

APPENDICES

Appendix A. SWOT Analysis

The Regional Needs and Opportunities were developed through a Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats, and Opportunities (SWOT) analysis. This was conducted through work sessions and open house sessions in which stakeholders shared their knowledge of the Region, as well as through surveys and interpretation of regional data. The stakeholder group and steering committee then selected priority needs and opportunities for each segment. In the Work Program, these are associated with corresponding concrete work items for implementation. This section shows the results from the input gathered from the SWOT Analysis. These results have been incorporated into the Regional Plan.

1. Economic Development

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land availability for new growth • Existing manufacturing • Transportation Corridors • Cost of living • Natural Resources • Strong agricultural/agribusiness (diverse agriculture in the region, with many different crops produced) • Proximity to Florida • Access to aquifer • Access to ports, rail • Climate • Training and Qualified Workforce • Tourism • Small town feel, hospitality 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Toward Rail • High School Industrial Education • More people to help attract large manufacturing • Tax Credits/State Rural Incentives • Development of Tourism • Workforce training • Value Added Agriculture • Job Tax Credit • Economically prosperous • Film Industry • Downtown Revitalization • Low Cost of Living • Reduce rates of vacancy in CBD's • Regionalism
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging and Undersized Infrastructure • Lack of funding for Economic Development • Lack of Regional Collaboration • Dysfunctional City/County Boundaries • No Money for Industrial Recruiting • Too many Dollar Stores, gas stations, and fast food restaurants • Workforce supply • Job availability and opportunities • Distance from larger metropolitan areas • Need more training for next-generation tools 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing population loss • Commercial Blight • Low Labor Force Participation Rates • Homelessness • Rising Cost of Healthcare • Lack of Workforce Housing • National Economy • Poor City and County Relationships • Lack of Jobs for College Graduates • Lack of Focus from State • Broadband accessibility • Wage stagnation • Crime

- Trained workforce

2. Natural & Cultural Resources

Strengths

- Several rivers that are excellent for recreation (e.g., Satilla, Withlacoochee)
- Peach State Summer Theater
- Valdosta Symphony Orchestra
- Turner Arts Center
- Georgia Museum of Agriculture & Historic Village
- The Agricultural industry is an economic driver
- State Parks
- Eco-tourism
- Historic downtowns
- Okefenokee Swamp
- Unusual areas like the cluster of round lakes around Lake Park, and unique natural places such as the Broxton Rocks
- Festivals

Opportunities

- Focus on eco-tourism
- More education on passive recreation, waterways, kayaking, canoeing, etc.
- A good steward of abundant natural resources
- Education on stream & water body cleanups
- State & federal grants
- Agri-tourism
- Water trails
- Riverside/lakeside trails with amenities such as benches and instructional signage
- Additional boardwalks (the facility at Grand Bay in Lowndes County is an example)
- Investment in established nature centers (for example, the facility at Grand Bay could invite more tourism if it were expanded and kept open)
- Native American history

Weaknesses

- Natural resources of the region are not marketed in a highly visible, cohesive way
- Lack of high-quality direct access to many natural areas (e.g., riverfront/lakeside trails)
- Some natural areas with great potential are not maintained
- Nature & culture aren't always a priority for some
- Lack of cleanups
- Lack of access to water (boat ramps, landings)
- Lack of knowledge about the local and regional history of Native American tribes
- Disrepair in historic districts
- Water quality in certain areas adjacent to industry
- Noise and light pollution

Threats

- Protection of sensitive areas
- Public education
- Conflicting objectives of tourism and preservation
- Flooding of streets in low-income areas
- Increase in natural disasters due to climate change
- Limited resources
- Many impaired water bodies
- No preservation of historic landmarks and downtown areas
- Limited resources, funding sources, etc.
- Reduction in funding levels for historic preservation
- Monuments in disrepair and/or without explanatory signage

3. Community Facilities & Services

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Supply • Improvements to Broadband • CDBG Accessibility for Infrastructure • Community support • Lots of churches (volunteer force programs) 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMC Incentives for Broadband • Extension of Natural Gas Service • Development of Solar Energy, in a responsible manner • Upgrades to local meeting venues in need of repair • Career Academies • Healthcare • Quality Affordable Childcare • Services for the aging population • Equalize geographic access to active recreation • Support & encourage preservation of historical land uses in rural areas • Public/private partnerships • Better coordination with faith-based organizations/churches to assist in implementing local priorities/goals
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging & Deteriorating Water & Sewer Infrastructure • Lack of Reliable Broadband & Cell Service • Lack of Natural Gas Capacity • Affordable Housing • Involvement of School System • Lack of private/philanthropic investment in communities • Lack of youth-focused facilities • Lack of organized youth activities • Downtown computer lab & library needed for students and seniors 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Labor Force Participation Rates • Affordable Housing • Lack of Market Rate Housing • Lack of Reliable Broadband & Cell Service • Lack of Natural Gas Capacity • High School Students not Trained for Employment in Existing Industries • Lack of Sufficient Public Transportation • Funding to maintain infrastructure • Low Population Numbers • Regional Collaboration • Leadership • Hospitals • Aging infrastructure, no funding to correct problems • Lack of recreational opportunities & funding for them • Rural healthcare – lack of facilities, closures

4. Housing

Strengths

- Retiree Attraction, including for Veterans
- Wide Open Spaces
- Small communities with caring people
- Short commute times
- Utilities
- Cost of Land
- Roads
- Availability of Service Infrastructure
- New Construction
- Lower than Average Housing Costs
- Habitat for Humanity
- Many builders
- Large-scale forestry, for wood products

Opportunities

- Creating Functional & Unique Neighborhoods
- Ease of life, low traffic, safe communities
- Cost of Living
- Grants for senior living
- Housing rehabilitation
- Ministries to benefit marginalized seniors
- Support rural communities in housing & economic development
- Expansion of Code Enforcement
- Attractions for Young People
- Mixed Use Downtowns
- Development of Partnership Opportunities

Weaknesses

- Need jobs more than new houses
- Need more starter houses and high quality rental units
- Lack of codes & enforcement
- Decline in housing stock
- Dilapidated Mobile homes
- Need more affordable housing
- Need grants for elderly housing
- Landlords need stricter guidelines to keep rental properties maintained
- Amenities like computer labs and after-school programs are needed within housing complexes
- Train noise and access to developments blocked due to trains sitting on tracks

Threats

- Lack of property maintenance
- Overgrown landscaping on public and private property
- Loss of landmarks
- “Not In My Back Yard” attitudes
- Lack of reinvestment in housing
- Lack of codes & enforcement
- Rental Rates
- Poorly Constructed Housing
- Lack of Recreational Opportunities
- Homelessness
- Lack of Collaboration amongst governments
- Preservation of prime farmland
- Conversion of farmland and/or residential areas to solar farms
- Vulnerability to natural disasters, especially for manufactured homes

5. Land Use & Transportation

Strengths

- Transportation Corridors
- Strong DOT support
- A great MPO in the Region
- Strong support for local government
- Location close to ports, I-95, I-75, I-10, US-82, Major Markets & Regional Airports
- Georgia Ports
- Rails
- Condition of Roadways
- Electric
- T-SPLOST/TIA
- Improvements to Broadband
- Tech Schools CDL Programs
- CDBG Accessibility for Infrastructure
- New Regional Transit system

Opportunities

- Increased transportation funding
- T-SPLOST/TIA
- A transportation hub for developed highways, sea, and rail
- Support, educate, and incentivize private investment in transportation
- Regional bike/pedestrian plan investment
- Need for Transportation Workforce
- Public transit – more is an asset
- Develop better zoning regulations
- Expansion of Rail
- Creating Functional and Unique Neighborhoods
- Implement Consistent Zoning and Land Use Development regulations
- Land use regulations can be revised and updated to promote equity, reduce sprawl, encourage appropriate development, and invite economic investment

Weaknesses

- Resistance of Rail Lines to Allow for Growth
- Overpasses for Vehicles Over Railroad Tracks
- Passing Lanes on 2 Lane Highways
- EV Charging Stations
- More Transportation Corridors between I-75 and I-95
- Funds for land use
- Transportation for student safety
- Need new land development regulations that encourage urban development, not greenfield development
- Transportation for students
- Many Dirt Roads
- Lack of political will for public transit
- Communities still lacking zoning regulations
- Lack of Sidewalks
- Vehicle Crashes
- Pedestrian Fatalities

Threats

- 4-Laning Highways, Bypassing Small Towns
- The Region should have reliable infrastructure connecting counties & cities to one another
- Lack of better transportation routes, more four lanes, to help with economic growth
- Lack of rail cooperation with communities
- Railroad overpasses threaten business development but help with safety
- Regional Collaboration
- Lack of Codes and enforcement
- Nonexistent, Inconsistent, and/or outdated land development ordinances and zoning regulations
- Homelessness
- Poorly Constructed Housing
- Deterioration of transportation infrastructure
- Tearing up roadways to fix or expand water/sewer infrastructure

6. Intergovernmental Coordination

Strengths

- Emergency management
- Mutual aid agreements
- Strong Regional Commission
- Deep South Solid Waste Authority

Opportunities

- Regional development authority
- City Council & County Commissioners could work together
- Break down silos to work with non-traditional government agencies (e.g., transportation & health)
- Establishment of regional cooperation to attract more business and industry

Weaknesses

- Not enough County/City coordination of services
- Not enough collaboration between City and County
- Long travel distances
- City & County not working together, no input
- Not enough input from School Boards

Threats

- Leadership
- Continued good ole' boy elections
- Loss of funding
- County "silos"