

2020 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE FOR CHARLTON COUNTY AND THE CITIES OF FOLKSTON AND HOMELAND

Adopted:



Prepared by:
Charlton County
City of Folkston
City of Homeland



Photos courtesy of SGRC staff, Explore Georgia, and John Quarterman
2020 Joint Comprehensive Plan Update for Charlton County and the Cities of
Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan Acknowledgements

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I. Chapter 110-12-1. Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning

1. Introduction

The 2020 Joint Comprehensive Plan Update for Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland was prepared in accordance with the Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Chapter 110-12-1, Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning, effective October 1, 2018.

As required by the Local Comprehensive Planning Standards, the 2020 Joint Comprehensive Plan Update for Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland consists of the following elements:

1. Community Goals
2. Needs and Opportunities
3. Community Work Program
4. Broadband Services Element

5. Economic Development Element

(As a community included in the Georgia Job Tax Credit Tier 1 category)

Although a separate summarized economic development element is included in this Comprehensive Plan, which by reference adopts the current regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), any economic development goals, policies, needs, opportunities, and objectives pertaining to Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland have also been integrated directly into their parallel components in this Comprehensive Plan.

6. Land Use Element – City of Folkston – update, with Character Areas for Charlton County and the City of Homeland

(As a community with zoning or land development regulations subject to the Zoning Procedures Law)

2. Community Involvement

All of the required elements have been developed with multiple opportunities for involvement and input from stakeholders and steering committee members throughout the Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland. The following steps were taken to ensure the plan reflects the full range of needs and opportunities from the many stakeholders and residents in Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland:

- a) Stakeholders and Steering Committee members were identified. These included the local governments of Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland; local businesses and industries; watershed groups; and the general public.
- b) Participation techniques were identified. Techniques used included a kick-off public information meeting, printed public information in local newspapers, and information on the Southern Georgia Regional Commission's website and local government websites. A steering committee was formed to oversee and participate in planned development, including representatives from the stakeholders mentioned above.
- c) A participation program was conducted. Identified stakeholders were invited and attended, yielding specific input in plan content. The steering committee participated in the three workshops and via email and telephone conversation to provide input and feedback.
- d) Community involvement is documented with workshop and public meeting photographs in the plan and plan appendix.

1st Public Hearing – “Kick-Off”

The public hearing kicking off the comprehensive planning process was held on August 1, 2019 in the Charlton County Commissioners Meeting Room. It was held for the purpose of making any potential stakeholders and residents aware of the comprehensive plan update and review; to explain the purpose of the update; and to encourage residents and other stakeholders to actively participate in the plan update.

3. Identification of Stakeholders and Steering Committee

A comprehensive list of potential Stakeholders and Steering Committee members was put together with input from the Chamber of Commerce, elected officials, local government staff, and residents. A complete list of all the [stakeholders is included in this plan in the Appendix](#).

4. Identification of Participation Techniques

The following participation techniques were utilized during the update process:

- Public Hearings
- Workshops
- E-mail and telephone correspondence with stakeholders
- Special Webpage on SGRC website
- Dissemination of information in the newspaper

5. Participation Program

A foundational principle utilized by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission in all of its planning projects is public and stakeholder participation from, and coordination with, multiple and diverse interest groups. Due to the relatively small population of Charlton County and the Cities of Homeland and Folkston, the entire stakeholder group was utilized as the steering committee – with several key additions from the public and private sector, ensuring the broadest buy-in and diversity of input into the comprehensive plan update. Outreach to the public, local governments and other stakeholders and interested parties was accomplished by e-mail correspondence, direct communication, the project website, and updates provided at workshops and at other group meetings. Opportunity for public comment was provided during the public hearings.

In addition to the two required public hearings, SGRC held a series of three workshops to discuss several elements of the plan. The first workshop, held on August 27, 2019 was used to review the existing goals, needs, and opportunities. Attendees participated in a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis and updated the list of goals, needs, and opportunities. Copies of the sign-in sheets are provided in the appendix along with public hearing notices.



1st Workshop (SWOT ANALYSIS)

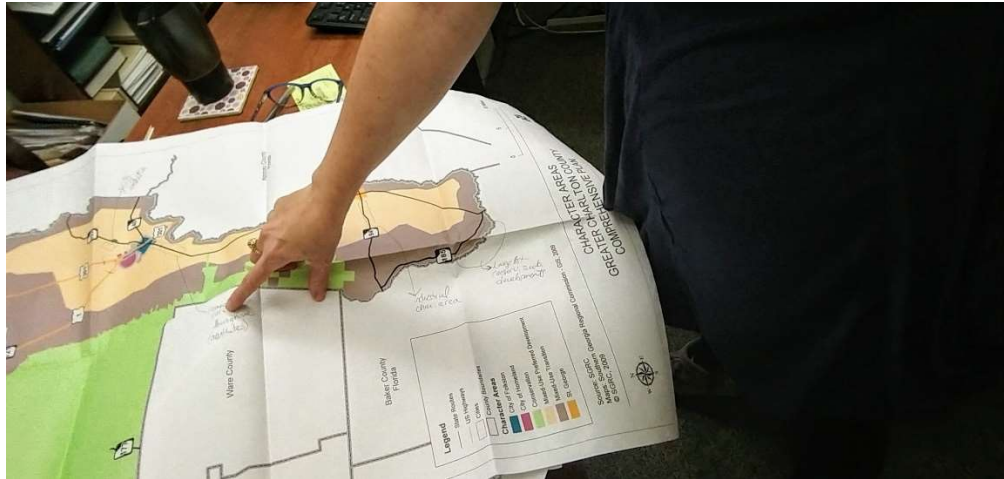
The Policies and Report of Accomplishments were developed in the second workshop, held on September 17, 2019, along with the draft of the updated Community Work Program. The Community Work Program was developed by the participants to include specific action items and projects that would be feasible for the County and the individual communities to implement should funding become available.



**2nd Workshop
Policies & Work Program Accomplishments**

The third workshop, held on November 14, 2019 was utilized to discuss the new Broadband Element and to update the Land Use Element and Maps as desired by the local governments.

**3rd Workshop
Land Use Element/Character Area**



Following the third workshop, staff met individually with each community to review the applicable Community Work Plans and Land Use maps/Character Area descriptions and designations.

Final Public Hearing

A final public hearing was held **on April 2, 2020**. The final draft of the plan was reviewed and public comment was sought. As a result of this hearing, the draft plan was transmitted to the Department of Community Affairs for review.

(ADD ADOPTION PHOTO and adoption dates)

6. Consideration of Regional Water Plan and Environmental Planning Criteria

During the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan, the local governments must review both the Regional Water Plan covering its area and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria, as laid out in Chapter 391-3-16, to determine whether any local implementation practices or development regulations need to be adapted to be consistent with both.

Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Plan

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland are within the area of the Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Plan, which was adopted in September 2017.



The Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Plan has identified 13 goals, listed below, to implement its vision of managing water resources in a sustainable manner under Georgia's regulated riparian and reasonable use laws in order to support the state's and region's economy, protect public health and natural resources, and enhance the quality of life for all citizens; while preserving the private property rights of Georgia's landowners, and in consideration of the need to enhance resource augmentation and efficiency opportunities.

Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Plan Goals:

1. Manage and develop water resources to sustainably and reliably meet domestic, commercial, industrial water needs, and agricultural water needs including all agricultural sectors (this includes the agricultural/ forestry economy of the region).
2. Manage groundwater and surface water to encourage sustainable economic and population growth in the region.
3. Manage the region's and state's water resources in a manner that preserves and protects private property rights.

4. Ensure an adequate water supply of suitable quality to meet current and future human needs, while protecting environmental resources.
5. Identify opportunities to optimize existing and future supplies, and water and wastewater infrastructure.
6. Promote efficient use and management of surface and groundwater resources to allow for sufficient supplies for current and future generations.
7. Protect and manage surface and groundwater recharge areas to ensure sufficient long term water supplies for the region.
8. Protect, maintain, and where appropriate and practicable, identify opportunities to enhance water quality and river base flows.
9. Protect and maintain regional water-dependent recreational opportunities.
10. Identify opportunities to manage stormwater to improve water quantity and quality.
11. Identify and implement cost-effective water management strategies.
12. Seek to provide economically affordable power and water resource service to all citizens of the region.
13. Identify and implement actions to better measure and share water use data and information.

In addition, the Regional Water Plan has adopted several Short-Term Water Quantity and Water Quality Management Practices, which the local comprehensive plan should include in order to manage water resources in a sustainable manner through the planning period and beyond. The most significant issues in the Suwannee-Satilla Region are surface water availability gaps driven by agricultural usage. As such, the majority of water supply management practices are intended to address agricultural surface water use.

Short Term Water Quantity Management Practices (0-10 Years)

1. Utilize surface water and groundwater sources within the available resource capacities.
2. Water conservation.
3. Data collection and research to confirm the frequency, duration, severity, and drivers of surface water gaps (forecast methodology assumptions and Resource Assessment modeling).
4. Evaluate and ensure that current and future surface water permit conditions do not contribute to 7Q10 low flow concerns.
5. Encourage sustainable groundwater use as a preferred supply in regions with surface water 7Q10 low flow concerns and adequate groundwater supply.
6. Identify incentives and a process to sustainably replace a portion of existing agricultural surface water use with groundwater use to address 7Q10 low flow concerns.
7. Evaluate the potential to use existing storage to address 7Q10 low flow concerns.
8. Education to reduce surficial aquifer groundwater use impacts to 7Q10 low flow Concerns.

Short-Term Water Quality Management Practices (0 – 10 Years):

1. Point Sources:

- Support and fund current permitting and waste load allocation process to improve the treatment of wastewater and increase treatment capacity.
- Data collection and research to confirm discharge volumes and waste concentrations as well as receiving stream flows and chemistry

2. Non-Point Sources:

- Data collection to confirm the source of pollutants and causes; encourage stormwater ordinances, septic system maintenance, and coordinated planning
- Ensure funding and support for local and state Best Management Practices programs, including urban/suburban, rural, forestry, and agricultural Best Management Practices

3. Non-point Source Existing Impairments:

- Total maximum daily load listed streams: Improve data on the source of pollutant and length of impairment; identify opportunities to leverage funds, and implement non-point source Best Management Practices

Longer Term (20 – 40 years) water quantity and quality management practices include:

- Improve the infiltration and management of wetlands
- Evaluate incentive-based programs to manage, increase, and restore wastewater and stormwater returns
- Identify potential/feasibility of a multi-purpose reservoir
- Identify the feasibility of regional inter-basin transfer
- Continue wastewater and stormwater master planning

Chapter 391-3-16, Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria

The Environmental Planning Criteria that are part of the Minimum Planning Standards deal specifically with the protection of water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, river corridors, and mountains, the last of which is not applicable in this region. These criteria were developed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR) as mandated in Part V of the Georgia Planning Act and in the Mountains and River Corridor Protection Act.

The criteria require that local governments shall identify existing and future water supply watersheds and adopt a water supply watershed protection plan for their jurisdiction. Some uses may be grandfathered, such as land uses existing prior to the adoption of a watershed plan, mining activities permitted by GDNR, certain utility placements, special forestry, or agricultural services.

The environmental guidelines also spell out criteria for the delineation of small and large water supply watersheds, for the protection of groundwater recharge areas, for the protection of wetlands, and for the protection of river corridors. These criteria shall be incorporated into this comprehensive plan and addressed specifically and in more detail through local ordinances and land development code regulations.

II. Plan Elements

1. Community Goals and Vision

Vision

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland place a strong value on their immense natural and cultural resources. The citizens of the County and Cities appreciate the economic and recreational value of these resources and will continue to be stewards of them while also placing a high priority on the fiscal welfare of the community and the economic, quality of life, and educational needs of the residents.

Community Goals

Goal 1: Improve the greater Charlton County economy by diversifying and establishing an economic and cultural climate that will allow the County to become a regional center for eco-tourism and other coastal area oriented businesses.

Goal 2: Ensure all residents of Charlton County have access to adequate and affordable housing with a suitable and healthy living environment.

Goal 3: Protect, appropriately use, or conserve the natural resources of the County, notably the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and Rivers, to maximize their functions and values in a sustainable manner for perpetuity.

Goal 4: Effectively protect, preserve, and promote the historic and cultural resources of Charlton County. Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland should promote adaptive reuse of vacant historic buildings, heritage tourism, and public education programs focusing on historic preservation.

Goal 5: Provide needed community facilities including digital broadband and communications, water, sewer, solid waste, police, fire, and EMS in a manner that ensures current and future needs of residents and businesses of Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland are met.

Goal 6: Ensure a high quality living environment through a mixture of compatible land uses reflecting the needs and desires of local residents and businesses and their vision for Charlton County.

Goal 7: Provide a safe and efficient integrated multi-modal transportation system including Greenways, Bikeways, and Blueways addressing the future needs of Charlton County businesses, residents, and visitors.

Goal 8: Establish effective coordination measures among all pertinent public and quasi-public entities to continuously improve Charlton County's quality of life and resources.

Goal 9: Enhance the provision of broadband infrastructure to better support educational opportunities and career advancement for residents of the Cities and County to effectively compete in the global economy.

2. Needs and Opportunities

The Needs and Opportunities listed in this section were developed through discussions with stakeholders; from the experiences of stakeholders; through analysis of statistical data and information; and through review and revision as applicable of the needs and opportunities identified in the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan Update for Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland. Each of the following needs and opportunities is addressed by corresponding policies in the “Community Policies” section.

Economic Development

Needs

- There is a lack of new industries and businesses coming to the County, resulting in a tight labor market.
- There is a lack of a coordinated tourism marketing program to effectively market the area including marketing opportunities specific to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Railwatch, Satilla and St. Mary's Rivers, among others.
- There is a lack of younger, educated workforce and a lack of skilled labor.
- There is a loss of population due to a lack of local available jobs.
- The film industry has approached the County about film production; however, there is a lack of lodging within the County which leads the industry to film in other areas.

Opportunities

- A tourism roundtable could coordinate many marketing opportunities.
- Connection of the tourism program with the coastal tourism program could provide for additional economic development opportunities.
- Continue to promote the Economic Development Authority and Chamber of Commerce in their efforts to coordinate marketing programs and events for natural and historic resources.
- Attraction of retirees, especially military retirees, could diversify the population and the workforce.
- An increase in job opportunities could stem the population out-migration.
- There is the potential for agri-tourism within the County.
- Continue to improve upon the safety of the airport.
- Seek the reclassification of the Satilla and St. Marys Rivers to a Recreational Use listing.

Housing

Needs

- Charlton County has a countywide shortage of affordable quality housing for all income groups.
- A significant portion of the properties and housing stock is in serious neglect; lack of property maintenance and housing maintenance are a serious issue.
- A small number of property owners contribute towards the majority of property taxes due to the low value of a portion of the housing stock. A high percentage of manufactured homes are not occupied or not owner occupied which contributes to their lessened valuation.
- A significant portion of the housing for the elderly or families with young children is substandard.
- Rents are high compared to rents for similar housing in surrounding areas.

Opportunities

- Raise the standards for existing manufactured homes to meet proper building codes and pass inspections.
- Code Enforcement encourages increased property and housing maintenance and reduces the amount of trash.
- The private market could provide more housing choices in a small housing market.

- Non-governmental organizations/non-profits could assist with housing options for low and moderate income populations.



RESOURCE CONSERVATION: Natural and Cultural Resources

Needs

- The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, St. Marys River, and Satilla River need to have their existing public access points upgraded with proper oversight.
- Enforcement is vital at river access points to keep up maintenance and minimize dumping of trash, which both rivers are experiencing.
- The St. Marys River and Satilla River both have existing grandfathered septic tanks located within the floodplain.
- Promote the connection of the Okefenokee Trail with the Suwanee Wilderness Trail to create a large scale, interconnected eco-tourism resource.
- Charlton County has a unique and remarkable history that needs to be preserved.

Opportunities

- Both Charlton County and the City of Folkston have historical properties surveys, which can be used to identify and protect historical resources.

- The City of Folkston and the County own most of the historic properties and structures and utilize public investment to preserve and maintain historic properties and structures and encourage the private sector to do the same.
- Possibilities to upgrade and improve existing access points at the rivers include installing dumpsters, running garbage trucks and continuing with the Spring River clean-up.
- Charlton County now has accurate floodplain maps which can be used for permitting.
- Continue the working relationship with the Department of Natural Resources, the applicable Riverkeepers (Suwanee, Satilla, and St. Marys), and the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.
- The Chamber of Commerce preserves historical documents and plans to display the history of Charlton County both in their building and on their website.
- Seek State funding for additional public access points along the Satilla and St. Marys Rivers.

Community Facilities and Services

Needs

- The length of the County (54 miles) poses logistical issues to provide sufficient law enforcement coverage for the Sheriff, EMS and Fire.
- The Cities of Folkston and Homeland only have small utilities. Federal and state regulations, including a periodic water quality testing fee redirect needed monetary resources from provision of services to regulatory expenditures.

Opportunities

- All five volunteer fire stations were brought under the control of a professional paid Fire Chief to improve compliance, increase effectiveness, and lower the ISO rating for the County and City.
- Improve the capacity for responding to brushfires.
- There are grant opportunities for improving waste water treatment plants.
- Move toward having full-time firefighters in conjunction with volunteers.

Land Use

Needs

- The City of Folkston has a zoning ordinance; the unincorporated county and City of Homeland do not. Some development standards need to be put into place countywide to protect the existing quality of life while still allowing new residential and non-residential development.
- The County is 54 miles long and due to the length has developed into two distinct North Charlton County and South Charlton County portions. An overall sense of community is minimal and the unique characteristics of each area need to be addressed separately.
- Charlton County does not permit septic tanks in the flood plain areas; however, septic tanks are installed without permits.

Opportunities

- Code Enforcement provides an effective tool to protect the floodplain. Grant and public/private/non-profit opportunities may exist to assist with floodplain protection efforts.

Transportation

Needs

- There is a lack of local and state funding to support resurfacing and maintenance of local roads.
- There is a lack of state funds and maintenance on existing state roads.

Opportunities

- Seek the development of additional bicycle and/or multi-use trails.
- Seek the development of additional sidewalk infrastructure.
- Seek the development of additional blueways and water trails; in addition to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge which is a National Scenic Water Trail.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Needs

- There is a lack of coordination with some of the State agencies – too much disconnect to the higher levels of government, especially as Charlton County is geographically removed from the Capital.
- There is a lack of coordination and cooperation between State and Federal agencies to market the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

Opportunities

- The school system has created a real fabric of unity, especially with the success of sports teams, the band, and its music program.
- The school system has done an exceptional job with improving their facilities, outreach, and programs.

Broadband Services

Needs

- The lack of sufficient digital broadband coverage in large areas of Charlton County limits education and economic development opportunities and causes communication problems for police, fire, and EMS.
- More affordable, accessible, consistent, and higher-speed broadband access is needed throughout all of Charlton County and the Cities of Homeland and Folkston.
- The school system, medical providers, and businesses need improved Broadband coverage.
- Communication systems need to be improved.
- An alternative to fiber infrastructure needs to be promoted for rural areas as it is cost-prohibitive to install fiber broadband.

Opportunities

- More robust broadband services may enable greater opportunity for citizens and businesses.
- Public/Private Partnerships could be developed to provide comprehensive broadband coverage that is consistent, reliable, and equitable.

3. Analysis of Data and Information

Charlton County

The estimated 2018 population of Charlton County is 12,968¹. This is an increase of 797 residents since the 2010 Census; indicating a stable, slightly increasing population². There are an estimated 4,494 housing units in Charlton County³. 66.7% of the population are White and 25.6% are Black or African American⁴. 8.4 % are of Hispanic/Latino origin and 1.6 % are American Indian and Alaska Native⁵.

The median age in Charlton County is 41.4, compared with a median US age of 37.8⁶. 77.2% of residents have a high school diploma or higher⁷. The median household income is \$43,257⁸. The median home value is \$82,200⁹. The homeowner vacancy rate is 1.1% while the rental vacancy rate is 11.2%¹⁰. The percentage of occupied housing units with no vehicle available is 6.7%¹¹.



¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2018

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census, General Population and Housing Characteristics, 2013-2017

³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Total Housing Units, 2013-2017

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Race, 2013-2017

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Race, 2013-2017

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Sex and Age, 2013-2017

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Educational Attainment, 2013-2017

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Income and Benefits, 2013-2017

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Median Value (Dollars), 2013-2017

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Housing Occupancy, 2013-2017

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Vehicles Available, 2013-2017

City of Folkston

The estimated 2018 population of the City of Folkston is 4,672¹². This is an increase of 2,171 residents since the 2010 Census; a 46% increase¹³. There are an estimated 1,221 housing units in the City of Folkston¹⁴. 73% of the population are White and 12.7% are Black or African American¹⁵. 17.6% are of Hispanic/Latino origin and 5.4% are Asian¹⁶.

The median age in the City of Folkston is 37.8, the same as the median US age¹⁷. 87.3% of residents have a high school diploma or higher¹⁸. The median household income is \$57,652¹⁹. The median home value is \$88,800²⁰. The homeowner vacancy rate is 2.8% while the rental vacancy rate is 7.9%²¹. The percentage of occupied housing units with no vehicle available is 13.5%²².



¹² U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2018

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census, General Population and Housing Characteristics, 2013-2017

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Total Housing Units, 2013-2017

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Race, 2013-2017

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Race, 2013-2017

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Sex and Age, 2013-2017

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Educational Attainment, 2013-2017

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Income and Benefits, 2013-2017

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Median Value (Dollars), 2013-2017

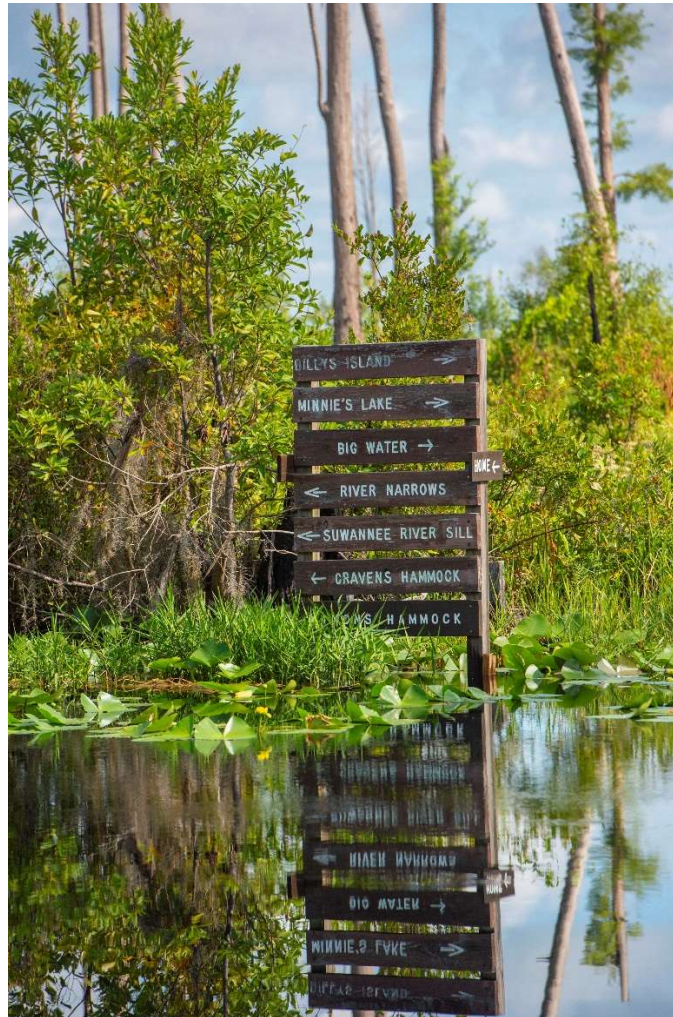
²¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Housing Occupancy, 2013-2017

²² U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Vehicles Available, 2013-2017

City of Homeland

The estimated 2018 population of the City of Homeland is 935²³. This is an increase of 25 residents since the 2010 Census; indicating a stable population²⁴. There are an estimated 303 housing units in the City of Homeland²⁵. 87.3% of the population are White and 0.1% are Black or African American²⁶. 8.9% are of Hispanic/Latino origin and 2.4% are American Indian and Alaska Native²⁷.

The median age in the City of Homeland is 32.7, compared with a median US age of 37.8²⁸. 87.3% of residents have a high school diploma or higher²⁹. The median household income is \$57,652³⁰. The median home value is \$47,400³¹.



²³ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2018

²⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census, General Population and Housing Characteristics, 2013-2017

²⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Total Housing Units, 2013-2017

²⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Race, 2013-2017

²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Race, 2013-2017

²⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Sex and Age, 2013-2017

²⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Educational Attainment, 2013-2017

³⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Income and Benefits, 2013-2017

³¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Median Value (Dollars), 2013-2017

4. Broadband Element

The Georgia legislature, in recognition of the importance of broadband infrastructure to the vitality of communities passed the Achieving Connectivity Everywhere (ACE) Act (SB 402) in 2018. The Act provides for broadband services³² planning, deployment, and incentives, along with other purposes. It also requires comprehensive plans to include the promotion of the deployment of broadband services. Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland recognize the importance of broadband expansion to economic development and quality of life for residents.

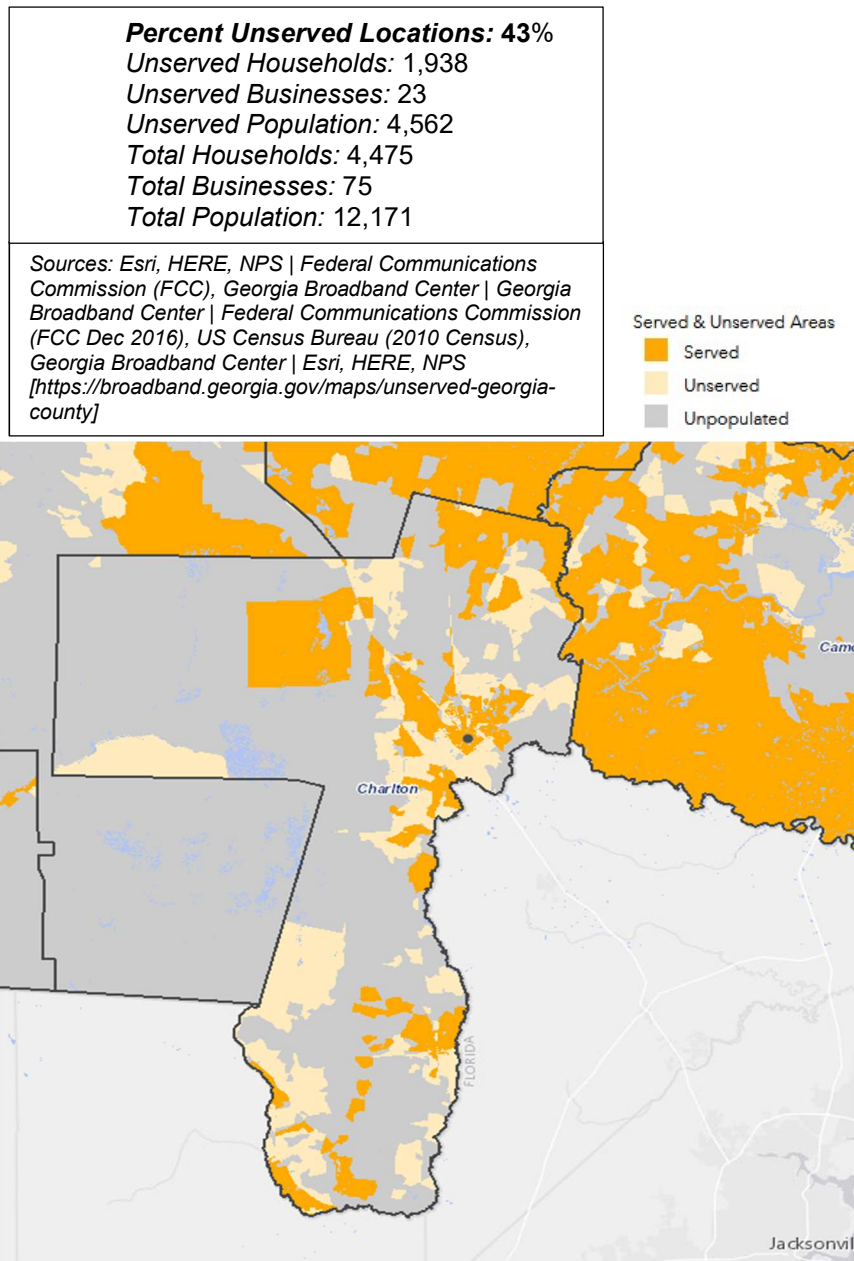
Provision of broadband services enables access by residents to a number of vital services such as healthcare, economic opportunity, and education. Expansion of rural broadband along with improvement in the provision of broadband services can address concerns of resident out-migration. Effective and efficient broadband enables internet-based businesses to succeed in the global economy. It is difficult to educate upcoming generations of students in web literacy and digital skills training without adequate broadband speed and connectivity.

The latest data shown in Map 1 below identifies 43% of the locations in Charlton County as unserved. However, it has been noted the technique of classifying unserved locations is too broad. A Census block is categorized as “served” if at least one consumer in a Census block has broadband service available to them. As more granular data becomes available, a more accurate classification is expected and the percentage unserved is anticipated to rise.



³² As defined in O.C.G.A. §50-40-1. Definitions. “Broadband services” means a wired or wireless terrestrial service that consists of the capability to transmit at a rate of not less than 25 megabits per second in the downstream direction and at least 3 megabits per second in the upstream direction to end users and in combination with such service provides:

- (A) Access to the Internet; or
- (B) Computer processing, information storage, or protocol conversion.



Map 1: Served & Unserved Areas in Charlton County, Folkston, and Homeland

County statistics are based on a fixed, terrestrial broadband definition of 25 megabits per second down and 3 megabits per second up, and where the broadband service is available to at least ONE consumer (residential and business) in a census block. Populated census blocks that did not meet this definition are delineated in Map 1 (above) as 'Unserved'. It has been noted by residents of Charlton County that there are people living in areas on the map above in the “Unserved” areas also identified as being “Unpopulated”.

76.4% of households in Charlton County have a computer, compared to 87% of households statewide.³³ Broadband internet subscriptions in the County are held by 60.4% of households.³⁴ During the analysis of broadband services provision in Charlton County, an electronic poll was distributed to businesses, hospitals, government bodies, libraries, and educational facilities. 75% of respondents indicate their Internet service options are not adequate (non-residential). 38% indicate that reliability is an issue with their service and 75% report the internet speed does not sufficiently meet their needs. The results of the broadband poll are included in the Appendix.

With the ONWR's eastern entrance just south of Folkston, tourism is a major attraction and economic stronghold in Charlton County. For navigation purposes and sense of safety, visitors depend on reliable cellular service. The southern and western portions of the County experience the largest gaps in cellular service coverage³⁵.

Fiber infrastructure is cost prohibitive due to the rural nature, propensity for wetlands, and vastness of the County. Non-fiber solutions to broadband infrastructure are sought by County leaders especially as new technologies develop. There is a small amount of fiber present at County/City buildings and at the D. Ray James Correctional Facility within Folkston; however, it is unlikely that fiber will reach much beyond the City of Folkston into the unincorporated portions of the County.

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland recognize there are many barriers for private broadband services providers to effectively roll-out necessary broadband infrastructure in rural areas of the State. City and County leaders recognize the importance of broadband quality for industry retention and recruitment within this small, rural community. Community leaders continuously seek improvement in the quality of life for the rural residents of the Cities and County. Industry relocation and business creation are dependent on the necessary infrastructure being in place. The lack of high quality broadband infrastructure is a major impediment to not only recruitment but also for the expansion of established local industry. The Broadband Ready Community and Site designation has been established to incentivize private investment in the provision of rural broadband services. Charlton County and the City of Folkston plan to apply for these designations and signal to the State and to private Internet Service Providers their prioritization of rural broadband improvement and expansion in the community.

³³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Households with a computer, percent, 2013-2017

³⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2013-2017

³⁵ *Dead Cell Zones Wireless Coverage Complaint Database*. Deadcellzones.com. Accessed 10 February 2020.

5. Consideration of DCA Community Quality Objectives

The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has crafted a series of objectives dealing with a broad range of issues that concern local governments. The objectives, which are listed below, are only recommendations, but provide local governments with a tool to guide them in the assessment of their needs and opportunities and in the development of their implementation activities. If they are used as such a tool by many of the local governments in their planning efforts, these objectives also have the potential to result in consistent planning projects and goals, which may translate into greater efficiency and a better quality of life for the residents.

1. Economic Prosperity

Encourage development or expansion of businesses and industries that are suitable for the community. Factors to consider when determining suitability include: job skills required; long-term sustainability; linkages to other economic activities in the region; impact on the resources of the area; and prospects for creating job opportunities that meet the needs of a diverse local workforce.

Notes on Consistency with Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan

Economic development activities, which are coordinated between the County and the City of Folkston, are consistent with the Economic Prosperity objective. Applicable best practices include: workforce training, corridor study, tracking business needs, business incubator, evaluating business formation in your community, and economic development strategy for diversifying the local economy.

2. Resource Management

Promote the efficient use of natural resources and identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas of the community. This may be achieved by promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy generation; encouraging green building construction and renovation; utilizing appropriate waste management techniques; fostering water conservation and reuse; or setting environmentally sensitive areas aside as green space or conservation reserves.

Notes on Consistency with Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan

Natural Resource and Land Use goals and policies are consistent with the Resource Management objective. Applicable best practices include: water resource protection, stormwater management, conservation easements to include the setting aside of flood-prone land and preservation of regionally important resources.

3. Efficient Land Use

Maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the costly conversion of undeveloped land at the periphery of the community. This may be achieved by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the traditional core of the community; designing new development to minimize the amount of land consumed; carefully planning expansion of public infrastructure; or maintaining open space in agricultural, forestry, or conservation uses.

Notes on Consistency with Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan

The development pattern of the County is consistent with the Efficient Land Use objective. Applicable best practices include: infill development program, adaptive reuse, and preservation of agricultural land.

4. Local Preparedness

Identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of future the community seeks to achieve. These prerequisites might include infrastructure (roads, water, and sewer) to support or direct new growth; ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired; leadership and staff capable of responding to opportunities and managing new challenges; or undertaking an all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness and response.

Notes on Consistency with Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan

Preparedness actions within the County are consistent with the Local Preparedness objective. In addition, the County has a Hazard Mitigation Plan that takes into account the County's unique threats (wildfire and flooding). Applicable best practices include: staff professional development, coordination with federal and state partners, all hazards strategy, and effective and reliable communications strategy.

5. Sense of Place

Protect and enhance the community's unique qualities. This may be achieved by maintaining the downtown as focal point of the community; fostering compact, walkable, mixed-use development; protecting and revitalizing historic areas of the community; encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community; or protecting scenic and natural features that are important to defining the community's character.

Notes on Consistency with Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan

The downtown character of the main street in the City of Folkston is consistent with the Sense of Place objective. Applicable best practices include: protection of natural features such as the ONWR, prioritizing growth in areas currently served by public infrastructure (infill development), environmental resource inventory, landscaping ordinance, and code enforcement.

6. Regional Cooperation

Cooperate with neighboring jurisdictions to address shared needs. This may be achieved by actively participating in regional organizations; identifying joint projects that will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer; or developing collaborative solutions for regional issues such as protection of shared natural resources, development of the transportation network, or creation of a tourism plan.

Notes on Consistency with Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan

The amount and level of collaboration between the County, Cities, and the region is consistent with the Regional Cooperation objective. Applicable best practices include: service delivery strategy, regional roundtable, communication strategy, environmental resource inventory, regional economic development efforts, and joint economic development strategy.

7. Housing Options

Promote an adequate range of safe, affordable, inclusive, and resource-efficient housing in the community. This may be achieved by encouraging development of a variety of housing types, sizes, costs, and densities in each neighborhood; promoting programs to provide housing for residents of all socioeconomic backgrounds, including affordable mortgage finance options; instituting programs to address homelessness issues in the community; or coordinating with local economic development programs to ensure availability of adequate workforce housing in the community.

Notes on Consistency with Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan

The Housing goals and policies of this plan are consistent with the Housing Options objective. Applicable best practices include: Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH), affordable housing, creative design for higher density, cottage zoning, cluster development, accessory housing units, and workforce housing.

8. Transportation Options

Address the transportation needs, challenges, and opportunities of all community residents. This may be achieved by fostering alternatives to transportation by automobile, including walking, cycling, and transit; employing

traffic calming measures throughout the community; requiring adequate connectivity between adjoining developments; or coordinating transportation and land use decision-making within the community.

Notes on Consistency with Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan

Transportation goals, policies, and objectives are consistent with the Transportation Options objective. Applicable best practices include: safe routes to school, complete streets, scenic byway designation, sidewalk/trail network, right of way improvements, and access control measures and management.

9. Educational Opportunities

Make educational and training opportunities readily available to enable all community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, manage their finances, or pursue life ambitions. This can be achieved by expanding and improving local educational institutions or programs; providing access to other institutions in the region; instituting programs to improve local graduation rates; expanding vocational education programs; or coordinating with local economic development programs to ensure an adequately trained and skilled workforce.

Notes on Consistency with Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan

Goals, policies, and objectives of this plan are consistent with the Educational Opportunities objective. Applicable best practices include: workforce training, inmate educational opportunities, and adequate internet access for education, including telemedicine education.

10. Community Health

Ensure that all community residents, regardless of age, ability, or income, have access to critical goods and services, safe and clean neighborhoods, and good work opportunities. This may be achieved by providing services to support the basic needs of disadvantaged residents, including the disabled; instituting programs to improve public safety; promoting programs that foster better health and fitness; or otherwise providing all residents the opportunity to improve their circumstances in life and to fully participate in the community.

Notes on Consistency with Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland Comprehensive Plan

Goals, policies, and objectives are consistent with the Community Health objective. Applicable best practices include: access to public services, parks and recreation resources, and development of trails/outdoor activity amenities.

6. Community Policies

The following policies, numbered to align with the Community Goals, were developed in conjunction with all stakeholders and are intended to provide a qualitative guidance to address the Needs and Opportunities identified in this Plan, and to provide a framework for the development of the Community Work Program. The Community Work Program then addresses the Needs and Opportunities through specific projects, for each of which the participants, anticipated cost, and time frame are identified.

Development Patterns

Economic Development

Goal 1: Improve the greater Charlton County economy by diversifying and establishing an economic and cultural climate that will allow the County to become a regional center for ecotourism and other coastal area oriented businesses.

Needs & Policies

There is a lack of new industries and businesses coming to the County, resulting in a tight labor market.

Policy 1.1: Create a favorable environment towards a certified industrial area by implementing strategies in coordination with Folkston and all economic development agencies and authorities and the Regional Commission.

There is a lack of coordinated tourism marketing program to effectively market the area including marketing opportunities specific to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Railwatch, and Satilla/St. Mary's River, among others.

Policy 1.2: Encourage the formulation of a short-term and a long term use and marketing plan to target tourism opportunities presented by the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and the St. Marys and Satilla Rivers without exceeding the carrying capacity of those areas.

Policy 1.3: Promote hunting and fishing tourism in the county.

Policy 1.4: In coordination with the City of Folkston and the Chamber of Commerce set a goal for creating a downtown master plan and develop incentives for businesses to locate downtown. The Train Watching Platform has the potential to encourage more train and tourism related businesses to relocate to the City, including arts and crafts and artisans.

Policy 1.5: Support an agricultural/forestry small business sector for niche farming, forestry and agriculture related businesses such as specialty foods, farmer's market products and food processing industries to expand on the existing agricultural sector.

Policy 1.6: Work with the Chamber of Commerce and other economic development organizations to develop a set of incentives to attract investors and encourage public/private partnerships, including financial and density bonuses.

Policy 1.7: Investigate the potential for developing a master planned retirement community within the county that would include a full range of services and facilities, including a community center, a health center, and restaurants.

There is a lack of younger, educated workforce and a lack of skilled labor.

Policy 1.8: Support non-cash incentives for military personnel and supporting businesses to locate in Charlton County.

- Policy 1.9:** Strengthen volunteer programs with local nonprofits, the Chamber of Commerce, the school system, recreation services and the library.
- Policy 1.10:** Encourage new work opportunities for the younger generation.
- Policy 1.11:** Increase coordination with the School Board and the local Chamber to provide additional education programs to address increasing the educational level of the workforce, specifically reading and writing as well as basic business skills.
- Policy 1.12:** Work with private businesses in the community to provide internships to the younger workforce to learn business and working skills and gain experience.
- Policy 1.13:** Develop a program in coordination with the School Board to identify higher education opportunities either through long-distance learning methods or in nearby metro areas and make them accessible to local residents of all ages who wish to obtain a higher education level.
- Policy 1.14:** In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, increase outreach to existing businesses and industry.
- Policy 1.15:** Promote location and expansion of internet and broadband infrastructure in the county as well as the education of the workforce in internet applications and skills.

There is a loss of Population due to a lack of local available jobs.

- Policy 1.16:** Work towards a step-by-step implementation plan to provide for a job center in the County.
- Policy 1.17:** Research how the rise in elderly population may enhance the county's economic base and provide a largely untapped knowledge and experience base for the labor market.
- Policy 1.18:** Promote the rural quality of life and low density of the area to residents of the Jacksonville area and other metro areas who may seek a more peaceful way of life.
- Policy 1.19:** Promote the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and the St. Marys and Satilla Rivers to attract residents to the area who are looking for an improved quality of life around first class natural resources.
- Policy 1.20:** Support a marketing campaign to emphasize Charlton's quality of life to neighboring Florida residents. Even though Georgia has a state income tax; the County experiences less crime, has a lower cost of living, and has lower property taxes.

The film industry has approached the County about film production; however, there is a lack of lodging within the County which leads the industry to film in other areas.

- Policy 1.21:** Promote lodging locations for development within the County to the private sector.

Housing

Goal 2: Ensure all residents of Charlton County have access to adequate and affordable housing with a suitable and healthy living environment.

Needs & Policies

Charlton County has a countywide shortage of affordable quality housing for all income groups.

- Policy 2.1:** Encourage construction of affordable, good-quality housing for all income groups. Incentives may include density bonuses, one-stop permitting, or other in-kind measures.

Policy 2.2: Provide incentives for the construction of good-quality housing in mixed-use developments within the cities to maximize infrastructure investments.

A significant portion of the properties and housing stock is in serious neglect, lack of property maintenance and housing maintenance are a serious issue.

Policy 2.3: Enforce the maintenance and clean-up of vacant lots and properties.

Policy 2.4: Provide and enforce regulations that require property owners to remove dilapidated, illegally placed mobile homes.

A small number of property owners contribute towards the majority of property taxes due to the low value of a portion of the housing stock. A high percentage of manufactured homes are not occupied or not owner occupied which contributes to their lessened valuation.

Policy 2.5: Maintain older neighborhoods that are also perceived as providing quality and character to the area. Housing preserved in quality will subsequently raise the value of housing stock.

Policy 2.6: Continue to use the Code Enforcement Inspector Program. Low value, substandard, dilapidated housing presents a danger to the welfare, health and safety of the public. It should be eliminated through demolition or removal and replaced with higher value, quality, and affordable housing stock.

A significant portion of the housing for the elderly or families with young children is substandard.

Policy 2.7: Be strategic with support for the location of businesses such as quality grocery stores and other businesses which support neighborhoods, attract quality housing, and complete well-functioning and sustainable neighborhoods with a mixture of uses.

Policy 2.8: Pursue public/private partnerships to build and market affordable infill housing in areas of need as identified in the county-wide housing survey.

Rents are high compared to rents for similar housing in surrounding areas.

Policy 2.9: Provide incentives to developers of high quality, affordable rental housing. These could include: allowing a mixture of housing sizes, contributing towards construction/development/land acquisition costs, and creating a one-stop shop for permitting.

Natural & Cultural Resources

Natural Resources

Goal 3: Protect, appropriately use, or conserve the natural resources of the County, notably the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and Rivers, to maximize their functions and values in a sustainable manner for perpetuity.

Needs & Policies

The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, St. Marys River, and Satilla River need to have their existing public access points upgraded with proper oversight.

Policy 3.1: Research options for public or private management of public river access points and their immediate vicinity (either as a state park or through concessions) to increase security and reduce crime and vandalism.

Policy 3.2: Coordinate with local water trail partnerships for improved access, signage, and information to facilitate travel/recreation on waterways.

Enforcement is vital at river access points to keep up maintenance and minimize dumping of trash, which both rivers are experiencing.

Policy 3.3: Coordinate with the Sheriff's Department, DNR and volunteers to enforce speeding limits in residential subdivisions adjacent to public river access points. Increase fines for offenders to finance administration of such a program.

Policy 3.4: Participate and assist in the annual river cleanups.

Policy 3.5: Support DNR, the St. Marys River Management Committee, the Satilla/St. Marys/Suwanee Riverkeepers and with projects to protect and enhance these valuable natural resources and take advantage of their economic value for the area.

Policy 3.6: Encourage the County to investigate sample ordinances that could help maintain the environmental character of the rivers, their banks, and the river corridors.

Policy 3.7: Encourage local governments and agencies to seek out funding for grants and other assistance to help clean up the rivers.

The St. Marys River and Satilla River both have existing grandfathered septic tanks located within the floodplain.

Policy 3.8: Encourage implementation and enforcement of regulations for septic system setbacks on for the St. Marys and Satilla Rivers and the Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge.

Policy 3.9: Encourage proper maintenance of septic systems within the river corridors and tributaries through increased education.

Policy 3.10: Investigate and encourage alternate methods of waste disposal other than septic tanks in order to protect the quality of the groundwater.

Policy 3.11: Consider incentives that will ensure existing and proposed uses are compatible and ensure proposed uses are appropriate and compatible with natural and cultural uses surrounding them.

Policy 3.12: Continue to pursue state and federal grants and other public funding sources to purchase and/or preserve some of the most environmentally sensitive lands in the county.

Promote the connection of the Okefenokee Trail with the Suwanee Wilderness Trail to create a large scale, interconnected eco-tourism resource.

Policy 3.13: Build awareness of a potential connection between the Okefenokee Water Trail and the Suwanee Wilderness Trail and pursue grant opportunities to work towards their eventual designation.

Cultural Resources

Goal 4: Effectively protect, preserve, and promote the historic and cultural resources of Charlton County. Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland should promote adaptive reuse of vacant historic buildings, heritage tourism, and public education programs focusing on historic preservation.

Needs & Policies

Charlton County has a unique and remarkable history that needs to be preserved.

Policy 4.1: Encourage the establishment of a historical museum and archive for Greater Charlton County. This museum should be used for the storage and display of historic papers, books, photographs, textiles, and other historic and cultural memorabilia. Information pertaining to the history of Greater Charlton County's historic & cultural resources, such as historic resources surveys should also be kept there.

Community Facilities and Services

Goal 5: Provide needed community facilities including digital broadband and communications, water, sewer, solid waste, police, fire, and EMS in a manner that ensures current and future needs of residents and businesses of Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland are met.

Needs & Policies

The length of the County (54 miles) poses logistical issues to provide sufficient law enforcement coverage for the Sheriff, EMS and Fire.

Policy 5.1: Encourage supplemental medical transport other than EMS to provide sufficient coverage including research of alternatives, cost and feasibility.

Policy 5.2: Investigate and consider developing a fee for services menu to provide for payment for non-emergency services.

The Cities of Folkston and Homeland only have small utilities. Federal and state regulations, including a periodic water quality testing fee redirect needed monetary resources from provision of services to regulatory expenditures.

Policy 5.3: Plan and guide the growth via the provision of water and sewer lines and tie the services into the appropriate land use.

Policy 5.4: Prevent or redirect development that is not supported by infrastructure.

Policy 5.5: Encourage clustered types of developments that will encourage the provision of water and sewer and protect natural resources.

Policy 5.6: Continue, in coordination with the Regional Commission, to apply for CDBG and other applicable grant and loan funding to construct and rehabilitate necessary infrastructure in the county.

Policy 5.7: Pursue CDBG grants for water and sewer for the St. George area to protect the groundwater and surface water from the impact of too many septic tanks and to enable smaller lot sizes of ¼ to ½ acre within the St. George Character Area limits.

Policy 5.8: Monitor development pressure coming from growth caused by the outmigration of Florida residents in order to ensure a timely response to impacts to local community facilities and services.

Land Use

Goal 6: Ensure a high quality living environment through a mixture of compatible land uses reflecting the needs and desires of local residents and businesses and their vision for Charlton County.

Needs & Policies

The City of Folkston has a zoning ordinance; the unincorporated county and City of Homeland do not. Some development standards need to be put into place countywide to protect the existing quality of life while still allowing new residential and non-residential development.

- Policy 6.1:** Develop a sense of purpose and intent and a geographic sense of space for the various areas of Charlton County and encourage innovative development practices.
- Policy 6.2:** Encourage and request that any proposed development be compatible with the underlying Character Areas as shown in the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan.
- Policy 6.3:** Provide adequate buffering and setbacks between agricultural and non-agricultural uses to protect any agricultural/forestry uses from adverse impacts associated with the encroachment of non-agricultural development and protect agricultural/forestry uses from nuisance complaints created by agricultural operations. Ensure that Agricultural Best Management Practices and Forest Best Management Practices are used in maintaining the county's agricultural and forest areas.
- Policy 6.4:** Develop some limited land development standards to plan for the future and steer development and economic growth where Charlton County would like to see it and to limit any potential negative environmental impacts. Provide for compatible development, market the County as a bedroom community to Jacksonville, and preserve a rural quality of life in the midst of the County's close proximity to a major metropolitan area.
- Policy 6.5:** Encourage new residential development to locate within the Mixed Use Preferred Development or the Gateway Corridor Character areas to ensure adequate service with infrastructure and minimize the cost on the County for road maintenance.
- Policy 6.6:** Create an inventory of available developable land (Homeland has 16 acres and the County has 7 acres in the Industrial Park) and promote the development of commercial and industrial development in those areas.
- Policy 6.7:** Promote development standards for landscaping and land use based on best management practices for the prevention of wildfires, specifically in areas adjacent to the county's timber areas and Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Appropriate types and methods of fuel reduction and structure ignitability reduction can be found in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, developed in 2019 by the Georgia Forestry Commission. The plan provides recommendations to protect the citizens of Charlton County and its essential infrastructure.
- Policy 6.8:** To ensure walkability and safety, coordinate with the School Board on Future Land Use designations to locate schools in to areas where residential development is desirable and in such a manner that the schools are located near existing or future residential neighborhoods to ensure walkability and safety.

The County is 54 miles long and due to the length has developed into two distinct North Charlton County and South Charlton County portions. An overall sense of community is minimal and the unique characteristics of each area need to be addressed separately.

- Policy 6.9:** Create pro-active community place-making projects to address the lack of a sense of overall community cohesion.

Charlton County does not permit septic tanks in the flood plain areas; however, septic tanks are installed without permits.

Policy 6.10: Property with industrial uses should have both water and sewer services available to it concurrent with development in order to provide sufficient protection to the health and safety of the public, avoid groundwater contamination and to provide for sufficient fire protection.

Policy 6.11: Encourage increased code enforcement action to prevent illegal septic tanks in flood plain areas and research new advances in sewage technology to address the needs of rural flood plain areas.

Transportation

Goal 7: **Provide a safe and efficient integrated multi-modal transportation system including Greenways, Bikeways, and Blueways addressing the future needs of Charlton County businesses, residents, and visitors.**

Needs & Policies

There is a lack of local and state funding to support resurfacing and maintenance of local roads.

Policy 7.1: Continue to pursue and lobby for additional funding to improve local roads, including CDBG and SPLOST funds.

Policy 7.2 Research and implement measures to develop multi-modal systems including bicycle and pedestrian safety initiatives.

There is a lack of state funds and maintenance on existing state roads.

Policy 7.2: Continue to raise awareness of maintenance issues on existing state roads among local and State elected officials and staff.

Policy 7.3: Continue to support the Transportation Infrastructure Act (TIA) which has enabled the local TSPLOST.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Goal 8: **Establish effective coordination measures among all pertinent public and quasi-public entities to continuously improve Charlton County's quality of life and resources.**

Needs & Policies

There is a lack of coordination with some of the State agencies – too much disconnect to the higher levels of government, especially as Charlton County is geographically removed from the Capital.

Policy 8.1: Encourage participation in committees, groups, and organizations promoting intergovernmental cooperation at the State and regional level. Continue to cooperate with adjacent jurisdictions.

There is a lack of coordination and cooperation between State and Federal agencies to market the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

Policy 8.2: Continue State and Federal agency cooperation with local groups and include them in State and Federal planning and projects.

Broadband Services

Goal 9: **Enhance the provision of broadband infrastructure to better support educational opportunities and career advancement for residents of the Cities and County to effectively compete in the global economy.**

Needs & Policies

The lack of sufficient digital broadband coverage in large areas of Charlton County limits education and economic development opportunities and causes communication problems for police, fire and EMS.

Policy 9.1: Continue to market Charlton County to cell phone providers for the location of communication towers in an effort to increase coverage in order to delete gaps of coverage for emergency services.

More affordable, accessible, consistent, and higher-speed broadband access is needed throughout all of Charlton County and the Cities of Homeland and Folkston.

Policy 9.2: Seek funding to enable public/private partnerships to advance the quality of broadband infrastructure in Charlton County.

The school system, medical providers, and businesses need improved Broadband coverage.

Policy 9.3: Continue to work with State agencies and local government representatives to encourage the provision of improved internet access.

Communication systems need to be improved.

Policy 9.4: Analyze the gaps in communication capabilities and seek grant funding to address the coverage gaps.

An alternative to fiber infrastructure needs to be promoted for rural areas as it is cost-prohibitive to install fiber broadband.

Policy 9.5: Create a dialogue with the broadband industry to learn of technological developments in the provision of internet service to rural areas.

7. Community Work Program

Charlton County 5-Year Short-Term Work Program Update Report of Accomplishments (2016 - 2020)

PROJECTS	STATUS	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	COMMENTS
Natural & Cultural Resources							
Promote and encourage outdoor recreation activities such as bird watching and bike riding.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025; Reworded for additional specificity.
Continue funding and support of the St Marys River Management Committee.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Develop a plan for outdoor recreation programs that will not have adverse environmental impacts.	Underway			x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Economic Development							
Pursue industries that involve the manufacture and/or processing of native materials such as wood/fuel pellets.	Completed	x	x	x	x	x	
Continue to provide funding for Charlton/Folkston Development Authority and its programs.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue to use the Chamber of Commerce for promotion of the County to attract business and promote eco-tourism.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue to participate in workforce development	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland 2020 Comprehensive Plan

PROJECTS	STATUS	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	COMMENTS
Approve and construct General Class Business Airport.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	This item will be modified to: improving the existing airport.
Develop Phase I of Certified Industrial Park.	Cancelled	x	x	x			No longer proposing a new industrial park.
HOUSING AND LAND USE							
Continue to provide funding for building and code enforcement program.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
As economy improves, lease or purchase a large tract of property for an industrial park in order to draw potential investors.	Cancelled	x	x	x	x	x	No longer proposing a new industrial park.
Conduct review of ordinances on an as-needed basis.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue to support land uses that encourage growth, enhance economic development, provide employment opportunities, and promote environmental sustainability.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025 Reworded for additional specificity to include adoption of a zoning ordinance.
Establish & Maintain Firewise Community Programs/Plans for all communities within the county.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES							
Build Voting Precinct Building at GA Bend Area.	Underway			x	x	x	In SPLOST, Expected Completion FY2025
Pave portions of Newell Road and other Connector Roads.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland 2020 Comprehensive Plan

PROJECTS	STATUS	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	COMMENTS
Continue Maintenance of Roads & Bridges.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Make general improvements to government buildings.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025; Reworded for additional specificity.
Schedule and implement park Improvements, such as playgrounds and landscaping.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Purchase Fire Trucks & Fire Equipment.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	The truck portion is complete, still in need of fire equipment. Expected Completion for fire equipment is FY2025
Purchase Sheriff's Vehicles & Equipment.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Expand the Public Library.	Complete	x	x				
Build Vehicle Fuel Centers - 2 Units.	Complete		x	x			
Renovate the Health Department building.	Complete		x	x			
Resurface Suwannee Canal Road with Bike Lane from Hwy 121 to Refuge.	Underway	x	x				Expected Completion FY2025
Construct EMS Facility.	Complete		x	x	x		
Renovate and upgrade Fire Stations.	Underway			x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION							
Hold Municipal Elections by Municipal Contracts.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Implement County-wide Building Inspection & Permitting Services.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland 2020 Comprehensive Plan

PROJECTS	STATUS	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	COMMENTS
Implement County-wide Recreation Program.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Implement County-wide E-911 Service for Cities.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Implement County-wide Jail Services for Cities.	Cancelled	x	x	x	x	x	No longer planning to do this.
Implement County-wide Fire Services for Cities.	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025

Charlton County 5-Year Community Work Program Update
(2021 - 2025)

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
CULTURAL RESOURCES									
Display items of historical significance at the Chamber of Commerce building and on the Chamber website.	Staff time	Okefenokee Chamber of Commerce	General Fund	4	X	X	X	X	X
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT									
Provide funding for Charlton/Folkston Development Authority and its programs.	\$29,000 per year	Charlton County	General Fund	1	X	X	X	X	X
Provide funding to the Chamber of Commerce for promotion of the County to attract business and promote eco-tourism.	\$10,000 per year	Charlton County	General Fund	1	X	X	X	X	X
Participate in workforce development.	\$7,500	Charlton County	General Fund	1	X	X	X	X	X
Improve the General Class Business Airport.	\$25,000 per year	Charlton County	General Fund	1	X	X	X	X	X
Evaluate methods of incentivizing medical services to locate in the County.	Staff time	Charlton County; Chamber of Commerce	General Fund	1	X	X	X	X	X
HOUSING									
Provide funding for building and code enforcement program.	\$40,000 per year	Charlton County	General Fund	2	X	X	X	X	X
Conduct review of ordinances on an as-needed basis.	\$2,500	Charlton County	General Fund	2	X	X	X	X	X
Establish & Maintain Firewise Community Programs/Plans for all communities within the county.	\$80,000	Charlton County, City of Folkston, City of Homeland	Georgia Forestry Commission	2	X	X	X	X	X
Fund neighborhood revitalization to address substandard housing within the Thomas Camp neighborhood.	\$750,000/project	Charlton County	General Fund, CDBG, grants, CHIP	2	X	X	X		
Fund housing rehabilitation to upgrade the quality of existing substandard housing within the northeast border of Folkston; specifically the area of SR 252 and HWY 40.	\$750,000/year	Charlton County	General Fund, CDBG, grants, CHIP	2	X	X	X	X	X

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland 2020 Comprehensive Plan

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
LAND USE									
Adopt a Zoning Ordinance in an effort to support land uses that encourage growth, enhance economic development, provide employment opportunities, and promote environmental sustainability.	\$15,000	Charlton County	General Fund	6	X	X	X	X	X
NATURAL RESOURCES									
Provide funding and support for the St Marys River Management Committee.	\$800/year	Charlton County	General Fund	3	X	X	X	X	X
Develop a Master Plan for outdoor recreation that will not contribute adverse environmental impacts.	\$15,000 (one-time fee)	Charlton County	General Fund	3	X	X	X	X	X
Implement recommendations from the Master Plan for outdoor recreation to support increased river access and sports programming and facilities.	\$300,000	Charlton County	General Fund, SPLOST, grants	3	X	X	X	X	X
Implement the highest priority management measures recommended in the Spanish Creek Watershed Management Plan to address fecal coliform and dissolved oxygen impairments in Spanish Creek.	\$650,000	Charlton County	319 grant, General Fund, grants	3	X	X	X	X	X
TRANSPORTATION									
Pave portions of Newell Road and other Connector Roads.	\$500,000	Charlton County	General Fund, SPLOST, grants	7	X	X	X	X	X
Maintain Roads & Bridges, to include street paving and Drainage.	\$500,000 per year	Charlton County	General Fund, SPLOST, grants, CDBG	7	X	X	X	X	X
Resurface Suwannee Canal Road with Bike Lane from Hwy 121 to Refuge.	\$750,000	Charlton County and ONWR	General Fund, SPLOST, grants	7	X	X	X	X	X
Support regional efforts to identify and support bicycle trails and supportive infrastructure.	\$15,000	Charlton County	General Fund, SPLOST, grants	7	X	X	X	X	X
Upgrade dirt roads to paved roads with associated improvements (curb, gutter, drainage, and sidewalks) in the St. George community.	\$750,000 per year	Charlton County, GDOT	SPLOST, TSPLOST, CDBG, grants	7			X	X	X

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland 2020 Comprehensive Plan

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES									
Build Voting Precinct Building at GA Bend Area.	\$50,000	Charlton County	SPLOST, grants	5	X	X	X	X	X
Make general improvements and perform necessary preventative maintenance to government buildings.	\$100,000	Charlton County	SPLOST, General Fund, grants	5	X	X	X	X	X
Schedule and implement park Improvements, such as playgrounds and landscaping.	\$175,000	Charlton County	SPLOST, General Fund, grants	5	X	X	X	X	X
Purchase Fire Equipment.	\$400,000	Charlton County	SPLOST, General Fund, grants	5	X	X	X	X	X
Purchase Sheriff's Vehicles & Equipment.	\$500,000	Charlton County	SPLOST, General Fund	5	X	X	X	X	X
Renovate and upgrade Fire Stations.	\$200,000	Charlton County	SPLOST, General Fund, grants	5	X	X	X	X	X
Increase participation by senior citizens in meal programs and Senior Center activities.	Staff time	Charlton County	General Fund, grants	5	X	X	X	X	X
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION									
Hold Municipal Elections by Municipal Contracts.	\$30,000	Charlton County	General Fund	8	X	X	X	X	X
Implement County-wide Building Inspection & Permitting Services.	\$40,000	Charlton County	General Fund	8	X	X	X	X	X
Implement County-wide Recreation Program.	\$80,000	Charlton County	General Fund, grants	8	X	X	X	X	X
Implement County-wide E-911 Service for Cities.	\$10,000	Charlton County	General Fund, grants	8	X	X	X	X	X
Implement County-wide Fire Services for Cities.	\$100,000	Charlton County	General Fund, grants	8	X	X	X	X	X

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
BROADBAND									
Provide adequate high speed broadband access for local industries and commercial businesses.	\$10,000,000	Charlton County, City of Folkston, Public/Private Partnership	General Fund, SPLOST, grants, private funding	9	X	X	X	X	X
Adopt a Broadband Ordinance.	Staff time	Charlton County	General Fund	9	X	X	X	X	X
Apply for Broadband Ready Certification.	Staff time	Charlton County	General Fund	9	X	X	X	X	X
Review and reduce any obstacles to roll-out or development of broadband infrastructure.	Staff time	Charlton County	General Fund	9	X	X	X	X	X

City of Folkston 5-Year Short-Term Work Program Update Report of Accomplishments

(2016 - 2020)

PROJECTS	STATUS	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	COMMENTS
CULTURAL RESOURCES							
Support programs and agencies that promote and protect the historical and unique character of Folkston	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue water audits to reduce number of gallons not metered	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
Support programs that encourage and promote eco-tourism for local businesses	Underway	x	x	x	x	x	Expected Completion FY2025
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT							
Continue to provide funding for the Charlton/Folkston Development Authority	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue to revitalize core downtown business districts	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue funding and support of the Chamber of Commerce	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
HOUSING & LAND USE							
Encourage property owners to clean up and maintain areas using the Dangerous Building Ordinance	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Develop land use regulations to promote controlled growth	Complete	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Revise ordinances as needed that are in conflict with desired development and growth patterns	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue to support and enforce land use regulations	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland 2020 Comprehensive Plan

PROJECTS	STATUS	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	COMMENTS
COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES							
Continue to support drainage and paving of unpaved roads as funding is available	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Build a community center	Cancelled	X	X				No longer planning to build this.
Maintain community facilities	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025; Reworded for additional specificity.
Continue repair, refurbishment, and replacement of defective wastewater lift stations, manholes, and distribution lines	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue funding and monthly support of the Charlton County Library	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue funding for rail viewing platform	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue repair and replacement of defective water/sewer lines	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Expand water system and build 1.5 MGD wastewater treatment plant	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION							
Continue participation in committees, groups, and organizations promoting intergovernmental coordination	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue to pursue intergovernmental cooperation between cities, county, and all boards and authorities	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025

City of Folkston 5-Year Community Work Program Update
(2021 - 2025)

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
CULTURAL RESOURCES									
Support programs and agencies that promote and protect the historical and unique character of Folkston.	\$20,000	City of Folkston	General Fund	4	X	X	X	X	X
NATURAL RESOURCES									
Complete water audits to reduce number of gallons not metered.	\$10,000 per year	City of Folkston	Water-sewer funds, grants	4	X	X	X	X	X
Support programs that encourage and promote eco-tourism for local businesses.	\$10,000 per year	City of Folkston	General Fund	4	X	X	X	X	X
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT									
Provide funding for the Charlton/Folkston Development Authority.	\$26,000	City of Folkston	General Fund	1	X	X	X	X	X
Revitalize the core downtown business districts.	\$25,000	City of Folkston	General Fund, grants	1	X	X	X	X	X
Provide funding and support for the Chamber of Commerce.	\$35,000	City of Folkston	General Fund	1	X	X	X	X	X
HOUSING									
Request property owners clean up and maintain areas per the Dangerous Building Ordinance.	\$10,000 per year	City of Folkston	General Fund	2	X	X	X	X	X
LAND USE									
Revise ordinances in conflict with desired development and growth patterns.	\$15,000 per year	City of Folkston	General Fund	6	X	X	X	X	X

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland 2020 Comprehensive Plan

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
Support and enforce land use regulations.	\$10,000 per year	City of Folkston	General Fund	6	X	X	X	X	X
COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES									
Complete maintenance on the train museum located in the historic depot.	\$20,000 per year	City of Folkston	SPLOST, CDBG, General Fund	5	X	X	X	X	X
Maintain the Veteran's Park.	\$20,000 per year	City of Folkston	SPLOST, CDBG, General Fund	5	X	X	X	X	X
Repair, refurbish, and replace defective wastewater lift stations, manholes, and distribution lines.	\$100,000	City of Folkston	General Fund	5	X	X	X	X	X
Provide funding and monthly support for the Charlton County Library.	\$25,000 per year	City of Folkston	General Fund	5	X	X	X	X	X
Improve and maintain the rail viewing platform.	\$20,000 per year	City of Folkston	SPLOST, CDBG, General Fund	5	X	X	X	X	X
Repair and replace defective water/sewer lines.	\$25,000 per year	City of Folkston	Water/Sewer funds, grants, SPLOST	5	X	X	X	X	X
Expand water system and build 1.5 MGD wastewater treatment plant.	\$10,000,000-\$12,000,000	City of Folkston	USDA Loan/Grant program	5	X	X	X	X	X
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION									
Participate in committees, groups, and organizations promoting intergovernmental coordination.	\$5,000 per year	City of Folkston	General Fund	8	X	X	X	X	X
Pursue intergovernmental cooperation between Cities, County, and all boards and authorities.	\$5,000 per year	City of Folkston	General Fund	8	X	X	X	X	X

Charlton County and the Cities of Folkston and Homeland 2020 Comprehensive Plan

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
BROADBAND									
Provide adequate high speed broadband access for local industries and commercial businesses.	\$10,000,000	City, County, Public/Private Partnership	General Fund, SPLOST, grants, private funding	9	X	X	X	X	X
Adopt a Broadband Ordinance.	Staff time	City of Folkston	General Fund	9	X	X	X	X	X
Apply for Broadband Ready Certification.	Staff time	City of Folkston	General Fund	9	X	X	X	X	X
Review and reduce any obstacles to roll-out or development of broadband infrastructure.	Staff time	City of Folkston	General Fund	9	X	X	X	X	X
TRANSPORTATION									
Support drainage and paving of unpaved roads as funding is available.	\$1,000,000	City of Folkston	LARP, DOT, General Fund, CDBG, SPLOST	7	X	X	X	X	X

City of Homeland 5-Year Short-Term Work Program Update Report of Accomplishments

(2016 - 2020)

PROJECTS	STATUS	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	COMMENTS
HOUSING & LAND USE							
Continue to fund the building and code enforcement program	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES							
Extend water service to Nature Trails Estates, including fire hydrants	Complete	X	X				Expected Completion FY2025
Continue to upgrade all recreational facilities and parks on an as-needed basis	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Pursue grant funding to construct new City Hall with built in fireproof vault	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Continually seek available grants to maintain and replace existing fleet on an as-needed basis	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Expected Completion FY2025
Continue funding for the Homeland Economic Development Authority and its programs	Underway	X	X	X	X	X	Moved to Economic Development section; Expected Completion FY2025

City of Homeland 5-Year Community Work Program Update
(2021 - 2025)

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT									
Fund the Homeland Economic Development Authority and its programs.	\$50,000	City of Homeland	General Fund	1	X	X	X	X	X
HOUSING									
Fund the building and code enforcement program.	\$25,000	City of Homeland	Fees and General Fund	2	X	X	X	X	X
COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES –									
Upgrade all recreational facilities and parks on an as-needed basis.	\$20,000	City of Homeland	General Fund, grants	5	X	X	X	X	X
Upgrade water system facilities and infrastructure on an as needed basis.	\$50,000	City of Homeland	CDBG, USDA, grants, and General Fund	5	X	X	X	X	X
Construct new City Hall with built in fireproof vault.	\$300,000	City of Homeland	CDBG, USDA, grants, and General Fund	5	X	X	X	X	X
Maintain and replace existing fleet on an as-needed basis.	\$25,000 - \$30,000	City of Homeland	General Fund, grants, and SPLOST	5	X	X	X	X	X
BROADBAND									
Encourage broadband internet providers to offer services within Homeland.	Staff Time	City of Homeland	General Fund	9	X	X	X	X	X
TRANSPORTATION –									
Provide storm water drainage improvements to Nature Trail Estates Subdivision.	\$100,000	City of Homeland	LMIG, DOT, CDBG, SPLOST, and General Fund	7	X	X	X	X	X
Resurface roads on an as needed basis.	\$100,000	City of Homeland	General Fund, SPLOST, DOT	7	X	X	X	X	X

8. Economic Development Element

The 2018-2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), as developed by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission under a grant from the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration, is hereby incorporated by reference into this Comprehensive Plan to serve as the Economic Development Element for Charlton County and the Cities of Homeland and Folkston.

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission's (SGRC) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was designed to bring together the public and private sectors in the creation of an economic roadmap to diversify and strengthen the regional economy. The SGRC CEDS analyzed the regional economy and serve as a guide for establishing regional goals and objectives, a regional plan of action, and investment priorities and funding sources.

As a performance-based plan, this CEDS plays a critical role in adapting to global economic conditions by fully utilizing the region's unique advantages to maximize the economic opportunity for its residents by attracting private investment that creates jobs. The SGRC CEDS is a regionally owned strategy that is the result of a continuing economic development planning process developed with the regional public- and private-sector participation. This plan sets forth the goals and objectives necessary to solve the economic development problems of the Southern Georgia region and clearly defines the measures of success.

The Southern Georgia CEDS gives an overview of the region, briefly describing the geography, population, economy, labor and workforce development and use, education, transportation access, environment, and regional resources. It reviews the state of the regional economy and provides a list of achievable Goals and Objectives for the region, a Plan of Action to ensure success, and Performance Measures used to evaluate the Southern Georgia Regional Commission's successful development and implementation of the 2018-2022 CEDS. Implementation of the goals identified in this plan is significant to the economic future of the SGRC District.

Policies, issues, and opportunities, and Short-term Work Program implementation strategies located in the current Comprehensive Plans for each jurisdiction in our 18-county region were used extensively to develop the CEDS Goals and Objectives, Vital Projects, and Problems and Opportunities.

Included below are goals and objectives from the CEDS which are aligned with the current economic development goals of Charlton County and the Cities of Homeland and Folkston.

Goal 1: Promote economic development strategies that encourage entrepreneurship, support existing industries, attract new employers, and stimulate tourism.

Strategy:

Coordinate economic development initiatives with a variety of economic development entities.

Objectives:

- Promote coordination among all economic development entities in the region.
- Promote coordination between the local governments and area businesses and agencies to identify ways to attract and retain more young, workforce age population to the region.

Goal 2: Protect, expand, and enhance critical infrastructure and connectivity for existing and future community growth.

Strategy:

Improve broadband access in rural communities.

Objectives:

- Identify locations where additional bandwidth is needed.
- Provide incentives for broadband; i.e. Electric Membership Cooperatives

Goal 3: Facilitate growth and development of an educated, skilled, prepared workforce by utilizing available programs and resources.

Strategy:

Create and maintain long-term, meaningful employment opportunities sufficient to establish a sound and balanced economic base in which average per capita income and employment levels are consistently comparable to those of the State and Nation.

Objectives:

- Encourage private/public partnerships between counties, cities, local businesses, and schools for the development of work programs and career education programs such as career academies for young adults.
- Support educational institutions to provide learning/skill development opportunities.

Goal 4: Create an inviting sense of place through rural renewal and other strategies in order to retain population and to attract new members to our community.

Strategy:

Facilitate vibrant, attractive communities.

Objectives:

- Create a welcoming, functional neighborhood with “work, play, live” atmospheres to invite younger families to the region.
- Encourage local governments to participate in CHIP, CDBG, and USDA housing programs.

9. Land Use Element

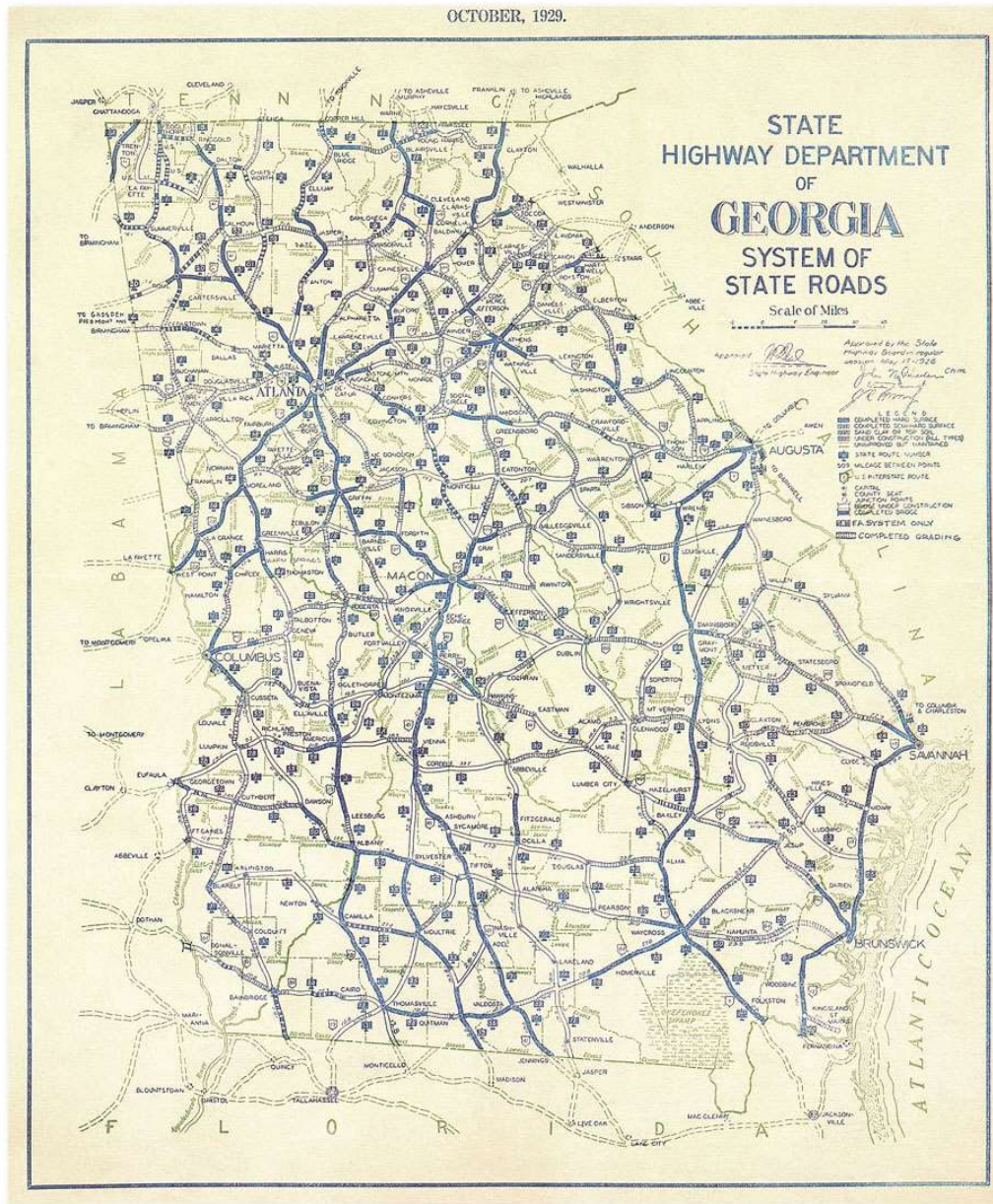
Background

As can be seen on the below map of the United States in 1812, Charlton County was a part of the southern US border while Florida was under colonial rule by Spain. Once Florida became a territory of the United States in 1821, the land currently in Charlton County was a part of Camden and Appling counties. Charlton County was created in 1854 by an act of the Georgia General Assembly, with land from Ware County. It was named for former U.S. Senator Robert M. Charlton, who died that same year. The first county seat was Traders Hill, a community located on the St. Mary's River previously known as Fort Alert.



Charte von den Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-America nebst Louisiana und Florida: nach Murdochischer Projection und den neuesten astronomischen Ortsbestim[m]ungen; 1812, Library of Congress

The City of Folkston was created as the Savannah, Florida, and Western Railroad needed a station in that location. Originally, the city was known as "the station." The first train passed through Charlton County in 1881. Most of the early settlers came from nearby Center Village. These settlers built homes and stores near the platform that was used for railroad passengers. Once the city began to grow, the settlement was named for Dr. William B. Folks of Waycross, Georgia. It was officially incorporated as a city in 1895. In 1901, Folkston replaced Traders Hill as the county seat of Charlton County. Folkston soon became the commercial center of the county. The City of Homeland was created as a Colony Community for retirees in 1906.



State Highway Map, 1929

As can be seen on the above map of State Highways from 1929, a major highway (Route 1) has crossed through Charlton County, between Folkston and Waycross, which predates the construction of Interstate-95 (construction began in 1966 to the east of Charlton County, in Camden County). Train and vehicular routes have brought people through Charlton County since the 1880's. With the construction of I-95 to the east and I-75 to the west, vehicular traffic is able to bypass the County. As such, strategies to bring visitors to the County are necessary, since travel through the County is not necessarily incidental to north/south travel through the state.

The County is relatively isolated due to the size, characteristics, and location of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. It is not possible to directly access the County by entering through the western edge of the Refuge. The County seat must be accessed by traveling a northern or southern route around the Refuge when approaching from the west. Access to the south, into the State of Florida, is hindered by the St. Marys River. Additionally, access to the east is constrained by the Satilla River.

Character Areas

In keeping with State Minimum Planning Standards, every part of the Greater Charlton Community was delineated into specific Character Areas. Character areas are intended to serve as guidance for future land use and land development. Each of the following character area narratives was developed based on stakeholder input, existing land uses, anticipated development, planned infrastructure improvements and expansions, and guidance found in the *State Planning Recommendations*. As with the Plan in general, these character area descriptions and goals should not be considered final. As the community gains a greater understanding of the role and value of character areas, their descriptions should be fine-tuned. Additionally, as the community continues to grow, specific character area depictions may need adjusting.

Each Character Area narrative has a unique **Description** stating either the existing or desired qualities for that area. **Predominant Land Uses** are then described.

The stated **Development Strategy** should serve as a guide for all development and redevelopment taking place in the Character Area. Adherence to these development strategies will ensure consistent and complimentary development, which promotes a greater sense of place and overall improved quality of life.

The listing of **Permitted Zonings**, for the City of Folkston as they have zoning; provides guidance as to the type of land uses encouraged within each Character Area. While many of the differences between uses can be mitigated through site design and development standards, there are certain uses which are incompatible with surrounding uses and should not be permitted.

As required by the State, the **Quality Community Objectives** demonstrate the unique ideals established for each Character Area (also see Section II, subsection 5 of this plan for descriptions of the Quality Community Objectives). While there is certainly a value to regional planning, planning on the neighborhood (or character area) level allows for greater implementation of specific objectives, which ultimately promotes an improved quality of life.

The **Implementation Measures** are the specific activities or programs which could take place within each of the Character Areas. While the suggested list of measures may or may not currently exist in Greater Charlton County, their implementation in appropriate areas would help achieve the established objectives and overall development strategy for each Character Area. In most cases, these measures should be considered joint efforts between the local government, development community, and citizens alike.

Character Area and Existing Land Use maps are provided in the Mapping section of this document, following the Land Use Element.

Conservation

(Unincorporated Charlton County)



Description

The Conservation Character Area is intended to identify those areas in Greater Charlton County which exhibit unique or special environmental characteristics, and may be held either publicly or privately. Conservation Character Areas in Greater Charlton County include the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, the St. Marys and Satilla Rivers, the Devil’s Elbow and Trader’s Hill.

Predominant Land Uses:

Conservation areas contain significant natural resources including watershed and groundwater recharge areas. The land uses are undeveloped, natural lands with significant natural features including floodplains, wetlands, watersheds, wildlife management areas and other environmentally sensitive areas not suitable for development.

Development Strategy

Protect the natural habitat in order to maintain or improve water quality and groundwater recharge areas, protect significant natural resources such as pristine wetland and upland habitat and wildlife while utilizing the natural resources’ attraction to visitors to build a sustainable economy around the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and the St. Marys and Satilla Rivers. Passive and active recreation uses will be allowed in addition to some limited residential uses. The primary mission is to maintain and improve critical water quality, preserve endangered species, preserve wetlands, educate future generations and add stability to the eco-system.

Quality Community Objectives:

- Resource Management
- Efficient Land Use
- Sense of Place
- Regional Cooperation

Implementation Measures:

- Support DNR, the St. Marys River Management Committee, the Satilla/St. Marys/Suwanee Riverkeepers and with projects to protect and enhance these valuable natural resources and take advantage of their economic value for the area (Policy 3.5).
- Encourage proper maintenance of septic systems within the river corridors and tributaries through increased education (Policy 3.9).
- Continue to pursue state and federal grants and other public funding sources to purchase and/or preserve some of the most environmentally sensitive lands in the county (Policy 3.12).
- Build awareness of a potential connection between the Okefenokee Water Trail and the Suwanee Wilderness Trail and pursue grant opportunities to work towards their eventual designation (Policy 3.13).

Mixed-Use Transitional

(Unincorporated Charlton County)

Description

The “Mixed Use Transitional” character area designation in Charlton County is intended for those areas outside of the more developed areas which are associated with agricultural/forestry and agriculture or forestry related activities. These areas are being recognized as appropriate for cash crops, livestock, and ranching activities. Many of these agriculturally/forestry utilized lands are under the 10-year (15-year for forest lands) conservation designation through the Tax Assessor and therefore, will not be available for development for those years. The Mixed Use Transitional Area serves as a buffer between the Conservation Character Area and its natural constraints on development and the Mixed-Used Preferred Development Character Area, which is the preferred area for potential future development.

Many of the wetlands and groundwater recharge areas are located in the Mixed Use Transitional Character Area. The soil suitability does not lend itself for prime development due to large coverage by wetlands or streams and incompatibility for development on septic systems. Water and sewer is generally not available within a cost feasible distance and will not be available in the near term future. The Mixed Use Transitional Area adjacent to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is also subject to increased wildfire danger. As such, additional standards for fire resistant landscaping and construction should be encouraged.

Predominant Land Uses:

Agricultural farm/silviculture operations and related activities, natural resources conservation, groundwater recharge areas, low-density residential development accessory to agricultural or farm operations of varying sizes. Limited commercial operations that would not adversely impact the adjacent conservation areas would also be permitted.

Development Strategy:

Protect the rural/agricultural/forestry character of these areas by maintaining very low density residential development primarily accessory to farm operations and large lot sizes. Use of conservation easements to protect environmentally sensitive areas should be encouraged. Roadways in these areas should be widened only when required to meet public safety standards.

Quality Community Objectives:

- Resource Management
- Efficient Land Use
- Local Preparedness

Implementation Measures:

- Consider incentives that will ensure existing and proposed uses are compatible and ensure proposed uses are appropriate and compatible with natural and cultural uses surrounding them (Policy 3.11).
- Provide adequate buffering and setbacks between agricultural and non-agricultural uses to protect any agricultural/forestry uses from adverse impacts associated with the encroachment of non-agricultural development and protect agricultural/forestry uses from nuisance complaints created by agricultural operations. Ensure that Agricultural Best Management Practices and Forest Best Management Practices are used in maintaining the county's agricultural and forest areas (Policy 6.3).
- Promote development standards for landscaping and land use based on best management practices for the prevention of wildfires, specifically in areas adjacent to the county's timber areas and Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Appropriate types and methods of fuel reduction and structure ignitability reduction can be found in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, developed in 2019 by the Georgia Forestry Commission. The plan provides recommendations to protect the citizens of Charlton County and its essential infrastructure (Policy 6.7).
- Encourage increased code enforcement action to prevent illegal septic tanks in flood plain areas and research new advances in sewage technology to address the needs of rural flood plain areas (Policy 6.11).

Mixed-Use Preferred Development
(Unincorporated Charlton County)

Description:

The Mixed-Use Preferred Development Character Area is intended for those areas in the County where the soil suitability and the availability of or potential for water, sewer and road infrastructure allows for compatible development of residential and non-residential uses. These areas are in relative close proximity to major transportation corridors such as rail or highways, and water and sewer lines are either currently available or can be made available at a reasonable cost. The majority of this area also follows prior trends of growth, such as along north-south corridors (SR 121) into Florida or east towards I-95 and Kingsland.

Predominant Land Use:

Low-density residential development with industrial and commercial development along the major highway corridors.

Development Strategy:

Encourage a sustainable mix of residential and commercial businesses.

Quality Community Objectives:

- Economic Prosperity
- Efficient Land Use
- Sense of Place
- Housing Options

Implementation Measures:

- Encourage clustered types of developments that will encourage the provision of water and sewer and protect natural resources (Policy 5.5).
- Develop some limited land development standards to plan for the future and steer development and economic growth where Charlton County would like to see it and to limit any potential negative environmental impacts. Provide for compatible development, market the County as a bedroom community

to Jacksonville, and preserve a rural quality of life in the midst of the County's close proximity to a major metropolitan area (Policy 6.4).

- Encourage new residential development to locate within the Mixed Use Preferred Development or the Gateway Corridor Character areas to ensure adequate service with infrastructure and minimize the cost on the County for road maintenance (Policy 6.5).
- Property with industrial uses should have both water and sewer services available to it concurrent with development in order to provide sufficient protection to the health and safety of the public, avoid groundwater contamination and to provide for sufficient fire protection (Policy 6.10).

Gateway Corridor

(Unincorporated Charlton County)

Description:

The Gateway Corridor Character Area is intended for those areas in the County with developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that serves as an important entrance or means of access to the community. This character area contains land that is highly visible to visitors and residents as it serves as a gateway to the incorporated cities. As such, the County intends for these lands to be held to a higher design standard to enhance the place-making quality and aesthetic appearance of the community.

Predominant Land Uses:

Medium to high-density residential development, commercial development, and well screened industrial development.

Development Strategy:

The focus should be on encouraging an aesthetically pleasing blend of residential, commercial, and industrial uses that reflect the character of the community.

Quality Community Objectives:

- Economic Prosperity
- Efficient Land Use
- Sense of Place

Implementation Measures:

- Develop a sense of purpose and intent and a geographic sense of space for the various areas of Charlton County and encourage innovative development practices (Policy 6.1).
- Encourage and request that any proposed development be compatible with the underlying Character Areas as shown in the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan (Policy 6.2).
- Research and implement measures to develop multi-modal systems including bicycle and pedestrian safety initiatives (Policy 7.2).

Commercial
(City of Folkston)



Description:

The City of Folkston was created in 1881 as a train station for the Savannah, Florida and Western Railroad. Trains no longer stop in Folkston, but as many as 60-70 trains per day travel through Folkston. Folkston has become a tourist destination for train enthusiasts and visitors to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. The commercial core of Folkston can be seen in the photograph above and contains a grid-like road network with a Main Street.

Predominant Land Uses:

Primary land uses for this area have been identified as city services, entertainment and commercial recreation, Main Street, mixed use businesses, business support services, newer residential subdivisions, and traditional older, but stable neighborhoods.

Development Strategy:

Preserve, restore & reuse historic buildings. Improve the environment for private investment and development. Expand downtown's green spaces and civic spaces. Mix land uses and control building architecture. Become a center for eco-tourism, local artisans and a niche farmer's and arts market drawing tourists and visitors from Jacksonville and become a quality, sustainable alternative to metro living. Interconnectivity and walkability have been identified as some of the primary factors for revitalization of the area along with preservation of historic resources, attracting private developers to the downtown and providing attractive outdoor spaces.

Quality Community Objectives:

- Economic Prosperity
- Efficient Land Use
- Sense of Place
- Housing Options
- Transportation Options

Implementation Measures:

- In coordination with the City of Folkston and the Chamber of Commerce set a goal for creating a downtown master plan and develop incentives for businesses to locate downtown. The Train Watching Platform has the potential to encourage more train and tourism related businesses to relocate to the City, including arts and crafts and artisans (Policy 1.4).
- Provide incentives to developers of high quality, affordable rental housing. These could include: allowing a mixture of housing sizes, contributing towards construction/development/land acquisition costs, and creating a one-stop shop for permitting (Policy 2.9).
- Encourage and request that any proposed development be compatible with the underlying Character Areas as shown in the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan (Policy 6.2).
- To ensure walkability and safety, coordinate with the School Board on Future Land Use designations to locate schools in to areas where residential development is desirable and in such a manner that the schools are located near existing or future residential neighborhoods to ensure walkability and safety (Policy 6.8).
- Property with industrial uses should have both water and sewer services available to it concurrent with development in order to provide sufficient protection to the health and safety of the public, avoid groundwater contamination and to provide for sufficient fire protection (Policy 6.10).
- Research and implement measures to develop multi-modal systems including bicycle and pedestrian safety initiatives (Policy 7.2).

Residential
(City of Folkston)

Description:

The Residential Character Area is intended for those areas in the City with predominantly residential uses, ranging from single-family to multi-family uses. Also included in this character area are residential support uses such as schools, churches, funeral homes, and some business professional uses.

Predominant Land Uses:

A balanced mix of single family detached, single family attached, duplex and multi-family housing on moderately sized lots, including manufactured homes and residential professional uses.

Development Strategy:

The focus should be on preservation of the Main Street historic character and adjacent residential uses. Infill developments and reuse of structures should be encouraged. A safe walking and bicycling environment should be supported.

Quality Community Objectives:

- Efficient Land Use
- Local Preparedness
- Sense of Place

- Housing Options

Implementation Measures:

- Provide incentives for the construction of good-quality housing in mixed-use developments within the cities to maximize infrastructure investments. (Policy 2.2).
- Maintain older neighborhoods that are also perceived as providing quality and character to the area. Housing preserved in quality will subsequently raise the value of housing stock (Policy 2.5).
- Encourage and request that any proposed development be compatible with the underlying Character Areas as shown in the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan (Policy 6.2).
- Research and implement measures to develop multi-modal systems including bicycle and pedestrian safety initiatives (Policy 7.2).

Industrial
(City of Folkston)



Description:

The Industrial Character Area is intended for those areas in the City with developed or undeveloped land utilized or intended for higher intensity industrial land uses and/or public utility areas.

Predominant Land Uses:

Manufacturing, processing, warehouses, open storage, rail/freight, and logistical uses.

Development Strategy:

The focus should be on encouraging an environment that supports higher intensity land uses that may include noise, vibration, odor, dust, or other potentially offensive effects. Attempts to mitigate the offensive effects should be taken such as by providing buffering, screening, separation from residential land uses and other incompatible land uses. Adequate access is necessary to ensure public safety and local preparedness steps should be taken to ensure safety should an unwanted event occur.

Quality Community Objectives:

- Economic Prosperity
- Efficient Land Use
- Local Preparedness

Implementation Measures:

- Create a favorable environment towards a certified industrial area by implementing strategies in coordination with Folkston and all economic development agencies and authorities and the Regional Commission (Policy 1.1).
- Create an inventory of available developable land (Homeland has 16 acres and the County has 7 acres in the Industrial Park) and promote the development of commercial and industrial development in those areas (Policy 6.6).
- Property with industrial uses should have both water and sewer services available to it concurrent with development in order to provide sufficient protection to the health and safety of the public, avoid groundwater contamination and to provide for sufficient fire protection (Policy 6.10).



Historic Homeland
(City of Homeland)



Description:

In 1906, a group of investors purchased about 8,000 acres of land one mile north of Folkston and began surveying and platting the “1906 Homeland Colony Company Domains”. The town included 144 blocks, platted streets and alleys, a town square and approximately 800 acres of five and ten acre tracts for small scale homesteading and farming. While the town had been conceived as a self-sufficient retirement community that goal has not been implemented to date. As part of the adoption of this comprehensive plan, the City of Homeland is renewing its goal of becoming the retirement town envisioned by its founders.

Predominant Land Use:

Low density residential uses, limited commercial/industrial development, civic or institutional uses as well as any service uses to establish and maintain a well-functioning retirement community.

Development Strategy:

Preserve and rehabilitate what remains of the original housing stock, while rebuilding on vacant land new, attractive neighborhoods following the principles of traditional neighborhood development. The neighborhoods should include a well-designed new neighborhood activity center at an appropriate location. Reactivate goal of being a retirement community.

Quality Community Objectives:

- Sense of Place
- Housing Options

- Community Health

Implementation Measures:

- Create an inventory of available developable land (Homeland has 16 acres and the County has 7 acres in the Industrial Park) and promote the development of commercial and industrial development in those areas (Policy 6.6).
- Enforce the maintenance and clean-up of vacant lots and properties (Policy 2.3).
- Maintain older neighborhoods that are also perceived as providing quality and character to the area. Housing preserved in quality will subsequently raise the value of housing stock (Policy 2.5).

St. George

(Unincorporated Charlton County)



Description

In 1904, St. George was founded as a Colony Company community for retired Civil War Veterans. St. George was incorporated as a town by the Georgia General Assembly in 1906; yet, the town's charter was repealed in 1924. St. George is also home to the Cherokee Tribal Grounds and is a cross roads for heavy truck traffic from I-10 near MacClenny to Valdosta, Folkston and Waycross, as well as truck traffic destined for the Chesser Island Landfill.

Predominant Land Uses:

The predominant land uses in St. George are one to five acre residential parcels with many vacant infill parcels. The main intersection of SR 94 and SR 121 also features a small commercial center including a feed store, two restaurants, two gas stations, a general store, the volunteer fire department, community center and an elementary school.

Development Strategy:

To develop a thriving cross roads community that will provide services, employment, and quality housing for residents in south Charlton County.

Quality Community Objectives:

- Economic Prosperity
- Sense of Place
- Housing Options
- Transportation Options

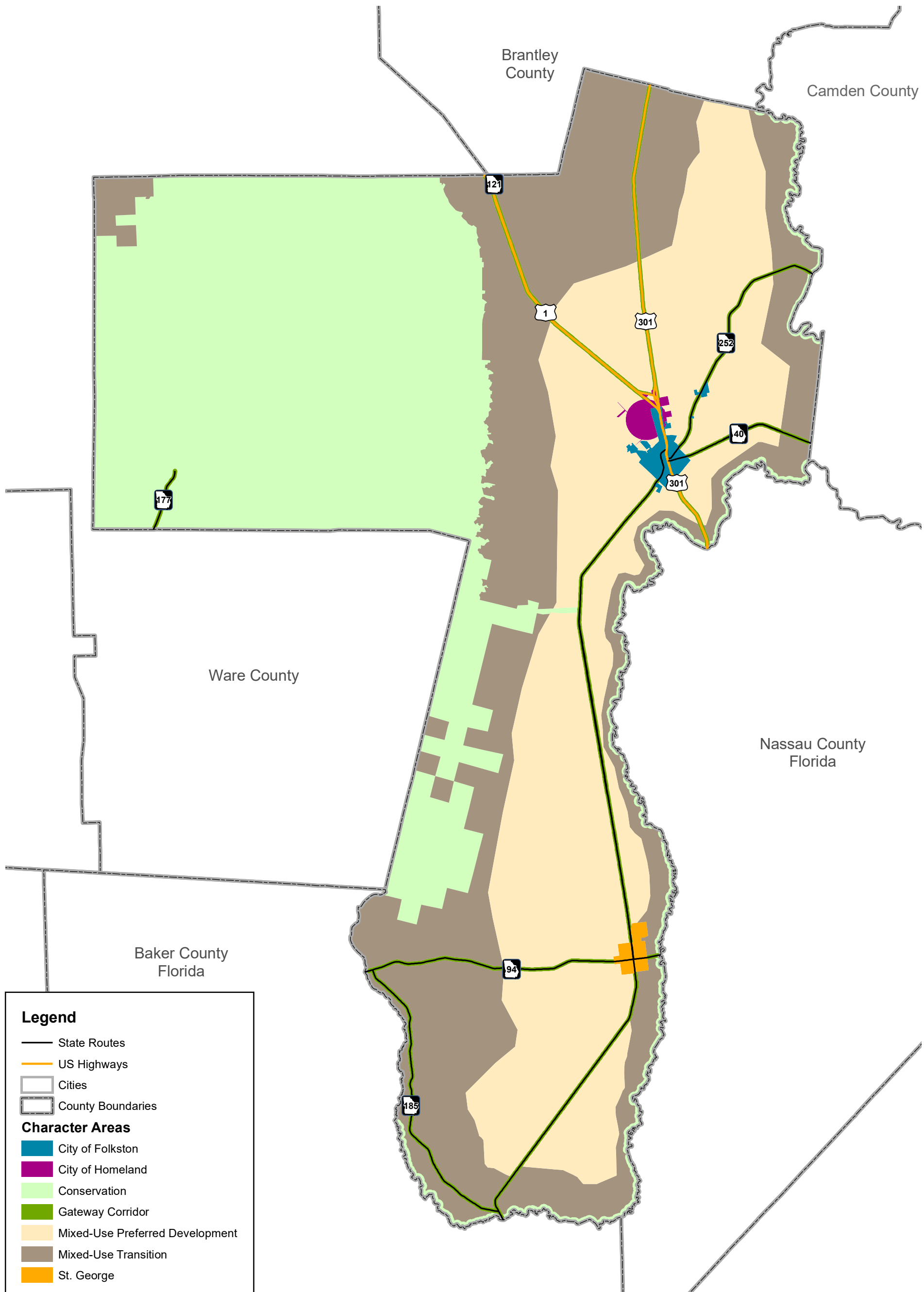
Implementation Measures:

- Support non-cash incentives for military personnel and supporting businesses to locate in Charlton County (Policy 1.8).
- Promote the rural quality of life and low density of the area to residents of the Jacksonville area and other metro areas who may seek a more peaceful way of life (Policy 1.18).
- Maintain older neighborhoods that are also perceived as providing quality and character to the area. Housing preserved in quality will subsequently raise the value of housing stock (Policy 2.5).
- Pursue CDBG grants for water and sewer for the St. George area to protect the groundwater and surface water from the impact of too many septic tanks and to enable smaller lot sizes of ¼ to ½ acre within the St. George Character Area limits (Policy 5.7).
- Continue to raise awareness of maintenance issues on existing state roads among local and State elected officials and staff (Policy 7.2).

III. Maps

Character Area Map of Charlton County and the City of Homeland
Character Area Map of the City of Folkston
Existing Land Use – City of Folkston

DRAFT



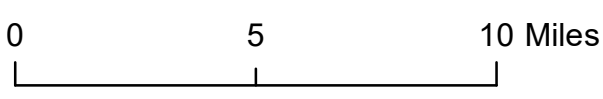
Legend

- State Routes
- US Highways
- Cities
- County Boundaries

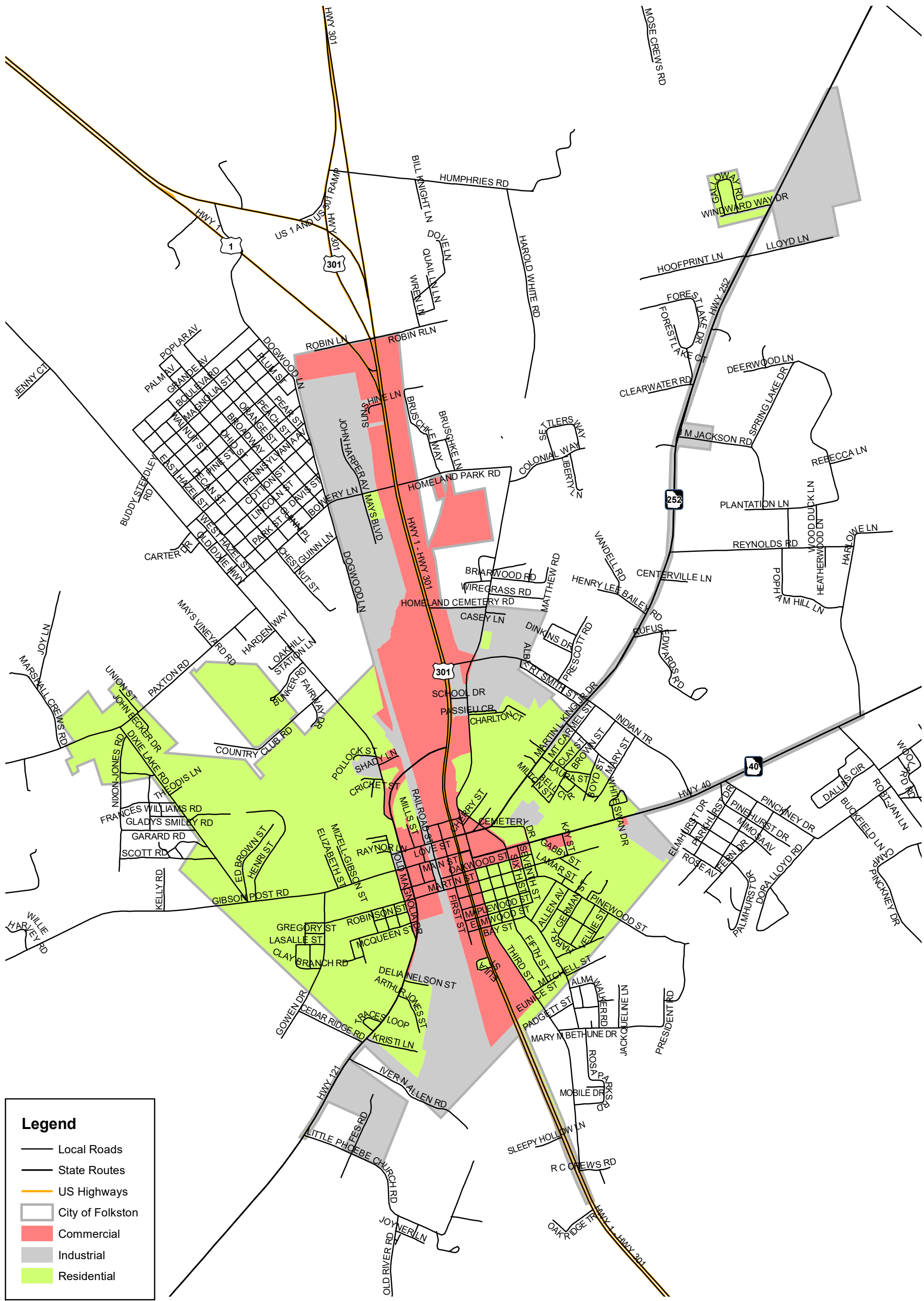
Character Areas

- City of Folkston
- City of Homeland
- Conservation
- Gateway Corridor
- Mixed-Use Preferred Development
- Mixed-Use Transition
- St. George

Source: SGRC
 Maps: Southern Georgia Regional Commission - GIS, 2020
 © SGRC, 2020



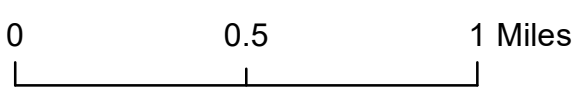
CHARACTER AREAS GREATER CHARLTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Legend

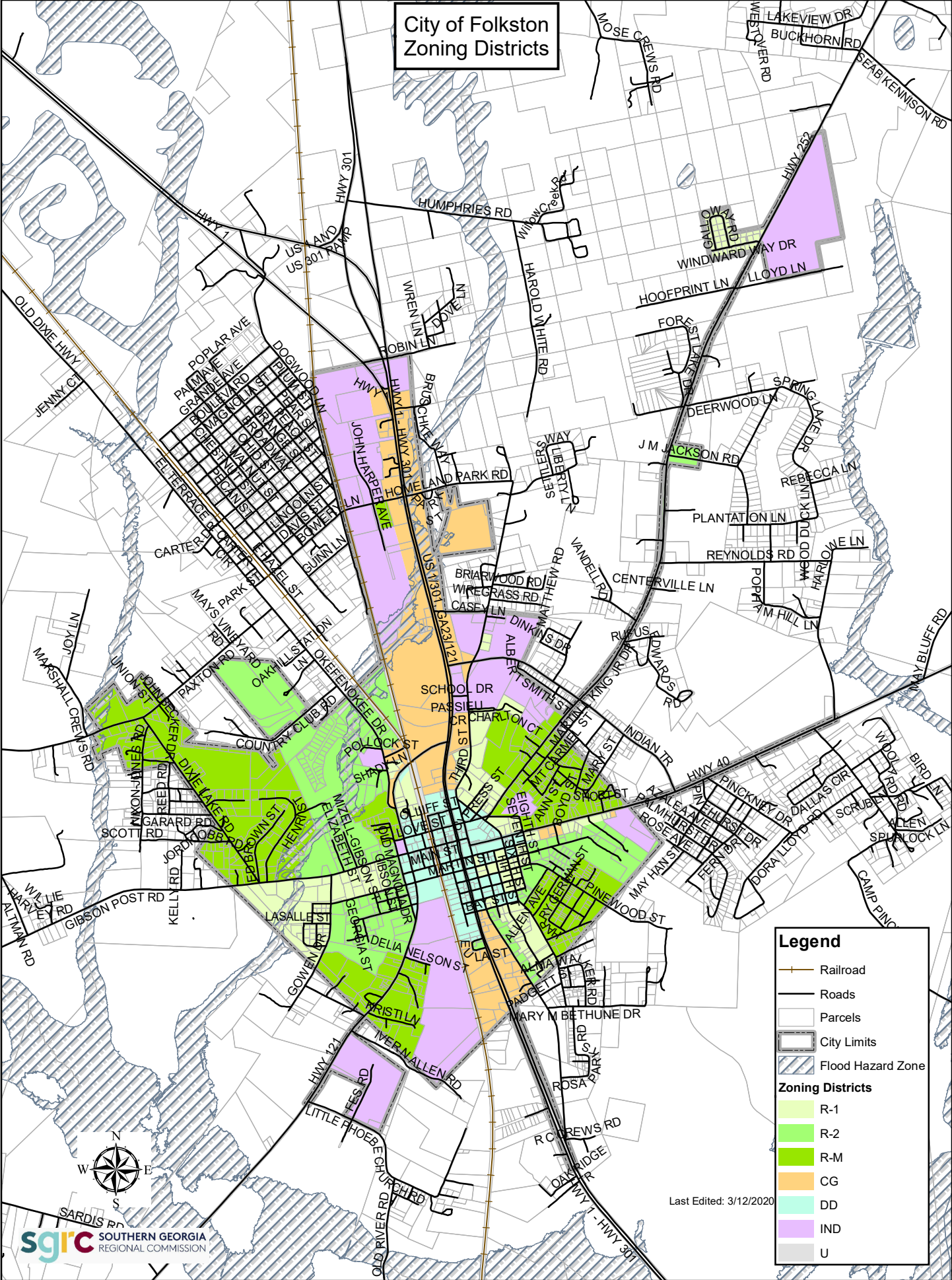
- Local Roads
- State Routes
- US Highways
- City of Folkston
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Residential

Source: SGRC
 Maps: Southern Georgia Regional Commission - GIS, 2020
 © SGRC, 2020



CHARACTER AREAS CITY OF FOLKSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

City of Folkston Zoning Districts



Legend

- Railroad
- Roads
- Parcels
- City Limits
- Flood Hazard Zone
- Zoning Districts**
- R-1
- R-2
- R-M
- CG
- DD
- IND
- U

Last Edited: 3/12/2020