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**Northwest Georgia Regional Plan
2013 – 2033**

**Regional Assessment
Part 3
Analysis of Consistency with Quality Community Objectives**

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Quality Community Objectives Assessment

Economic Prosperity

Matching jobs and industry to communities offers a better chance of economic progress, since it takes advantage of a level of human capital already available. A variety of businesses requiring various skill levels can help foster stability. Other factors to be considered are existing economic ties within the region and nearby, to enhance the possibility that juxtaposed enterprises can complement and reinforce each other.

Observations

The impact of the economic downturn was distributed unevenly in the region. This was doubtless due to the divergent nature of industries, which range from health care to textile manufacturing. The ten largest employers in 2010 were: Beaulieu Group, LLC; Floyd Healthcare Management, Inc.; Hamilton Medical Center, Inc.; Mohawk Carpet Corporation; Mt. Vernon Mills, Inc.; O'Reilly Automotive, Inc.; Pilgrims Pride Corporation; Roper Corporation; Shaw Industries Group, Inc.; and Wal-Mart.

This eclectic mix is beneficial for the region as a whole, since employers can hire at varying skill levels. In areas where a single industry is concentrated, however, unemployment can be high if that industry suffers a downturn. In that situation, a generally beneficial juxtaposition of mutually dependent enterprises can reinforce the negative impact of a downturn.

Resource Management

Maximizing the profitable use of a community's resources requires that they be inventoried and assessed for protection, extraction, marketing, or processing into other products for sale, or that they be put to some other use. Pure water and air are necessary to sustain life, and resources ensuring that they remain plentiful must be safeguarded. Sometimes a community's most vulnerable resources are assets that can drive economic development. Especially in the Blue Ridge and the Ridge and Valley areas of Northwest Georgia, mountains, rivers, and streams bring in hunters and anglers, tourists in general, and new residents seeking alternatives to rapidly urbanizing metro areas.

Observations

Many jurisdictions have adopted the Department of Community Affairs' Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria (known as Part V) to protect water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, river corridors, and mountains, as appropriate for their geography. Other jurisdictions have not followed suit for various reasons.

Throughout the region, the private sector manages various resources, such as agricultural fields, timber, and minerals, for private and corporate profit.

As noted below under “Sense of Place,” many jurisdictions have historic resource surveys and historic preservation commissions to manage their historic resources. Some jurisdictions also have informal public/private partnerships to acquire historic sites for public access.

At the regional level, the Regional Commission has an appointed Historic Preservation Advisory Committee, and the Regional Council has adopted a Regionally Important Resources Plan to assist jurisdictions in the region in protecting their resources. The Plan can be downloaded at <http://www.nwgrc.org/regionalresourceplan.pdf> Accompanying maps can be found at http://www.nwgrc.org/RIR_Maps.pdf

Efficient Land Use

There are a number of practices that can use land effectively without encouraging further extension of auto-dependent sprawl.

Infill development is an efficient way to maximize use of land and infrastructure by developing vacant lots, and brown- and grey-field sites in areas already somewhat or extensively developed. The practice avoids the need for infrastructure extension to unserved areas, and makes use of community facilities already in place in existing neighborhoods or commercial and industrial areas.

Traditional neighborhoods were the norm prior to World War II, and represented organic growth of downtown-centered communities before car ownership became the norm. Neighborhoods developed in such a way as to allow walking access to necessary goods and services. Children could walk or bike to school, and people could walk to shopping areas.

Open space is protected (whether temporarily or permanently) land and water, including agricultural and forestry land whose development rights have been severed from the property (whether temporarily or permanently), and that is in its undeveloped natural state, or developed only to the extent as to be consistent with water quality and wetlands protection; flood mitigation and erosion reduction; habitat, cultural resource, agriculture and forestry protection; and certain types of recreation.

Observations

While mentioned in some Comprehensive Plans, few jurisdictions have in place policies encouraging infill development. Most development in the region has occurred with little reference to sustainable, walkable communities, and there appears to be little consideration given to non-motorized access to jobs, schools, services, and other necessities of life.

Conventional zoning codes generally tend to reinforce current patterns, and to encourage the continual extension of infrastructure.

Some counties in the region have undertaken greenspace programs, and achieved impressive results. Other counties have expressed no interest in land conservation, sometimes noting large areas of National Forest within their jurisdictions.

The Regional Commission has developed a downloadable, region-wide greenspace plan available at http://www.nwgrc.org/Final_Greenspace_Plan_2010.pdf

Maps and design guidelines to accompany the plan can be found at http://www.nwgrc.org/NWGRC_Region_Greenway_2010_07_26.pdf and http://www.nwgrc.org/Design_Guidelines.pdf

Local Preparedness

To grow and thrive, a community must plan for its future, and determine how to get into place the kind of infrastructure that will nurture and sustain their vision. This will likely involve not only on-the-ground community infrastructure, but also ordinances and regulations enabling growth management. For some communities, this may entail the cultivation of a well-trained, educated workforce, along with careful resource conservation and management.

Observations

Communities in the region have comprehensive plans which are periodically updated to reflect changing conditions. These documents are available to local communities to assist in guiding growth to appropriate areas based on resource availability, and conservation opportunities.

Actual growth management is generally effected by local zoning ordinances, some of which implement the Department of Community Affairs' Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria.

Generally, across the age spectrum, about 35.6% of the regions workforce has completed high school, and 20.9% has some college education. This means that over a third of the workforce can be expected to have the skill level necessary for ordinary factory work. Another 5.2% have two year degrees, and 9.4% have four year degrees. This suggests that there is in the region a spectrum of education that can provide labor at many skill levels. (Source: US Census Bureau – 2010 ACS 5-yr estimate) In addition, there is one university, four colleges and five technical colleges in the region. (Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

Sense of Place

Sense of Place arises from an aggregate of physical features that project a sense of history (however long or short) and stability that help to anchor individuals in their environment in such a way that the individual and the environment interact to mold each other. Sense of place is unique, and in times of rapid change, communities need to be pro-active to preserve those characteristics that define it. Vital downtowns and traditional neighborhoods are often important contributors to a sense of place.

Heritage, an important component of sense of place, is a complex of cultural elements that includes not only beliefs, ideas, and practices, but often also includes the built environment, landscapes, natural areas, and other components of the environment.

Observations

Most jurisdictions in the region have historic resource surveys, done either in cooperation with the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources or by Georgia Transmission Corporation's FindIt! (sic) Program. These surveys document a jurisdiction's cultural resources that are worthy of preservation.

Many jurisdictions also have Historic Preservation Commissions to assist with identification and preservation of historic properties. The competence and commitment of these commissions is variable. Some successfully oversee large downtown and residential districts, enforcing design review provisions, others are inactive.

Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation is often vital to accomplish large goals. Various jurisdictions and entities working in collaboration can implement multiple strategies that magnify the impact of their efforts exponentially. Effective coordination requires forethought, and mechanisms to encourage interjurisdictional collaboration should be incorporated into local and regional comprehensive plans.

The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission is one prominent example of regional cooperation. It originated in 1959 as the Coosa Valley Planning and Development Association which held informal meetings of civic leaders. In 1960, the Governor of Georgia agreed to provide funding for the Association's initiatives, and it re-organized as the Coosa Valley Area Planning and Development Commission. Today, the organization, now known as the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, delivers a wide range of services in collaboration with the Area Agency on Aging, the Workforce Investment Program, and several departments of the State.

Other examples of regional cooperation:

The North Georgia Water Resources Partnership and the Coosa-North Georgia Regional Water Council collaborate across jurisdictional lines to insure an adequate supply of clean water in the region.

The Appalachian Valley Fiber Network, LLC, is a public-private partnership dedicated to the construction of at least 250 miles of new fiber optic cable in the region in with the help of a grant from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. Combined with previously existing infrastructure, the new cable will provide a valuable economic development tool for the region.

Jurisdictions throughout the region have developed State-approved Service Delivery Strategies to minimize duplication of services, and to reduce competition among governmental service providers.

Housing Options

A variety of housing options that meet the needs of different income levels and social groups helps enable people who work in a community to live there. In addition to conventional single-family dwellings and apartment houses, lofts above commercial spaces, garage apartments, and other arrangements can accommodate members of the workforce who might not otherwise be able to live near their work places.

Observations

Most communities in the region have sufficiently diverse housing choices to meet local demand. Often a large proportion of an area's housing stock consists of mobile (as opposed to manufactured) homes, some of which house the lowest income residents in the region.

Most housing options, including mobile homes, are conventional, though some cities have allowed loft living for some time. New construction tends to repeat typical mid-to-late-20th century suburban patterns, providing little opportunity to walk to work, or to access necessary goods and services without a car. The concept of traditional neighborhood development has made little headway in this region.

Transportation Options

Transportation Alternatives conventionally refers to travelling by conveyences other than stereotypical cars, pickups, SUVs, and the like. Alternatives include walking, bicycles,

skateboards, and a variety of public transportation options such as buses, trolleys, and trains. Mass transit can lower energy costs, and free up land otherwise needed for parking.

Observations

There is little large-scale public transport in the region, except in the City of Rome. The region is served by Rural Transportation Programs which provide a variety of weekday van and bus trips, especially for the elderly, handicapped, and transportation disadvantaged individuals.

Alternatives such as biking, skateboarding, etc., tend to be seen as recreational activities, and not true transportation modes.

Educational Opportunities

As society becomes more dependent on technology in the workplace, education and training will become indispensable for those seeking well paying jobs. Community and technical colleges should be encouraged to provide the kind of job training that will enable citizens entering the workforce to fill jobs locally without having to leave their home communities in search of work.

Observations

The region has four technical colleges; four colleges, one with a school of technology; and one university. Much of the region has easy access to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Kennesaw State University, and Jacksonville State University in Alabama.

As noted above in Local Preparedness, generally, across the age spectrum, about 35.6% of the regions workforce has completed high school, and 20.9% has some college education. This means that over a third of the workforce can be expected to have the skill level necessary for ordinary factory work. Another 5.2% have two year degrees, and 9.4% have four year degrees. This suggests that there is in the region a spectrum of education that can provide labor at many skill levels. (Source: US Census Bureau – 2010 ACS 5-yr estimate) In addition, there is one university, four colleges and five technical colleges in the region. (Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)).

Community Health

It is crucial to overall community health that all residents have access to critical goods and services, safe housing, and job opportunities. This often requires that certain basic services be provided to the disadvantaged to assure equal participation in all aspects of community life.

Observations

Rome is a regional medical center, and has been extending its geographical infrastructure for a number of years. Dalton is also a medical center, and is also expanding its services. There are also smaller hospitals and various clinics throughout the region that help maintain adequate medical services in Northwest Georgia.