 3) An analysis of the community's consistency with the State Quality Community Objectives based on existing policies, actions, and development trends
- 4) Analysis of supporting data and information for seven different community elements: population, economic development, housing, natural and cultural resources, community facilities and services, intergovernmental coordination, and transportation. *

* The complete analysis of supporting data and information is presented within the associated Appendices.

The information presented in the *Community Assessment* should not be considered finalized, as, for the most part, the various community stakeholders were not highly involved in its development. Instead, this information is only meant to generate discussion for preparation of the *Community Agenda*

2. STATEWIDE PLANNING GOALS

The State Department of Community Affairs has established the following goals to assist communities in implementing their Comprehensive Plan. These goals will serve as a guide for the development of the Greater Lowndes 2030 Vision and Implementation Program within the *Community Agenda*.

2.1 Economic Development

To achieve a growing and balanced economy, consistent with the prudent management of the state's resources that equitably benefits all segments of the population.

2.2 Natural and Cultural Resources

To conserve and protect the environmental, natural and cultural resources of Georgia's communities, regions and the state.

2.3 Community Facilities and Services

To ensure the provision of community facilities and services throughout the state to support efficient growth and development patterns that will protect and enhance the quality of life of Georgia's residents.

2.4 Housing

To ensure that all residents of the state have access to adequate and affordable housing

2.5 Land Use and Transportation

To ensure the coordination of land use planning and transportation planning throughout the state in support of efficient growth and development patterns that will promote sustainable economic development, protection of natural and cultural resources and provision of adequate and affordable housing.

2.6 Intergovernmental Coordination

To ensure the coordination of local planning efforts with other local service providers and authorities, with neighboring communities and with state and regional plans and programs.

3. POTENTIAL ISSUES and OPPORTUNITIES

The following is a list of typical issues and opportunities provided in the *State Planning Recommendations* that may be applicable to the Greater Lowndes communities. This initial step is intended to yield an all-inclusive list of **potential** issues and opportunities for further study. This list will be modified based on stakeholder input received during preparation of the *Community Agenda*.

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

3.1 Population

3.1.1 Issues:

a) Increasing percentage of elderly –

Based on existing trends, all of Lowndes County (with the exception of Remerton) is experiencing a rise in elderly population. We can expect this rise to continue as Lowndes County is marketed as a Triple-Crown Hometown. This rise presents a challenge in that some elderly residents may require more services from a community including healthcare, recreation, and transportation along with often desiring more accessible forms of housing.

b) Migration of young professionals to other areas –

Although greater Lowndes County has a stable percentage of young population due to the presence of Valdosta State University, Valdosta Technical College, and Georgia Military College; a large number of graduates from these institutions leave the area in search of internship and employment opportunities.

3.1.2 Opportunities:

a) Increasing percentage of elderly –

This rise is also an opportunity in that a stable retirement population can enhance a community's economic base (due to their larger disposable income) while also providing a diverse component to the general demographics. Greater Lowndes actually has a lower percentage of elderly than state and national averages increasing market opportunities.

3.2 Economic Development

3.2.1 Issues:

a) Lack of high-wage jobs for local residents—

The community has an abundance of low paying retail jobs which leads to a low unemployment rate however; many people are underemployed and often work two or three minimum wage jobs to make ends meet. There is a growing disparity in average wages between South Georgia, the rest of Georgia, and the United States.

b) Workforce inadequacy –

In some instances, the community is experiencing a trend referred to as 'brain-drain', as some of the brightest high school and college graduates leave for better employment opportunities. This leads to employer dissatisfaction with the quality of employees and an increased need to grow a workforce able to meet the demands of higher paying industry. Prospective industries may be hesitant to locate in the community because of workforce inadequacy.

3.2.2 Opportunities:

a) Executive office park –

Greater Lowndes has the opportunity to establish an executive office park targeted toward regional headquarters. While pockets of professional development exist throughout the community, an executive office park with easy access to major transportation corridors does not.

b) Development of Existing Industrial Properties -

Large tracts of land designated for industrial use are currently undeveloped. Once served with infrastructure (if not already), these holdings could accommodate heavy or light manufacturing facilities.

c) Stable Economic Resources -

Greater Lowndes has several economic resources to encourage and promote viable economic development including, the Chamber of Commerce, the Industrial Authority, the Central Valdosta Development Authority, the Conference Center and Tourism Authority and several Entrepreneurial Support Programs,

d) Targeted Business Clusters Study -

An ongoing study, sponsored by the Partnership for Metropolitan Development, will help determine what business sectors are most suitable for the Greater Lowndes region, ensuring efforts are focused on common goals and thus more effective.

3.3 Housing

3.3.1 Issues:

a) Lack of affordable housing –

There is an observable lack of quality housing for low to middle income families. Some local regulations are impediments to affordable housing and should be reviewed to allow redevelopment on existing, nonconforming lots. Lack of infrastructure or capacity in several areas is an additional obstacle to affordable housing.

b) Abundance of rental properties –

Due to the lack of affordable housing ownership opportunities, there is an overabundance of rental properties in some areas. This has contributed to concentrations of absentee landlords in particular areas and degradation of established residential areas.

c) Balance between available housing and major employment or commercial centers -

As housing centers continue to push into the unincorporated areas of the county, development occurs in a non-connected fashion causing the commute to major employment and commercial centers to lengthen.

3.3.2 Opportunities:

a) Quickly growing housing market –

In the past five years, Greater Lowndes has seen a dramatic increase in the number of housing units constructed throughout the community, resulting primarily from the rapidly growing population

b) Numerous infill opportunities—

Throughout the community, there are several opportunities for residential infill where infrastructure already exists. This includes downtown areas of Valdosta.

3.4 Natural and Cultural Resources

3.4.1 Issues:

a) Disappearing rural scenery –

As is a challenge with many rural communities, rural landscape and farmland is gradually developing into commercial and residential subdivisions. If current trends continue, Greater Lowndes will lose one of its most attractive features.

b) Environmental pollution challenges (water bodies, air, etc.) –

As development encroaches upon our natural resources, certain streams and lakes are beginning to experience point source and non-point source pollution.

c) New development locating in areas that should not be developed i.e.) environmentally sensitive areas or farmland –

As the prime land in Greater Lowndes is reduced through development, farmland and environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands and floodplains face pressures for development. Increased regulations have helped to protect these areas however the challenges continue to exist. State and National programs are available to aid in this protection.

d) Many trees lost to new development –

Some communities still lack adequate tree and landscape ordinances. This absence presents a challenge as many landowners clear cut land prior to development thus eliminating any opportunity for preserving existing vegetation.

3.4.2 Opportunities:

a) Establishment of connected network of greenspace and parkland –

The existing river corridors traversing through Greater Lowndes could serve as a foundation for this network. Several tracts of open space have already been purchased through the County's former Greenspace Plan. Conservation or Environmental Resource zoning exists in both Lowndes County and Valdosta providing an appropriate tool for such establishment.

b) Established Parks & Recreation Program—

The City of Valdosta and Lowndes County have a well established Parks and Recreation program which provides an increasing amount of recreation opportunities. A Master Plan has recently been completed which provides recommendations for future facilities.

c) Protection of historic resources –

Although a number of historic resources have already been removed, there is still a substantial number of resources throughout Greater Lowndes, especially within the City of Valdosta. Valdosta has an established Historic Preservation Commission and local and national register historic districts. The City of Hahira also has a local historic district. Continued protection of these resources is encouraged.

d) Places for arts activities and performances –

Several well-established art venues are located throughout the community including the Annette Howell Turner Center for the Arts, Theater Guild Valdosta, VSU, and Mathis Auditorium. The opportunity exists for development of an official fine arts center, civic center, and agri-business center.

3.5 Community Facilities and Services

3.5.1 Issues:

a) Public facility capacity for attracting new development –

This is a challenge for some of the smaller communities in Lowndes County whose existing systems are either nonexistent or at capacity. Reduced funding increases the challenge of addressing these issues. These communities may need to examine the economic feasibility of providing individual versus joint services. The larger communities have established water/sewer master plans which aid in ensuring adequate public facility capacity for new development.

3.5.2 Opportunities:

a) Shared cost of providing public services and facilities for new development –

Both the developers and local governments work collectively to share the cost of providing public services and facilities. Improved planning could ensure services and facilities are used most efficiently as development occurs.

b) Establishment of Capital Improvement Program—

Each of the Greater Lowndes communities has the opportunity to establish a capital improvement program, which would aid in planning future investments.

c) Consolidation of services and/or facilities—

The opportunity exists for consolidation of facilities and services such as water/sewer in several of the Greater Lowndes communities. Additionally, there is an opportunity for consolidation of the two existing public school systems resulting in an increased efficiency of service delivery and facility use.

3.6 Land Use and Development

3.6.1 Issues:

a) No clear boundary where town stops and rural county begins—

As development continues to sprawl into the rural portions of the county, the boundary between cities and the county is increasingly blurred. The Urban Service Area should be enforced and an Urban Fringe Area should be established to clearly delineate urban and rural growth.

b) No mix of uses (i.e. corner groceries or drugstores) within neighborhoods / Lack of neighborhood centers to serve adjacent neighborhoods -

Many neighborhoods are developed in areas with no existing commercial services and uses are clearly separated. Several of the existing zoning ordinances present obstacles to mixed-use developments.

c) Much land dedicated to parking or other paved areas –

With the development of large commercial centers, a large number of parking spaces is required by existing ordinances. The location of these parking areas in front of the development decreases overall visual attractiveness. Additionally, stormwater runoff presents a challenge due to the large amount of impervious surface throughout several established corridors. The establishment of shared parking areas and increased use of pervious parking materials would aid in this issue.

d) Unattractive commercial areas, sprawl development, or visual clutter along roadways
Strip zoning and thus strip development has allowed some corridors to become visually and physically cluttered. Lack of interconnected access through these developments increases traffic congestion on major arteries.

e) Unattractive new subdivisions –

The typical “cookie cutter” subdivisions built on clear-cut land do still continue to develop throughout the county. This is most often seen in the moderately priced range, where there is the greatest demand for housing. However, Greater Lowndes does have numerous innovative and aesthetically pleasing subdivisions both established and newly developed.

f) Development patterns that don’t encourage interaction with neighbors –

A substantial number of new residential development includes a high number of cul-de-sacs. Often, development is not centered around community space and neighborhoods are not interconnected.

g) No mix of housing sizes, types, and income levels within neighborhoods –

Typically neighborhoods are developed under conventional zoning districts allowing for only one type of housing, resulting in very homogenous neighborhoods.

h) Schools located in neighborhoods, so children can walk to school –

As population continues to increase, the demand for school space also rises. Both school systems have stated plans for expansion. Development of some new schools has occurred in lowly populated areas thus forcing a dependency on bussing or driving students. The opportunity exists for future school development to locate near existing or planned residential neighborhoods; however, a challenge is presented due to the amount of land required by each facility.

3.6.2 Opportunities:

a) Improved manufactured home standards –

Manufactured housing is an affordable and popular option for residents in Greater Lowndes County. New standards have been adopted increasing the compatibility of manufactured housing with site built housing. All of our communities have regulations designed for incorporating this type of housing into the market.

b) Undeveloped vacant sites close in to town –

There are several commercial centers throughout Greater Lowndes that have been abandoned or are seldom frequented. These present great redevelopment opportunities, especially since they are often located in densely populated areas and already have necessary infrastructure. A complete inventory of these sites should be considered along with public-private partnerships for redevelopment

c) Pleasant community gathering spaces –

Greater Lowndes has a significant number of parks and community facilities, with the majority located in neighborhoods. Additional spaces of this type would benefit the entire county. A concentrated effort should be made to ensure the majority of residents are within walking / biking distant of a community space.

d) Sense of place - visitors knowing when they've arrived –

Each community within Lowndes County does have a unique character, which is something to be protected and enhanced. However, portions of the community abutting the interstate or major corridors are highly nondescript, and could lead to an “Anyplace, USA” image. Collectively and individually, the Greater Lowndes communities need to determine what type of character they would like to pursue and protect, whether it is “rural”, “suburban”, “commercial, industrial center”, etc. This character should be incorporated into countywide marketing campaigns.

e) Some areas and neighborhoods in need of revitalization –

Portions of the community are in need of revitalization. The City of Valdosta has taken significant steps towards addressing this issue as plans for 15 Neighborhood Revitalization Strategies are being incorporated. There are some additional areas throughout the County, which are showing signs of disinvestment.

f) Town centers declining and growing –

Each community's town center is facing unique challenges and opportunities for revitalization. Programs established in some of the communities are encouraging redevelopment of buildings and establishment of uses, which will attract residents. Scheduling of regular community events encourages citizens to visit downtown.

g) Developer input regarding local development approval process, especially for innovative projects –

Opportunities for communication between local government staff and the development community have increased dramatically. Staff is willing to listen to developers' concerns through organized and informal meetings and amend regulations if appropriate. Developers have increased their involvement and awareness of government processes. The County's adoption of a Unified Land Development Code should help streamline the development process.

h) Support of zoning and development regulations / Neighborhood opposition to higher density or new/innovative developments –

Greater Lowndes does not have an unrealistic amount of opposition to development. Only in extreme circumstances do large numbers of residents come out against a particular development. For the most part, Greater Lowndes supports zoning and the use of land development regulations. Not surprisingly, opposition to zoning is most often felt from individuals who are unable to do what they would like with property they currently own. Additionally, Greater Lowndes does experience its share of discussion between property owners' rights and the greater community protection and benefit.

3.7 Intergovernmental Coordination

3.7.1 Issues:

a) Communication and collaboration between various governmental entities—

Increased communication and collaboration between the various jurisdictions, school systems, and authorities would improve future planning efforts and increase effectiveness of individual efforts.

3.7.2 Opportunities:

a) Regional or multi-jurisdictional cooperation –

The state required inter-governmental agreement (House Bill 489) has enhanced inter-jurisdictional cooperation. Lowndes County and City of Valdosta have several joint departments and the County provides several services to the smaller jurisdictions. The opportunity does exist for increased cooperation regarding development occurring within the urban fringe area between the County and the City of Valdosta.

b) Local officials open to new development ideas –

All of the Greater Lowndes communities are highly open to new development ideas. The County Commission and each City Council is always interested in attracting growth to their community, especially when the development is cutting edge.

3.8 Transportation

3.8.1 Issues:

a) Few alternatives to using a car to get places –

Previous traffic planning has only focused on moving automobiles resulting in a lack of public transit or adequate bike/pedestrian facilities. Recent steps towards promoting alternative modes of transportation have been taken through the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the development of a regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

b) Increased traffic challenges –

As the area continues to grow, traffic of course increases. Continued sprawling of residential and strip commercial development will only increase road congestion. Greater attention should be given to the impact individual developments will have on the greater transportation system.

3.8.2 Opportunities:

a) Public transit –

With the exception of the MIDS ride request program, there is no system for public transit. In the past, there have been few areas of sufficient density to warrant such a system. Development focuses on character areas would establish the necessary density. Public opinion seems to support such a system.

b) Establishment of pedestrian and bicycle facilities –

While increasing efforts are occurring to address this issue, a community-wide bike and pedestrian friendly mindset should be promoted. The City of Valdosta has incorporated a 3-mile multiuse trail, which it should continue expanding. However, throughout the county/cities, there is still a significant need for bike trails and sidewalks, especially connecting neighborhoods to commercial/recreation centers. Additionally, there are some existing bike/pedestrian facilities in need of repair and improvement.

c) Improved traffic management—

Through the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the City of Valdosta's Traffic Management Center increased efforts for traffic management are occurring. Greater evaluation of traffic impacts of proposed developments would help mitigate traffic congestion.

4. EXISTING LAND USE and DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

In order to adequately plan for the future of Greater Lowndes, we must have a strong understanding of our communities' current development patterns. This section includes the existing land use maps, identification of areas requiring special attention, and recommended character areas. This information allows us to identify current development trends while planning for future growth issues including protection of natural and cultural resources and the provision of appropriate infrastructure.

4.1 Existing Land Use Maps

Maps 1-4 detail the existing use of land within each of the Greater Lowndes communities. These maps were created based on physical site visits and information received from the Lowndes County Tax Assessor's Office. The depicted uses may or may not be accurately reflected by the property's current zoning classification. Additionally, this information will be revised on a regular basis as a more thorough investigation of the land uses occurs through monthly site visits.

The existing land use maps include the following categories:

4.1.1 Agriculture/Forestry

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

4.1.2 Commercial

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

4.1.3 Industrial

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

4.1.4 Parks/Recreation/Conservation

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

4.1.5 Public/Institutional

Includes certain state, federal or local government uses, and institutional land uses.

4.1.6 Residential

Predominate use is single-family and multi-family dwelling units organized into general categories of net densities.

4.1.7 Transportation/Communication/Utilities

Includes major transportation routes, public transit stations, power generation plants, railroad facilities, radio towers, telephone switching stations, airports, or other similar uses.

4.1.8 Undeveloped/Vacant

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

4.2 Areas Requiring Special Attention –

Upon evaluation of the existing land use patterns and trends within each jurisdiction, the following areas requiring special attention were identified.

- Areas of significant natural resources include **wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, and river corridors** particularly where they are likely to be intruded upon or otherwise impacted by development;
- Areas where rapid development or change of land uses is likely to occur such as the **US 41 North Corridor Bemiss Road Corridor, North Valdosta Road, and Inner Perimeter Road;**
- Areas where the pace of development has and/or may outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation facilities such as **Mt. Zion Church Road, Knight’s Academy;**
- Areas in need of redevelopment and/or significant improvements to aesthetics or attractiveness (including strip commercial corridors) such as the **Ashley Street Corridor, the 5-Points Commercial Center, and areas in the southern part of Valdosta;**
- Large abandoned structures or sites, including those that may be environmentally contaminated such as **brownfields;**
- Areas with significant infill development opportunities (scattered vacant sites) such as within **downtown Valdosta and Hahira;**
- Areas of significant disinvestment, levels of poverty, and/or unemployment substantially higher than average levels for the community as a whole such as the **designated neighborhood revitalization areas.**

These areas will be incorporated into the depicted Character Areas for future planning.

4.3 Recommended Character Areas –

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

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

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

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

Maps 5—8 depict the recommended boundaries of these potential character areas and also the areas requiring special attention identified in the previous section. This map is still in *draft* form and will be finalized during the *Community Agenda* development process.

4.3.1 General Areas

4.3.1.1 Conservation/Greenspace areas:

Undeveloped, natural lands with significant natural features including flood plains, wetlands, wildlife management areas, and other environmentally sensitive areas not suitable for development of any kind.

4.3.1.2 Rural/Agricultural areas:

Primarily open or cultivated pastures, farmlands, or woodlands

4.3.1.3 Industrial areas:

Land used for manufacturing, assembly, wholesale trade, and distribution activities. May include uses producing noise, vibration, smoke, odors, etc.

4.3.1.4 Historic areas:

Designated local and national register historic districts containing features, landmarks, civic or cultural uses of historic interest

4.3.2 Residential Areas

4.3.2.1 Rural Residential areas:

Rural, undeveloped land like to face development pressures for lower density (1 unit per 2+ acres) residential development. Typically has low pedestrian orientation and access, very large lots, open space, pastoral views, and high degree of building separation.

4.3.2.2 Suburban Residential area:

Likely to evolve with low pedestrian orientation, high to moderate degree of building separation, predominately residential, varied street patterns often curvilinear and consisting of numerous cul-de-sacs.

4.3.2.3 Established Residential areas:

Neighborhoods with relatively well-maintained housing possessing a distinct identity through architectural style, lot and street design, and high rates of home-ownership.

4.3.2.4 Traditional Neighborhood areas:

Residential areas in older part of community, typically developed prior to WWII. Includes smaller lots, buildings close to or at the front property line, predominance of alleys. May be experiencing decline in home-ownership.

4.3.2.5 Neighborhood Revitalization areas:

Areas with poor housing conditions, large areas of vacant land, deteriorating/unoccupied structures, low rates of home ownership.

4.3.3 Activity Centers

4.3.3.1 Regional Activity Centers:

Concentration of regionally marketed commercial and retail centers, office and employment areas, higher-education facilities, sports, and recreational complexes. Characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic, on-site parking, and low internal open space.

4.3.3.2 Local Activity Centers:

Community focal point with concentration of activities such as general retail, service commercial, professional office, recreation.

4.3.3.3 Community Crossroads:

Commercial activity area located at highway intersection. Typically automobile focused with a mixture of uses to serve highway passers-by, rural, and agricultural areas.

4.3.3.4 Downtown areas:

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

4.3.3.5 Commercial Redevelopment Areas:

Declining, unattractive, vacant or under-utilized strip shopping center. Characterized by high degree of access by vehicular traffic, on-site parking, low degree of open space.

4.3.4 Corridors:

4.3.4.1 In-Town Corridors:

Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a street or highway in town that is already or likely to experience uncontrolled strip development if growth is not properly managed.

4.3.4.2 Gateway Corridors:

Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that serves as an important entrance or means of access to the community.

4.3.4.3 Scenic Corridors:

Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that has significant natural, historic, or cultural features and scenic or pastoral views.

4.3.4.4 Major Highway Corridors:

Developed or undeveloped land on both sides of designated high volume transportation facility, such as arterial roads and highways.

5. CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES

The State Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has established a number of Quality Community Objectives that further elaborate the Statewide Planning Goals (listed under Section 2), based on growth and development issues identified in local and regional plans throughout the state. These objectives are intended to provide guidance, or targets, for local governments to achieve in developing and implementing their Comprehensive Plan.

Quality Community Objectives: The Quality Community Objectives are separated into four different areas of community development:

- 1) Development Patterns
- 2) Resource Conservation
- 3) Social and Economic Development
- 4) Governmental Relations

Staff has evaluated Greater Lowndes’ current policies, activities, and development patterns for consistency with these objectives utilizing an assessment tool provided by DCA. The results of this assessment will be added to the list of potential issues and opportunities in Section III.

5.1 Development Patterns

5.1.1 Traditional Neighborhood Objective:

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

5.1.1.1 Assessment (Zoning Ordinances):

- a) Each of our communities has its own unique zoning code, which, for the most part, **separate commercial, residential and retail uses** in each district with. However, the Residential-Professional (R-P) district and the Planned Development (PD) district both provide options for mixed-use developments.
- b) Our community does not currently have in place ordinances that allow **neo-traditional development “by right”** so that developers do not have to go through a long variance process. Developers would be required to complete a variance process, which should only be approved in the case of demonstrated hardship, or developers are able to request a planned development approval.

5.1.1.2 Recommendation (Zoning Ordinances):

- a) Each community’s existing zoning ordinance should be reviewed and amended to allow for mixed-use developments and “neo-traditional” developments as a matter of right. This amendment would increase the quality and creative factors of new development while also encouraging in-fill development.

5.1.1.3 Assessment (Tree and Landscape Ordinances):

- a) The Cities of Valdosta and Hahira both have **street tree ordinances** that require new development to plant shade-bearing trees appropriate to our climate. Lowndes County is in the process of developing a similar ordinance.
- b) The City of Valdosta has an **organized Tree Commission**, which is charged with regulating planting of trees in public places. No other communities within Greater Lowndes have such an organization.

- c) The Keep Lowndes-Valdosta Beautiful Program strives to educate the communities on the importance of keeping our **public areas (commercial, retail districts, parks) clean and safe.**

5.1.1.4 Recommendation (Tree and Landscape Ordinances):

- a) Communities, which currently do not have Tree and Landscape Ordinances, should adopt appropriate regulations to encourage the planting of shade trees in conjunction with new development. Communities should also establish a regular tree-planting program to improve the pedestrian-friendliness and stormwater management capability of public spaces.

5.1.1.5 Assessment (Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities):

- a) The majority of **sidewalks and vegetation** throughout the community are well maintained by the appropriate jurisdiction however, there are some areas that are not ADA accessible, have high amounts of cracking and shifting, and are infiltrated by weeds and hanging tree limbs. These hazards may limit the number of people choosing to walk in these areas.
- b) There are few areas throughout the community where **errands can be made on foot** should that be desired, with the exception of strip commercial centers.
- c) Some schools are located near neighborhoods allowing for some of our **children to walk or ride to school** however; the majority of new residential subdivisions are developed more than 1 mile away from a school or there are no adequate sidewalks for children to walk or ride safely.

5.1.1.6 Recommendations (Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities):

- a) Communities should ensure they have a well-managed sidewalk maintenance program. Disrepaired and non-ADA compliant sections of sidewalks should be replaced. As roads are repaved or widened sidewalks and bike lanes should be incorporated.
- b) Sidewalks and bike lanes should be established in areas of commercial activity and connect educational facilities with nearby residential areas.
- c) Future schools should locate near existing residential neighborhoods and future residential subdivisions should be planned near existing schools.

5.1.2 Infill Development Objective:

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

5.1.2.1 Assessment:

- a) Currently our community does not have a comprehensive **inventory of vacant sites and buildings** available for redevelopment and/or infill development. The Valdosta Land Bank Authority does maintain a list of properties it owns.
- b) There are several **brownfield** and **greyfield** redevelopment opportunities throughout the community. This has been an increasingly common issue of discussion and several staff members have participated in appropriate training.

- c) Past development trends have not been focused on **nodal development** (compacted near intersections rather than spread along a major road.) The previous **activity centers** throughout Greater Lowndes were very broad based and did not necessarily support nodal development.
- d) Based on current zoning ordinances throughout Greater Lowndes, the only district allowing for **small-lot development** (5000 SF or less) for some uses is the Planned Development District, which is site plan specific.
- e) Habitat for Humanity assists in infill development through its build program.

5.1.2.2 Recommendations:

- a) A comprehensive list of vacant sites and buildings available for redevelopment and/or infill should be established and maintained by the Greater Lowndes Planning Commission or another appropriate party.
- b) Increased efforts, in the form of public-private partnerships and possible incentives, should be made to attract developers to Brownfield and Greyfield sites.
- c) Character areas should be established to promote nodal development (compacted near intersections rather than spread along a major roads.)
- d) Zoning Ordinances should be reviewed to allow for small-lot development as a matter of right in appropriate areas.

5.1.3 Sense of Place Objective:

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

5.1.3.1 Assessment:

- a) “If someone dropped from the sky into our community, he would know immediately where he was, based on our **distinct characteristics**.” - In some areas, this is true especially in the historic portions of the City of Valdosta, the maintained natural areas of Lowndes County, and the cores of our smaller cities. Many residential developments throughout Greater Lowndes do have distinct characteristics however, there is also a large number of “cookie-cutter” subdivisions.
- b) In an effort to delineate the areas of our community that are important to our **history and heritage**, the City of Valdosta and Lowndes County have both established driving tours to highlight the historic, cultural, and natural resources important to our community’s history and heritage. The City of Valdosta also maintains local and national register historic districts although at times, these experience extreme development pressures.
- c) None of the Greater Lowndes communities have ordinances that regulate the **building materials used in our highly visible areas**.
- d) All of the municipalities within Greater Lowndes have some form of **signage regulations**.
- e) There are still a large number of rural areas throughout Lowndes County. Although the County did produce a Greenspace Report in response to the State’s former Greenspace Program, this did not address the **protection of existing farmland**. Currently, the Comprehensive Plan is the only adopted plan in place for the protection of these rural spaces.

5.1.3.2 Recommendations:

- a) The community should determine what type of “sense of place” it would like to exhibit and develop appropriate tools to establish that image. New residential and commercial developments should be encouraged to implement innovative design methods.
- b) Additional steps should be taken to protect the established historic areas from further degradation. Increased public awareness of existing historic tours would improve opportunities towards heritage tourism efforts.
- c) In some communities enhanced sign regulations would support a decrease in visual clutter by further limiting size, number, and location of signs.
- d) A designated rural space and farmland protection program should be established.

5.1.4 Transportation Alternatives Objective:

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

5.1.4.1 Assessment:

- a) Greater Lowndes does not have any formal means of **public transportation** with the exception of Lowndes County MIDS, which is a caller requested service. The argument could be made that there are few areas of substantial residential and commercial density to warrant public transportation. However, in specific corridor areas, such as downtown and the mall area, citizens may be inclined to participate should the service be offered.
- b) Currently the regulation that new development connects with existing development through a **street network** as opposed to a single entry/exit is not effectively enforced through the Greater Lowndes communities. The majority of communities require new development to provide a stub out to adjacent, undeveloped properties however the regulation requiring the adjacent developer to connect to the provided stub out is not strictly enforced. The common opinion supports independently bounded developments, without providing for interconnected access.
- c) The quantity and quality of **sidewalk networks** vary with each community. There are several areas necessitating sidewalk improvements or sidewalks installations especially in areas with key destinations.
- d) In some of our communities, developers are required to provide **user-friendly sidewalks**.
- e) The SGRDC has adopted a regional **bike and pedestrian plan** however; no plan has been adopted at the local level. The regional plan identified possible routes throughout the region including local routes.
- f) Although commercial and retail developments are allowed to **share parking areas**, it is not an easily accessible opportunity and is only approved in circumstances of hardship.

5.1.4.2 Recommendations:

- a) Focusing development on core areas will increase the amount of density and thus the viability of a public transportation system.
- b) Subdivision regulations for each community should be amended to require interconnected access of all new residential and commercial developments along with the requirement for shared parking areas.

- c) Areas for improved, universally designed sidewalks and bike routes should be identified in the Short Term Work Program (STWP).

5.1.5 Regional Identity Objective:

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

5.1.5.1 Assessment:

- a) Several areas within our community are characteristic of the region in terms of **architectural styles and heritage** however over time a large number of these examples has been destroyed.
- b) Our community is connected to the surrounding region for **economic livelihood** through businesses that process local agricultural products.
- c) Historically, there has not been a large focus placed on encouraging **businesses that create products that draw on our regional heritage** (i.e. mountain, agricultural, metropolitan, coastal) although a trend towards heritage tourism is developing.
- d) Our community participates in the Georgia Department of Economic Development’s **regional tourism partnership**.
- e) An increasing amount of attention is being placed on **tourism opportunities based on the unique characteristics of our region**.
- f) Due to the variety of cultural, historical, educational, and entertainment venues, the Greater Lowndes community contributes to the region, and draws from the region, as a **source of local culture, commerce, entertainment, and education**.

5.1.5.2 Recommendations:

- a) A clear definition of our region and its unique characteristics needs defining in order to increase protection and enhancement of these characteristics.
- b) Greater Lowndes' natural and historic resources should be protected and marketed as potential eco-tourism opportunities.

5.2 Resource Conservation

5.2.1 Heritage Preservation Objective:

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

5.2.1.1 Assessment:

- a) The City of Valdosta has a designated local historic district and 5 designated national register districts.
- b) The City of Valdosta’s **historic preservation commission actively reviews** requests for Certificates of Appropriateness on a monthly basis.
- c) There is a strong desire by the City of Valdosta for **new development to complement historic development** and there are design guidelines in place to ensure this happens. However, compliance with the design guidelines sometimes becomes cost prohibitive causing some developers to locate outside of the historic district.

5.2.1.2 Recommendations:

- a) The other Greater Lowndes municipalities should look at designating their individual historic resources.
- b) Additional efforts should be made in educating the community on the importance of historic resources and fostering a preservation-friendly mentality.

5.2.2 Open Space Preservation Objective:

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

5.2.2.1 Assessment:

- a) In compliance with the now nonexistent Governor’s Greenspace Program, Lowndes County completed a greenspace report, which included the conservation of 5 parcels throughout the County. Currently, no **formal greenspace plan** is implemented.
- b) Due to lack of funding, no Greater Lowndes community is **actively preserving greenspace** through direct purchase. New development is encouraged to set aside land and this is often accomplished through Planned Developments.
- c) There is no formal **local land conservation program** and none of the Greater Lowndes communities work with state or national land conservation programs to preserve environmentally important areas in the community.
- d) Lowndes County is in the process of adopting a **conservation subdivision ordinance**, which should increase the amount of green space preserved.

5.2.2.2 Recommendations:

- a) All jurisdictions, especially the County, should establish some form of green space conservation program. Ideally, the jurisdictions will work together to establish an interconnected network of greenspace throughout Greater Lowndes.

5.2.3 Environmental Protection Objective:

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

5.2.3.1 Assessment:

- a) No Greater Lowndes community currently has a **comprehensive natural resources inventory**.
- b) Because the inventory has not yet been developed, it is not used **to steer development away from environmentally sensitive areas**.
- c) All communities within Greater Lowndes have passed the **Part V Environmental Ordinances** and are actively enforcing them.
- d) The City of Valdosta has a **tree preservation ordinance**, which it actively enforces.
- e) As part of the tree and landscape ordinance, the City of Valdosta enforces a **tree-replanting ordinance** for new development.

- f) As required by their National Pollutant Discharge Elimination Systems (NPDES) permit, the City of Valdosta and Lowndes County both use **stormwater best management practices** for all new development.
- g) Lowndes County and the Cities of Valdosta and Hahira currently have **land use measures** that help protect the natural resources in our community (i.e. floodplain regulations)

5.2.3.2 Recommendations:

- a) A comprehensive natural resources inventory should be completed identifying the defining natural resources of Greater Lowndes. The inventory should be used to direct growth away from the identified areas.
- b) All Greater Lowndes communities should adopt, and actively enforce, tree preservation and replanting ordinances.
- c) The smaller communities within Greater Lowndes should implement stormwater best management practices.

5.2 Social and Economic Development

5.3.1 Growth Preparedness Objective:

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

5.3.1.1 Assessment:

- a) Through the Comprehensive Planning process, we have **estimated population projections** for all Greater Lowndes communities through the year 2030.
- b) Efforts have been made to encourage local governments, the local school boards, and other decision-making entities to **use the same population projections**.
- c) None of the Greater Lowndes communities have a formal **Capital Improvements Program** although, they do plan for facility additions and improvements in their annual budgets.
- d) Through the existing Future Land Use map, we have **designated areas for specific types of growth**. The development of Character Areas will encourage further delineation of these areas.

5.3.1.2 Recommendations:

- a) All decision-making entities should rely on common data projections to ensure consistency in planning efforts.

5.3.2 Appropriate Business Objective:

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

5.3.2.1 Assessment:

- a) A comprehensive assessment to consider our community’s strengths, assets, and weaknesses and create business development strategies based on the results has been completed through a Targeted Business Cluster Study. The results, building on our diverse job base, identified the types of businesses that would be compatible and produce higher-wage jobs.

5.3.2.2 Recommendation:

- a) The three industry clusters identified through the Targeted Business Cluster study should be supported and expanded through targeted planning and incentive programs.

5.3.3 Employment Options Objective:

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

5.3.3.1 Assessment:

- a) The Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce and Valdosta State University have **entrepreneur support programs** and Valdosta-Lowndes County has been designated as an “Entrepreneur Friendly” community.
- b) While Greater Lowndes’ agricultural, manufacturing, and construction related jobs provide **employment opportunities for unskilled labor** this employment sector has followed the national pattern of general decline. Many relatively unskilled laborers end up in service-related jobs, which have low pay and no benefits. Employment opportunities for unskilled labor are scarce and continue to decline, with nearly all jobs requiring some skills and education.
- c) Our area jobs - even those requiring **skilled labor** - tend to pay significantly less than the state or national average. Our 9-county region has the lowest average weekly earnings of 20 WIA areas in Georgia. The gap between our region’s per capita income compared with the state and nation continues to widen each year.
- d) There are **professional and managerial jobs** in our community, but employers typically are recruiting from outside our area to fill many of these jobs. Some employers feel required to recruit from outside Lowndes County to find qualified professionals and managers. On the other hand, many graduates of VSU (and the best and brightest youth of the surrounding more rural counties) are leaving our area after graduation to seek these types of jobs elsewhere. We simultaneously have a “brain drain” while we are importing talent from other states.

5.3.3.2 Recommendations:

- a) Enlist the efforts of regional educators to meet the workforce needs of the identified industry clusters.
- b) Continue efforts to link employers with educators, to communicate their specific workforce needs and call for higher standards.
- c) Continue to re-emphasize that workforce development is essential to south Georgia’s economic development

- d) Work to sustain vibrant communities with amenities, cultural resources, good schools, high environmental standards, and other assets of quality living, in order to attract and keep talented, skilled workers in South Georgia.

5.3.4 Housing Choices Objective:

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

5.3.4.1 Assessment:

- a) For some of the Greater Lowndes communities, some zoning districts **allow accessory units like garage apartments or mother-in-law units** although there are size limitations in effect. The current zoning ordinances do not encourage new residential development to **follow the pattern of our original town**. They do encourage **connecting to existing streets**, however it is not a requirement. **Smaller setbacks** are typically not allowed, thus buildings are located far from the street.
- b) In general, within Greater Lowndes, the cost of living is comparable to the average wage meaning that **those who work in our community can afford to live here** as well.
- c) The availability of **housing for each income level** (low, moderate, and above-average incomes) varies throughout Greater Lowndes. There is a large number of existing above-average income housing opportunities. Recent trends have been for moderate level income units. Affordable housing and lower-income housing is still needed in some areas.
- d) The downtown area of Valdosta does have a limited number of **loft/downtown apartments** however; this type of **“neo-traditional”** development is not common elsewhere in the County.
- e) **Multifamily housing** is allowed within our community and encouraged in appropriate areas. Throughout Greater Lowndes there is **vacant and developable land available** for this type of housing.
- f) Several community development corporations have built **housing for lower-income households** throughout Greater Lowndes.
- g) The City of Valdosta has **housing programs that focus on households with special needs**.
- h) **Small houses built on small lots** (less than 5,000 square feet) are not allowed as a matter of right and are only permitted in conjunction with a Planned Development.

5.3.4.2 Recommendations:

- a) Public education should occur to inform residents of the importance of affordable housing and its true definition.
- b) An increased amount of affordable and low-income housing should be encouraged to allow our service and retail employees’ opportunities for home ownership.
- c) Amendments to zoning ordinances allowing 5,000 square foot or less lot sizes, as a matter of right, in appropriate areas would increase the availability of affordable housing.
- d) Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) should be encouraged.

5.3.5 Educational Opportunities Objective:

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

5.3.5.1 Assessment:

- a) Through VSU, Valdosta Technical College, and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program at the SGRDC, our community provides **work-force training options** for our citizens providing **citizens with skills for jobs** available in our community.
- b) Due to Georgia Military College, Valdosta Technical College, and Valdosta State University, our community has **higher education opportunities**.
- c) Our community has **job opportunities** for some of our college graduates, so that our children may live and work here if they choose. However, many graduates leave the area for employment opportunities elsewhere.

5.3.5.2 Recommendations:

- a) Greater collaboration between our educational institutions, workforce training programs, and economic development programs would enhance efforts towards attracting and retaining a young, skilled workforce.
- b) Increased support for efforts to tackle illiteracy and lift the status of our region's large underclass.

5.3 Governmental Relations

5.4.1 Local Self-Determination Objective:

Communities should be allowed to develop and work toward achieving their own vision for the future. Where the state seeks to achieve particular objectives, state financial and technical assistance should be used as the incentive to encourage local government conformance to those objectives.

5.4.1.1 Assessment:

- a) Greater Lowndes has an open door policy in regards to citizen involvement in development. All meetings are open to the public and staff is committed to working with developers throughout the process. A formal **citizen-education campaign** to allow all interested parties to learn about development processes in our community does not exist however, several departments do provide informational literature, first step meetings, and pre-application meetings.
- b) Each of the Greater Lowndes jurisdictions have processes in place that make it **simple for the public to stay informed** on land use and zoning decisions and new development including websites, public notices, and open meetings.
- c) With the adoption of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan, a **public-awareness element** (the *Community Participation Program*) will also be adopted.
- d) Each of the Greater Lowndes communities has **clearly understandable guidelines for new development**. However, with the exception of the City of Valdosta historic district, none of the Greater Lowndes communities offer a **development guidebook illustrating the type of new development** desired in our community.
- e) Following the completion of the Comprehensive Planning process, staff will identify aspects of the development regulations and zoning codes that need updating in order to **achieve the Quality Community Objectives**.

- f) There is an **annual training budget** for both planning commissioners and staff, which staff utilizes on a regular basis. SGRDC Community and Economic Development staff also offers several in-house training opportunities for planning commissioners and elected officials throughout the year. As is common in many communities, some elected officials have a better **understanding of the land-development process** than others.

5.4.1.2 Recommendations:

- a) Greater efforts should be made in implementing a formal citizen-education campaign regarding the value and importance of quality planning and development.
- b) Existing development regulations for each jurisdiction should be consolidated into easily understood, unified land development codes. (The county is in the process of completing this.) These codes should include guidance on the type of development the community desires and focus on meeting the state Quality Community Objectives.
- c) In an effort to increase their knowledge and effectiveness, Planning Commissioners should participate in a mandatory training program regarding planning and land use. Planning should be incorporated into the existing training program for newly elected officials.

5.4.2 Regional Cooperation Objective:

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

5.4.2.1 Assessment:

- a) Each of the Greater Lowndes communities participates in a **joint Comprehensive Plan** and is a member of the Greater Lowndes Planning Commission. Additionally, the South Georgia Regional Development Center maintains a Comprehensive Plan for the entire South Georgia Region. The **Service Delivery Strategies** will be updated during the 2030 Comprehensive Planning process.
- b) Some of the Greater Lowndes communities **share services** including Parks and Recreation, Emergency Services, and E911. The City of Valdosta and Lowndes County have separate school systems, water, sewer, fire, and police/sheriff's offices.

5.4.2.2 Recommendations:

- a) Increasing the number of joint jurisdictional services may increase service delivery efficiency and reduce associated costs.

6. SUPPORTING DATA AND INFORMATION

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

- 1) Population
- 2) Economic Development
- 3) Housing
- 4) Natural and Cultural Resources
- 5) Community Facilities and Services
- 6) Intergovernmental Coordination
- 7) Transportation Systems

A 25-year planning time frame was employed for evaluating the listed data and information items. A variety of information and sources was used to compile the data including but not limited to interviews with city and county representatives, review of Census data, and review of past trends.

When evaluating this data and information, staff focused on:

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

In order to ensure a concise and readable *Community Assessment* report, the following pages only include general statements and/or recommendations taken from the completed assessment. These statements pertain to potential issues or opportunities, significant trends affecting the community, or character area delineation.

**The complete evaluation including all data and maps,
can be found in the respective Appendices A through G.**

6.1 Population

- 6.1.1** The projected population increase of all of Greater Lowndes but especially Hahira and the unincorporated areas will cause increased pressures on infrastructure, particularly water and sewer.
- 6.1.2** The lower rate of increase of 18-34 year olds could be related to a lack of higher wage employment opportunities or an inability to afford quality housing.
- 6.1.3** The increasing number of senior citizens will require greater attention to accessible housing, convenient community facilities, public transportation, and recreational opportunities.
- 6.1.4** Although precise data is not available, it can be assumed that a percentage of the rising minority population is non-English speaking. To facilitate integration of these individuals into the community and encourage their active involvement, the Greater Lowndes communities should ensure there are appropriate opportunities for non-English speaking citizens to involve themselves in the community.
- 6.1.5** The increasing disparity between the local, state, and federal incomes may negatively impact Lowndes County in terms of individual and community level economic stability.

6.2 Economic Development

- 6.2.1** Greater Lowndes has experienced several changes in employment sector ratios since 1995: a 27% increase in construction related jobs, a decline of 17.5% in the wholesale trade sector, a 27% increase in retail (compared to the state's 23% increase), a 29% increase in services (compared to the state's increase of 36%) and a 30% increase in state/local government (compared to the state's 16% increase). (See Figure B-1 in Appendix B)
- 6.2.2** Although Greater Lowndes has a growing number of jobs and a greater number of residents participating in the labor force, there is still a continued decline of percentage increase for weekly and annual wages. This decline could be contributed to an increase in the number of low-paying jobs due to migration of young professionals and/or inadequate workforce.
- 6.2.3** As stated by the Georgia Department of Labor, 20 percent of jobs in 2012 in South Georgia will require an associate degree or higher. The statewide figure is 24 percent.

6.3 Housing

- 6.3.1** While the number of housing units increased by 26.5% between 1990 and 2000, the population only increased by 21.2%.
- 6.3.2** This dramatic increase in manufactured housing could be related to the lack of high-paying jobs and the rising costs of housing. An increasing percentage of Greater Lowndes residents are relying on manufactured homes as an affordable alternative to site built homes.
- 6.3.3** Each of the Greater Lowndes communities should look at instituting a rental property registration program. This would aid in tracking the rise or decline of rental properties, assist those relocating to the community in finding quality rental housing, and provide a means of ensuring regular review of rental properties.

- 6.3.4** It must be remembered that the above affordability data represents an average of all housing units within Lowndes County. A review of the individual jurisdictions would provide a better understanding of affordability needs.

6.4 Natural Resources

- 6.4.1** While our current policies and ordinances meet state standards, education outreach and enforcement should be implemented and continued.
- 6.4.2** The current Water Resource Protection District Ordinance should be expanded to include maintaining, protecting and restoring wetlands. Regulations should be established that maintain wetlands and adjacent buffer strips as open space. Wetland-related ecotourism activities such as hunting, fishing, bird watching, and photography should be promoted to boost the economy and draw attention to our natural resources.
- 6.4.3** To protect groundwater resources/drinking water supplies, while enabling development, areas of “most significant” groundwater recharge areas should have limited impervious surfaces, increased lot sizes for septic use, and cluster development.
- 6.4.4** A riparian buffer ordinance for all USGS blue line streams should be established including education and outreach to explain the benefits and importance of such an ordinance. Critical riparian areas in which existing land uses threaten water quality should be identified.
- 6.4.5** Wildlife areas, historic/prehistoric sites, and other areas meriting preservation should be identified.
- 6.4.6** Impervious surfaces limits should be established and erosion and sedimentation control statutes should be properly enforced.
- 6.4.7** The existing floodplain ordinance should be amended to emphasize the importance of limiting floodplain development and to prohibit certain activities harmful to water quality.
- 6.4.8** Partnerships should be established with the few remaining farms in Lowndes County to protect their existence and recognize them as a valuable natural resource.

6.5 Cultural Resources

- 6.5.1** The general public should be better educated regarding available federal and state tax incentives for rehabilitation. This should include development of a handbook about rehabilitation for historic property owners.
- 6.5.2** A viable plan of action should be developed for preservation of the many vacant and deteriorating buildings in the County. This is especially needed in the Southside (St. Paul-Hudson-Dockett) neighborhood.
- 6.5.3** Consensus building activities supporting preservation should be implemented through educational programs for the public about the necessity for preservation through workshops, special activities, general information, local school programs, and Valdosta State University.
- 6.5.4** Local ordinances should be analyzed for their impact on historic resources. Concerned citizens could be recruited to study and guide preservation activities in the County.
- 6.5.5** The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation should be contacted regarding vacant historic properties suitable for the Statewide Revolving Fund Program. The Richard Herman Wisenbaker House (LW-DA-40) in Dasher might be a good candidate.

- 6.5.6** Eligible properties should be nominated for inclusion to the National Register of Historic Places. (Refer to Appendix D1 for a National Register of Historic Places eligibility list for Lowndes County.)
- 6.5.7** A local tourism program should be created based upon historic resources. Greater Lowndes has a good basis for this program with its many historic properties associated with early tourism and resorts.
- 6.5.8** Continue to implement the Regional Historic Rural Schools Initiative and promote the adaptive re-use of vacant historic schools
- 6.5.9** Historic routes, including general stores, gas stations, motor lodges, and diners should be designated as Scenic Byways through the Georgia Department of Transportation. Development plans for the Hwy 41 corridor should be reviewed to determine future threats to historic resources in these areas.
- 6.5.10** Longtime operating farms should be reviewed for possible nomination to the Centennial Farm Program. Possible nomination: Cater Farm (LW-94), Zipperer Farm (LW-103), Grover Wisenbaker Farm (LW-132), Burkhalter-McLeod Farm (LW-134) and Charlie A. Burkhalter, Sr. Farm (LW-145).
- 6.5.11** Eligible cemeteries and parks should be nominated for inclusion to the National Register of Historic Places. (Refer to National Register of Historic Places eligibility list for Lowndes County.)
- 6.5.12** Provide education on criteria for determining presence of archaeological sites.

6.6 Intergovernmental Coordination

- 6.6.1** Individual communities should ensure they are aware of the Regional Comprehensive Plan and related Short Term Work Program and the impact they will have on their respective communities.
- 6.6.2** Continued dedication and active participation within the PMD will ensure several of the issues identified through the comprehensive planning process are addressed in a timely manner.
- 6.6.3** Consolidation of the two school boards has been a topic of discussion for many years. The current system presents many challenges including the requirement to bus students long distances when an appropriate level of school may be located within one mile, but within the opposite jurisdiction.
- 6.6.4** Additionally there is a reduced efficiency of tax dollar spending due to duplication of services and the redundancy of school facilities.
- 6.6.5** The perceived disparity between the two school systems impacts the community in regards to economic development, housing, and social interactions.
- 6.6.6** Recently, there has been greater levels of communication between the school systems and the local governments, specifically pertaining to siting of school facilities. The two school systems involvement in the PMD aids in addressing these issues. Continued communication is encouraged to ensure future schools are located in areas with the necessary infrastructure that are planned for compatible uses (e.g. residential and light commercial).
- 6.6.7** Increased collaboration and partnership with the local governments is encouraged especially in terms of traffic circulation around the VSU main campus.
- 6.6.8** VSU, the City of Valdosta, and private property management associations should study the feasibility of establishing a public-private partnership to expand the bus route to downtown and area apartment complexes.
- 6.6.9** Continued communications between VSU and the surrounding historic, residential

neighborhoods is encouraged.

- 6.6.10** In general, increased communication and cooperation between all Greater Lowndes governments, organizations, and authorities would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of long term planning.
- 6.6.11** In some cases increased collaboration between individual departments would also aid in reaching established goals, protecting natural resources, and improving traffic management.
- 6.6.12** Understanding that every Greater Lowndes stakeholder, no matter their place of residence, is affected by the decisions of all individual governing bodies. Thus, valuing each community's uniqueness, while embracing their interdependence, should be a goal of all stakeholders during the comprehensive planning process.
- 6.6.13** The Greater Lowndes communities are encouraged to take advantage of this resource for solid waste management and planning.

6.7 Transportation Systems

- 6.7.1** The increasing lack of interconnected local roads. The majority of new residential subdivisions are self-contained and do not provide access to adjoining neighborhoods. This increases the amount of traffic on collector and arterial roadways.
- 6.7.2** The obvious lack of frontage roads and cross access easements in commercial areas of the Greater Lowndes Community.
- 6.7.3** The increasing number of developments attempting to locate in the rural portions of the county on unpaved roads or roads which were not designed to handle large amounts of traffic.
- 6.7.4** The top ten crash areas (See Figure G-3 in Appendix G) are all established commercial centers. These areas should be further analyzed to identify potential changes in land use development methods as a means of reducing traffic crashes.
- 6.7.5** Increased awareness and advertisement of these routes could lead to additional usage. Route 10, running through the core of Valdosta and the VSU campus lends itself to primary usage by those commuting between the campus and area residential/commercial centers.
- 6.7.6** All of the Greater Lowndes communities should look at installing the bicycle routes identified in the SGRDC Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan along with additional routes identified through the community participation process.
- 6.7.7** As streets are widened or repaved, the community should consider incorporating bike paths for appropriate areas.
- 6.7.8** Many areas are in need of sidewalk improvements and additional attention should be paid to connecting existing sidewalks to residential and commercial centers.
- 6.7.9** The Greater Lowndes Communities should look at the feasibility of establishing public transit options from major residential and commercial centers.
- 6.7.10** VSU, the City of Valdosta, and property managers of nearby apartments should consider the feasibility of establishing a public-private partnership to expand VSU's bus route to downtown and apartments within a close proximity.
- 6.7.11** Increased marketing of ride and share parking areas could possibly result in a reduced amount of traffic on the interstate and other arterials.

- 6.7.12** All communities should look at requiring new commercial developments to interconnect parking facilities for cross-access between parcels or provide shared parking facilities.
- 6.7.13** Communities should work with private developers to encourage development of out-parcels on underused or abandoned parking areas.
- 6.7.14** Traffic management plans should be developed for each of the areas identified through the travel demand model (See Appendix G)