

Appling County

EXISTING DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS AND LAND USE

Excerpts from the Appling County Joint Comprehensive Plan
Approved August 2007

Existing and Future Growth

Appling County is a rural county in southeast Georgia located south along the Altamaha River where its yellow pine forests have long dominated its landscape and economy. Its county seat, Baxley, is located at the crossroads of U.S. 1 and U.S. 341. Appling County grew steadily from its beginnings in the early 1800s until the turn of the century, with a particular surge of growth in the 1890s because of the railroad. All three current municipalities trace their beginnings to the railroad's location and completion in 1870. The county then grew slowly, but was relatively stable until WWII. After the war, there was slow decline until the 1970s and the location of the Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Power Plant. The growth of the 1970s was stabilized in the 1980s because of the national recession early in the decade. Since 1990, growth has been steady (at a pace much less than the state) because of economic diversification with small businesses and the county's location. Growth continues and appears to be accelerating in the early 2000s because of the location of a Wal-Mart Supercenter, other continued economic growth, the two U.S. highways, and resident in-migration. Agriculture and forestry remain important components of the economy.

Commercial and industrial growth continues to concentrate in and near Baxley, particularly along the U.S. 341 corridor. The community's three industrial parks are located along U.S. 341, although two are west of the City Limits proper between Baxley and Graham. The existing center of growth in Baxley, combined with the location of U.S. 341, and the City's ownership of the only public sewer system, will continue this

concentration, although the entire U.S. 341 Corridor, particularly from Baxley to Hazlehurst, will be a nexus of growth, especially because of the parallel railroad.

Residential growth is seen as beginning to pick up more steam in recent years as well. Past growth has concentrated near Baxley, particularly on its southern fringes, although much has also been primarily manufactured homes on scattered individual lots across the county. Several new subdivisions have been developed in recent years, again mostly south and west of Baxley, and with some in south Baxley itself. These have included the Deerfield subdivision, two along Satilla Church Road, and lots around the Country Club golf course. There has also been some growth near Altamaha River landings, Lake Mayers, and a new private lake, Lake Henry Grady, in south Appling County. This growth may be gaining momentum because of recent economic growth, sale of industrial timberlands, and purchase of land by outside interests, including those from Florida. These residential growth trends are expected to continue in a similar manner.

Future opportunities for growth include the U.S. Highway 341 and U.S. 1 corridors, as well as the Georgia Highway 15 and 121 corridors to a lesser extent. The economic growth of U.S. 341 and the completion of multi-laning on both highways will spur additional growth. Both Georgia Highway 121, with its regional cooperation to again market it as the Woodpecker Trail, and Georgia 15's importance as an intrastate connector could be important in increasing tourism and other economic growth. Appling County's location inland at the crossroads of these important highways, with easy access to Georgia's coast and its ports of Brunswick and Savannah as well as to Jacksonville, Florida, will facilitate economic and residential growth. The abundant natural and cultural resources of the County, including the Altamaha River, Lake Mayers, Moody Forest, and the Bullard Creek Wildlife Management Area, as well as its verdant pine forests will also attract growth through tourism and residential quality of life appeal. The availability of relatively inexpensive land and the climate of the county will further facilitate such growth.

The GIS system is also able to determine acreages for the various land use classifications in each jurisdiction. Table LU-1 provides the existing land use acreages for

Appling County and each of its municipalities. Combined, agriculture and forestry land uses account for about 92 percent of the land area of the county, with forestry (mostly pine tree plantations) accounting for about two-thirds (66.4 percent) of all land use by itself. Agriculture and forestry land uses also constitute nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of all land area land use in the City of Graham, and about 46 percent of all land use in the City of Surrency. The City of Baxley, the county seat, accounts for about one-fourth of total county population, and nearly 90 percent of the county's incorporated population. Baxley contains over 72 percent of incorporated residential land use, although over 62 percent of county residential land use acreage is in the unincorporated area. As might be expected, Baxley has the largest concentration of commercial, industrial, and public/institutional land uses in the county. Over 35 percent of county industrial land use acreage is in Baxley, as is 51 percent of county commercial and 88 percent of county public/institutional land use.

Greater Baxley. The City of Baxley is the largest municipality, the seat of county government, the only municipality with public sewerage, and the site of most of the county's commercial, industrial, and other economic activity. As such, the City of Baxley will continue to be the focus for intense development, particularly general commercial, industrial, and multi-family residential growth. The expected growth and character area will include the surrounding environs, within approximately 3 miles of the old city limits, including both the annexed and adjacent county areas resulting from the past radial roadway annexations. This area would also include the Park West Industrial Park. This Greater Baxley area is the likely principal growth area for intense land uses because of the potential availability of water/sewer services and because it is the existing location of facilities, services, and economic development.

U.S. 341 West Corridor. The U.S. 341 West Corridor in and west of the City of Baxley to the City of Graham and the Jeff Davis County line just beyond (and actually on to the City of Hazlehurst) remains a recognized growth corridor, especially for commercial and industrial businesses. The highway is now completed as a divided four-lane highway for the entire length (except for five-lane sections in Baxley and Graham), has traffic volumes in excess of 11,000 per day, and at least is partly served by

infrastructure for most of this length. The regional Tri-County Industrial Park is located in this corridor as well as Appling County's Park West Industrial Park. Baxley has extended sewer service to the Tri-County Park, while Graham has extended water service. The Norfolk Southern Railroad also runs parallel to U.S. 341 on the south side. The corridor was recognized as a special land use "target area" in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Development Center's Regional Plan. After the Greater Baxley Character Area, this corridor will receive the most intense commercial/industrial growth.

Altamaha River. The entire northern border of Appling County is the Altamaha River, the most significant natural feature of a rural county with abundant natural and cultural resources. The Altamaha River's ecological and natural importance has been recognized by The Nature Conservancy which has labeled it one of the last 75 "Great Places" of the natural world. This agency is actively involved in facilitating the protection of the Altamaha River Corridor along its entire length. The Nature Conservancy owns a large natural area within Appling County in the Altamaha River Valley corridor, Moody Forest. Moody Forest is an area characterized by several unique natural communities, including the river swamp and an old growth longleaf pine forest. It is an area of natural significance comparable to a national park. An adjacent Wildlife Management Area (Moody Forest) purchased by the state from The Nature Conservancy original property purchase, and a portion of another state-owned wildlife management area, Bullard Creek Wildlife Management Area, both lie within the Altamaha River Valley corridor. The Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant also is located adjacent to U.S. 1 and the Altamaha River. In addition, Falling Rocks Park and several other boat landings are located on the Altamaha River. The community also desires the location of a new state park along the Altamaha River, and such a park has been proposed in the past. The Altamaha River is of significant natural and economic importance to Appling County and the region. The Altamaha River has been somewhat threatened by unregulated residential development, but such development pressure remains relatively minor at present.