

# BARROW IN BALANCE

comprehensive plan



2023

*Joint Comprehensive Plan for Barrow County and the municipalities of Bethlehem, Carl, & Statham*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### Photo Acknowledgement

*Unless otherwise noted, photos/graphics were taken/created by the project team.*

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## APPENDIX



## CHAPTER 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Required by the State of Georgia to remain eligible for certain funding sources, comprehensive plans serve as a long-term, high-level guide for a community's growth over the next 20 years. The Barrow County Joint Comprehensive Plan Update addresses unincorporated Barrow County as well as the municipalities of Bethlehem, Carl, and Statham. It reflects the community's vision for growth, supported by technical planning analysis and best practices for creating a balanced, reality-based plan for accommodating development while maintaining a high quality of life.

### Community Vision

The community vision's vision for growth is one of balance. It is a vision that directs growth to where infrastructure is best able to serve it, and one that prioritizes the preservation of the county's rural and small-town atmosphere where possible.

### Needs, Opportunities, and Goals

This vision for balanced growth will be struck by zeroing in on seven focus areas, stated as goals below and supported by key policies. These seven areas—which serve as the “Barrow in Balance Focal Areas”—were identified early in the planning process through public input.



#### 1-Align infrastructure investments with development

- 1-1 Focus transportation and sewer infrastructure improvements in the same locations to facilitate these areas' capabilities for handling growth
- 1-2 Prioritize projects that meet multiple goals across safety, mobility, access, public support, and cost effectiveness
- 1-3 Focus pedestrian and bicycle improvements in the highest density areas, as well as around schools, parks, and other key community landmarks
- 1-4 Pursue new technologies to expand the capacity of the sewer/wastewater system
- 1-5 Reserve areas within sewer basins for higher intensity growth



#### 2-Prioritize workplace uses where appropriate

- 2-1 Diversify the local economy and increase jobs for high-skilled workers
- 2-2 Prioritize sewer service to industrial and commercial parcels with the fewest barriers to development
- 2-3 Concentrate workplace uses along major transportation corridors that can accommodate truck traffic
- 2-4 Where adjacent to residential neighborhoods, ensure that workplace development is well buffered
- 2-5 Encourage the growth of a retail center to serve eastern Barrow County
- 2-6 Improve circulation and mobility around existing major retail centers
- 2-7 Support local businesses, particularly in the small downtowns throughout the county



# Chapter 1



## 3-Expand housing options

- 3-1 Encourage a broader range of quality housing types
- 3-2 Direct higher intensity housing into target growth areas where infrastructure is best able to accommodate it
- 3-3 Encourage housing in rural, low-growth development areas to be designed in a way that preserves Barrow's rural character
- 3-4 Pursue flexible regulations that allow for different housing types in one development with an overall density goal for targeted areas
- 3-5 Expand housing affordability, particularly for seniors and young professionals



## 4-Invest in a system of parks and recreation facilities

- 4-1 Expand the system of community-level parks serving Barrow County residents
- 4-2 Continue to collaborate with other green space providers on sharing access
- 4-3 Ensure quality neighborhood-level parks and recreation spaces are provided through private development
- 4-4 Invest in a network of greenways and multi-use trails connecting major destinations in the county



## 5-Create a more detailed plan for south Barrow County

- 5-1 Protect Bethlehem's small-town character
- 5-2 Prioritize high intensity workplace development near

Highway 316

- 5-3 Limit higher intensity housing beyond the 1-mile corridor surrounding 316
- 5-4 Proactively identify opportunities to improve the local roadway network
- 5-5 Invest in infrastructure in advance of the new hospital and Lanier Tec/innovation center, including roadway improvements identified in the CTP
- 5-6 Invest in creating the Apalachee River Greenway where natural resources exist in balance with sensitive recreation access



## 6-Establish land use visions for the Town of Carl and the City of Statham

### Town of Carl:

- 6a-1 Protect Carl's small-town character
- 6a-2 Concentrate new development within a defined town center
- 6a-3 Proactively expand a grid-like local street network
- 6a-4 Invest in sidewalks
- 6a-5 Invest in a greenbelt to buffer Carl from surrounding development

### City of Statham:

- 6b-1 Protect Statham's small-town character
- 6b-2 Concentrate new commercial development within a defined town center
- 6b-3 Proactively expand grid-like local street network
- 6b-4 Invest in sidewalks for improved connectivity, especially downtown
- 6b-5 Invest in a greenbelt/greenway loop trail

# Chapter 1

6b-6 Develop a strong, clear vision for the higher intensity uses possible along 316 and “hold the line”

6b-7 Expand the city parks system



## **7-Foster greater coordination, collaboration, and a sense of community**

7-1 Increase outreach and public engagement in county projects and initiatives

7-2 Support and connect an ecosystem of community groups and advocates

## **Future Development Guide**

The Future Development Guide provides an illustrative depiction of goals for future development. It was based off an overall growth concept that favors concentrating higher intensities of development in targeted areas where infrastructure is strongest, and maximizing rural, low-density uses in much of the county elsewhere.

The guide includes a Future Development Map for unincorporated Barrow County, the Towns of Bethlehem and Carl, and the City of Statham.

## **Key Implementation Actions**

Although there are several implementation actions associated with the seven focal areas, there are two major, overarching recommendations that span across these topics and geographies:

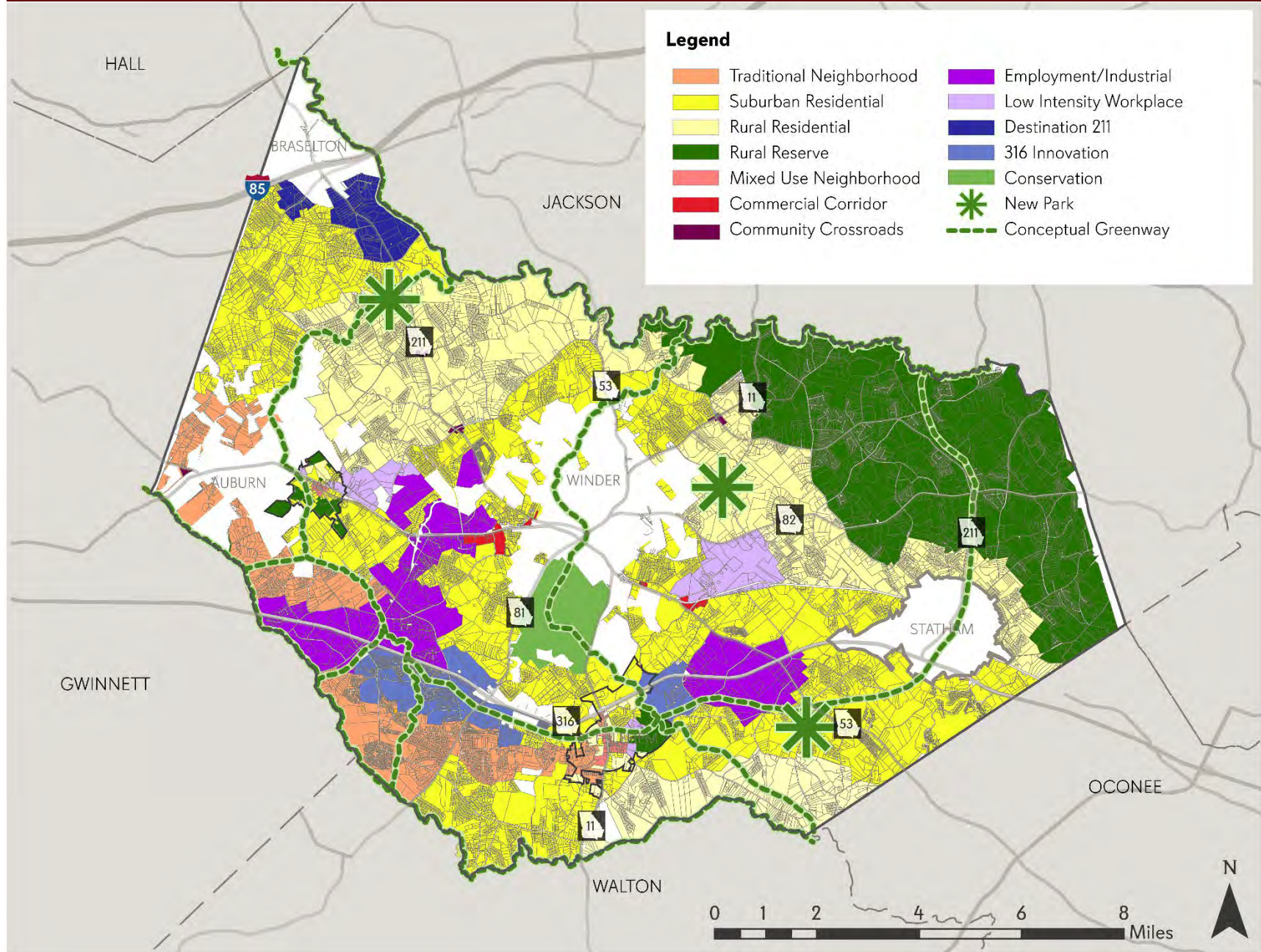
**1. Implement the Impact Fee Program.** At the time of this Joint Comprehensive Plan Update, the county was in the middle of studying a potential impact fee program. This program should be implemented to its fullest.

**2. Revise the Unified Development Code.** The Unified Development Code (UDC) is one of the county’s strongest tools for steering the amount, look, and feel of development. To implement the recommended strategies, several revisions to the UDC are recommended including:

- Developing an overlay for the West Winder Bypass corridor
- Revising M-1 Light Industrial to reflect the type of businesses Barrow wishes to draw, and prohibiting noxious industry
- Pulling the 316 corridor out of the current Corridor Overlay and establishing its own overlay
- Establishing a new R-4 Residential district and a new Mixed Use district
- Improving both roadway and sidewalk connectivity through higher development standards

# Chapter 1

## BARROW COUNTY FUTURE DEVELOPMENT MAP





## Chapter 2

### CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION

Barrow County is projected to experience continued growth and investment over the next 20 years. To meet citizens' future needs, the county and the Towns of Bethlehem and Carl, and the City of Statham prepared a coordinated, community-driven plan intended to express a desired vision for future development. The resulting Joint Barrow County Comprehensive Plan updates and replaces the previous plan, which was adopted in 2018.

#### Purpose of Plan

The updated Joint Barrow County Comprehensive Plan represents the growth and development policy for unincorporated Barrow County and the municipalities of Bethlehem, Carl, and Statham.<sup>1</sup>

This joint plan meets the intent and requirements of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) "Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning," as an essential requirement in maintaining status as a Qualified Local Government (QLG). QLG status allows communities to be eligible for financial incentives from DCA, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Georgia Environmental Financial Agency (GEFA), and the OneGeorgia Authority.

The Comprehensive Plan addresses the following plan elements required by DCA's "Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning": Needs and Opportunities, Community Goals, a Land Use Element, and the Community Work Program. The

Atlanta Region's Transportation Plan (updated June 2022; a portion of Barrow is included in the federally designated Atlanta Metropolitan Planning Organization Boundaries for long-range transportation planning) and the Barrow County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (2023) are substituted for the Transportation Element and are incorporated by reference in this plan.

Consideration of the Regional Water Plan and the Environmental Planning Criteria can be found in Chapter 3, and the Broadband Element is contained in the Appendix.

This update departs from the 2018 plan in its focus on seven key needs to:

1. Align infrastructure investments with development
2. Prioritize workplace uses where appropriate
3. Expand housing options
4. Invest in a system of parks and recreation facilities
5. Create a more detailed plan for south Barrow County
6. Establish land use visions for the Town of Carl and City of Statham
7. Foster greater coordination, collaboration, and a sense of community

These seven focal areas comprise the content of Chapter 4: Barrow in Balance, which includes goals and policies, as well as more detailed information and analysis on the challenges faced in Barrow County. These goals, policies, and strategies were then translated into a County-wide Land Use Element (Chapter 5) and their implementation actions detailed in the Community Work Program (Chapter 6).

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<sup>1</sup> The Cities of Auburn, Braselton, and Winder conducted their comprehensive plan updates independently.

## Chapter 2

### Community Participation and Plan Development

Creating a functional comprehensive plan begins with defining a common vision for the future development of the community. Identifying this shared vision is the starting point for creating a plan and identifying action to implement the plan. A successful vision process requires meaningful participation from a wide range of community stakeholders.

In addition to the required public hearings, this update used the following community engagement methods:

- Stakeholder interviews
- Steering Committee
- Online Survey
- Pop-Up Events at the Barrow Farmers' Market
- Visioning Workshop

Summarized in the timeline below, the process included periodic touchpoints with stakeholders and community members through the four main phases of the project. This enabled the project team to continually refine the plan according to community feedback. Details on each public engagement opportunity and their outcomes can be found in Chapter 3.

## PROCESS & SCHEDULE



## Chapter 2

### Plan Organization

The sequence of chapters in this plan is structured to follow the planning process, organized into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Executive Summary
- Chapter 2: Introduction
- Chapter 3: Community Profile
- Chapter 4: Barrow in Balance
- Chapter 5: Land Use Element
- Chapter 6: Community Work Program
- Appendix



# Chapter 3

## CHAPTER 3: BARROW TODAY

The following chapter summarizes socioeconomic, land use, and environmental characteristics, as well as previous plans that have bearing on future growth and development and that were used to help identify key needs and opportunities in Barrow County.

Where pertinent, data from the 2020 U.S. Decennial Census and 2020 was used. The Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates supplement this base-level data for additional years and more detailed topics that the Decennial Census does not cover. ACS surveys a sample of the population to produce statistically valid estimates for the entire population; however, it should be noted that data for smaller communities may have a higher margin of error given their inherently smaller sample sizes. Decennial Census figures generally have lower margins of error, but both sources face challenges counting rural populations like much of Barrow County. Regardless of these considerations, these two sources set the standard for community-level socioeconomic and demographic data and provide the data presented in this chapter unless otherwise noted.

In addition to the Census, the section presents projections based on Woods & Poole economic data. Woods & Poole data combines demographic and economic data from a number of sources to develop projections on job growth and other economic variables—making it particularly useful for long-range planning.

### Population & Household Characteristics

#### COUNTYWIDE POPULATION

Between 2015 and 2021, Barrow County added just over 10,000 people for a total of 82,138 residents (a 14.1% increase). This comes on the

heels of another period of rapid growth: between 2010 and 2015, the county grew by 8.5% as it began to recover from the Great Recession.

Unincorporated Barrow County has a larger population than any of the incorporated areas. The City of Winder is the largest of the jurisdictions and has witnessed incredible growth. With a 2020 population of 18,338 residents, its population jumped by over 30% since 2010. The City of Auburn is the second largest city in Barrow at 7,495 people. Braselton, while a sizable community, is only partially within Barrow County but is seeing tremendous growth as well. Unincorporated Barrow County has also grown markedly, with a population gain of over 27% percent. The Town of Carl is the only jurisdiction with a negative growth rate.

**TABLE 1. ANNUAL POPULATION ESTIMATES**

	2010	2015	2020	2021	2010-2020 GROWTH RATE
Barrow County	66,367	72,012	83,505	82,138	25.8%
Auburn (Part)	6,887	7,409	7,495	7,424	8.8%
Bethlehem	601	688	715	891	19.0%
Braselton (Part)	1,095	1,409	1,773	1,856	61.9%
Carl	255	220	209	225	-18.0%
Statham	2,408	2,647	2,813	2,771	16.8%
Winder	14,099	15,777	18,338	17,768	30.1%
Balance of County	41,022	43,862	52,162	61,398	27.2%

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### POPULATION IN CONTEXT

Barrow County shares a border with Athens-Clarke, Gwinnett, Jackson, Oconee, and Walton Counties, and just touches the tip of Hall County. Compared to its neighbors (Table 2), Barrow has one of the smallest populations, but one of the higher growth rates—slower only than Jackson and Oconee. Larger, more populous counties like Gwinnett, Athens-Clarke, and Hall have slower rates.

**TABLE 2. POPULATION IN CONTEXT**

COUNTIES	2010	2020	GROWTH RATE
Barrow	69,367	83,505	20.4%
Athens-Clarke	116,714	128,671	10.2%
Gwinnett	805,321	957,062	18.8%
Hall	179,684	203,136	13.1%
Jackson	60,485	75,907	25.5%
Oconee	32,808	41,799	27.4%
Walton	83,768	96,673	15.4%

### HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

According to Census Bureau's 2021 American Community Survey, there are an estimated 28,087 households in Barrow County, of which over three quarters (75.4%) are families. Over one-fifth (20.6%) of households consist of a householder living alone, and 35% of households have at least one person aged 60 or older.

About 8.4% of Barrow County's population was foreign born in 2021,

which was previously 6.7% in 2010. Of the county's foreign-born population in 2021, a little over half were naturalized citizens (50.5%) and the largest group was from Latin America.

The racial composition of the county's population has continued to diversify since 2018. In 2021, the county's population remained majority White (73.6%) with Black or African Americans comprising 12.5%. As the next largest group, Asians comprised 4.0% of the 2021 population. Between 2010 and 2021, the Latino/Hispanic population of Barrow County grew by 89.6% and now represents about 12.3% of Barrow's 2021 population.

### PROJECTED GROWTH

Looking ahead to 2050, future population growth for the whole county is projected to increase at a conservative pace consistent with past population increases and housing market cycles. Growth in the unincorporated area is projected to outpace growth in the county's cities and towns, but ultimately these numbers may be skewed by future annexations.

Based on projections calculated by Woods & Poole (W&P), the population of Barrow County is anticipated to reach 141,269 in 2050—a 69% increase from the 2020 population. Table 3 on the next page contains population projections for each of the county's jurisdictions. These projections were developed using the Woods & Poole projection for the county as a whole, calculating different annual growth rates for each jurisdiction based on their growth rates from 2010-2020 relative to Barrow County as a whole. For the part of Braselton in Barrow County, the planning team used the annual growth rate of 1.9% indicated in the Town's recent Comprehensive Plan update.

## Chapter 3

**TABLE 3. POPULATION GROWTH PROJECTIONS**

	2020	2030	2040	2050
Barrow County	83,505	100,872	119,417	141,369
Auburn (Partial)	7,495	8,192	8,870	9,605
Bethlehem	715	832	953	1,092
Braselton (Partial)	1,773	2,140	2,583	3,118
Carl	209	219	228	238
Statham	2,813	3,157	3,500	3,880
Winder	18,338	23,623	29,640	37,190
Balance of County	52,162	62,709	73,643	86,246

The county's second largest city, Auburn, is anticipated to add about 2,110 more people to its current 7,495 residents, while the Barrow portion of Braselton is expected to increase markedly, adding 1,345 people by 2050. These numbers are consistent with the high growth historically observed in Gwinnett County that is shifting eastward.

The City of Winder is also expected to grow significantly, potentially doubling in size by 2050. Statham will likely continue to grow, with an anticipated population of 3,880 by 2050, and Bethlehem is expected to grow to over 1,000 residents. Carl is likely to remain a small community, gaining about 20 residents.

The composition of the county's population is also expected to change. Between 2020 and 2050, the population is projected to become older: the median age in 2020 was 35.6, and in 2050 it is projected to be 37.77 years old. Mirroring this, the proportion of residents over age 65 will grow from 13.0% in 2020 to 18.7% in 2050. This projection signals a future need for more senior-friendly housing options and services that can enable seniors to age in place.

Conversely, the proportion of residents 19 years-old or younger will decrease from 30.1% in 2020 to 27.7% in 2050. Although the proportion of young people is expected to decline, in absolute numbers there will be many more children in the county to serve. The School Board and private institutions may find challenges accommodating almost 10,000 more students by 2050.

It should be noted that the Woods & Poole projections are significantly higher than those calculated by the State of Georgia, which shows a more modest population gain to 119,407 residents by 2050.

### GROWTH IN CONTEXT

Using State of Georgia population projections by county as a guide, Barrow County is expected to grow moderately compared to its neighbors. Its growth rate is expected to be significantly faster than Gwinnett and Clarke Counties between 2020 and 2050, similar to Walton and Hall Counties, and slower than Jackson and Oconee Counties. This reflects a statewide trend of ex-urban/rural counties growing much more quickly than their more urban neighbors because of lower land values and more plentiful greenfield development opportunities.



## Chapter 3

### Housing

Housing has changed in Barrow County remarkably between 2016 and 2021. According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), the county experienced a net gain of an estimated 2,628 units in this time period. The vast majority—84.3 %—of housing in the county consists of detached single-family units. This percentage is likely even higher in unincorporated Barrow County, as multi-unit housing is more common in incorporated areas like the City of Winder.

Between 2016 and 2021, there has been a shift in housing types in all of Barrow County. The share of single-family attached homes (such as townhomes) increased from 1.4% to 2.0%. With a net loss of 75 units, the proportion of duplexes decreased slightly from 2.7% to 2.2%. Conversely, the proportion of triplexes and quadplexes slightly increased from 1.1% to 2.0% with a net gain of 272 units, as did buildings with 5-9 apartments from 1.2% to 1.3% with a net gain of 63 units. Similarly, housing units in structures of 10 or more apartments slightly increased from 1.3% to 1.8% with a net gain of about 200 units. Mobile homes witnessed a substantial decrease with their share decreasing from 9.4% to 6.3% and a reduction of 689 units. Although these percentages are just small parts of a whole, they do suggest that even the limited number of units that could constitute “missing middle” housing—such as duplexes and units in small apartment buildings—are only increasing modestly, and housing types are still predominantly single-family units.

### Occupancy & Ownership

Despite the overall increase in housing units, the vacancy rate has dropped sharply, from about 11% in 2016 to just 5% in 2021. In rural-

suburban markets like Barrow County, a vacancy rate of just 4% signals a “tight” market, or a likely housing shortage that drives up prices. This tight market is further supported by the sharp increase seen in housing prices.

Mirroring the increase of detached single-family units, the number of family households in Barrow County has increased from almost 18,000 in 2016 to over 21,000 in 2021. Despite this increase in families, there has been a reduction of both the average family household size and overall household size. The average number of family household members slightly decreased from 3.51 in 2016 to 3.38 people in 2021. Similarly, the overall average household size, which includes people living with unmarried partners or with roommates, decreased from 3.05 to 2.92 people between 2016 and 2021 respectively.

This reduction in average household size is largely because family sizes are becoming more polarized. The proportion of 2-person and 3-person households decreased by 1.2 and 2.4% respectively between 2016 and 2021. Conversely, 4-or-more-person households increased by 3.1% during the same period. 1-person households witnessed a modest increase of half a percentage point. This shift suggests that differences in household size are becoming more extreme between single person households and larger families; however, the most common household sizes remain 2-person households and 4-or-more-person households.

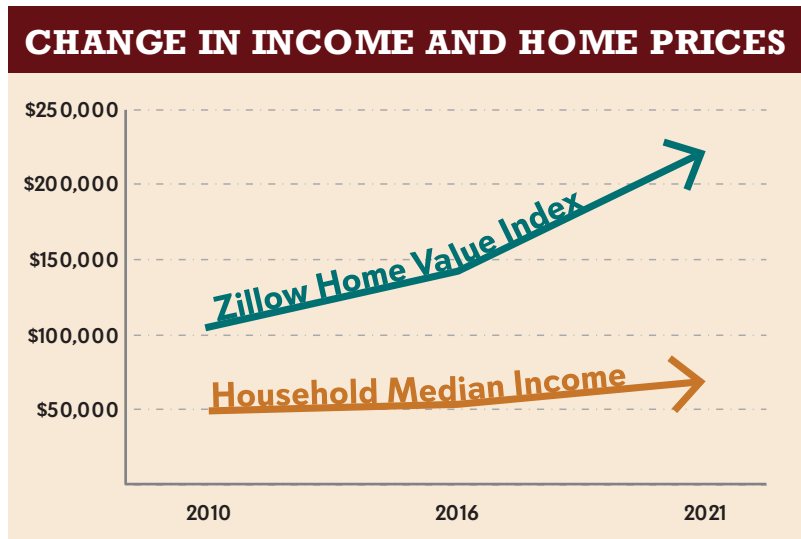
Over this same period, homeownership increased by over 5% from 72.8% to 78.5%. This high percentage of homeowners indicates high community stability; however, it may also indicate the homogenization of housing types and households.

## Chapter 3

### Housing Costs & Affordability

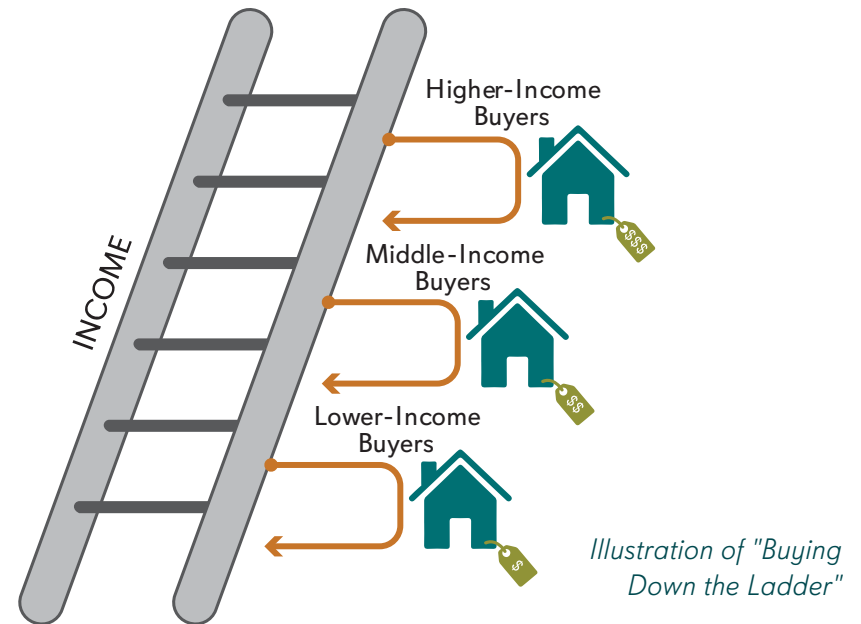
There has been a steady increase in the rise of housing costs nationwide and Barrow County is no exception. National house listing company, Zillow, has developed the Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI) that identifies the typical value of homes in the 35<sup>th</sup> to 65<sup>th</sup> percentile range. The chart below shows this value in comparison to average household incomes in Barrow County in the same time period.

Since 2010, home values in Barrow County have more than tripled, whereas median incomes have increased far more slowly. Between 2016 and 2021, home values increased by 56.9%; incomes increased significantly too at 28.7%, but at almost half the rate of housing prices. In less than two years between January 2021 and December 2022, home prices shot up another 45.4%.



### BUYING DOWN THE LADDER

These runaway housing costs are not unique to Barrow County. However, they have made homes that were originally built as “starter homes”—new, inexpensively built single-family homes with 3 or 4 bedrooms—out of reach for many households. This is likely due to a “cascading effect” where higher-income home buyers “buy down the ladder.” Inherently, higher-income home buyers possess more housing choices than middle to low-income groups. When higher-income households experience a shortage of homes suitable to their income, they resort to purchasing homes below their price point because they have access to capital to renovate or rebuild to their preferred quality and size. This ‘cascading effect’ reduces the housing supply affordable to middle- and lower-income groups, which already face constrained home buying choices.



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### HOUSING GAPS

A high-level housing gap analysis further examined this housing shortage. It matched ACS income brackets to corresponding home price ranges based on what Zillow's Affordability Calculator (ZAC) deemed affordable at that income level. Then, these Zillow home prices were matched to the housing value of Barrow's existing housing stock from ACS data to document the proportion of owner-occupied homes in the corresponding price bracket. If this percentage of homes

was below the percentage of households, there is likely a housing shortage for that income bracket. This analysis revealed that two groups faced significant housing shortages: low-income groups and households making above \$100,000. These higher income groups are, therefore, likely to spend less than they can afford on housing, thereby reducing options for low to middle income groups.

**TABLE 4. HIGH-LEVEL HOUSING GAP ANALYSIS**

INCOME BRACKETS (ACS, 2021)	% OF HOUSEHOLDS IN INCOME BRACKET (ACS, 2021)	HOME PRICE RANGES (ZAC, 2023)	HOME PRICE/VALUE RANGES (ACS, 2021)	% OF OWNER- OCCUPIED HOMES IN PRICE BRACKET (ACS, 2021)
Up to \$34,999	<b>22.8%</b>	Up to \$120,000	Up to \$125,000	<b>15.4%</b>
\$35,000-\$49,999	12.4%	\$120,000 - \$175,000	\$125,000-\$175,000	19.6%
\$50,000-\$74,999	19.7%	\$175,000 - \$275,000	\$175,000 - \$250,000	30.5%
\$75,000-\$99,999	16.9%	\$275,000 - \$375,000	\$250,000 - \$400,000	17.4%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	<b>18.2%</b>	\$375,000 - \$550,000	\$400,000 - \$500,000	<b>2.6%</b>
\$150,000 and up	<b>9.9%</b>	\$550,000+	\$500,000+	<b>4.0%</b>

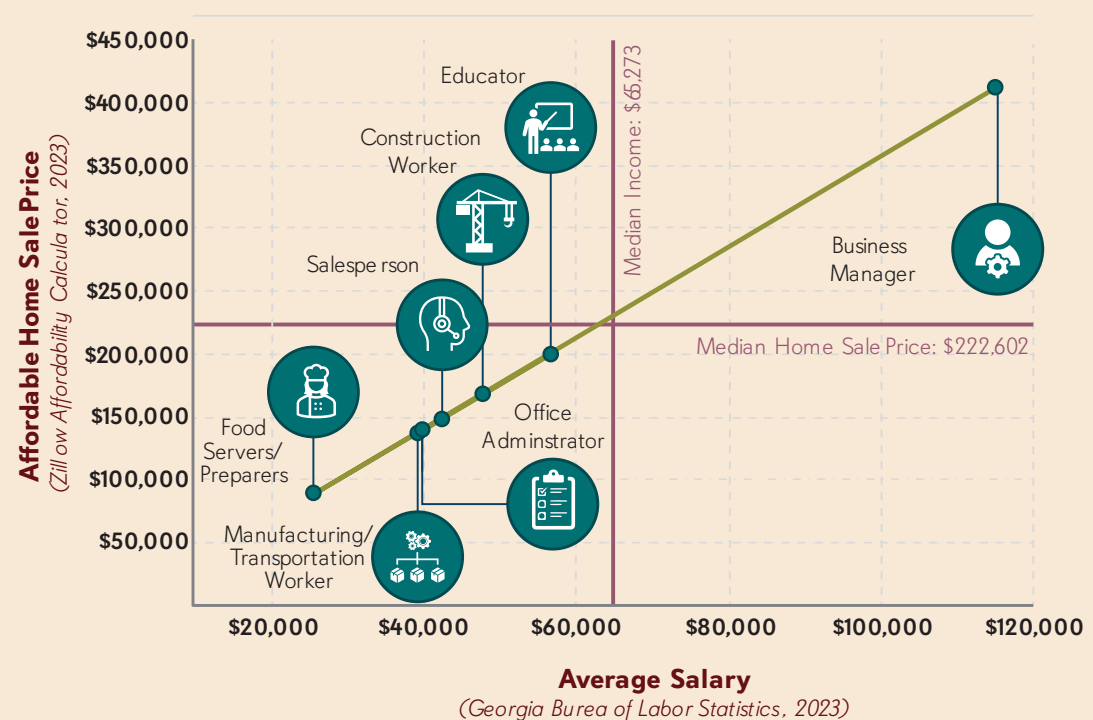


## Chapter 3

### JOBS AND HOUSING

Another high-level housing analysis revealed that many Barrow residents hold jobs that—as individuals—do not afford them homes within Barrow’s current housing price points. ACS data from 2021 determined the top 7 jobs in Barrow are office administrator; salesperson; business manager; manufacturing/transportation workers; construction worker; educator/librarian; and food servers/preparers, respectively. Then, Georgia Bureau of Labor Statistics 2023 data provided average salaries of these top professions. Using the ZAC, affordable price points for these average salaries were plotted against Barrow’s median home sale price for 2023. Of these 7 occupations, 6 could not afford the median home sale price of \$222,602.

### JOBS AND HOUSING THEY CAN AFFORD

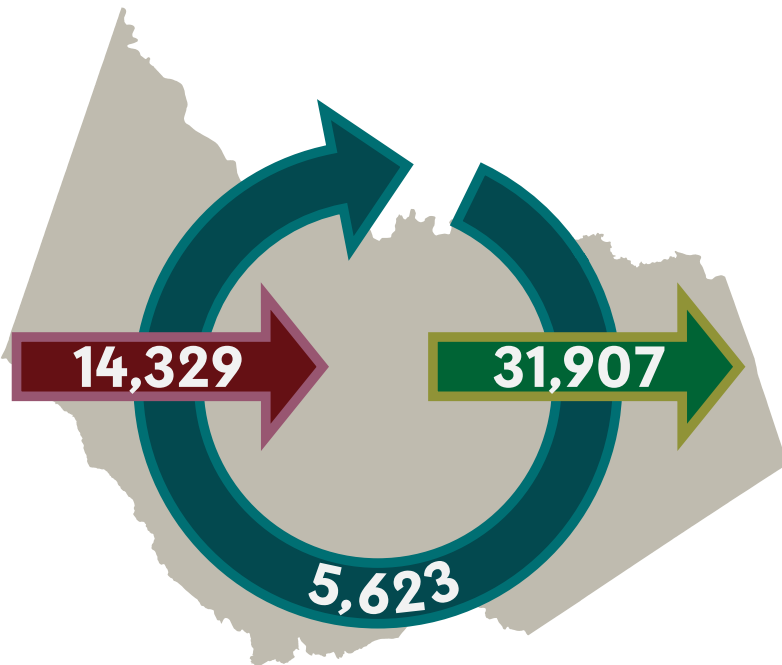


## Chapter 3

### Commuting Patterns

Understanding commuting patterns can help direct job growth and infrastructure investments. In 2020, the Census reported that a little over 37,530 people living in Barrow County had jobs. There were, however, only 19,952 people actually employed in the county.

Of the 37,530 workers living in Barrow, only 5,623 actually worked within the county, while a significant majority of employed Barrow residents— 31,907—commuted outside of the county for work. On the other hand, Barrow absorbed a substantial 14,329 workers living outside its borders. These commuting patterns contribute significantly to the stress and congestion on Barrows roadways, particularly during peak commuting times.



Many of the Barrow County residents commuting elsewhere worked in nearby counties. Of the 31,907 Barrow County residents that worked in other counties in 2019, 85% of them worked in one of the counties adjoining Barrow County. The greatest percentage of these Barrow residents commuting outside the county held jobs in Gwinnett County (about 10,401 workers at 32.6%) with another 17.6% working in Jackson, Clarke, and Walton Counties. Together, these four counties account for a little over half (50.2%) of all of the out-bound county workers.

Key takeaways about employment in the county include:

- Of those employed people living in the county, only 15% of them held jobs in the county while 85% worked in other counties
- 15% of employed residents that held jobs in the county filled only 28.2% of the local jobs available
- 71.8% of the jobs in the county were filled by employees residing in other counties
- This "out-sourcing" of county residents to jobs in other counties may well continue, particularly to Gwinnett County.
- If the W&P jobs-to-population projections to 2050 hold true, and the number of jobs in Barrow County remains at 0.24 jobs per person, retirees aside, even more residents finding employment outside of the county can be expected. This 0.13 decrease (35%) is a significant drop from the projections made in 2018 Comprehensive Plan.

Housing, commuting data, and household income data suggests that many Barrow County's residents are middle management employees in services and retail businesses who have found well-paying jobs in other counties but 1) cannot afford to live where they work or 2)

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choose to not live there. This suggests that Barrow County offers an attractive alternative as a place to live, despite a longer commute.

### Economic Indicators

The county has shown great strides in the increase of its population's educational achievement levels. Most notably from a workforce standpoint, Barrow residents over the age of 25 who earned a college degree (Associate, Bachelor's, or Graduate) increased dramatically from 12,194 (25.6%) in 2016 to 15,960 (29.5%) in 2021.

The growth of the civilian work force in Barrow County exceeds its population growth. Between 2016 and 2021, the work force increased from 35,655 to 41,853, netting 6,198 more workers, a 17.4% increase compared to 12.0% in population growth. During this same period, the unemployment rate dropped dramatically from 8.6% down to just 4%.

County residents with jobs showed particular skill sets and types of employment. In 2021, the majority (81.0%) of employed county residents are classified as "private wage and salary workers." Government workers and those self-employed make up the remaining two general classifications of workers. Between 2016 and 2021, each employment category increased in number of residents between 20-40%, consistent with the overall increase in workforce during that same period; however, the proportion of residents in each type of job remained relatively consistent between 2016 and 2021.

**TABLE 5. EMPLOYMENT CLASSIFICATIONS**

	2016	%	2021	%	% CHANGE
Private wage and salary workers	26,935	82.6%	32,562	81.0%	20.9%
Government	4,049	12.4%	5,539	13.8%	36.8%
Self-employed	1,606	4.9%	2,088	5.2%	30.0%
Total	32,590		40,189		

According to 2021 ACS estimates, Barrow residents typically have white-collar jobs; the top three jobs Barrow residents hold are office and administrative support (12.9%), sales (9.9%), and management positions (9.1%), respectively. However, blue-collar jobs remain prevalent when looking at the higher-level job groupings—or occupation classifications. The top three occupation classifications include two white-collar categories: management, business, science, and arts occupations (33%) and sales and office occupations (22.9%). The third most common occupation classification is blue-collar: production, transportation, and material moving (17%).

Looking at industry, Barrow residents worked in these top three industries in 2021: education and health services (19.5%), manufacturing (15.0%), and retail trade (10.9%). Of these industries, more residents worked in education and health services since 2016, with a growth of 1,583 employed residents between 2016 and 2021. Despite it remaining a top industry in Barrow, retail trade saw a reduction of 404 workers.

## Chapter 3

### Spending Power

Since 2016, Barrow households' incomes have become more evenly distributed across income brackets, with high-income earners growing significantly. The share of households in the middle income range—\$50,000 to \$100,000—has remained consistently around 37%; however, households have shifted out of lower-income brackets—or less than \$50,000. This proportion of lower-income households decreased from 47.2% in 2016 to 35.2% in 2021. That means the percentage of households with higher incomes—or those making \$100,000 or more—has increased. Specifically, high-income earners grew from just 16.3% of households in 2016 to 28.1% in 2021. Breaking these income brackets down further, households making between \$100,000 and \$150,000 grew the most, increasing by 6.1% from 12.1% in 2016 to 18.2% in 2021. This increase in high-income earners and

decrease in lower-income households is reflected in Barrow's median household income<sup>2</sup>. Between 2016 and 2021, it increased nearly 30% from \$53,133 to \$68,365. The increase in higher-income households may indicate more spending power; however, high rates of inflation and skyrocketing housing costs have markedly decreased spending power across the board in the past 5 years.

Poverty is of some growing concern in the county. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of people living in the county under the "poverty line" (based on federal guidelines) decreased from 5.8% to 4.4% of the county population, a decrease of 1.4 percentage points. The population grew during this time period, but this percentage decreased because the absolute number of people living below the poverty line decreased as well.

**TABLE 6. CHANGE IN INCOME (2016-2021)**

Income Brackets	% of Households in Income Bracket (2016)	% of Households in Income Bracket (2021)	Household Income Breakdown	% of Households (2016)	% of Households (2021)
Low Income (less than \$50K)	47.2%	35.2%	Up to \$35K	30.5%	22.8%
			\$35K-\$50	16.7%	12.4%
Middle Income (\$50K-\$100K)	36.5%	36.6%	\$50K-\$75K	22.5%	19.7%
			\$75K-\$100K	14.0%	16.9%
High Income (\$100K or more)	16.3%	28.1%	\$100K - \$150K	12.1%	18.2%
			\$150K +	4.2%	9.9%

<sup>2</sup> Median Household Income is specific to Barrow County and is different from Area Median Income (AMI) referenced in the housing section. AMI covers the Atlanta metropolitan statistical area.



## Chapter 3

### Earnings and Personal Income

The total wages and salaries generated by companies and proprietors in the county provide insight into the economic sectors that contribute the most and least to Barrow County's economy.

Total estimated net earnings by all sectors in 2023 is nearly \$2 billion—an over \$100 million increase from the \$1.86 million in 2018 when the previous Comprehensive Plan was completed. In 2023, W&P estimates that top industries will generate \$156 million in retail, \$154 million in Wholesale Trade, and over \$151 million in Services. Manufacturing—contributing nearly \$140 million—came in fourth place.

By 2050, these four leading sectors will likely continue to generate the highest net earnings in the country but will change position: Services will lead at \$379 million, Wholesale Trade will follow up at \$343 million, with Retail Trade trailing at \$333 million, and Construction falls to fourth place at \$256 million.

Per employee earnings by sector, however, tell a different tale. The sector generating the highest average per-employee earnings in 2022 is Management at about \$137,621. In 2050, Management continues to lead with the highest average per-employee earning with Utilities in second place. Between 2023 and 2050, Management is projected to grow its average per-employee earnings by about 42% to \$194,919.

While the Retail sector generates the most in earnings in the county (almost \$156 million in 2023), its employees have a relatively low average earnings of only \$30,384. Earnings in the Retail Trade sector will grow dramatically by 2050, more than doubling its total to more than \$332.7 million. The average earnings of its employees will also grow (7%) in 2050. In 2023 the combined Services sector employees average earnings per employee is \$27,678 and in 2050 is projected to

be \$32,649, a relatively low figure than other sectors in the county.

In both 2023 and 2050, the Services sector has more employees than any other sector, though the Retail Trade sector trails closely behind. Average employee earnings in the Services sector is a bit lower than Retail Trade. In 2023, Services employees earned an average \$2,706 more than Retail Trade employees. While average earnings per employee increase over time for both sectors, they do so modestly.

**TABLE 7. INDUSTRY EARNINGS**  
(WOODS & POOLE)

EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR	2018 EARNINGS (\$ MILLIONS)	2023 EARNINGS (\$ MILLIONS)	CHANGE	% CHANGE	2050 EARNINGS (\$ MILLIONS)
Retail Trade	150.2	156.0	5.8	3.9%	332.7
Wholesale Trade	133.5	154.1	20.6	15.5%	343.1
Manufacturing	135.3	139.2	3.9	2.9%	156.5
Services	115.2	151.4	36.2	31.4%	378.9
Construction	144.8	131.0	-13.8	-9.5%	256.9
Total Earnings	1,181.1	1,276.8	95.8	8.1%	2,627.7
NET Earnings	1,861.8	1,991.9	130.1	7.0%	4,016.4

## Chapter 3

### Future Job Prospects

Economists foresee growth in private sector jobs being focused most heavily in the Retail Trade and the Service sectors under normal future conditions. By 2050, Woods & Poole Economics sees the Retail sector growing by well over 4,473 from almost 5,134 jobs in the county to more than 9,607 jobs, a more that 87% increase. Moreover, the Retail sector is projected to increase from almost 14.7% to 15.7% of all jobs in the county in 2050.

The Accommodation and Food Services category is also expected to expand notably, from almost 2,809 jobs in 2023 to more than 5,182 in 2050, more than an 84% increase and almost 2,373 new jobs. The services sector will also increase in presence in the job market from 15.7% of all jobs in the county today to over 19.0% in 2050. Almost all sectors see gains in jobs except agriculture will see losses.

While the future expansion of services and retail jobs (and sales) will serve the county residents well and will occur as the population grows, the county is actively seeking opportunities to bring more industries to Barrow, which can result in diverse types of manufacturing, wholesale, and warehousing companies.

### Growth in Jobs

Today Woods & Poole Economics (W&P) estimates that job opportunities in the county are comparatively few. In 2023, W&P estimates the number of jobs in the county at almost 34,855.

Commuting patterns, discussed above, indicate that a comparatively large number of people living in Barrow County hold jobs outside of the county, which deflates the potential number of jobs in the county

and artificially inflates the jobs-to-population ratios in the counties where they work.

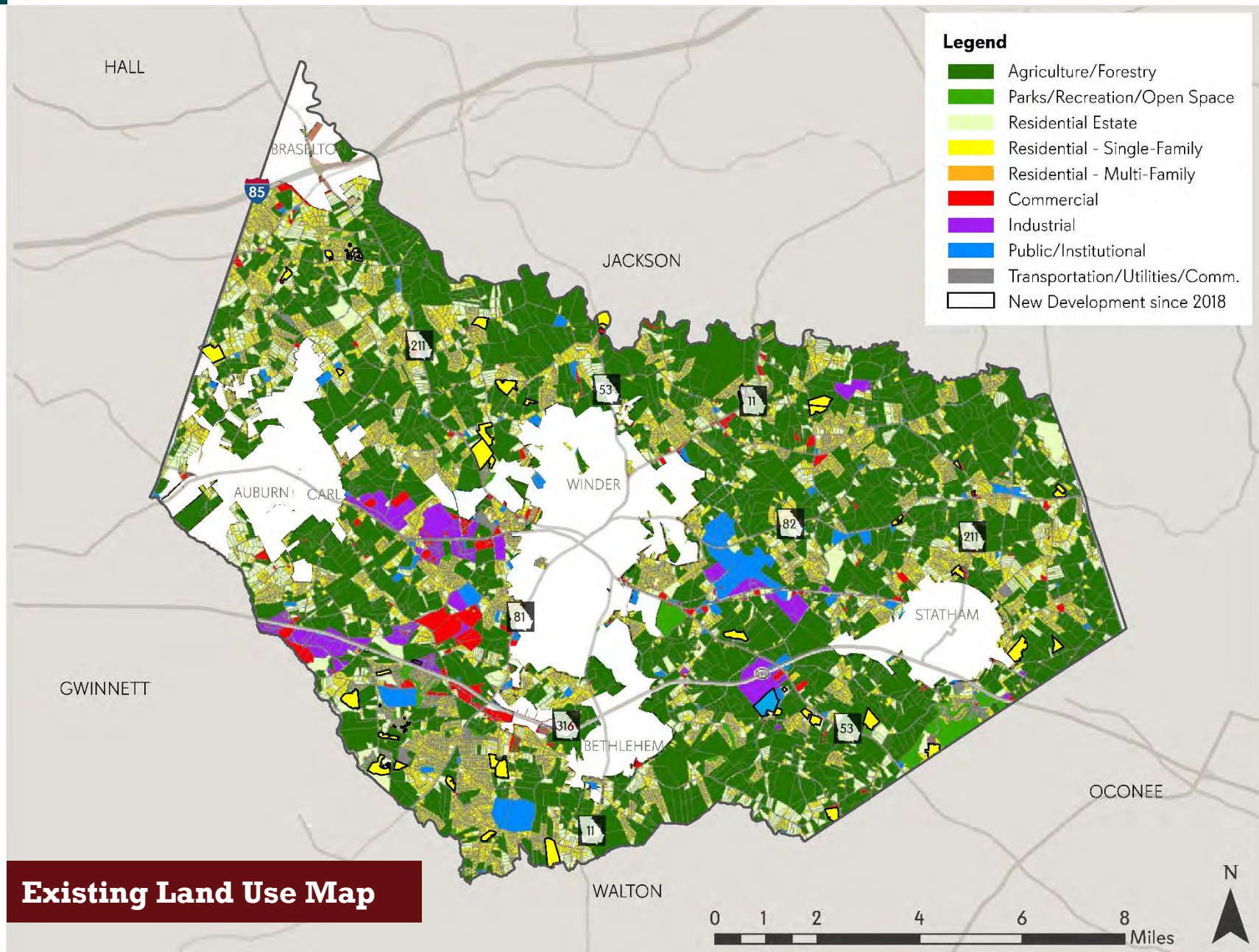
Future job growth is seen as a direct function of population growth in the county. In 2023, the jobs-to-total population ratio in Barrow County estimated by W&P is 0.39 jobs per resident. This ratio slightly increases in 2050 to 0.43 jobs per resident. To a certain extent, this reflects the county's emphasis on local sales and service jobs, which tend to focus on serving nearby residents and are therefore strongly local-customer oriented.

Gwinnett County will continue to be a source of employment for Barrow County residents. According to employment growth statistics released by the Census Bureau for the Atlanta Region's "core" counties, of the ten zip codes that showed the highest increase in jobs since 2000, five are in Gwinnett County. According to Woods & Poole Economics, jobs in Gwinnett County are forecast to increase from more than 607,023 in 2023 to almost 854,754 in 2050, representing an average annual increase (1.5%), which is lower than Barrow County (a healthy 2.1%).

### Land Use

The Existing Land Use Map on the following page displays existing land use for unincorporated Barrow County, defined as the current use of parcels of land and categorized as described in the Existing Land Use Categories table on page 20. The Existing Land Use Map was developed for the 2018 Update through a process of GIS analysis that involved tax digest data from Barrow County, aerial photography from various sources, and windshield surveys. Areas outlined in black show the major land use changes since then.

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## Chapter 3

**TABLE 8. EXISTING LAND USE CATEGORIES**

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Agriculture/ Forestry	Land dedicated to agricultural and forestry activities
Parks/Recreation/ Conservation	Dedicated open space such as parks and state lands
Residential Estate	Single-family detached homes on individual lots > 5 acres
Residential- Single-Family	Single-family detached homes on individual lots < 5 acres
Residential- Multi-Family	Apartments, attached homes (e.g., townhomes, duplexes), condominiums
Commercial	Non-industrial businesses including retail sales, office, services, and entertainment
Industrial	Land dedicated to warehousing, wholesale trade and manufacturing
Public/ Institutional	State, federal, or local government uses including city halls and government building complexes, police and fire stations, libraries, prisons, schools, etc.
Transportation/ Communication/ Utilities	Properties devoted to power generation plants, radio towers, telephone switching stations, electric utility substations, and other similar uses

Land use patterns in Barrow County include a mix of rural (agricultural uses or zoning; residential uses on large lots) and single-family residential uses dispersed across the unincorporated area, with greater concentrations of residential subdivisions in the western half of the county. Agricultural uses and large areas of open spaces are found to the north along major transportation corridors. In the cities, traditional town centers with civic and commercial uses are largely surrounded by residential uses, sometimes at a slightly higher density near the city center (i.e. Winder). Open space is primarily represented by local and state parks, golf courses, as well as ant parcels held by a land trust.

The most notable change in existing land use since 2018 is the conversion of rural land to single-family development. 85% of new developments are single-family homes or subdivisions. Of those single-family developments, over half of them were developed in the “rural neighborhood” or “rural reserve” future land use designations from 2018’s comprehensive plan.

Commercial and industrial developments emerged on 316 and within Winder.



## Chapter 3

### Transportation

Concurrently with the Comprehensive Plan, the Barrow County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) was updated in 2023. It addresses transportation infrastructure in detail and includes an assessment of the existing countywide system. The plan's Five-Year Work Program mirrors the projects identified in the Atlanta Regional Commission's (ARC) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). As the short-term work program of the Atlanta Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), the TIP allocates federal funds toward the construction of the highest priority projects in the RTP. The RTP is the long-range transportation plan for a 20-county region that includes Barrow County.

According to the 2018 Barrow County CTP, the near-term County debt obligations take precedence over identifying funds for transportation projects; accordingly, the CTP's work program consists of projects in the TIP, as they are fully funded (federal and state transportation funds). These projects reflect an emphasis on large projects that address significant congestion and safety issues in the county and support regional mobility. Major projects include the West Winder Bypass and the SR 316 interchange projects.

At the time of this plan's adoption, the 2023 CTP had produced an existing conditions and needs assessment reports. Roadways with current and projected poor Level of Service (LOS) include SR 211 near I-85 and Braselton and SR 11 from the southern county border. A planned widening project is projected to improve the LOS along the SR 211 segment, but this roadway is still projected to have congestion problems into 2050 without additional intervention.

As a major east-west corridor through Barrow County, SR 316 is a concern from both congestion and safety perspectives. Outside of

Winder, SR 316 recorded the highest concentration of severe crashes, particularly near its intersection with SR 81 where Barrow Crossing's commercial development has increased.

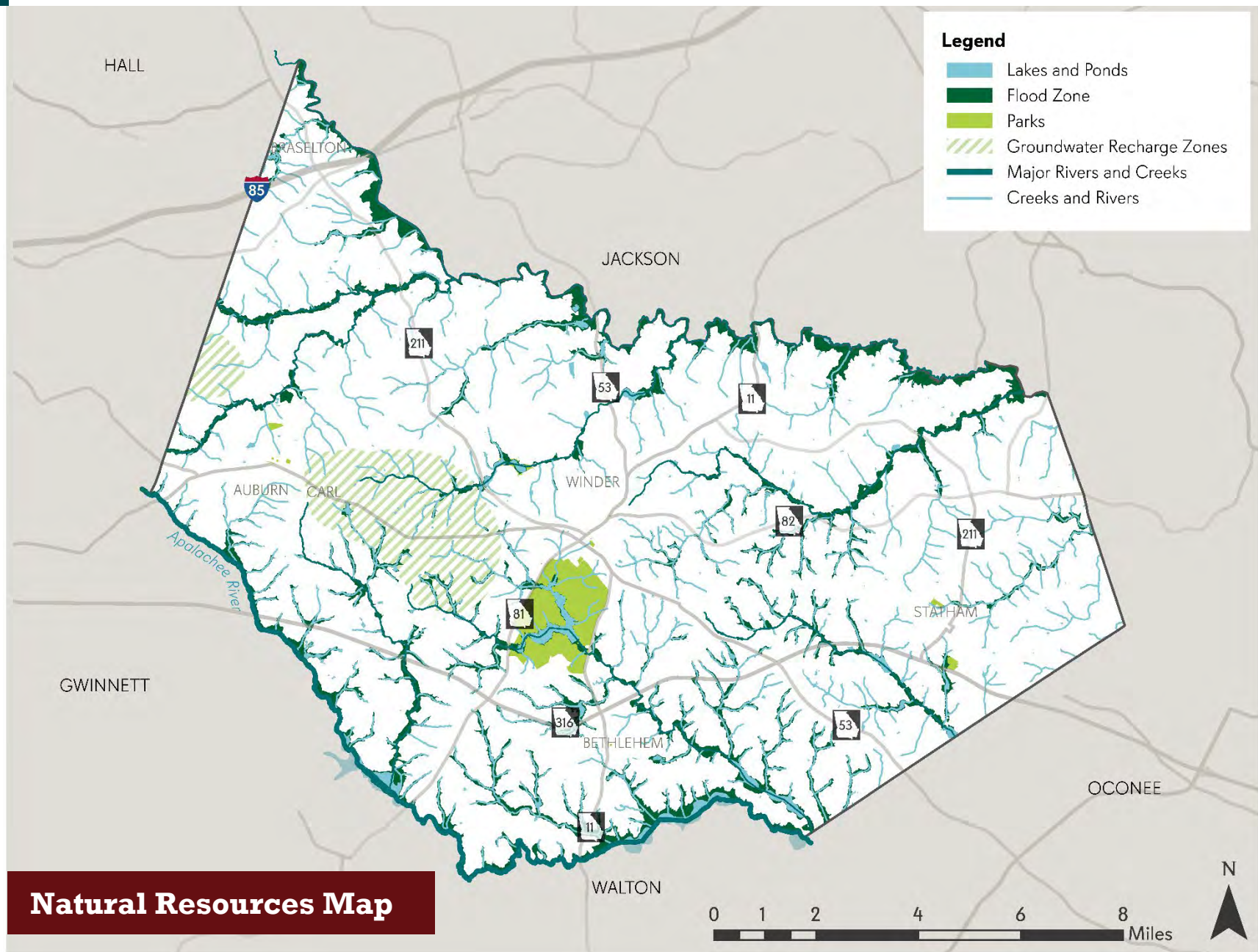
Outside Fort Yargo State Park, there are currently no dedicated bicycle facilities—including multi-use paths—in the rest of Barrow County. Similarly, transit does not serve the county.

### Natural Resources

To protect the state's natural resources and environment, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) developed Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria (Chapter 391-3-16). The Georgia Department of Community Affairs' (DCA) Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning (Chapter 110-2-1) require local governments to review the standards during the development of comprehensive plans to determine if there is need to adapt development regulations to address protection of the following natural resources:

The Compliance with State Environmental Planning Criteria table in this section indicates whether these natural resources are present in Barrow County and if affected jurisdictions have implemented protection efforts.

## Chapter 3



**Natural Resources Map**

## Chapter 3

### Other Environmental Regulations

Each jurisdiction participating in this plan has adopted a local Flood Damage Prevention ordinance, which sets forth standards for development within the floodplain. A community's floodplain management activities, including its local ordinances, can make it eligible to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program's (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS). The CRS program is a voluntary incentive program that recognizes and encourages activities that exceed the minimum NFIP requirements. Depending upon the level of participation, flood insurance premium rates for policyholders can be reduced up to 45%. Barrow County and its municipalities currently do not participate in the CRS program.

Barrow County, Bethlehem and Carl require all "primary conservation areas" in a conventional subdivision, open space subdivision or master planned development to be permanently protected by a natural resource or conservation easement. Primary conservation areas include river and stream channels and required buffers, protected wetlands and buffers, 100- year floodplain, and wildlife habitats of threatened or endangered species.

## Chapter 3

**TABLE 9. COMPLIANCE WITH STATE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING CRITERIA**

RESOURCE	DEFINITION	LOCATION	LOCAL PROTECTIONS
<b>Water Supply Watershed</b>	A "small water supply watershed" has less than 100 square miles of land within the drainage basin up- stream of a governmentally owned public drinking water supply intake and a "large water supply water- shed" is greater than 100 square miles	Large water supply watersheds: Apalachee River, Middle Oconee River and the Mulberry River Watershed Small water supply watersheds: Cedar Creek, Laurel Lane Reservoir, Fort Vargo Lake, Barber's Creek and Bear Creek	Watershed Protection Ordinance: <b>Yes</b>
			Typical provisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buffer and impervious surface requirements for the water quality critical area, or a 7-mile radius upstream of public water supply reservoir. Septic tanks and drainfields are also prohibited within this boundary.</li> </ul>
<b>Groundwater Recharge Areas</b>	Any portion of the earth's surface where water infiltrates into the ground to replenish an aquifer	Significant groundwater recharge areas are located in Carl and Auburn, in the unincorporated areas north and south of Highway 29 between Auburn and Winder, and along the Gwinnett County line in western Barrow.	Groundwater Recharge Area Protection Ordinance: <b>Yes</b>
			Typical Provisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Septic tank regulations, including minimum lot sizes for new homes</li> <li>• Special requirements for uses with on-site hazardous materials</li> </ul>
<b>Wetlands</b>	Areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions	County-wide, as delineated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetlands Inventory	Wetlands Protection Ordinance: <b>Yes</b>
			Typical provisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limitations on allowed uses</li> <li>• Local development permit is required for regulated activity</li> </ul>
<b>Protected Rivers</b>	Any perennial river or watercourse with an average annual flow of at least 400 cubic feet per second as determined by appropriate U.S. Geological Survey documents	Apalachee, Mulberry and Middle Oconee Rivers in unincorporated Barrow County	River Corridor Protection Buffer: <b>Yes</b>
			Typical provisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100-foot buffer</li> <li>• Prohibitions on uses that generate or handle hazardous wastes</li> </ul>



## Chapter 3

### Regional Water Plan

DCA's Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning require local governments to review their Regional Water Plan to determine whether additional or modified regulations/actions are needed. In July 2023 the Upper Oconee Regional Water Planning Council completed an update to the Upper Oconee Regional Water Plan. The plan recommends specific measures for the wise use and management of the 13-county region's water over the next 35 years, specifically for: water conservation, water supply, wastewater, and water quality. Surface water availability and water-quality impaired waters are two challenges/infrastructure needs for the county. Barrow County, Winder, and Statham provide water and wastewater (sewer) service and are working toward implementation of applicable management techniques identified in the Regional Water Plan.

### Historic Resources

Historic resource surveys provide a working base for communities in devising a local preservation strategy. In 2011 a survey of unincorporated Barrow County was conducted by FindIT, a state-wide cultural resource survey program sponsored by the Georgia Transmission Corporation (GTC) in partnership with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Historic Preservation Division (GA SHPO). The program is housed in the College of Environment+ Design at the University of Georgia.

The Barrow County survey provides the following summary: "A total of 53 resources were documented that meet and maintain a minimum level of age, integrity, and significance. The construction date of all identified resources ranges from 1850-1944; the periods with the most extant resources are 1890-1899 and 1910-1919, which both have 11 resources (20.8%), followed closely by 1880-1889 with 10 resources

(18.8%). The majority of identified resources are single family dwellings (54.7%), with the most common types being Craftsman (41.4%) and Queen Anne (10.3%). Many dwellings (37.9%) did not exhibit any type of High Style architecture and are considered to be of no academic style. "Cemeteries" accounted for 41.5% of the total resources surveyed, and "Religious Facilities" accounted for 3.8%." However, most of these sites are in the City of Winder.

The public can view the resources and detailed information from the survey on DNR's official web-based database system: NAHRGIS (Natural, Archaeological, and Historic Resources Geographic Information Systems).

### National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places ("National Register") is the official list of the nation's historic and archaeological resources worthy of protection. A program of the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Park Service, the National Register is intended to identify, evaluate and protect historic places. As an honorary designation, National Register status places no obligations or restrictions on private owners. However, to take advantage of federal and state tax incentives for building rehabilitation, projects must retain a property's historic character by following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

The following local districts, buildings and sites in unincorporated Barrow County, Bethlehem, and Statham, are listed on the National Register:

- Carlyle--Blakey Farm (Unincorporated Barrow, adjacent to western Winder city limit on Hwy 211)

## Chapter 3

- Kilgore Mill Covered Bridge and Mill Site (Unincorporated Barrow, SW of Bethlehem)
- Manning Gin Farm (Bethlehem)
- Omer Christian Church and Cemetery (Unincorporated Barrow, northeast corner of SR 316 and Carl-Bethlehem Road)
- Rockwell Universalist Church (Unincorporated Barrow, intersection of Hwy 53 and Rockwell Church Road)
- Russell Homeplace Historic District (just east of Winder city limits on Atlanta Hwy)
- Statham Historic District

### Locally Designated Historic Districts

While National Register designated is largely symbolic, a locally-designated historic district can afford meaningful protection to historic resource. In Barrow County, only the City of Winder has created a locally designated district.

### Community Engagement

The Comprehensive Plan team employed several different engagement methods to reach various members of the Barrow community and hear many perspectives. Methods ranged from virtual interviews and surveys, pop-ups at community events, and in-person workshops.



*The planning team attended opening day of the Barrow County Farmers Market in Winder*

## Chapter 3

### PUBLIC HEARING

Signaling the start of the plan, the County Board of Commissioners opened a public hearing on Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>. This public hearing served as an opportunity for members of the public to hear about comprehensive planning and to express their thoughts at the outset of the process.

### STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The Comprehensive Plan team conducted almost 20 interviews with various stakeholders. This included county commissioners, school system staff, economic developers, members of parks and leisure services, and many more. Throughout the eleven hours of virtual interviews, there were three consistent themes on what the county does well and what is needed to improve. The first theme was the need for a broader range of housing types, particularly housing options for senior citizens to age in place. Secondly, dedicating space for more industrial and commercial businesses was important; however, interviewees mentioned the need to balance this development with infrastructure limitations and impacts to already congested roadways. Lastly, there was a need to see more parks and community facilities to both benefit Barrow residents and to preserve the rural character of Barrow County.

### STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Steering Committee meetings served as periodic check-ins at which the planning team updated community stakeholders on the planning process and received feedback on ideas. Each steering committee meeting was held in person at the Hostess House in Winder.

The first steering committee meeting was held on Tuesday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Eight members of the steering committee joined the

planning team to discuss the initial findings, including the seven strategies the planning team will use to balance a quickly growing Barrow County. The steering committee was given the chance to offer feedback on the engagement strategies as well as the planning strategies. The committee noted that wider strategies are needed on how to increase taxes and to support collaboration between the cities and the county; specifically, there was a great deal of discussion about how the parks and recreation system needed additional resources.

On Tuesday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, the second steering committee meeting opened up a discussion about future land use. After hearing a presentation on existing conditions impacting future development, the steering committee workshopped ideas on how best to guide development in the county through two scenarios—one more constrained and the other an ideal scenario with fewer infrastructure constraints.

The third and final steering committee meeting was held on Tuesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>. The planning team presented the draft Future Land Use map and held a discussion about needed adjustments.

### COMMUNITY SURVEY

An initial public input survey was open for one month from Monday, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023 to Monday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The eight-question survey was distributed by the Barrow County staff and received one hundred and forty-nine responses throughout the course of its availability online. Survey results can be found in the Appendix.

## Chapter 3

### FARMER'S MARKET POP-UPS

For the first pop-up, the planning team attended opening day for Barrow County Farmer's Market on Saturday, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023, from 8:30am-12:00pm. This event allowed the team to connect to the Barrow community. The Barrow in Balance Comprehensive Planning team was joined by the Barrow County Transportation Planning Team in discussing both projects. Approximately 65 shoppers stopped by to learn more and answer similar questions to the community survey, using stickers to vote on how they agreed with each statement. The team returned on Saturday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023 to ask for additional feedback on the future land use map.

### VISIONING WORKSHOP

The visioning workshop was held on Tuesday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023 from 5:00pm-8:00pm at the Hostess House in Winder, GA. This workshop offered a chance for community members to learn more about the various strengths, opportunities, and weaknesses that the planning team found in researching the county. Residents were then able to learn about how these factors impacted their top issues within the county including employment, housing, commercial opportunities, and recreation amenities. While each issue was being considered, the residents worked together on a printed map of the county and some subareas to decide where best to guide future development types. This engagement process allowed participants to consider their personal needs for future development while hearing about potential impacts on fellow community members. At the end of the exercise, participants were able to use their experiences and the presented research to recommend specific locations for developments and future amenities.



### FINAL PUBLIC HEARING

The Comprehensive Planning process closed with an opportunity for the public to air thoughts and feedback on the plan before adoption.



## Chapter 4

### CHAPTER 4: BARROW IN BALANCE

Barrow County is at an important point in its evolution: no longer rural but not quite urban, the county is finding itself growing quickly and racing to keep up its services, infrastructure, and the quality of life that attract new residents and jobs. Chapter 4 is a deep dive into the seven focal areas identified through analysis and the plan's engagement process. These topics, phrased as goals, are:

-  **1 - Align infrastructure investments with development**
-  **2 - Prioritize workplace and retail uses where appropriate**
-  **3 - Expand housing options**
-  **4 - Invest in a system of parks and recreation facilities**
-  **5 - Create a more detailed plan for south Barrow County**
-  **6 - Establish land use visions for the Town of Carl and City of Statham**
-  **7 - Foster greater coordination, collaboration, + a sense of community**



*Barrow County Courthouse (Image Source: Explore Georgia)*



## Chapter 4



### 4.1 Align Infrastructure Investments with Development

#### NEED/OPPORTUNITY

*Growth is happening everywhere, but infrastructure--both existing and planned--is not keeping pace.*

#### OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGE

In the past five years alone, there have been over 1,700 acres of new development in Barrow County. Primarily, these new developments are residential, with the majority being new subdivisions of tract homes. About 85% of developments since 2018 consist of single-family subdivisions, and there is a growing number of townhomes. This housing surge is reflected in population growth; between 2018 and 2023, the county has gained an estimated 9,828 residents and 3,333 households (Woods & Poole projections). Barrow's infrastructure and services cannot be expanded fast enough to keep up with this growth.

#### ANALYSIS

Since 2001, the population of the county has almost doubled from an estimated 48,171 (2001) to approximately 86,658 in 2021, resulting in an average annual growth rate of 2.9% (ACS). Recent development has been largely residential—about 90.4% of newly developed land acreage—to accommodate this growth and housing demand. This residential growth puts a significant strain on county infrastructure and services—particularly roadways, sewer, and schools.

#### Transportation

Barrow County completed an update to its Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) in 2023. It assesses Barrow County's transportation system and infrastructure at a detailed level. Through a prioritization process, the plan identifies short-term (5-years) and mid-range (10-years) projects to improve mobility, connectivity, and congestion. Barrow County currently allocates portions of its General Fund, a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST), and the state's Local Maintenance and Improvement Program (LMIG) to fund transportation improvements. As noted in the previous comprehensive plan, these funding sources are limited, and continue to be constrained due to debt obligations.

Because of these financial considerations, the CTP arranged projects into two tiers. Tier 1 includes projects that can be funded through Barrow's current funding sources, and tier 2 comprises projects that can be funded if the County passes a dedicated TSPLOST for solely transportation projects through a referendum. Short-range projects in both tiers are listed in the table on the next page.

In the short range, only four projects are currently funded without anticipated TSPLOST funding. These tier 1 projects include a bridge on Liberty Church Road, a bridge on Arnold Road, general roadway resurfacing projects at various locations, and a roundabout at SR 82 and SR 330. The extensive tier 2 list of 32 short-range projects demonstrates a need for an additional funding source—like the TSPLOST—for critical transportation improvements.

## Chapter 4

**TABLE 10. SHORT RANGE CTP PROJECTS (2023) – UNINCORPORATED BARROW COUNTY**

CATEGORY	ID	TIER	PROJECT DESCRIPTION
Active Transportation	N/A	2	Miscellaneous sidewalk improvements at various locations.
Bridge	B-1	1	Liberty Church Road bridge over Mulberry River
	B-2	1	Arnold Road bridge over Bear Creek
	B-3	2	Boss Hardy Road bridge over Little Mulberry River
	B-5	2	Covered Bridge Road bridge over Mulberry River
	B-6	2	Manning Gin Road bridge over Marbury Creek
	B-8	2	Smith Mill Road bridge over Marbury Creek
	B-19	2	Miscellaneous bridge rehabilitation
Roadway Resurfacing	N/A	1	Roadway rehabilitation and resurfacing for various locations
Intersection Improvements	N/A	2	Intersection safety improvements at various locations
	I-19	1	Roundabout at SR 82 and SR 330
	I-27	2	Realignment and left turn lanes at SR 211 at Cedar Creek Road and Hal Jackson Road
	I-10	2	Safety and operational improvements at SR 211 NW at SR 124
	I-18	2	Roundabout at SR 211 at Bowman Mill Road /Double Bridges Road
	I-26	2	Realignment and other intersection improvements at Atlanta Highway and Bowman Mill Road
	I-20	2	Roundabout at Pleasant Hill Church Road at SR 211
	I-28	2	Roundabout at SR 211 at SR82
	I-31	2	Realignment and left turn lanes at SR 53 N at Mulberry Road
	I-23	2	Roundabout at Rockwell Church Road at City Pond Road
	I-41	2	Intersection safety improvements at Jefferson Highway and Pendergrass Road
	I-24	2	Turn lanes at SR 11 at Holsenbeck School Road
	I-39	2	Safety improvements at Tom Miller Road at Haymon Morris Road
	I-38	2	Flashing red light and other safety improvements at Bill Rutledge Road at Matthews School Road
	GDOT-15	2	Roundabout at SR 81 at Tom Miller Road/Tanners Bridge Road
Roadway Capacity and Widening	R-13	2	Two to four lanes on SR 211 from north of I-85 to WWBP with on road multi-use path
	R-12	2	Two to four lanes on SR 81 from Walton County line to Carson Wages Road
	R-15	2	Two to four lanes on Carl Bethlehem Road from US 29 Business to SR 316
	R-16	2	Spot safety and turn lanes on Dee Kennedy Road from Gwinnett County to SR 211
	R-20	2	Various improvements on Rockwell Church Road from SR 53 to Carl Cedar Hill Road
Roadway Improvements	R-1	2	Roadway operational improvements study on SR 211 from WWBP to N Broad Street
	R-6	2	Various improvements on Atlanta Highway from Gwinnett County to Carl Midway Church Road
	R-5	2	Various improvements on Atlanta Highway from Carl Midway Church Road to Patrick Mill Road
	R-9	2	Various improvements on Bankhead Highway from Carl-Cedar Hill Road to Pearl Pentecost Road
	R-8	2	Various improvements on Carl-Cedar Hill Road from Atlanta Highway to SR 211
	R-10	2	Various improvements on Rockwell Church Road from SR11 to SR 53
	R-7	2	Various improvements on Pearl Pentecost Road from Atlanta Highway to Carl Cedar-Hill Road

## Chapter 4

### Sewer

Wherever sewer goes, growth follows—it is one of the most powerful implementation tools in guiding growth and development. Shown in the map at right, the county has limited sewer infrastructure, and capacity is a challenge. Its sewer lines are predominantly in south Barrow in the Tanners Bridge and Barber Creek sewer basin, and some exist in the Cedar Creek sewer basin just west of Winder. Sewer expansion is currently only feasible in the sewer basins—thus limiting where Barrow can direct growth.

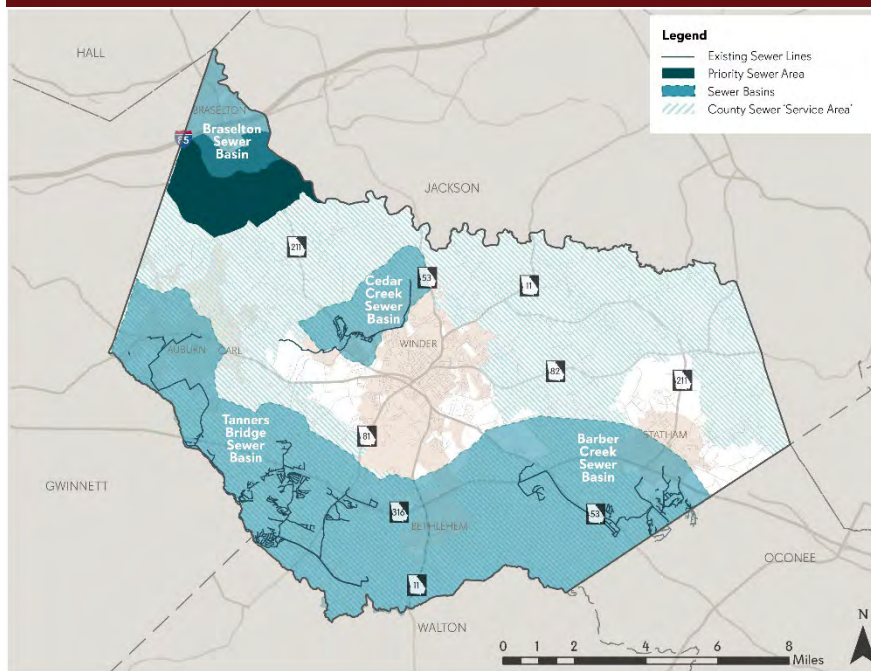
The presence of sewer infrastructure also dictates the type and intensity of possible development. Lack of sewer lines especially limits commercial, industrial, and other workplace uses, as these are often

more intense than residential. Without sewer infrastructure, low density uses are the only development possible because it can operate on septic systems.

### Schools

The Barrow County Board of Education has purview over the school system and is not directed by this comprehensive planning process. However, the future land use plan has a direct impact on planning for school facilities, and the Board often references it in making its decisions for facility expansion. Because it is used as tool for significant decision-making—where new schools need to be located, which need to be enlarged, etc.—it is important to the future land use plan to not only be as accurate as possible, but for it to be implemented consistently in land use decisions.

### Sewer Infrastructure



### RECOMMENDED POLICIES

- 1-1 Focus transportation and sewer infrastructure improvements in the same locations to facilitate these areas' capabilities for handling growth
- 1-2 Prioritize projects that meet multiple goals across safety, mobility, access, public support, and cost effectiveness
- 1-3 Focus pedestrian and bicycle improvements in the highest density areas, as well as around schools, parks, and other key community landmarks
- 1- 4 Pursue new technologies to expand the capacity of the sewer/wastewater system
- 1-5 Reserve areas within sewer basins for higher intensity growth

## Chapter 4



### 4.2 Prioritize Workplace Uses Where Appropriate

#### NEED/OPPORTUNITY

*The county has limited opportunities for new industrial and commercial growth; these need to be protected to create a more balanced tax digest.*

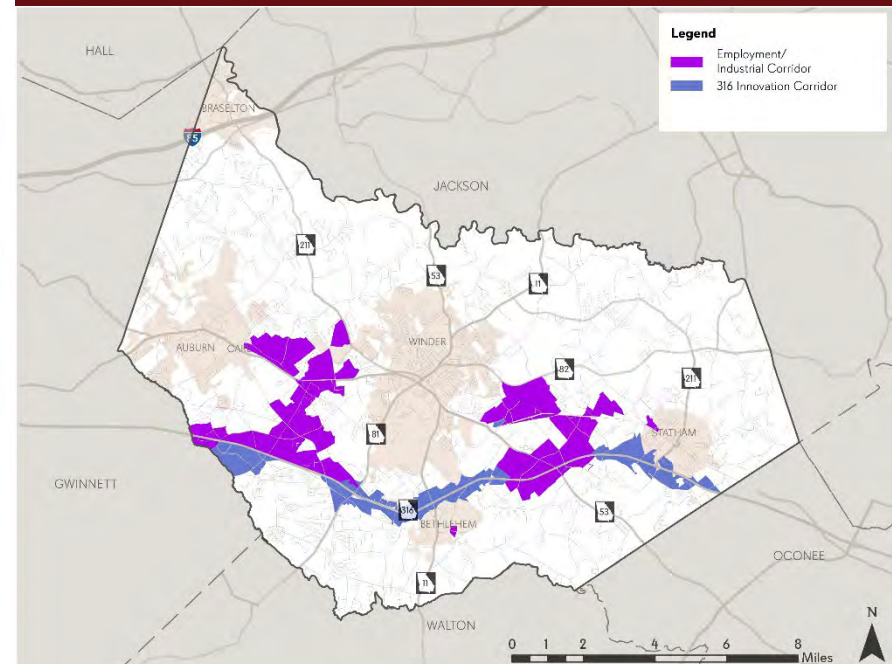
#### OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGE

Barrow County is historically a rural area that has grown into a bedroom community for the Atlanta region, and to a lesser extent Athens-Clarke County. As a result, much of its growth has been residential in nature.

While growth is a positive thing, a preponderance of residential growth and land use can burden the County's tax digest. Typically, residential land uses "consume" more services and infrastructure than the taxes they contribute. Conversely, commercial and industrial uses usually add more to the tax base than they take out in terms of services. Encouraging commercial and industrial growth can help balance out Barrow's residential-heavy tax base and prevent future drastic tax hikes on residents.

There are only a handful of areas of Barrow County that are desirable—and appropriate—for these workplace uses. However, with the high demand for residential development, these areas are vulnerable to additional residential development—making opportunities scarcer to grow the tax base with more industrial and commercial uses.

### 2018 Future Land Use – Employment + Innovation



#### ANALYSIS

To evaluate these opportunities, the planning team analyzed areas where commercial and industrial uses might be appropriate. Starting with the 2018 Comprehensive Plan, its future land use (FLU) map (not to be confused with this update's FLU map) has about 10,300 parcels shown as commercial and/or industrial uses in the Employment/Industrial Center and the 316 Innovation corridor character areas.

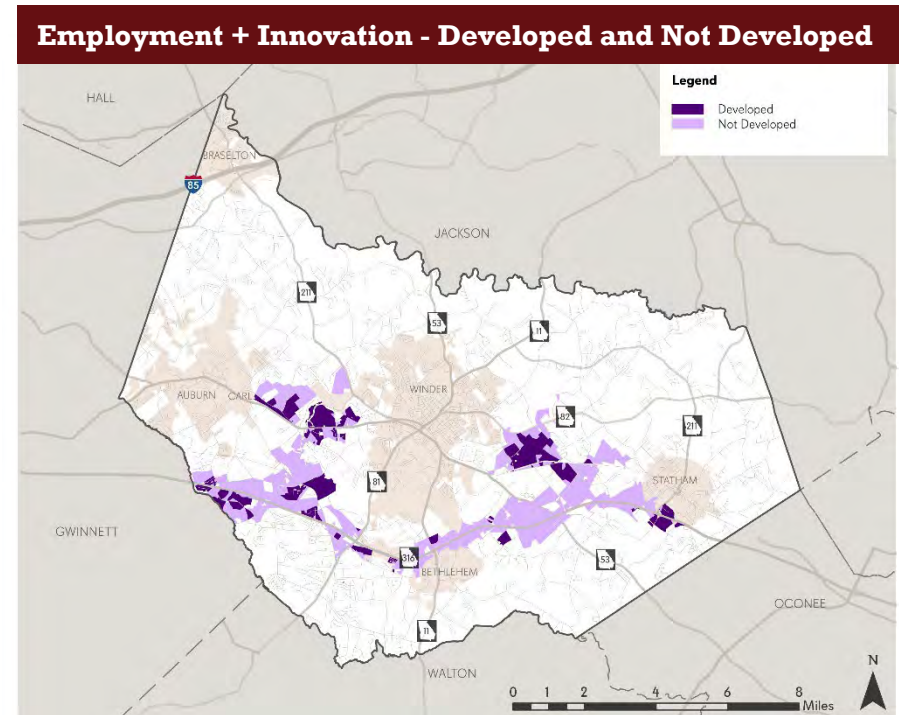
## Chapter 4

From there, the planning team performed a desktop analysis of the parcels in these character areas to determine how much land in these two character areas have been developed for commercial or industrial uses. An estimated 2,350 acres in these character areas are developed for these uses already and about 7,940 acres are not yet developed for these purposes.

### ***Why have these parcels not developed?***

Generally, there are two types of reasons for why industrial or commercial development has yet to occur: the market and physical/site constraints. The market reasons are beyond the scope of this comprehensive plan but deserve a detailed look.

Typical physical or site-related constraints are lack of adequate infrastructure like sewer access or easy access to major roadways needed for customer visibility or freight travel. Environmental characteristics like steep topography, creeks, wetlands, or heavily wooded land pose challenges to development. The parcels themselves may be small or awkwardly shaped to accommodate needed building layouts. Finally, current regulations may discourage or even prohibit these commercial or industrial uses.





## Chapter 4

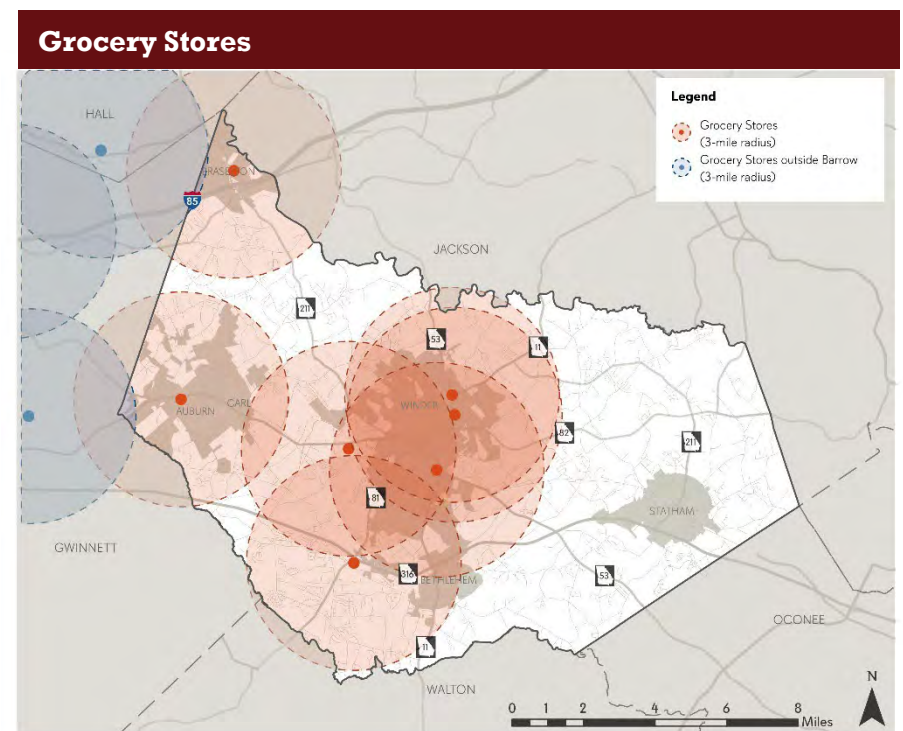
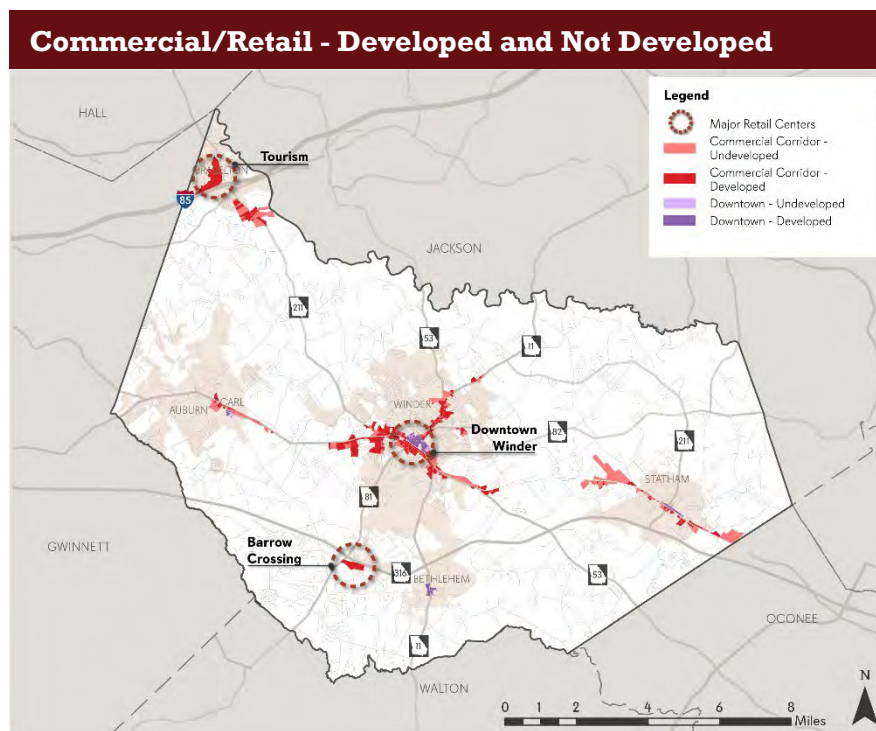
### *From a commercial (retail) perspective:*

Barrow County currently has two major retail centers to serve its growing population. The first is Downtown Winder, the second is Barrow Crossing at Highway 81 and Carl-Bethlehem Road, just south of 316. Another commercial center is growing in Braselton, centered on tourism around Chateau Elan. The eastern side of Barrow is underserved by retail.

Looking at the current FLU map, there are about 1,619 acres of land designated for commercial uses like retail, but only about 1,114 acres of this is developed for this use.

Grocery stores are important anchors in retail centers and are often highly desired by residents. While the major chains typically have a set of criteria for nearby population density and household income, individual chains tend to see their customer catchment areas as about a 3-mile radius. The map below identifies grocery stores in Barrow as well as their 3-mile catchment areas and shows another very clear gap in the eastern part of the County.

In addition to major retail centers and grocery stores, the community voiced a desire for more “main street”-like retail; the growth and improvement of Downtown Winder was noted with enthusiasm for what’s possible in Barrow County, and there is a desire for more “main street” retail hubs.



## Chapter 4

### RECOMMENDED POLICIES

- 2-1 Diversify local economy and increase jobs for high-skilled workers
- 2-2 Prioritize sewer service to industrial and commercial parcels with the fewest barriers to development
- 2-3 Concentrate workplace uses along major transportation corridors that can accommodate truck traffic
- 2-4 Where adjacent to residential neighborhoods, ensure that workplace development is well buffered
- 2-5 Encourage the growth of a retail center to serve eastern Barrow County, with the goal of attracting a premium grocery store
- 2-6 Improve circulation and mobility around existing major retail centers
- 2-7 Support local businesses, particularly in the small downtowns throughout the county





## Chapter 4



### 4.3 Expand Housing Options

#### NEED/OPPORTUNITY

*Barrow County has lots of new housing, but there is a need for a greater diversity of types. The county needs to accommodate new growth but wants to maintain its rural character; housing diversity is key to striking this balance.*

#### OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGE

Though there has been a large amount of residential growth in recent years, it is homogenous in type. The majority of new construction units are 3-4 bedroom single-family suburban style homes, leaving few smaller (or larger) alternatives.

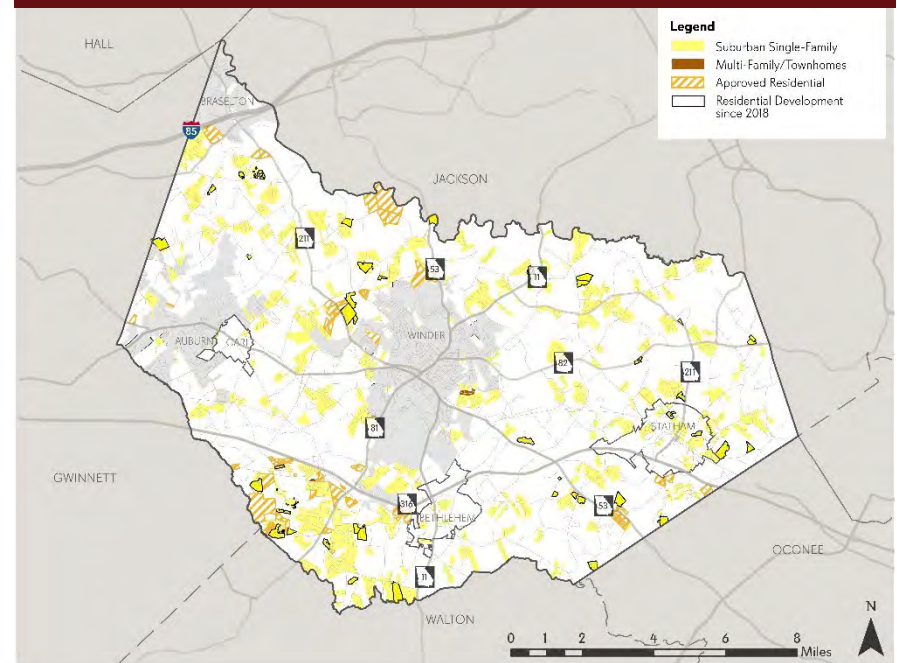
Another challenge is maintaining Barrow's rural character amidst this growth. With existing policy, it is relatively easy for developers to meet this growing demand by converting rural properties into suburban style subdivisions.

Because of this rapid growth of “cookie cutter” subdivisions and loss of rural land, many residents do not want to see additional housing development. However, there is a need for a broader diversity of housing types, ranging from smaller units that are attainable to households just starting out or on more modest incomes, housing suitable to seniors, as well as “executive” housing developments.

#### ANALYSIS

Recent development in Barrow has been largely residential. Since 2018, 85% of new developments are single-family homes or subdivisions. Of those single-family developments, over half of them were developed in the “rural neighborhood” or “rural reserve” future land use designations from 2018's comprehensive plan.

#### Residential Development



## Chapter 4

There is a significant amount of approved residential in the pipeline as well. Of recent rezonings, over 60% are residential. Most of these are for single-family developments, but there are a few townhome developments coming online as well.

Amongst new construction for-sale units, the most common housing product is a single-family detached home with at least 4 bedrooms and priced at over \$375,000 (Zillow). According to Zillow's affordability calculator, a household would need a combined income of \$100,000 to afford this typical house. Barrow County's median income was \$68,365 in 2021—meaning most Barrow families cannot afford this typical new construction home. In addition to being too costly, for-sale homes may also be too large for many potential buyers. Given that the second most common household size was a 2-person household, there is likely demand for smaller units (ACS 2021). Overall, the market is not providing much housing diversity nor options for smaller families, first-time homebuyers, and seniors who may prefer smaller and more affordable homes.

### RECOMMENDED POLICIES

- 3-1 Encourage a broader range of quality housing types,
- 3-2 Direct higher intensity housing into target growth areas where infrastructure is best able to accommodate it
- 3-3 Encourage housing in rural, low-growth development areas to be designed in a way that preserves Barrow's rural character
- 3-4 Pursue flexible regulations that allow for different housing types in one development with an overall density goal for targeted areas
- 3-5 Expand housing affordability, particularly for seniors and young professionals



*Typical new construction home for sale in unincorporated Barrow County. It is listed for \$455,000 and has 5 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms. (Image Source: Redfin)*

## Chapter 4



### 4.4 Invest in a System of Parks and Recreation Facilities

#### NEED/OPPORTUNITY

*Although Fort Yargo and Victor Lord Park are excellent facilities, Barrow County as a whole lacks parks and recreation opportunities.*

#### OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGE

Barrow County is currently under-served by parks and recreation facilities. There is only one county-owned park, Victor Lord Park, to serve the community's recreation needs.

The presence of the 1,733-acre Fort Yargo State Park obscures this underlying need for more park space given its size and activity offerings. Fort Yargo State Park is a fantastic park and natural resource that draws visitors from around the state. However, it likely does not meet all of the needs of Barrow County residents. Furthermore, Victor Lord Park lies at the northern tip of Fort Yargo State Park. This co-location of community parks limits the geographical “reach” of the parks in serving the rest of Barrow County.



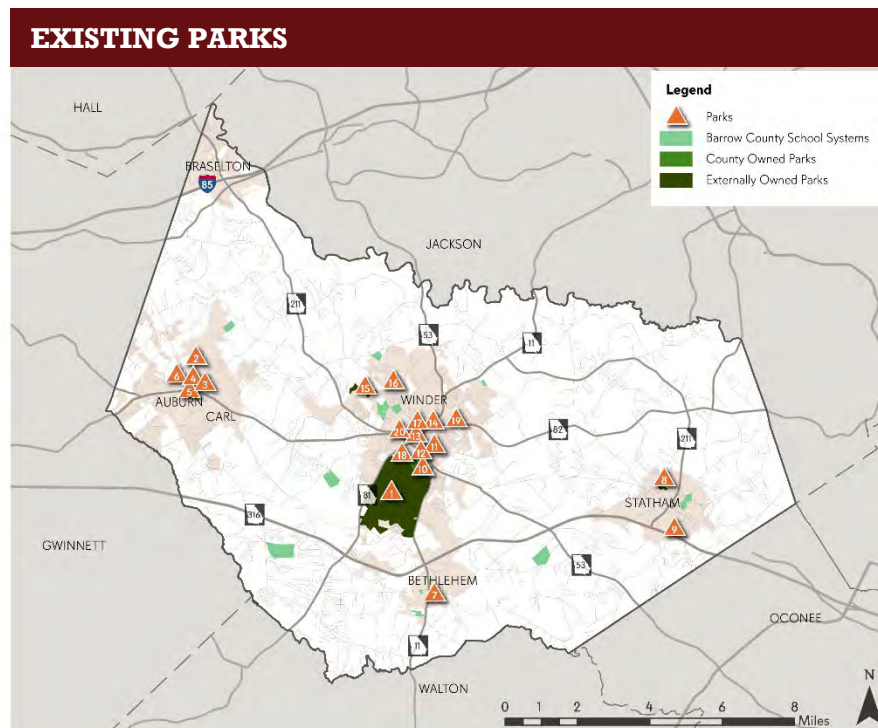
(Image Source: Grady Newsource/ Henry Fletcher)



# Chapter 4

## ANALYSIS

As a first step, the planning team inventoried existing parks. This inventory included not just parks owned by Barrow County, but those owned and operated by other jurisdictions. These were included because residents typically do not pay mind to jurisdictional boundaries when visiting a park. In total, there are about 1,896 acres of public parkland in Barrow County; the vast majority of this, however, is Fort Yargo which itself is 1,733 acres, leaving just 163 acres of parkland.

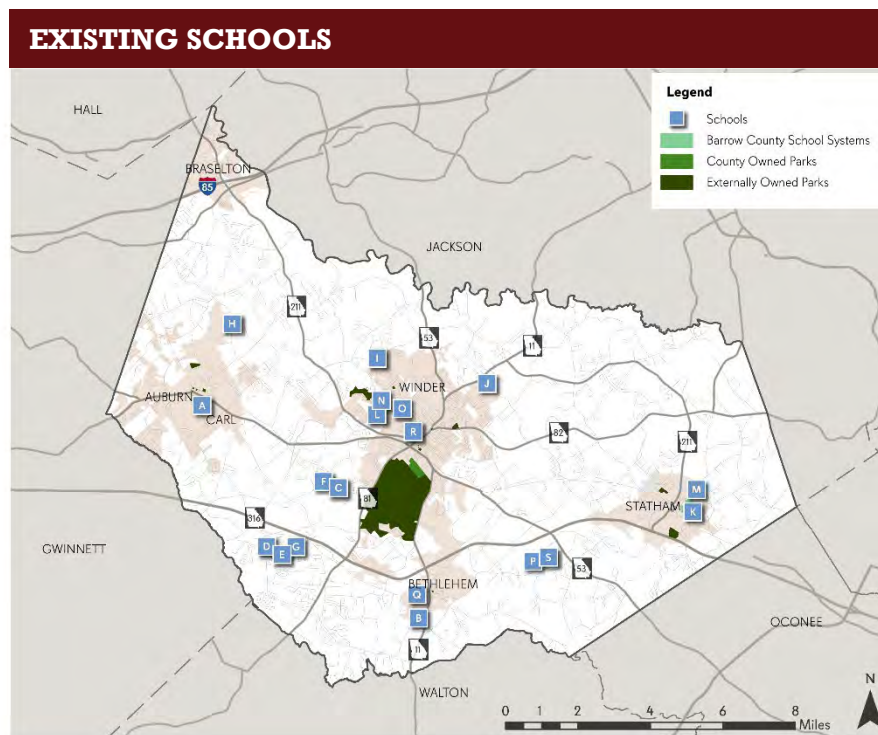


**TABLE 11. EXISTING PARKS INVENTORY**

MUNICIPALITY	PARK	ACRES
Auburn	2. City of Auburn Ballfields	3.9
	3. The Auburn Ballpark	3.8
	4. Roy E. Parks Community Playground	0.6
	5. R.H. Burel Park	1.9
	6. City of Auburn Tennis Courts	0.5
Bethlehem	7. R. Haroldson Community Playground	0.9
Statham	8. Robert L. Bridges Park	3.0
	9. Hillmon-Rainwater Park	4.4
Winder	1. Fort Yargo State Park	1,732.8
	11. Jug Tavern Park	2.9
	12. Veterans Commemorative Park	0.5
	13. Hal Jackson Park	0.3
	14. J.C. Cook Park	0.8
	15. City Pond Park	2.6
	16. Pine Shore Park	1.5
	17. Mayor's Walk Park	0.3
	20. Richard B. Russell Park	0.03
	19. Winder Lions Club Field	9.9
County	10. Victor-Lord Park & Dog Park	66.1
	18. Barrow County Senior Citizens Center	1.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,896.2</b>

## Chapter 4

In addition to parks, the planning team inventoried schools, as they often have space dedicated to sports and recreation. Schools can also open their grounds to the public through joint use agreements. However, it should be noted that their recreation function is often limited to organized sports only during certain times of the day or days of the week.



**TABLE 12. EXISTING SCHOOLS INVENTORY**

CLUSTER	BARROWCOUNTYSCHOOLS	ACRES
Apalachee	A. Auburn Elementary	1.4
	B. Bethlehem Elementary	1.5
	C. Kennedy Elementary	2.9
	D. Yargo Elementary	2.3
	E. Haymon-Morris Middle	-
	F. Westside Middle	8.3
	G. Apalachee High	30.9
Winder-Barrow	H. Bramlett Elementary	10.3
	I. County Line Elementary	3.7
	J. Holsenbeck Elementary	1.9
	K. Statham Elementary	1.2
	L. Winder Elementary	1.5
	M. Bear Creek Middle	3.2
	N. Russell B. Middle	5.6
Academy	O. Winder-Barrow High	12.0
	P. Barrow Arts & Science Academy	23.5
Programs	Q. Barrow County Alternative Education Program	0.5
	R. Arts & Innovation Magnet Program	2.1
	S. Sims Academy of Innovation	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>113.0</b>

## Chapter 4

Without doing a full-blown parks and recreation master plan, it is difficult to fully understand how well Barrow County's existing park system is meeting the needs of its residents. However, a parks level of service (LOS) analysis acts as a high-level barometer to better understand how well a parks system is serving the population. Parks LOS can be measured in many ways, but the planning team used two of the most common types:

- **Acreage LOS** is a ratio that measures the quantity of parks. It is usually calculated as the number of acres of parks per 1,000 residents
- **Access LOS** looks at the geographic distribution of parks: how far do people have to travel to reach a park?

### Acreage LOS

Conducting an Acreage LOS analysis is not always straight-forward. The first step is determining what qualifies in counting total park acreage. Looking at just the county and city-owned parks, acreage only amounts to 97.3 acres. Including the School district to that base acreage, that number bumps up to 210.3 acres. With Fort Yargo—which certainly provides a recreation function, but much of it is limited-access natural areas—then the acreage dramatically increases to 2,009.2 acres.

Depending on what is counted, Barrow County has an acreage LOS as low as 1.17 acres per 1,000 residents with just County and City parks or as high as 24.06 acres if the schools and Fort Yargo are included. In parks and recreation planning, a strong LOS is about 15-20 acres/1,000 people. If the analysis counts Fort Yargo, then Barrow County is well served by its park system. If not, then Barrow County is operating at a significant deficit.

Another way to understand acreage LOS is to look at the systems of other counties. The table below shows the acreage of county-owned parks in a number of peer counties. To make this chart more comparable, only Barrow County's acreage of Victor Lord Park is included. The comparison is imperfect as some acreage numbers are self-reported and depend on what governments consider part of their system; however, the chart aids in establishing context. For example, Catoosa also has a very large national military park (Chickamauga) that adds to its system, and Floyd has Sloppy Floyd State Park too, yet both of these counties have higher LOS acreages than Barrow when considering just their county-owned acreage.

Furthermore, these numbers only reflect the LOS in 2022. As the county adds more residents without adding park space, the Acreage LOS will only decrease.

**TABLE 13. PARKLAND COMPARISON**

COUNTY	COUNTY PARKLAND ONLY	ACREAGE LOS
Barrow	66.1	0.79
Catoosa	77.1	1.13
Coweta	534.1	3.56
Floyd*	539.5	5.46
Jackson	314.0	3.91
Oconee	631.0	14.67
Rockdale	339.0	3.60
Walton	268.4	2.69
Walker	1213.0	17.71

*\*Includes City of Rome because of service agreements*

## Chapter 4

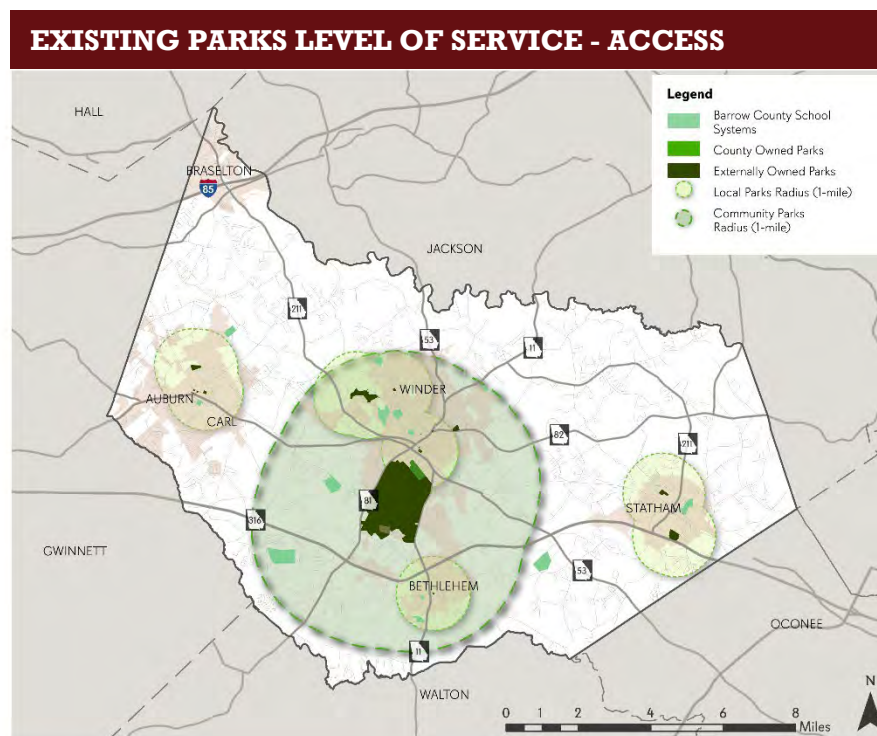
### Access LOS

An alternative method to measuring parks LOS is by access, or mapping a “service-shed” around a park. Distances that residents are willing to travel for recreation defines the “service-shed” extent. In a rural-to-suburban setting, residents will typically travel roughly 3 miles to visit a community park. In contrast to smaller neighborhood parks, a community park offers significant space and a diverse set of recreational activities and facilities.

The planning team evaluated the access LOS of Barrow County’s community parks which only include Fort Yargo State Park and Victor Lord Park. The map below identifies these parks and their service-shed—a 3-mile radius—thus, showing how much of Barrow County can

easily reach a community park. Looking at this distribution, both parks’ “reach” overlaps quite a bit because they are adjacent to one another. Therefore, only central Barrow County residents have strong access to a park.

Although a more detailed parks and recreation master plan is recommended, there appears to be a clear need for additional park space, particularly in the northwestern and eastern parts of the County. Given that Fort Yargo is predominantly natural area and passive, the largest need for parks and recreation is most likely in active recreation facilities such as multi-purpose fields, playgrounds, paved trails, etc.



### RECOMMENDED POLICIES

- 4-1 Expand system of community-level parks serving Barrow County residents
- 4-2 Continue to collaborate with other green space providers on sharing access
- 4-3 Ensure quality neighborhood-level parks and recreation spaces are provided through private development
- 4-4 Invest in a network of greenways and multi-use trails connecting major destinations in the county

## Chapter 4



### 4.5 Create a More Detailed Plan for South Barrow County

#### NEED/OPPORTUNITY

*South Barrow County is changing rapidly in particular, but there is no guiding plan in place to make sure this growth contributes positively to the community's character*

#### OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGE

Perhaps out of everywhere in the county, South Barrow is experiencing the most rapid change. This is mostly due to its proximity to 316 and access to sewer. Several major new subdivisions like Apalachee Falls have introduced more homes to the area but residential is not the only type of development changing South Barrow's landscape. Barrow Crossing is unincorporated Barrow's only major commercial area. While the bulk was built in 2009, new commercial and residential development continues to cluster around it. Furthermore, South Barrow is anticipating follow-on growth from the forthcoming medical plaza. Further east, Lanier Tech's innovation campus is planting the seed for additional growth.

While growth benefits the County, it also brings new issues. Because of this development activity, some of the worst congestion in the county occurs in South Barrow. The new Highway 316 interchanges will alleviate some of the traffic, but these infrastructure investments will also encourage even more growth.

In addition to congestion, a major challenge with this rapid growth is that the Town of Bethlehem—a town in between these major developments—struggles to maintain its small-town charm and quality of life.

#### ANALYSIS

Shown on the map on the next page, South Barrow has witnessed significant development since 2018 and continues to grow with many pipeline projects. The map compares these new and pipeline developments to roadways with low LOS, showing that much of this growth concentrates where the roadway network experiences severe congestion.

Near Barrow Crossing, the Northeast Georgia Health System (NGHS) is constructing a new medical facility. NGHS expects more than 100,000 annual visits—generating jobs, activity, and also more traffic. Further east, the county introduced the Barrow Innovation Campus Elementary School next door to Lanier Tech's growing Winder-Barrow campus. This cluster of education and research uses is located near the intersection of Highway 316 and Highway 53—another intersection experiencing severe bottlenecks. This additional development will likely worsen the existing congestion issues.

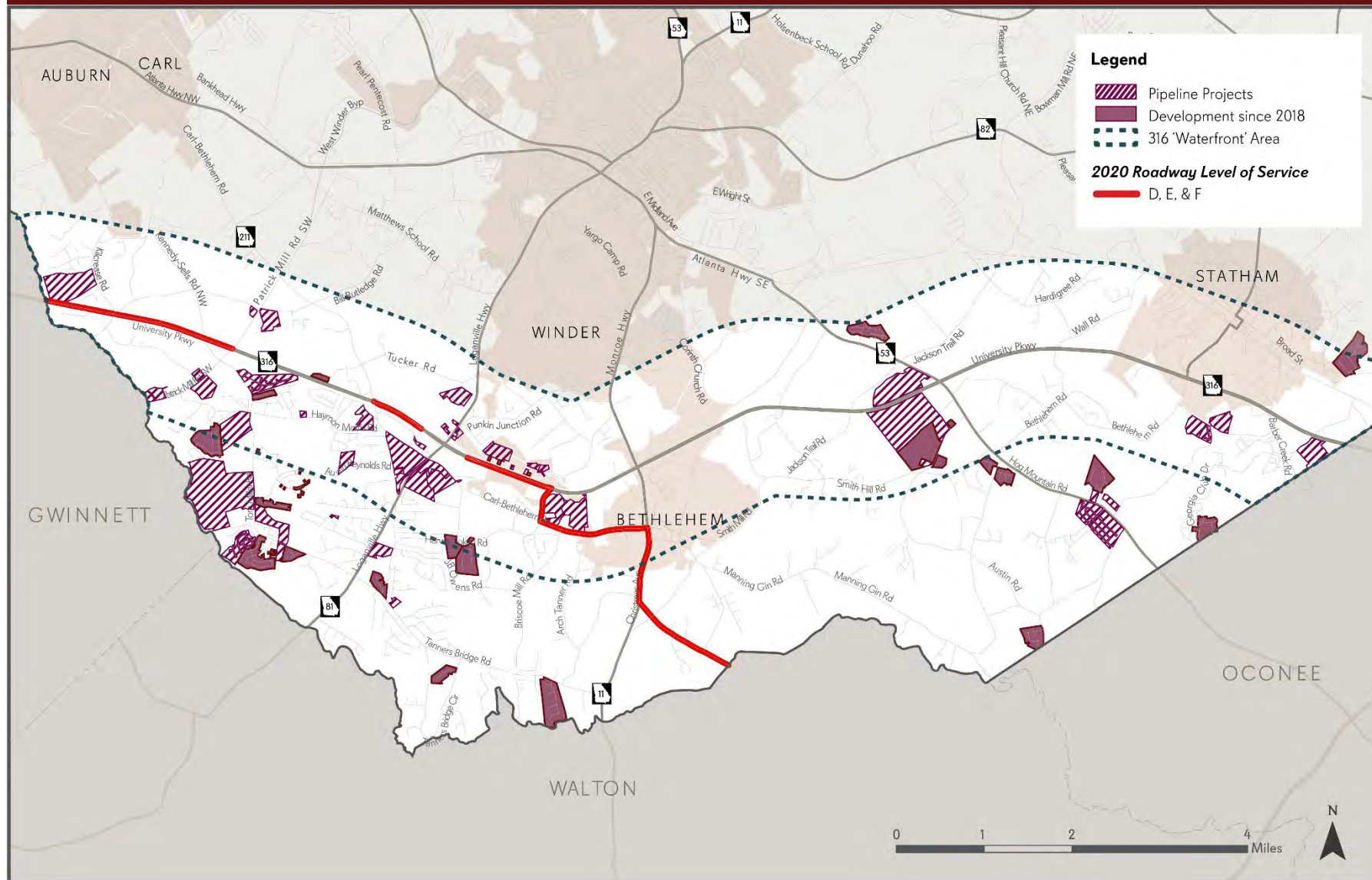
Both of these developments “book end” the town of Bethlehem. Community members expressed the desire to retain Bethlehem's small-town charm, but the congestion and nearby development along its edges pose challenges to retaining its small-town feel.

The area's access to sewer will continue to draw development interest, but needs to be considered in balance with the capacity of the Tanners Bridge wastewater facilities.



## Chapter 4

## SOUTH BARROW DEVELOPMENT AND ROADWAY INFRASTRUCTURE STRESS



## Chapter 4

### RECOMMENDED POLICIES

- 5-1 Protect Bethlehem's small-town character
- 5-2 Prioritize high intensity workplace development near 316
- 5-3 Limit higher intensity housing beyond the 1-mile corridor surrounding 316
- 5-4 Proactively identify opportunities to improve local roadway network
- 5-5 Invest in infrastructure in advance of the new hospital and Lanier Tech/innovation center, including roadway improvements identified in the CTP
- 5-6 Invest in creating the Apalachee River Greenway where natural resources exist in balance with sensitive recreation access



*Gazebo in a park in Bethlehem, Georgia. (Image Source: Google Street View)*



## Chapter 4



### 4.6 Establish Land Use Visions for the Town of Carl and the City of Statham

#### NEED/OPPORTUNITY

*The communities of Carl and Statham retain their small-town charm, but like other parts of the County are under increasing growth pressure. Without clear, strong land use plans in place, their character is vulnerable to significant change.*

#### CARL

##### Overview of Challenge

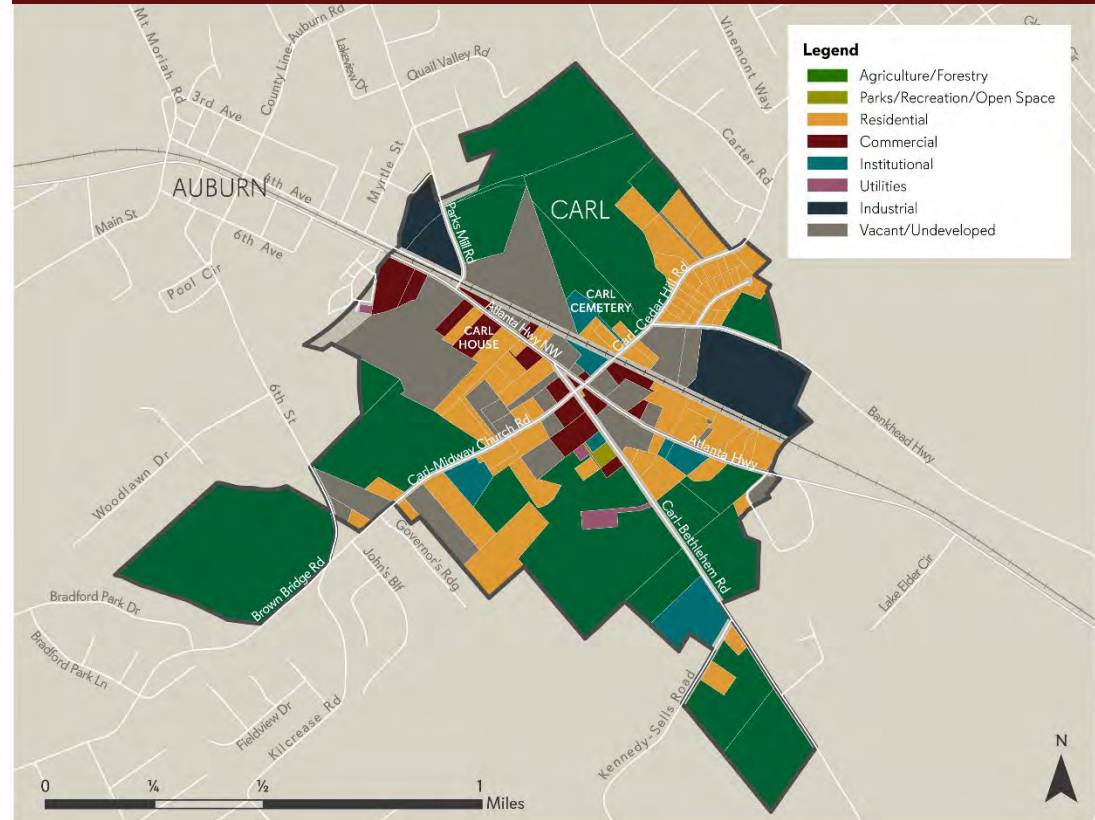
The Town of Carl is a very small community, but it is some experiencing growth pressures from the City of Auburn next door. On the opposite side of town, Carl has experienced some industrial growth where farmland used to exist. Historically, the community has not been very connected nor engaged—many moved to Carl for its rural and quiet qualities. These growth pressures on both the east and west of Carl endanger its rural charm.

##### Analysis

Looking at the 2020 LOS map on the next page, Carl is experiencing a lot of traffic congestion along Atlanta Highway—detracting from its rural character. This traffic is only expected to get worse by 2050.



**TOWN OF CARL EXISTING LAND USE**



## Chapter 4

Starting in the early 2000s, unincorporated Barrow witnessed industrial growth on Bankhead Highway, just outside of Carl. In 2014, this industrial growth crept into town limits when the German company Schutz Storage Systems constructed a manufacturing facility on formerly agricultural land. Since then, industrial development has not expanded, but there are parcels of vacant, underutilized, or agricultural land nearby that may be vulnerable to industrial development pressures.

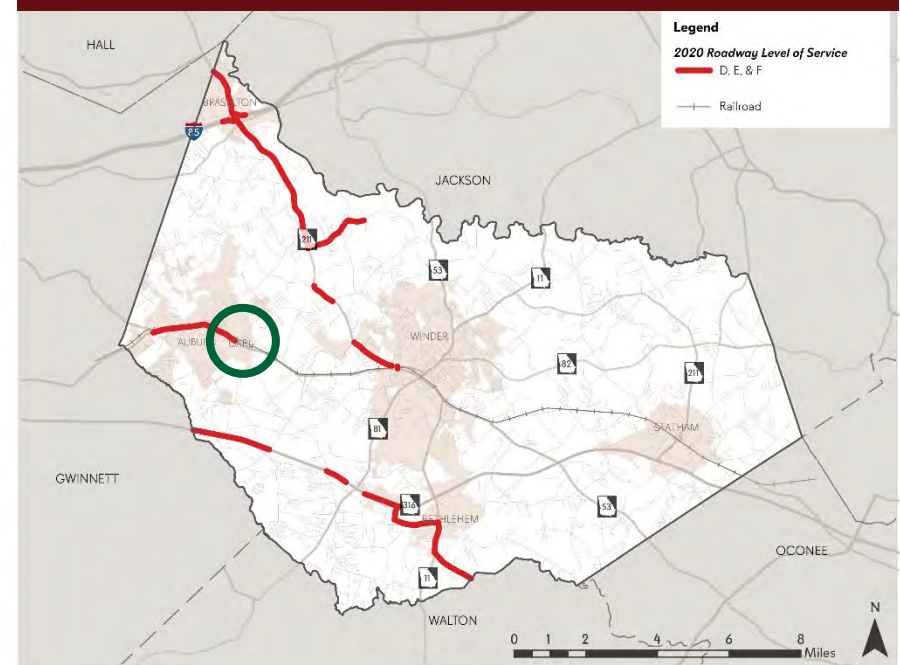
Just outside Carl's western boundary, the City of Auburn is constructing its town center complete with a new city hall, 152 single-family residences, a community garden, and trails. While located in another city, the \$12.25 million public investment may attract more private development to Carl, given its proximity.

Additionally, Gwinnett County broke ground on Rowen, a 2,000-acre mixed-use research/innovation-centered community anticipated to bring almost 100,000 jobs to the area just on the other side of Barrow's western border. If it develops as planned, a population surge is likely to accompany this tremendous injection of jobs and spread to surrounding communities including Carl.



*Auburn Town Center project just west of its boundary with the Town of Carl. (Image Source: Schmit + Associates)*

### Traffic Congestion/Level of Service - 2020



### Recommended Policies

- 6a-1 Protect Carl's small-town character
- 6a-2 Concentrate new development within a defined town center
- 6a-3 Proactively expand grid-like local street network to preserve connectivity and facilitate local traffic flow
- 6a-4 Invest in sidewalks
- 6a-5 Invest in a greenbelt to buffer Carl from surrounding development



# Chapter 4

## STATHAM

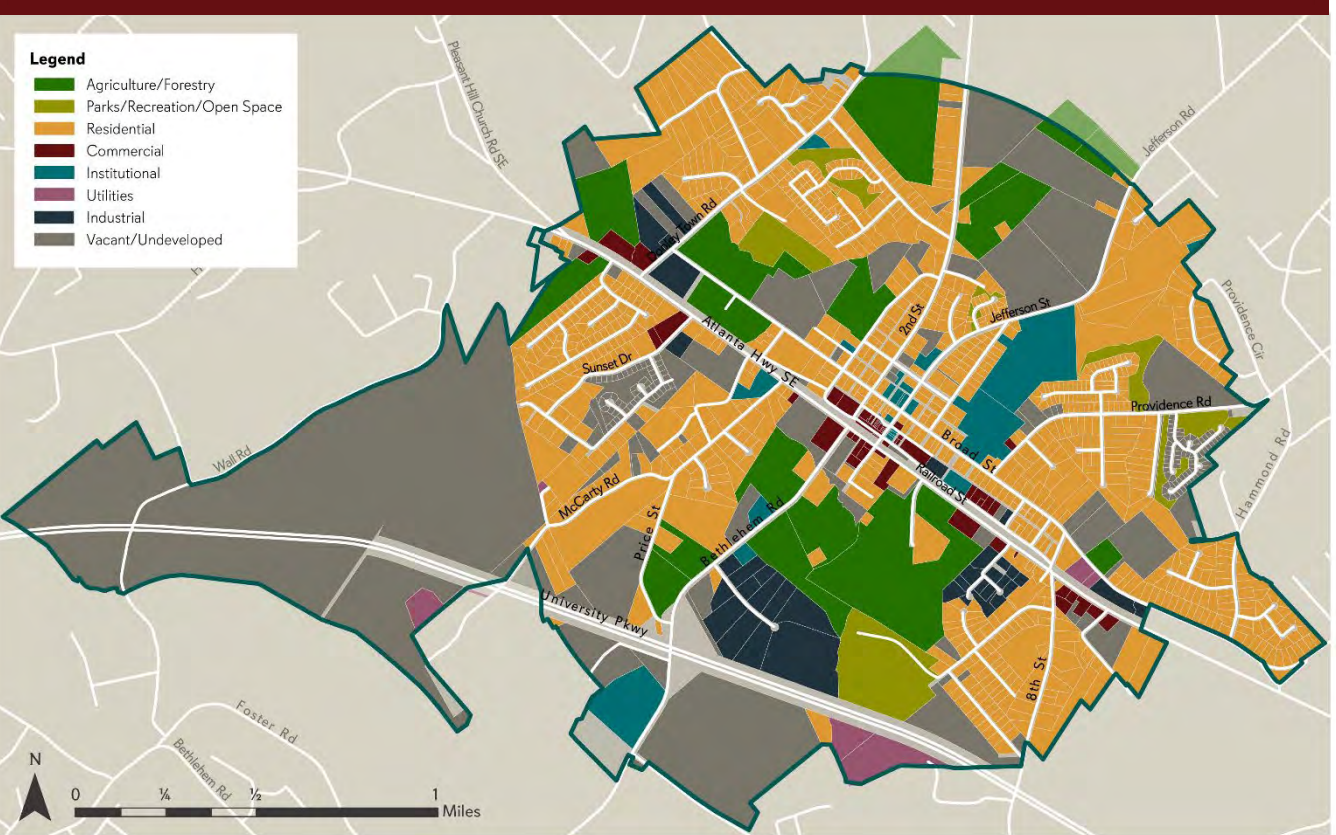
### Overview of challenge

Because of its location on the east side of the County and north of 316, growth has not been as much of a threat to Statham compared to other parts of the county. However, with Highway 316 improvements and ongoing residential growth, development is coming closer. Before

tremendous growth pressures reach Statham, the City has an opportunity to evaluate infrastructure needs and establish a vision to steer anticipated growth in a way that supports Statham's sense of place, rather than eroding it.



### CITY OF STATHAM EXISTING LAND USE



## Chapter 4

### Analysis

On Statham's northern fringes, large tracts of rural land have recently been converted into single-family home developments, such as Statham Place on Dooley Town Road. Like most of the county, however, affordability is a challenge.

Overall, Statham lacks major traffic congestion issues other than some bottlenecks where Bethlehem Road intersects with 316. Instead, there is need for roadway maintenance and for key intersection improvements along Atlanta Highway. Other infrastructure challenges include a need to repair and reconstruct aging sewer lines, as well as improving the water plant.

The city's downtown has classic small-town charm, but few retail options. The eastern side of Barrow lacks a grocery store to serve Statham residents but also the broader Barrow community.

This side of Barrow also lacks community park space. Statham has two

parks: Robert L. Bridges Park and Hillmon-Rainwater Park that serve as neighborhood parks for the local community. Because the east side of Barrow lacks community parks—or those that offer several activities and serve a much wider community—the City of Statham should consider expanding its park system.

### Recommended Policies

- 6b-1 Protect Statham's small-town character
- 6b-2 Concentrate new commercial development within a defined town center
- 6b-3 Proactively expand grid-like local street network
- 6b-4 Invest in sidewalks for improved connectivity, especially downtown
- 6b-5 Invest in a greenbelt/greenway loop trail
- 6b-6 Develop a strong, clear vision for the higher intensity uses possible along 316 and "hold the line"
- 6b-7 Expand city parks system



*A rural tract of land being prepped for single family development on Jefferson Street (Image Source: Google Street View)*



*A smaller footprint grocery store emulating the character of its location. (Image Source: Publix)*



## Chapter 4



### 4.7 Foster Greater Coordination, Collaboration, and a Sense of Community

#### NEED/OPPORTUNITY

*The recent climate of conflict in Barrow County is a source of deep concern for many residents and stakeholders. As Barrow County actively works towards resolution, there is an opportunity at the community level to strengthen ties and work together collaboratively on the county-wide issues everyone is facing, regardless of the jurisdiction.*

#### OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGE

Political conflict not only negatively affects existing residents, but also poses challenges to attracting new businesses. Barrow County continues to work diligently towards resolution with the City of Winder, and staff and community members are eager to collaborate and work together.

Although the current conflict has been in the spotlight, it is important to note that there are many examples of cross-jurisdictional collaboration and coordination. Relationships with the jurisdictions of Braselton, Carl, Bethlehem and Statham are on good terms, as evidenced by the latter three participating in this joint update process. Several development authorities include political leadership from multiple jurisdictions, and there is a Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) that meets quarterly.

A significant part of the challenge is not at the government level, but is a function of a growing community. Many new households have moved to the county in recent years, and there is an increasing sense that people do not know their neighbors or have deep ties to the county.

#### Analysis

Almost 40% of Barrow residents moved to their current households between 2015 and 2021 (ACS 2021). While there may be some moving around within the county, this significant percentage likely correlates with a surge of newcomers in less than 10 years. This rapid, high-growth ushers in change and turnover in this bedroom community. Given this rapid change, it is difficult to build community connections between residents, particularly between newcomers and people who have lived in Barrow for a long time. Without community connections, public outreach efforts are even more challenging.

#### RECOMMENDED POLICIES

- 7-1 Increase outreach and public engagement in County projects and initiatives
- 7-2 Support and connect an ecosystem of community groups and advocates

# Chapter 5

## CHAPTER 5: LAND USE ELEMENT

A key component of the comprehensive planning process is the creation of the land use element, which illustrates and explains the community's vision for growth and development in unincorporated Barrow County, the Town of Bethlehem, the Town of Carl, and the City of Statham.

The Land Use Element includes the following three sections:

- Overall Growth Strategy
- Future Development Maps for Unincorporated Barrow County, the Town of Bethlehem, the Town of Carl, and the City of Statham
- Character Area Policy

It is important to note that the future land use maps are not the same as the zoning map. The official zoning maps of the jurisdictions are more detailed and provide property owners with specific rights to development. The role of the future land use maps is to provide the desired future state of properties. This only comes into play when a property owner is looking to change uses or redevelop—in that context, the future land use map is a guide for what the community wants to property to change into.

### 5.1 Future Development: Overall Growth Strategy

Throughout the comprehensive planning process, the community expressed numerous concerns about the rapid pace of growth. There was also a sense that growth was happening in inappropriate places, or that the type of growth did not make sense for specific geographies.

Although many community members would like to halt growth altogether, this is not feasible (or legal) due to the property rights guaranteed by zoning. However, the County and its jurisdictions do have influence on how that growth occurs, what type of growth it is, and what it looks like.

During the public engagement process, the community was asked the question, “Given that the County must accommodate at least some growth, which of the two strategies would you rather see the County pursue?”

1. Spread out growth as much as possible – we will avoid density this way, but more rural and natural lands will be converted to development; or,
2. Concentrate growth in specific areas close to infrastructure – we will have more density than we are used to, but will keep more rural and natural lands

In both the online survey and the pop-up event at the Barrow Farmers' Market, about two-thirds of respondents indicated **a preference for concentrating growth in specific areas** to create more density where infrastructure is best, but trying to preserve the rural feel of other areas.

### DENSITY DRIVERS

To pursue this strategy, the planning team developed a methodology to identify which areas are most suitable for accommodating density.

Building off the first Barrow in Balance focus area of “Align infrastructure investments with development,” the team identified four primary drivers for directing density. The first two are density magnets:



## Chapter 5

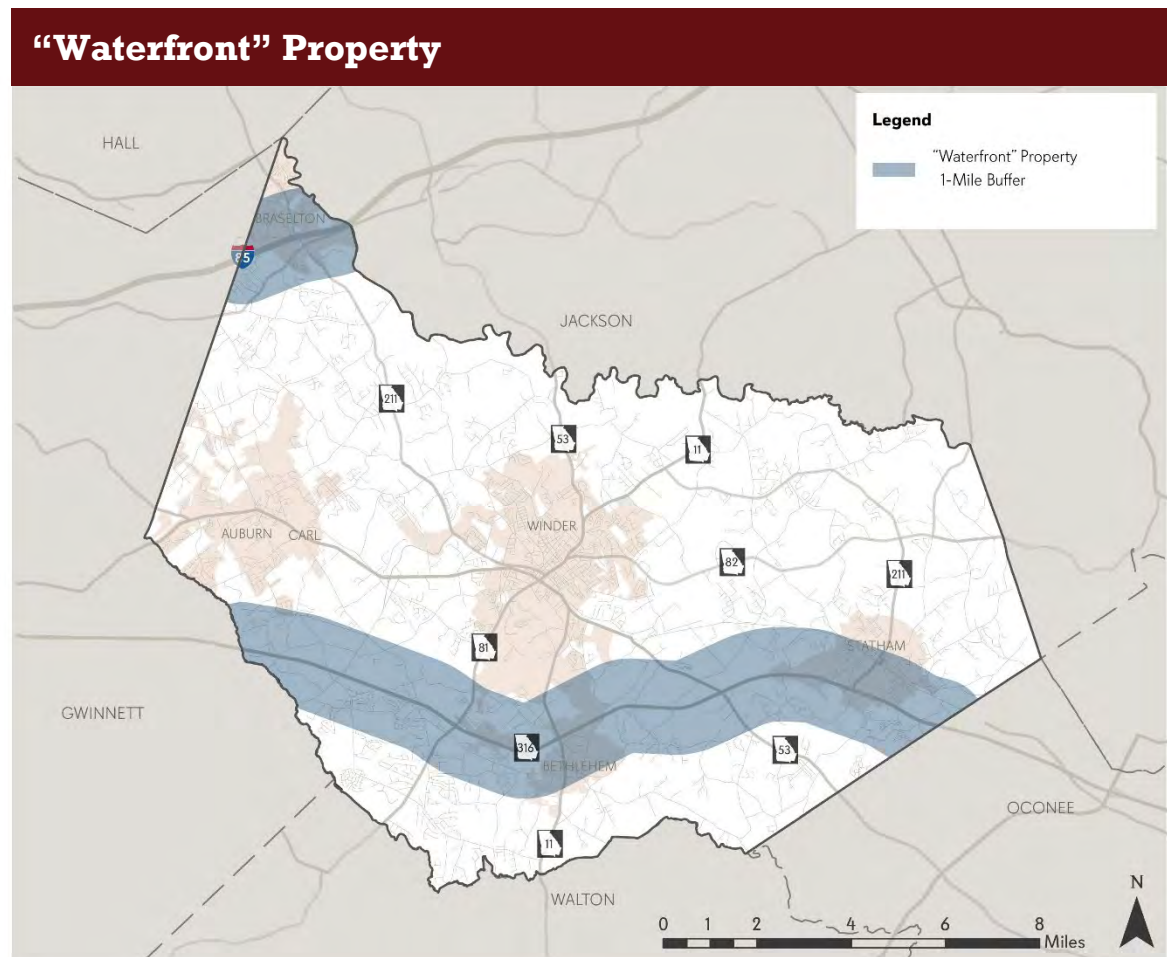
the 316/Interstate 85 “waterfront” and sewer basins. The other two are density deterrents: highly congested roadway segments with no currently planned improvements, and established small towns.

### DENSITY MAGNET: THE 316/I-85 “WATERFRONT”

All communities—whether they are on the water or not—have their equivalent of “waterfront property.” If there is no shoreline or river that provides this, it is often a key piece of transportation infrastructure or a great amenity that attracts development.

In Barrow County, there are two figurative waterfronts. The most prominent is the 316 corridor that connects Barrow County to the Atlanta region to the west and Athens-Clarke to the east. In the far northwest corner, there is a smaller span of waterfront property where I-85 crosses Braselton.

Access to key transportation corridors is a major driver of most types of development; this is particularly the case for higher intensity land uses such as workplaces, retail, and larger/more dense types of residential development. While access to key corridors is a perk for single-family residential development, it is not a necessity—collector roads and minor arterials are usually sufficient for these lower density uses.



## Chapter 5

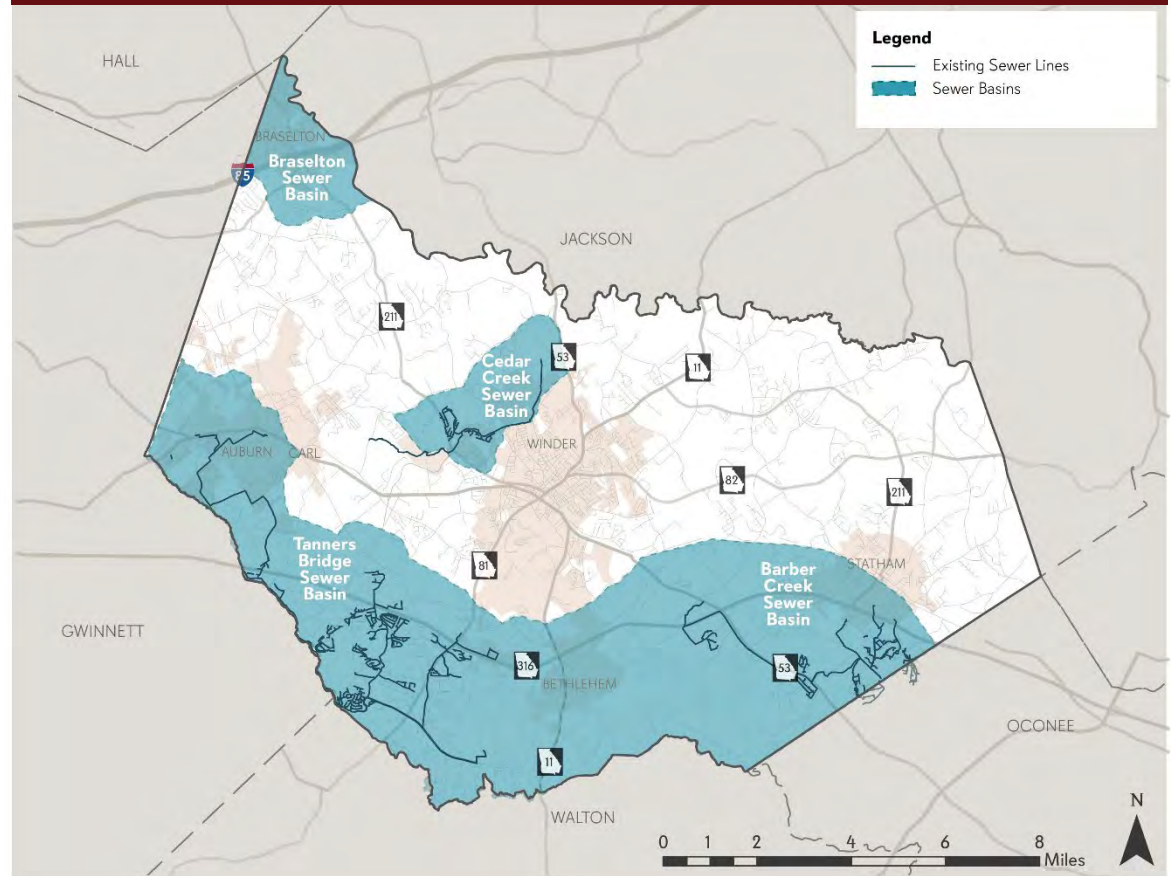
### DENSITY MAGNET: SEWER BASINS

The second major density magnet—or more accurately, a requirement—is sewer infrastructure. Low intensity development like 1-acre residential lots and low-intensity workplaces and commercial (like gas stations) can operate on septic systems. However, denser single-family, workplace, and high-quality, community- or regional-serving commercial uses require sewer systems to handle wastewater needs.

For the purposes of directing future growth, areas within the County's sewer basins are better suited to accommodate more intense development types. It should be noted however, that a location within a sewer basin does not automatically mean a guarantee of sewer service—additional infrastructure would need to be built, and solutions to the County's treatment capacity will also need to progress.



### Sewer Basins



## Chapter 5

### DENSITYDETERRENT: CONGESTED ROADWAYS

One of the chief challenges in Barrow County is traffic: the County's roadway system was built to handle the needs of a rural community, and development has far outpaced the network's ability to keep up and add capacity.

There are many roadway segments within the county that operate at a poor Level of Service (LOS) for 2020 (2023 CTP), indicating considerable congestion. Given their number and geographic spread, it is not possible to avoid adding new growth near all these segments.

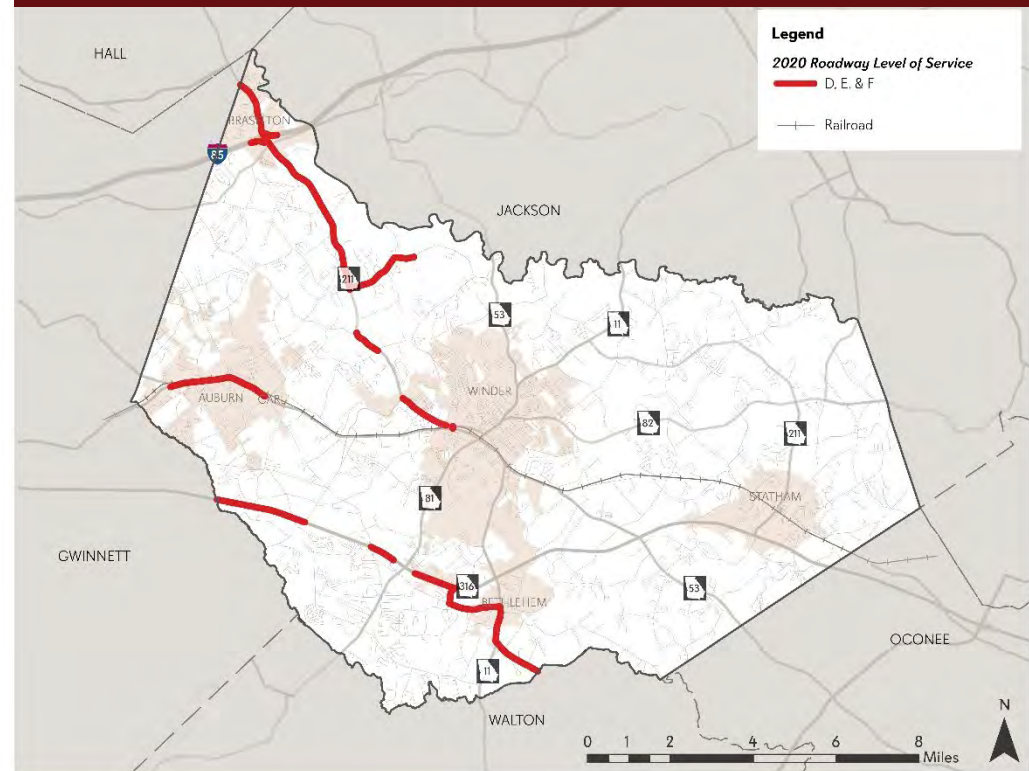
The planning team reviewed ongoing projects as well as programmed projects from the 2023 CTP that can alleviate some of this congestion. For example, the 2023 CTP includes a road widening project of SR 211 from two to four lanes from north of I-85 to the West Winder Bypass. The planning team considered existing congestion as well as these future improvements when making future land use recommendations, particularly designations with higher development intensity.

### DENSITYDETERRENT: SMALL TOWNS

Although not a physical deterrent, the presence of small jurisdictions like Bethlehem, Carl, and Statham are a special consideration. Without strong, intentional policy protections, these historic communities are vulnerable to insensitive development and losing their sense of place and character.

This is at odds with some of the most consistent feedback heard from the comprehensive planning engagement process: the community

### Congested Roadways – 2020 Level of Service



feels very strongly about preserving the small-town, rural character of Barrow. For this reason, these three jurisdictions are “exempted” from the overall density strategy based on proximity to 316/I-85 and sewer basins. However, to combat those natural growth magnets (particularly prevalent in Bethlehem and Statham), there needs to be very strong policies in place and the political will to say no to projects that do not respect the vision for maintaining small-town character.

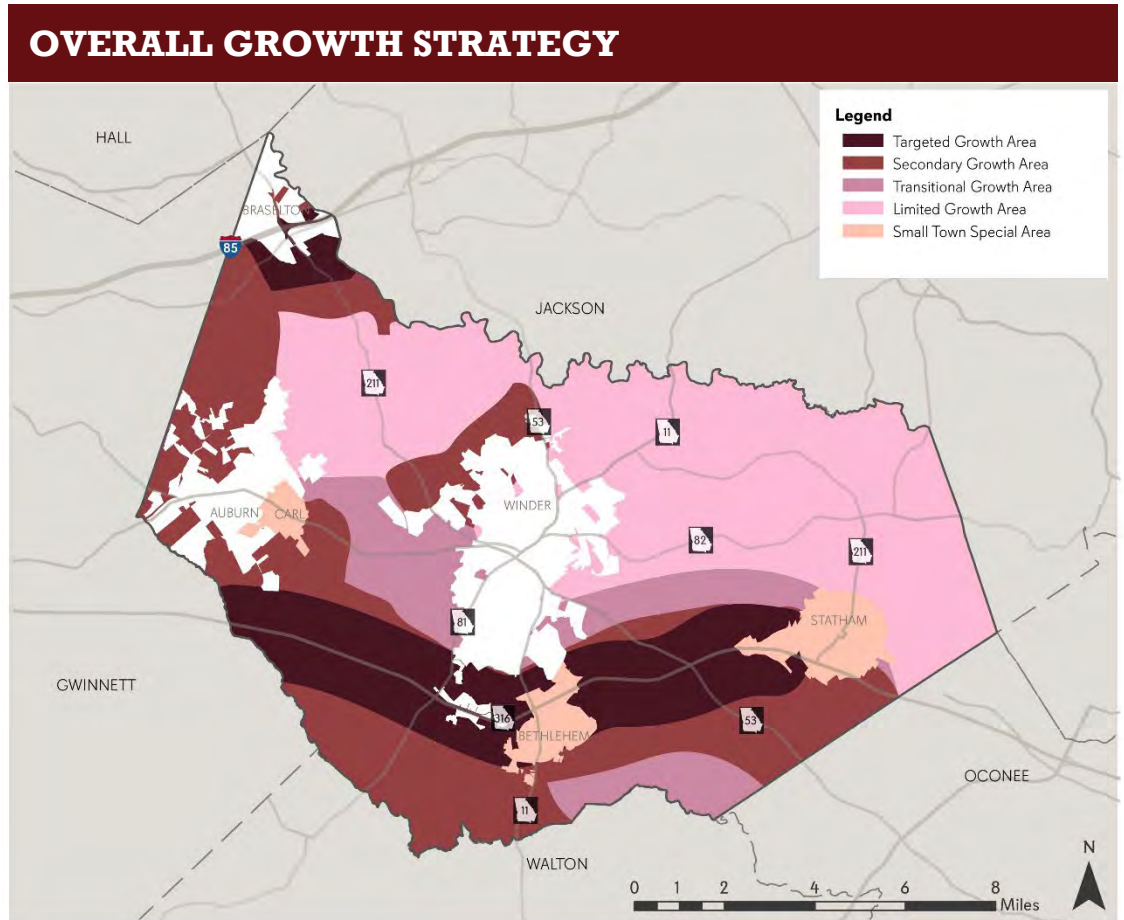


## Chapter 5

### GROWTH AREAS

Putting all of this together—the two growth magnets of 316/I-85 and the sewer basins, and the deterrents of highly congested roadways and small-town areas, the planning team created five high-level growth zones to guide where density should be directed.

- The **Targeted Growth Area** is where the most new development should occur. These are unincorporated areas that are within 1 mile of 316 or I-85 and are within the Barrow County and Braselton sewer basins.
- The **Secondary Growth Area** is the next highest layer of development intensity. These are areas beyond 1 mile from 316 or I-85, but are still within the Barrow County or Braselton sewer basins.
- **Transitional Growth Areas** are the bridge between secondary growth areas, or serve as “stepped down” intensity from the Secondary Growth Areas into limited growth areas. They are intended for modest development but at lower intensities.
- The **Limited Growth Area** is the remainder of unincorporated Barrow County. This is where growth should be discouraged, but where growth does occur it should be very low intensity and/or be subject to regulations that aim to preserve the rural character of the county.
- The **Small Town Special Areas** cover the Towns of Carl and Bethlehem and the City of Statham; these areas should follow the more detailed land use plans for these jurisdictions that prioritize preservation of their small-town character.





## Chapter 5

### 5.2 Future Land Use Maps

The Overall Growth Areas strategy is a very high-level, conceptual approach directing intensity of growth—it does not provide direction on the actual *types* of uses.


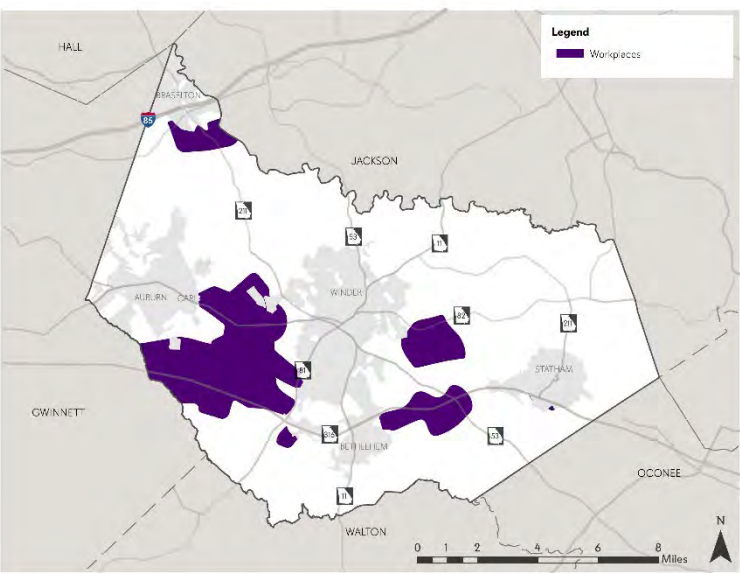
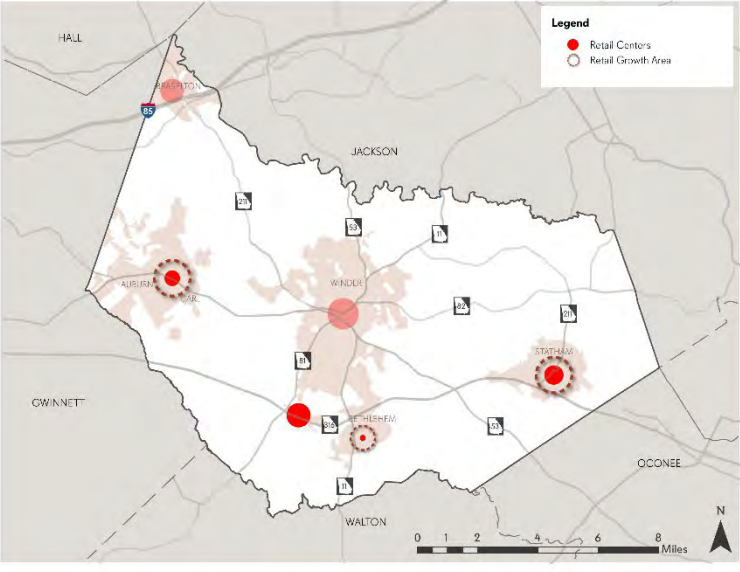
#### UNINCORPORATED BARROW COUNTY

The next step in the planning process was to look at the types of growth and uses expected in Barrow County, and determine the best locations. To do this, the planning team used the Overall Growth Area strategy as a base, and then looked to the Barrow in Balance topics for guidance on three major types of uses: workplaces, commercial/retail, and residential. Table 14 summarizes the details on how the Barrow in Balance focus areas conceptually influenced the future land use map.


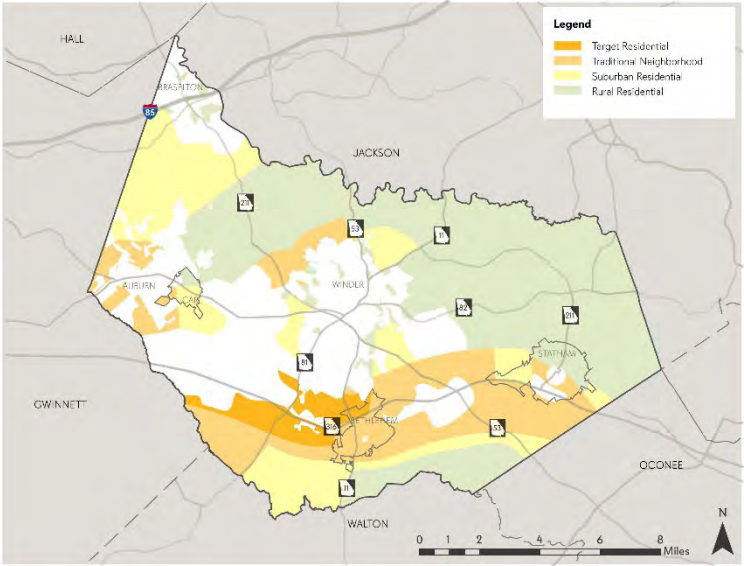

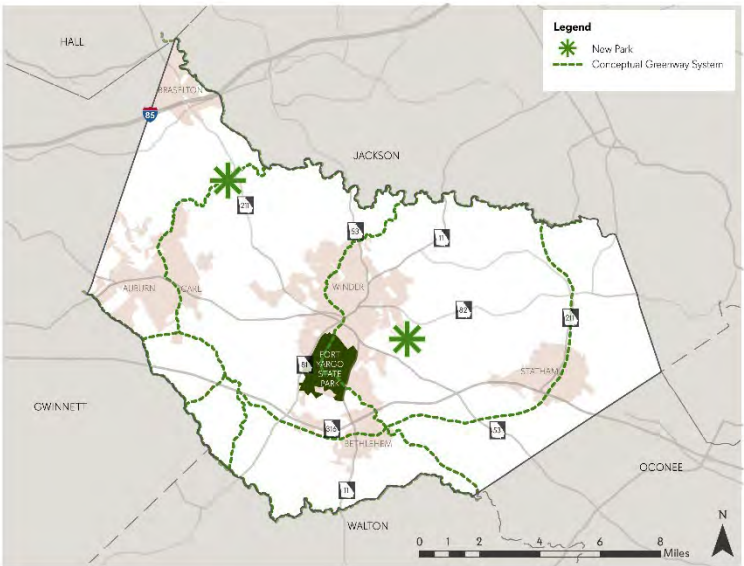
The Barrow in Balance influencers were applied to the existing future development maps; where there were discrepancies, the future development map was updated to better reflect the growth strategy of concentrating more dense uses along 316, except for where parcel sizes made larger scale development impractical. Descriptions of each land use can be found in the next section, Character Area Policy.

# Chapter 5

**TABLE 14. FUTURE LAND USE BREAKDOWN**

BARROW IN BALANCE FOCUS AREA	HOW DID THE BARROW IN BALANCE FOCUS AREA FINDINGS INFLUENCE THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP?	GENERAL AREAS OF INFLUENCE
 <p><b>Prioritize workplace and retail uses where appropriate</b></p>	<p>Workplaces are shown where....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They already exist now</li> <li>• At some of the best development opportunities near 316 and I-85</li> <li>• Along the West Winder Bypass</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes an expanded retail hub in/near Statham to serve eastern parts of Barrow County</li> <li>• Shows small retail hubs at the hearts of Carl and Bethlehem</li> </ul>	

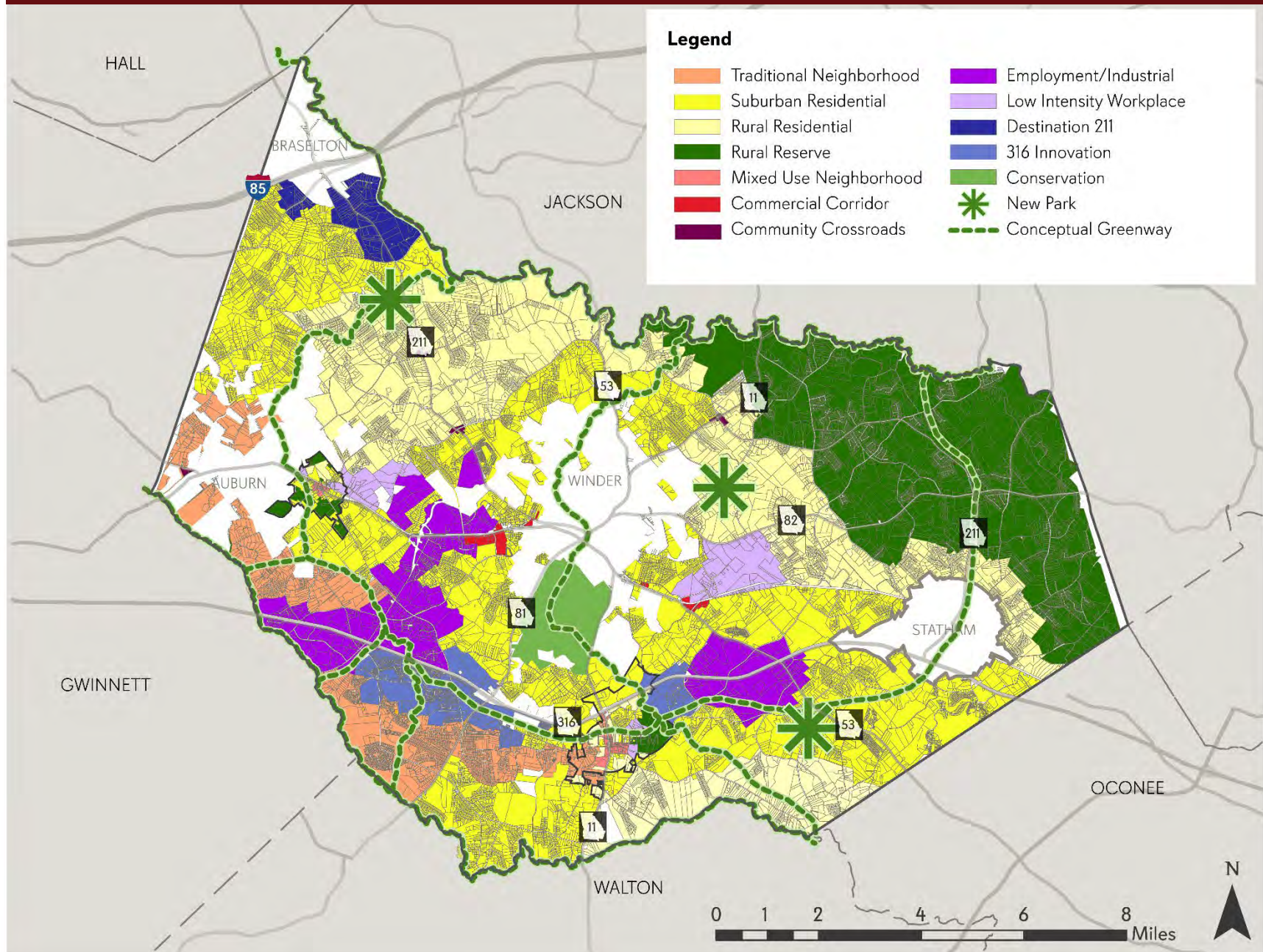
# Chapter 5

BARROW IN BALANCE FOCAL AREAS	HOW DID THE BARROW IN BALANCE FOCUS AREA FINDINGS INFLUENCE THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP?	GENERAL AREAS OF INFLUENCE
 <b>Expand Housing Options</b>	<p>Matched the type of housing to infrastructure capacity and community character:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focusing residential developed is appropriate within 1 mile of 316 and where sewer is available and transportation infrastructure is more robust</li> <li>Traditional residential uses, with a mix of medium intensity housing types, are appropriate in/near the cities and just outside of the 316 corridor</li> <li>Suburban residential is a transitional use between more town-like development and rural, and near the western border where growth pressure is expected</li> <li>Rural reserve is the prevalent type in the eastern part of the County where much of the rural character is still intact</li> </ul>	
 <b>Invest in a System of Parks and Recreation Facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New community-level parks in Northwest and eastern part of the County</li> <li>A conceptual system of greenways along major creeks and river corridors and connecting major destinations</li> </ul>	



## Chapter 5

### BARROW COUNTY FUTURE DEVELOPMENT MAP





## Chapter 5

### TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

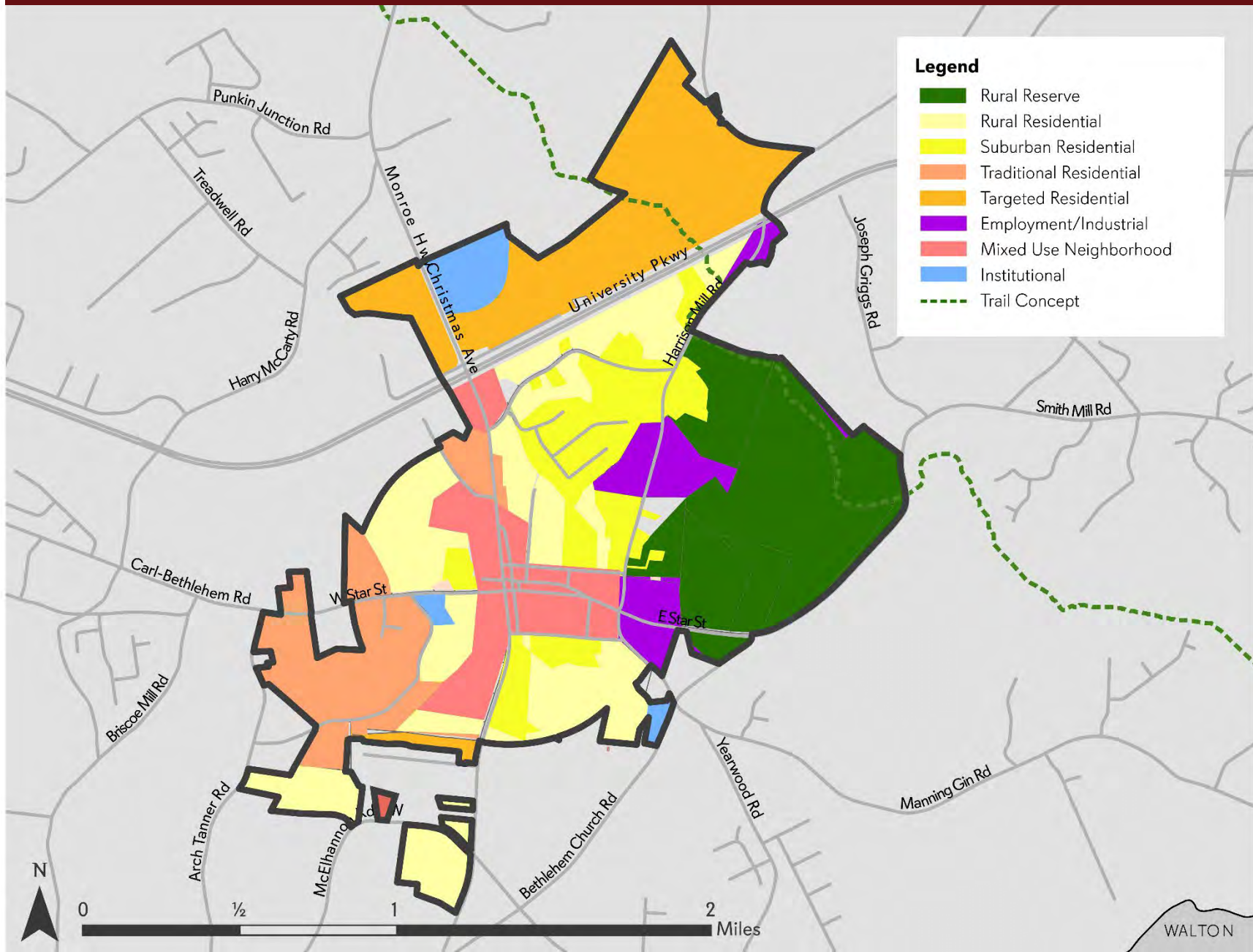
Barrow in Balance Focus Area 5 called for a closer look at the area of Barrow County south of 316. This is an area that has experienced enormous growth pressures—with the resultant congestion—and is also where the Town of Bethlehem is located.

Perhaps more than any other jurisdiction in Barrow County, the Town of Bethlehem is under the most pressure from growth outside its boundaries. Despite the community's desire to remain a small town, larger scaled, more intense growth is happening around it, impacting residents' quality of life—particularly where traffic is concerned. The future land use plan for Bethlehem emphasizes the following:

- **A larger, more defined “downtown” Bethlehem.** This is envisioned as a classic small town with a low-intensity mix of commercial and residential uses.
- **Traditional residential west of Christmas Avenue, lower intensity residential to the east.** The only higher intensity, focused residential would be north of 316.
- **Low intensity workplaces.** These are reflected of uses currently in place.
- **Connection to the broader trail system.** A direct link to the future system of greenways and trails in the County.

## Chapter 5

### TOWN OF BETHLEHEM FUTURE DEVELOPMENT MAP



## Chapter 5

### CITY OF STATHAM

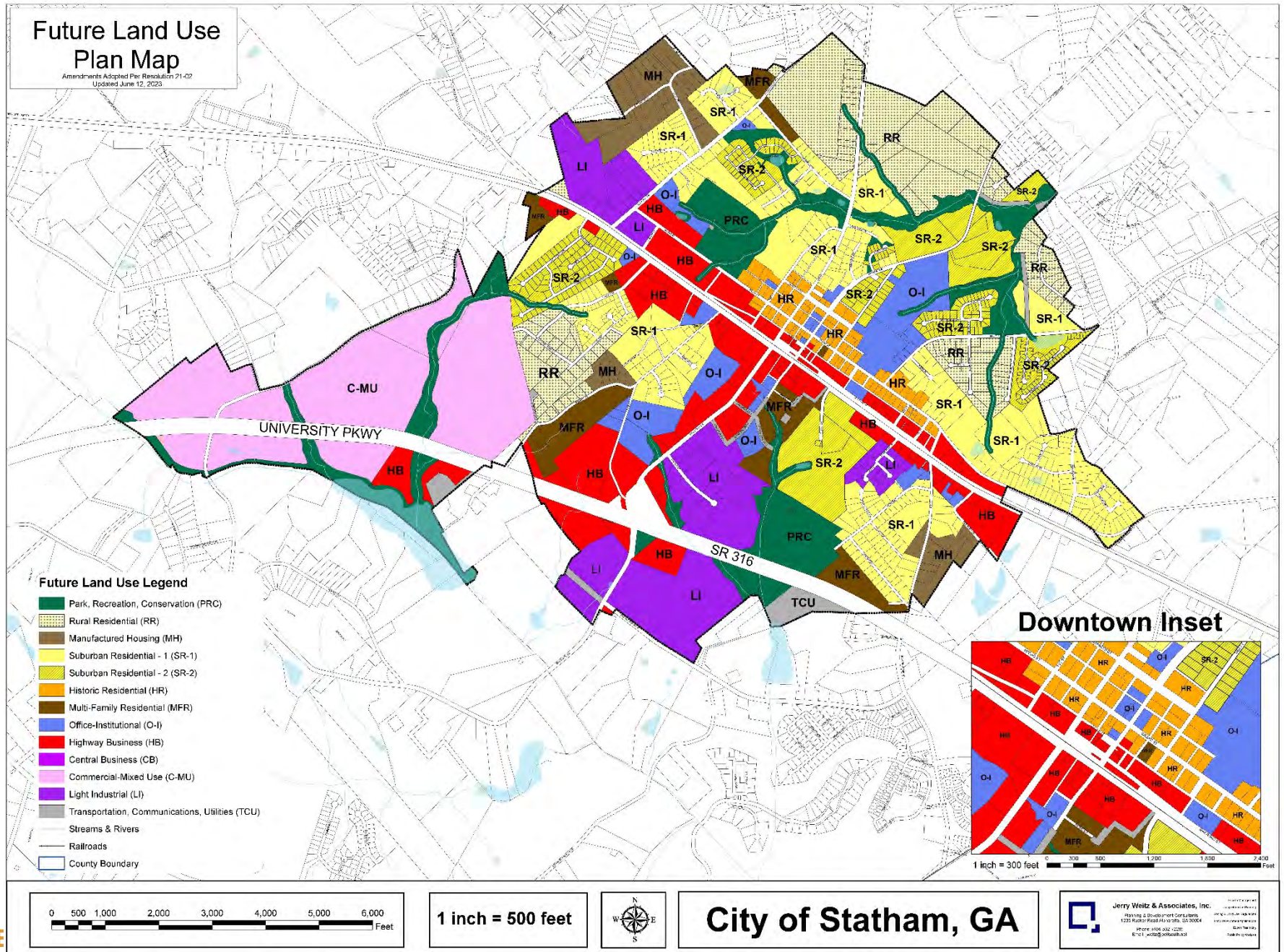
With its proximity to 316 and small-town heritage, the City of Statham is in a similar position to Bethlehem. The growth pressures here are not as strong yet however—the City is only partially within the County’s sewer basin, and its location further east from the Atlanta region has delayed pressures somewhat. This “extra” time is a major benefit, and highlights the opportunity for Statham to put a strong growth strategy into place.

Map on the following page shows the future land use plan for Statham, which elected to use its own (but similar) land use types for its mapping. To support and enhance its small-town character, the plan shows the following:

- **More commercial space connected to downtown Statham**, particularly along Bethlehem Road.
- **Commercial mixed use on 316**. To take advantage of Statham’s “waterfront” properties.
- **Expanded suburban residential** in the northern portion of the City
- **Additional workplace uses**. Expanded on and near existing light industrial.



# Chapter 5





## Chapter 5

### TOWN OF CARL

Of all the Barrow County jurisdictions, the Town of Carl currently has the least amount of growth pressure. This is likely due to its relatively far distance from both 316 and I-85 and the lack of sewer. Population projections show very little to no growth expected for the town, though it's possible additional pressure will spillover from the City of Auburn's growth and Rowen.

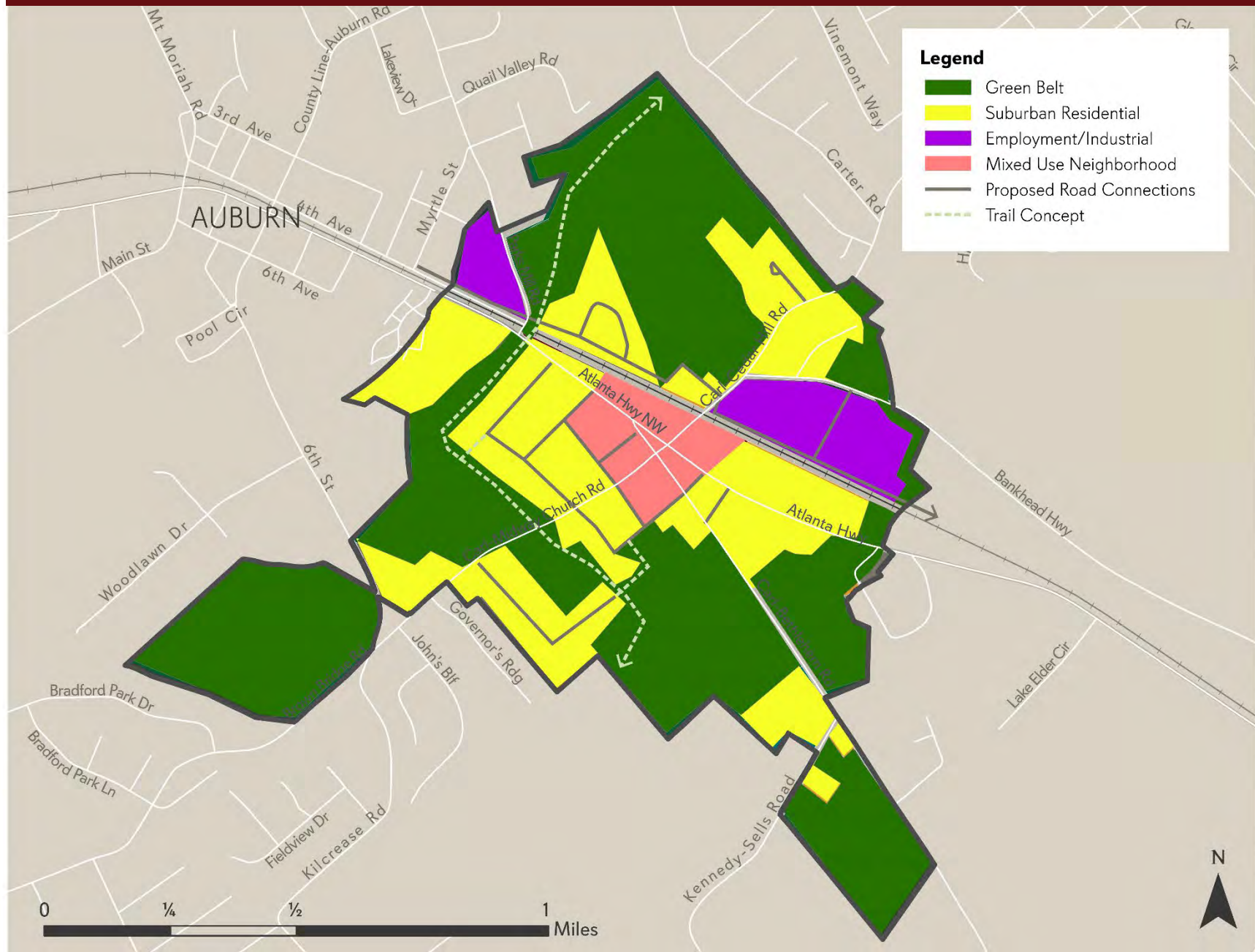
Because there is little expected growth in Carl, the future land use map is not a significant departure from existing land uses, but it does include:

- **A more defined village center.** This takes advantage of the existing “bones” of the town right now, but the vision for a more enhanced sense of place.
- **A conceptual greenbelt.** This conceptual greenbelt would help define Carl as a place distinct from Auburn and the rest of the county; it does not need to be publicly owned or accessible, but the future trails concept does show a linkage through its west side to the broader County system.
- **Low intensity housing and workplace uses.** Because roadways are limited and there is no sewer, there are no intense land uses shown in the future land use map.

If the Town of Carl does establish sewer in the future, this will fundamentally alter the development interest in the area and will require a new future land use plan.

## Chapter 5

### TOWN OF CARL FUTURE DEVELOPMENT MAP



# Chapter 5

## Character Area Policy

Character areas shown on the Future Development Map are described on the following pages.

Each character area policy presented in the narrative incorporates the following components:

- Intent describes the policy intent of each character area, specifically to preserve, maintain, enhance and/or create a desired character
- Location shows a map of where the character is in Barrow County, Bethlehem, Carl, and Statham
- Future Land Uses lists appropriate land uses, densities where appropriate, that support the desired type of land uses in a character area
- Appropriate Zoning lists appropriate zoning districts that support the desired land uses and densities
- Infrastructure/Community Facilities lists types of infrastructure and public services or uses that are appropriate for a particular character area. Consideration is also given for anything that is required in order for certain types of desired development to occur, and/or if something should not be introduced to an area due to the potential for inappropriate types or intensity of development to follow
- Design Principles recommends key elements that contribute to or help define the character of an area. These include physical elements, such as building and site design, and environment considerations.

Unless specifically noted in the character area descriptions, the policies listed apply to Unincorporated Barrow County and the Towns of Bethlehem and Carl.



# Chapter 5

## CONSERVATION

**Intent:** Protect environmentally sensitive areas and open space for conservation and passive recreation purposes and prevent degradation of natural resources in areas that have developed or have the potential to develop.

### Future Land Uses:

- Passive recreation areas (for environmentally constrained areas)
- Active recreation areas (areas without environmental constraints)
- Undeveloped areas in their natural state

### Design Principles

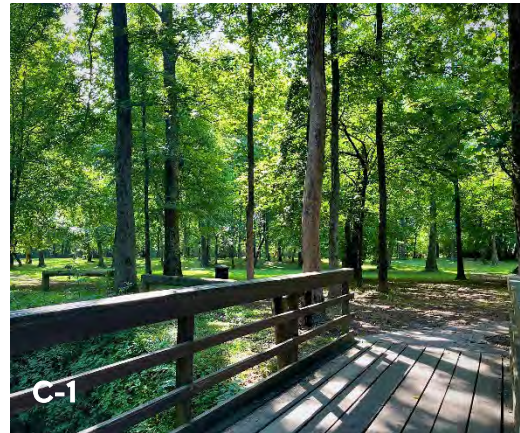
- Natural/informal landscape
- Minimal impervious surface
- Building placement and exterior materials should blend with surrounding landscape
- Limited development in the “primary conservation areas” (includes floodplains, wetlands, river/stream buffers) in accordance with local code requirements

### Appropriate Zoning

- N/A (Underlying zoning varies)

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

- Greenways/trails

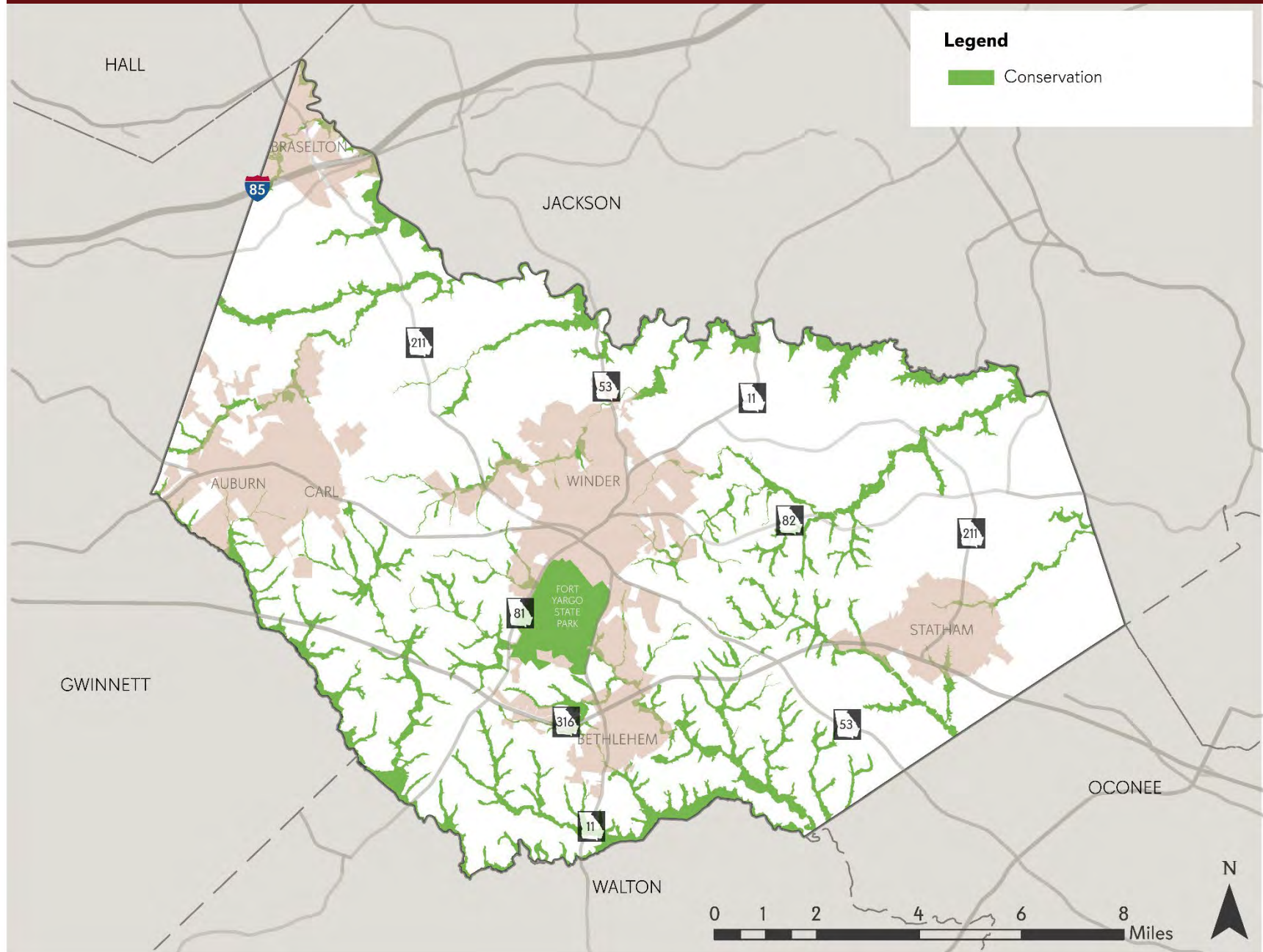


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## Chapter 5

### CONSERVATION FUTURE LAND USE





# Chapter 5

## RURAL RESERVE

**Intent:** Preserve the existing rural character of the county, including agricultural and large-lot residential uses as well as natural and historic features.

### Future Land Uses:

- Agriculture/forestry
- Very low density detached single-family residents (max 1 dwelling unit per 2 acres, unless underlying zoning allows 1 dwelling unit/acre)

### Design Principles

- Maintain natural landscape, tree cover, open space
- Limit development in “primary conservation areas” (includes floodplains, wetlands, river/stream buffers)
- Conservation subdivisions are encouraged

### Appropriate Zoning

- AG Agricultural
- AR Agricultural-Residential
- R-1 Low Density Single-Family Residential

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

- Greenways/trails, public parks
- Extension of public sewer discouraged

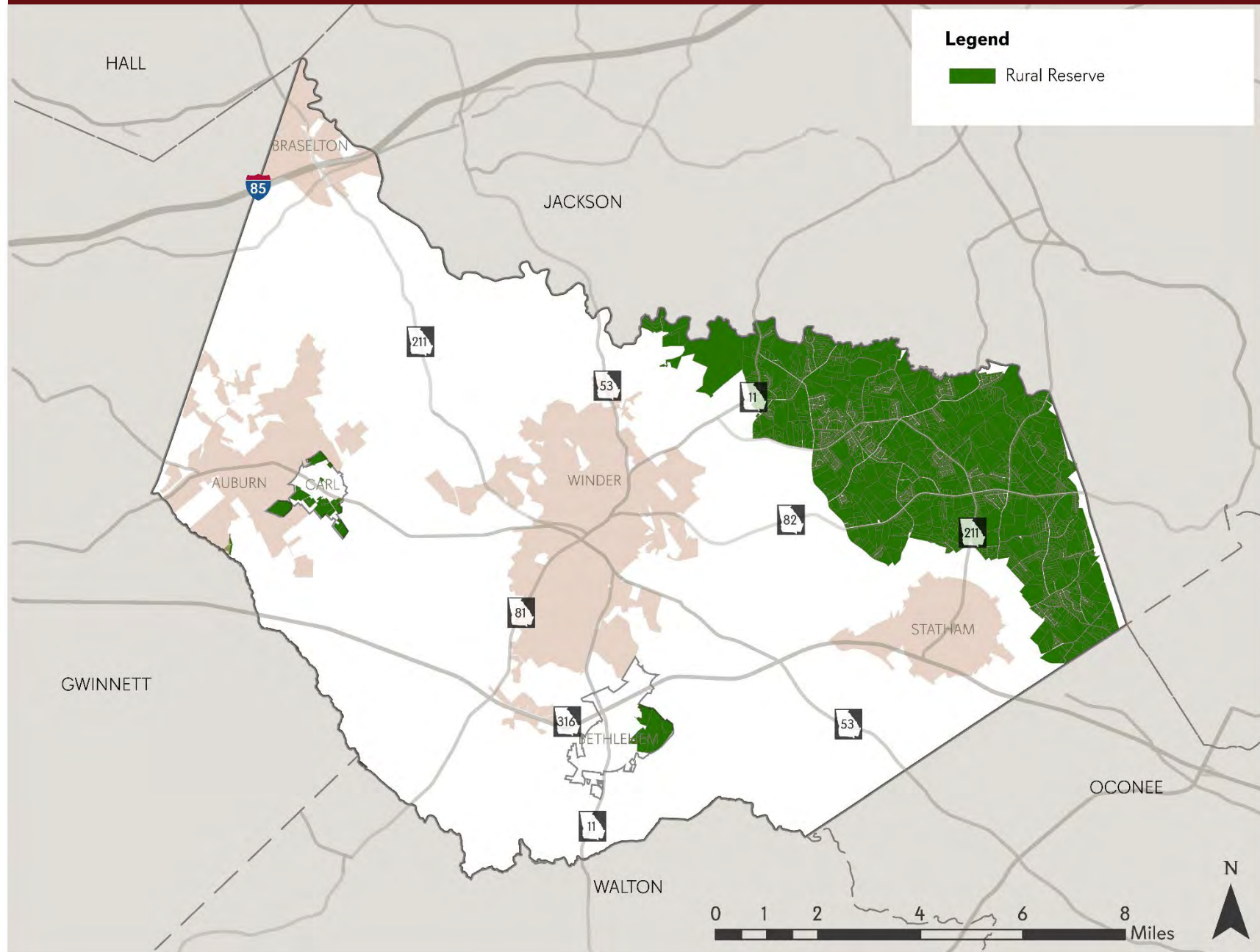


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## Chapter 5

### RURAL RESERVE FUTURE LAND USE



# Chapter 5

## RURAL NEIGHBORHOOD

**Intent:** Create a transition between Rural Reserve Areas and development in Suburban Neighborhood area and maintain the existing rural character of the county.

### Future Land Uses

- Low density detached single-family residents (max 1 dwelling unit per 1 acre), including residential subdivisions that protect natural features and set aside community open space
- Agriculture/forestry

### Design Principles

- Maintain tree cover
- Residential subdivision design should set aside a high percentage of open space;
- Limit development in “primary conservation areas” (includes floodplains, wetlands, river/stream buffers) in accordance with local requirements

### Appropriate Zoning

- AG Agricultural
- AR Agricultural-Residential
- R-1 Low Density Single-Family Residential

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

- Greenways/trails
- Public parks, community centers, city or county services, schools
- Public sewer may be present, but sewer expansion should be discouraged to limit development pressures

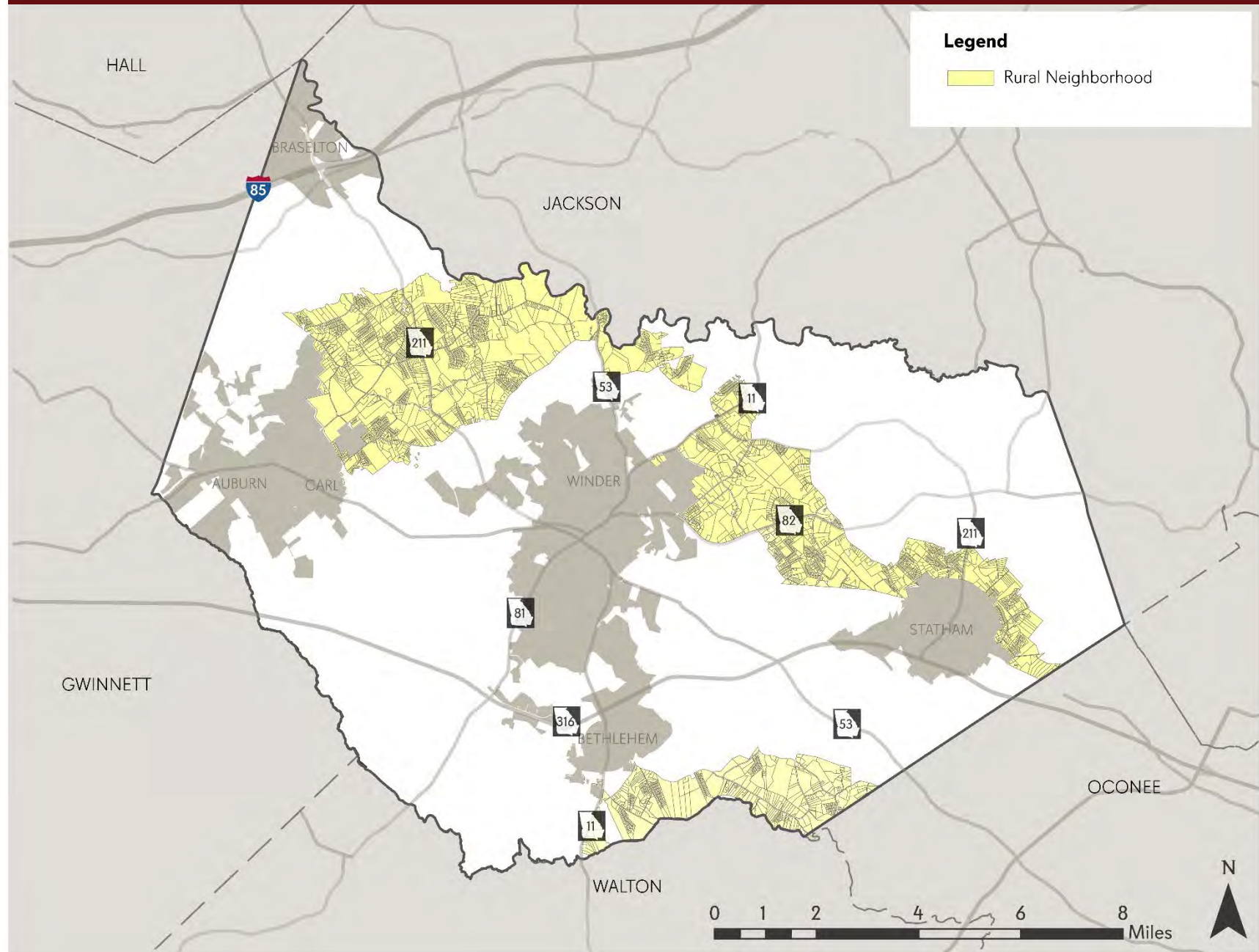


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## Chapter 5

### RURAL RESIDENTIAL FUTURE LAND USE





# Chapter 5

## SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

**Intent:** Preserve established neighborhoods and create quality new residential development that is consistent with surrounding suburban densities.

### Future Land Uses

- Unincorporated Barrow: Single-family homes at low to moderate densities: 1 to 2.3 dwelling units per acre); retirement/active adult communities
- Bethlehem and Carl: single-family homes at low densities (maximum 1 dwelling unit per acre)
- Public/institutional

### Design Principles

- High quality building materials and site design
- Maintain tree cover
- New development should provide opportunities for open space, including shared areas for the benefit of residents
- Limit cul-de-sacs or dead-ends

### Appropriate Zoning

- R-1 Low Density Single-Family Residential
- R-2 Medium Density Residential

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

- Sidewalks
- Public parks, schools, community centers, city or county services
- Public sewer is required for R-2

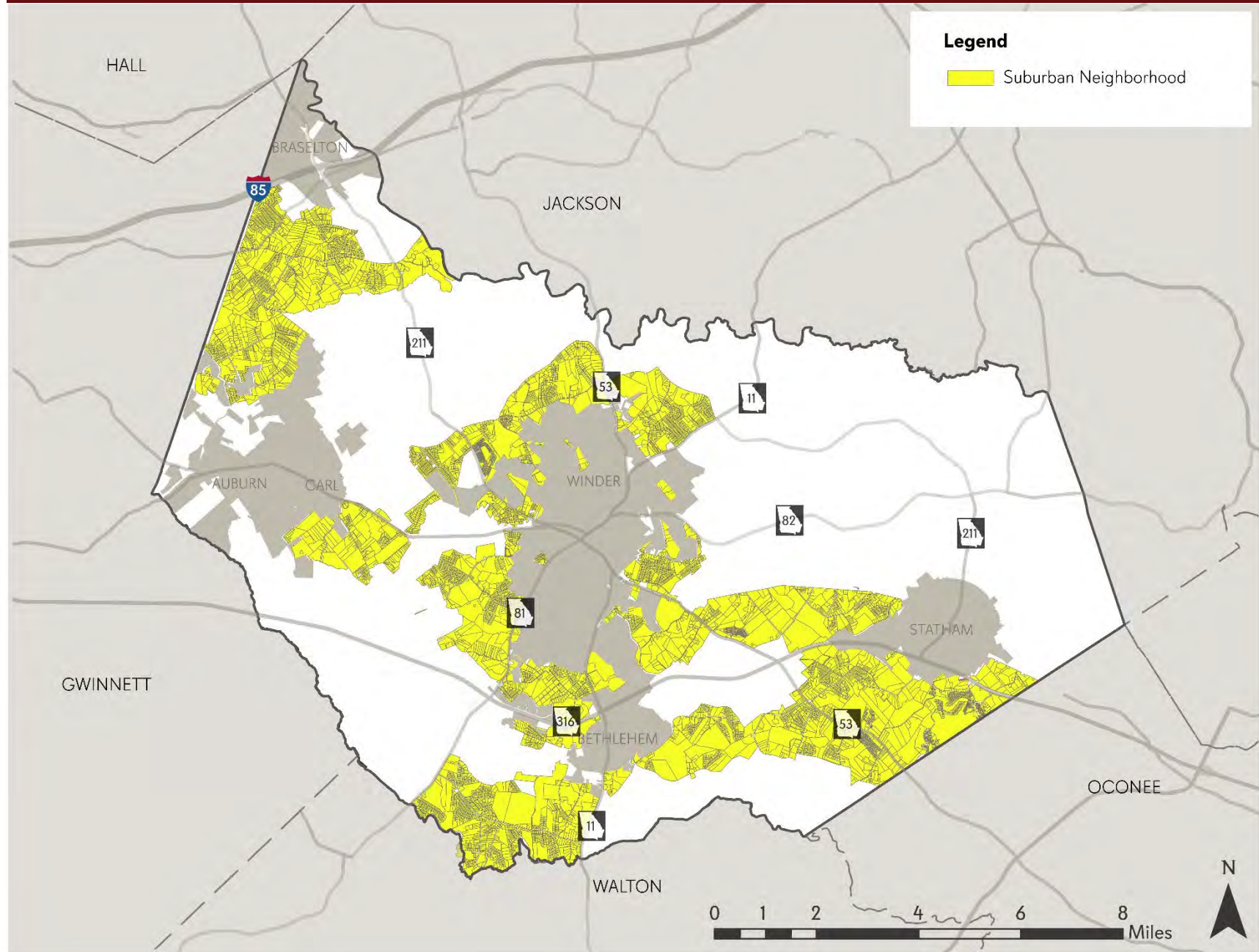


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## Chapter 5

### SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD FUTURE LAND USE





# Chapter 5

## TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD

**Intent:** Preserve established neighborhoods and create quality infill development that respects the prevailing single-family character and traditional materials and site design.

### Future Land Uses

- Single-family homes on smaller lots, townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and cottage-style homes (minimum of 2 dwelling units an acre; maximum of 6 dwelling units an acre)
- Public/institutional

### Design Principles

- Infill development should complement the scale, setback and style of existing adjacent homes
- Maintain tree cover
- Sidewalks required
- Strong roadway connectivity – maximum block sizes of 800 feet, and no cul-de-sacs or dead ends

### Appropriate Zoning

- R-2 Medium Density Residential
- R-3 High Density Residential

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

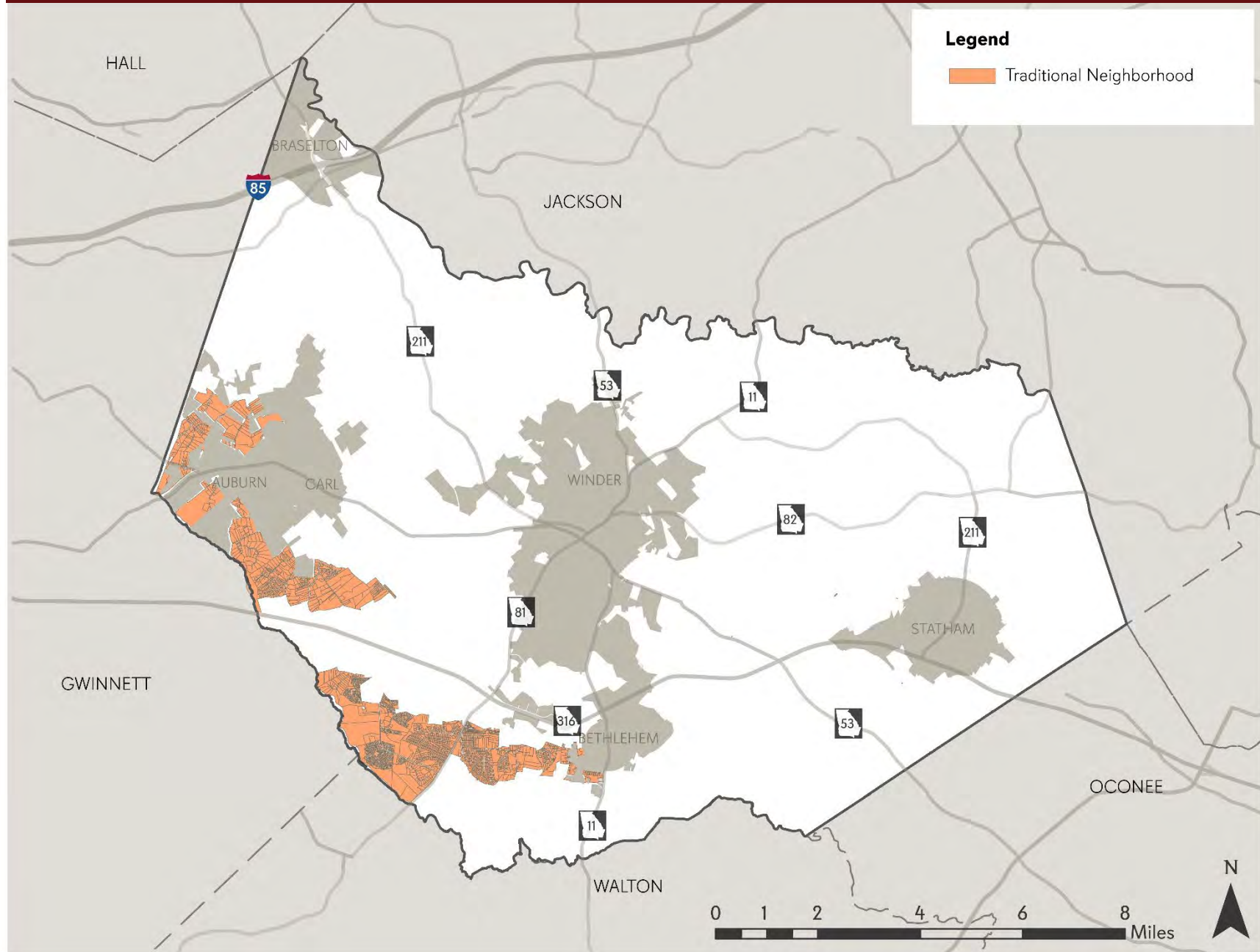
- Sidewalks required
- Public parks, schools, community centers, libraries, other “civic benefit” uses



*See appendix and reference number for character image photo credits.*

## Chapter 5

### TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD FUTURE LAND USE





# Chapter 5

## MIXED USE NEIGHBORHOOD

**Intent:** Create opportunities for neighborhood-oriented commercial uses that serve the local area and are compatible with surrounding residential uses in terms of building and site design.

### Future Land Uses

- Small-scale neighborhood commercial or office
- Single-family homes on smaller lots, townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and cottage-style homes (where there is sewer, minimum of 2 dwelling units an acre; maximum of 6 dwelling units an acre)
- Residential units above commercial or office
- Public/institutional

### Design Principles

- Parking should be to the side or rear of buildings
- Maintain tree canopy
- Well-designed streetscape/landscape
- Sidewalks required
- Strong roadway connectivity – maximum block sizes of 800 feet, and no cul-de-sacs or dead ends

### Appropriate Zoning

- MX – Mixed Use (New)

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

- Public parks, schools, community centers, libraries, other “civic benefit” uses
- Public water and sewer requirements follow UDC

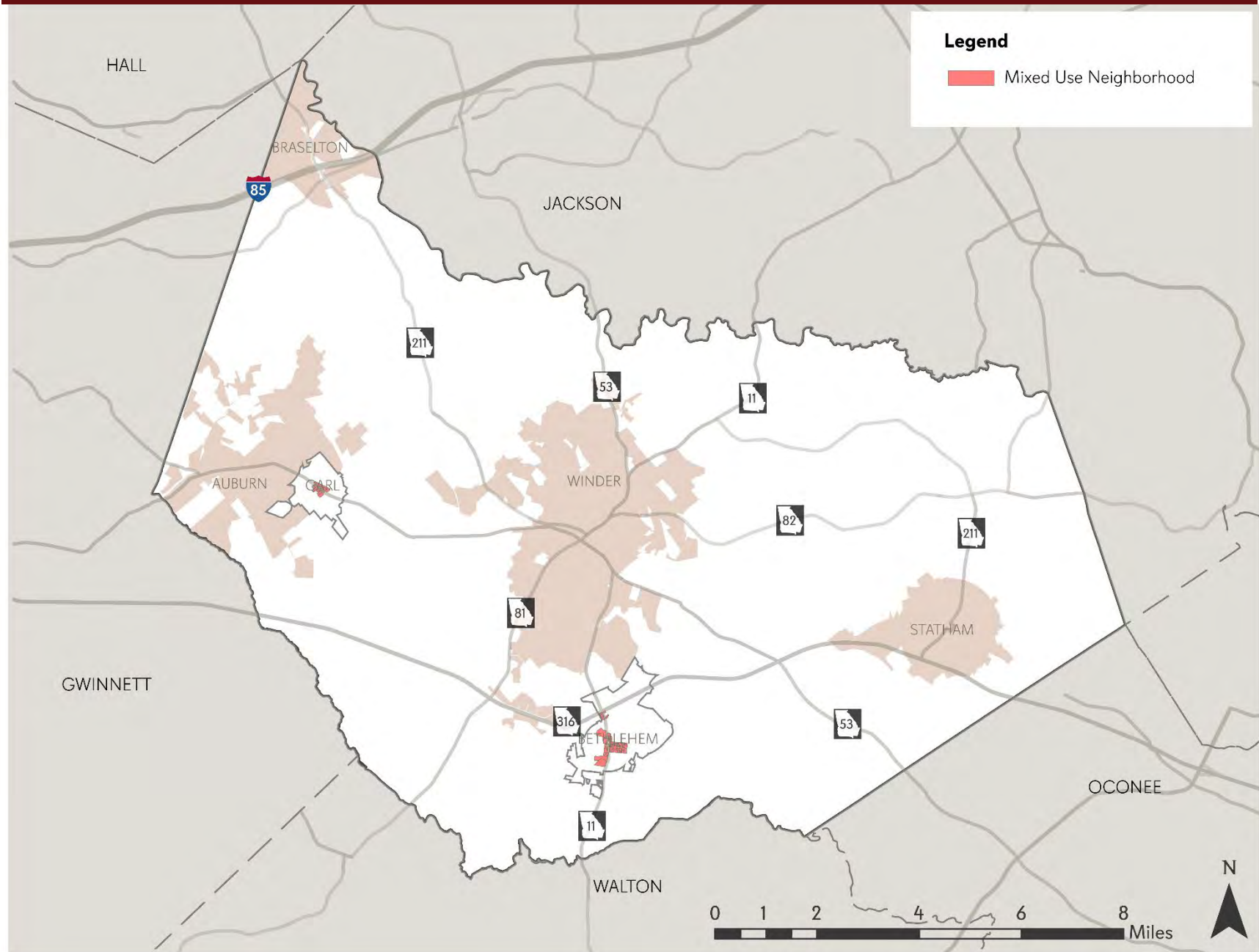


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## Chapter 5

### MIXED USE NEIGHBORHOOD FUTURE LAND USE



# Chapter 5

## COMMUNITYCROSSROADS

**Intent:** Maintain and/or create access to goods and services for local residents in a small geographic area. These are allowable at major intersections throughout the county as desired by the community.

### Future Land Uses

- Neighborhood commercial uses (smaller scale retail and services serving nearby residents and agricultural operations)
- Small footprint, chain discount stores that contribute to food deserts should be discouraged through tighter zoning regulations

### Design Principles

- Compact development oriented around a major intersection
- Limit development in “primary conservation areas” (includes floodplains, wetlands, river/stream buffers)

### Appropriate Zoning

- AG Agricultural
- AR Agricultural-Residential
- C-1 Neighborhood Commercial

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

- Parks and community centers
- Public sewer should be discouraged

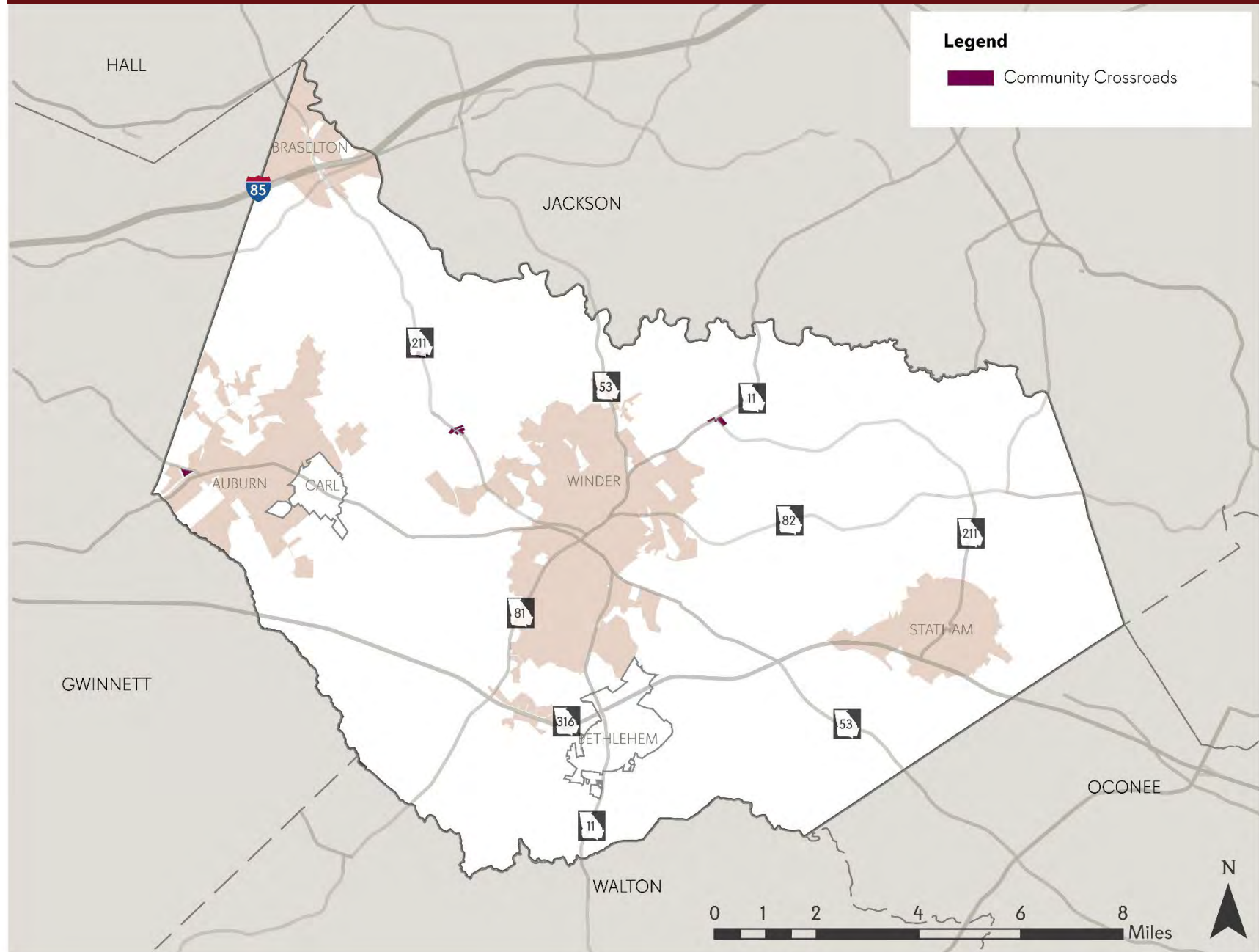


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## Chapter 5

### COMMUNITY CROSSROADS FUTURE LAND USE





# Chapter 5

## LOW INTENSITY WORKPLACE

**Intent:** maintain low intensity industry and workplaces that do not require sewer but have good access to state routes and rail.

### Future Land Uses

- Light industrial
- Light to medium commercial that does not require sewer

### Design Principles

- Screening between industrial/commercial uses and adjacent residential areas and public right-of-way
- Strong roadway connectivity

### Appropriate Zoning

- M-1 Light Industrial (revised)

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

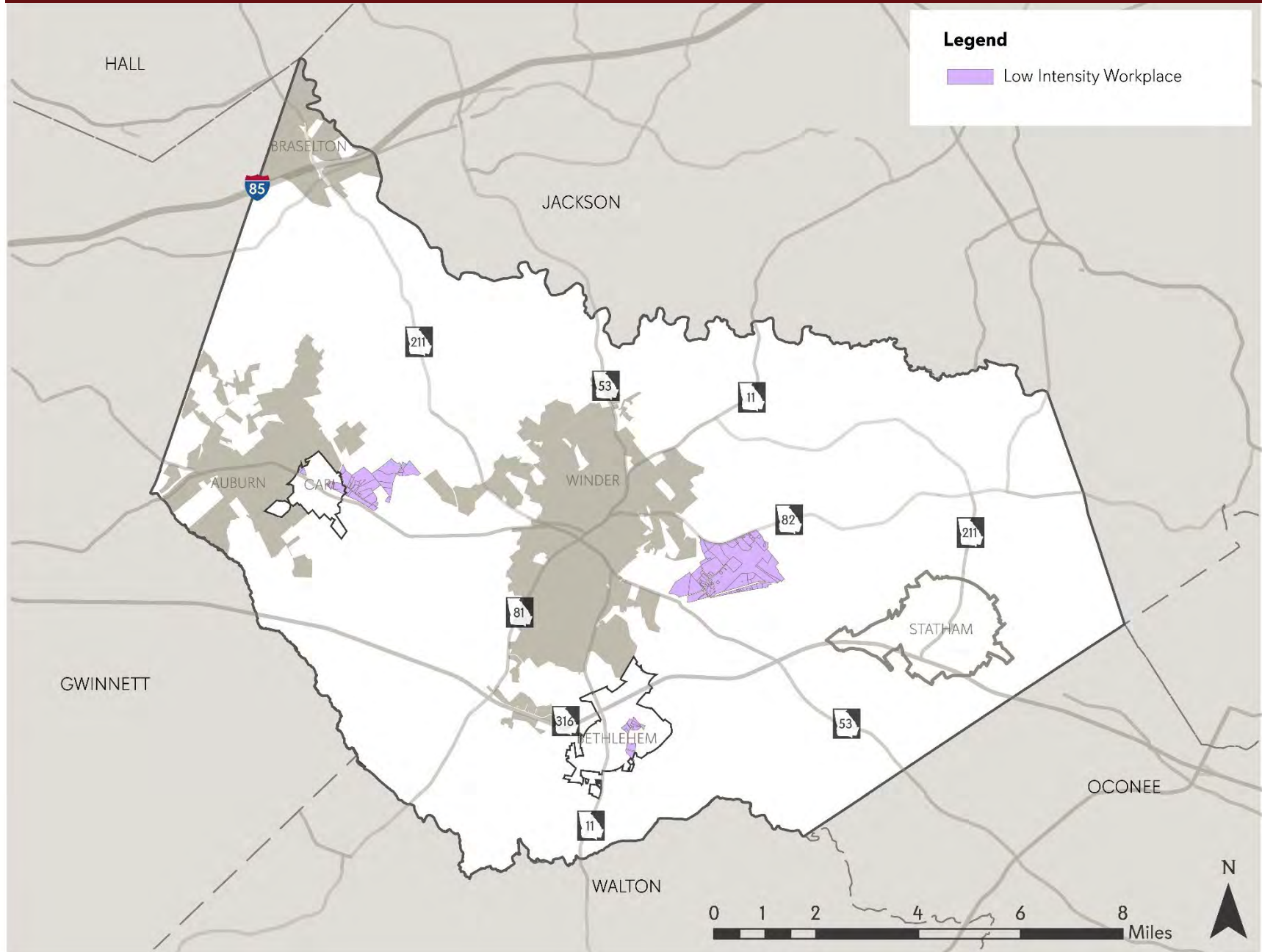
- Public water



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## Chapter 5

### LOW INTENSITY WORKPLACE FUTURE LAND USE





# Chapter 5

## COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

**Intent:** Maintain well-functioning corridors that serve local needs and facilitate traffic flow without encroaching on adjacent neighborhoods.

### Future Land Uses

- Service, retail, and office
- Public/institutional

### Design Principles

- Access management elements (interparcel access, shared drives, etc.) to minimize curb cuts
- Screening between corridor uses and adjacent residential
- Right-sized parking—reduce amount of excess surface parking
- High quality building materials
- Formal landscaping
- Limited signs and prohibit new billboards
- Limit clearing and grading as much as possible

### Appropriate Zoning

- C-1 Neighborhood Commercial
- C-2 Community Commercial

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

- Sidewalks, both internal and connections to external if already in place
- Public water and sewer requirements based on local codes

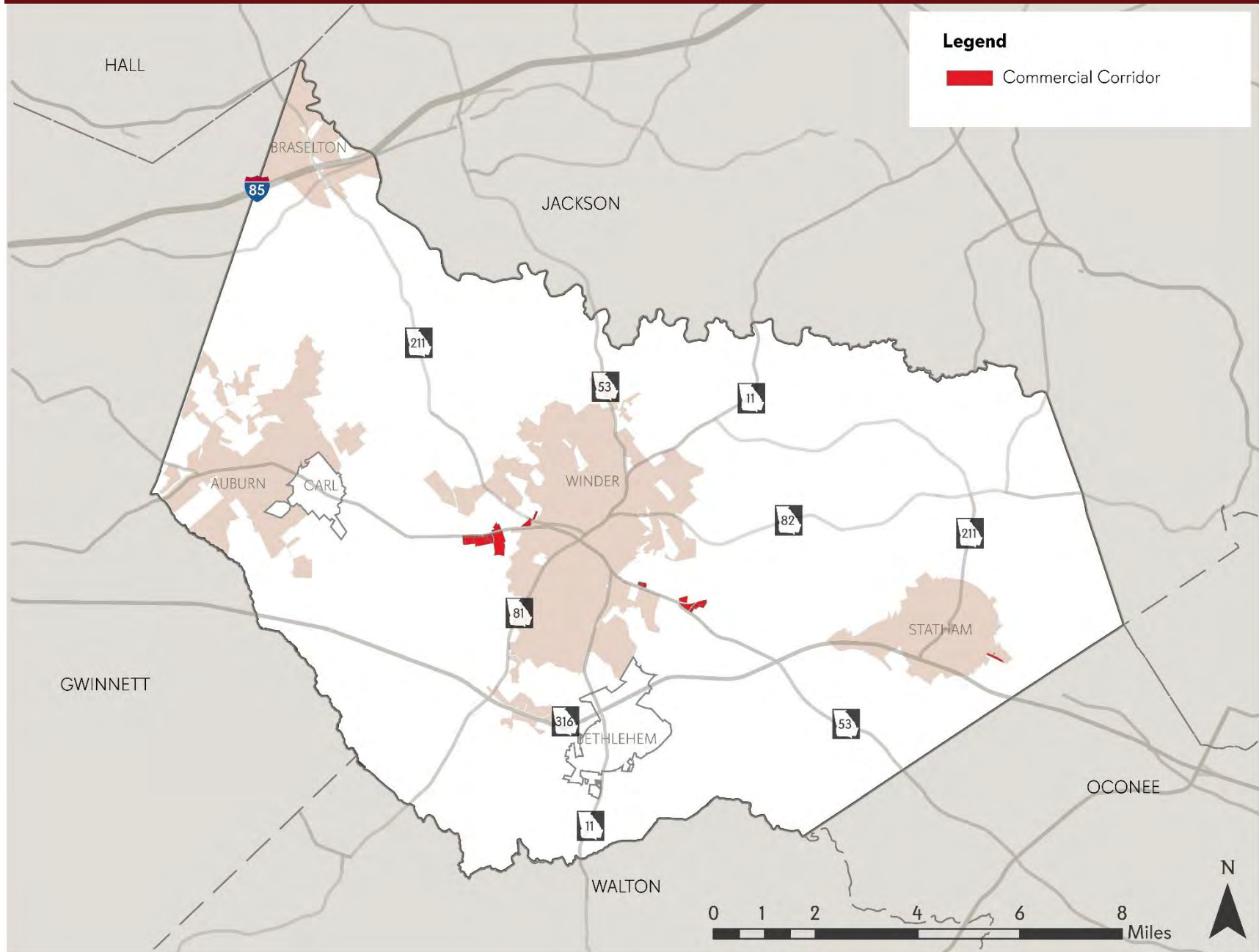


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## Chapter 5

### COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR FUTURE LAND USE



# Chapter 5

## EMPLOYMENT/INDUSTRIAL CENTER

**Intent:** Create opportunities for job-rich employment centers where a location benefits from SR 316 access.

### Future Land Uses

- Clean industrial uses, like bio-tech and life sciences, R&D center, and advanced manufacturing
- Commercial uses that support workers

### Design Principles

- Access management elements (interparcel access, shared drives, etc.) to minimize curb cuts
- Screening where adjacent to non-industrial uses
- Formal landscaping
- Limited signs and prohibit new billboards
- Assembly of parcels into business parks encouraged

### Appropriate Zoning

- M-1 Light Industrial (revised)
- West Winder Bypass Overlay (new)
- C-2 Community Commercial

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

- Public water and sewer requirements based on local codes
- Roadways designed with freight and industrial needs in mind (high pavement quality, wide turn radii, etc.)

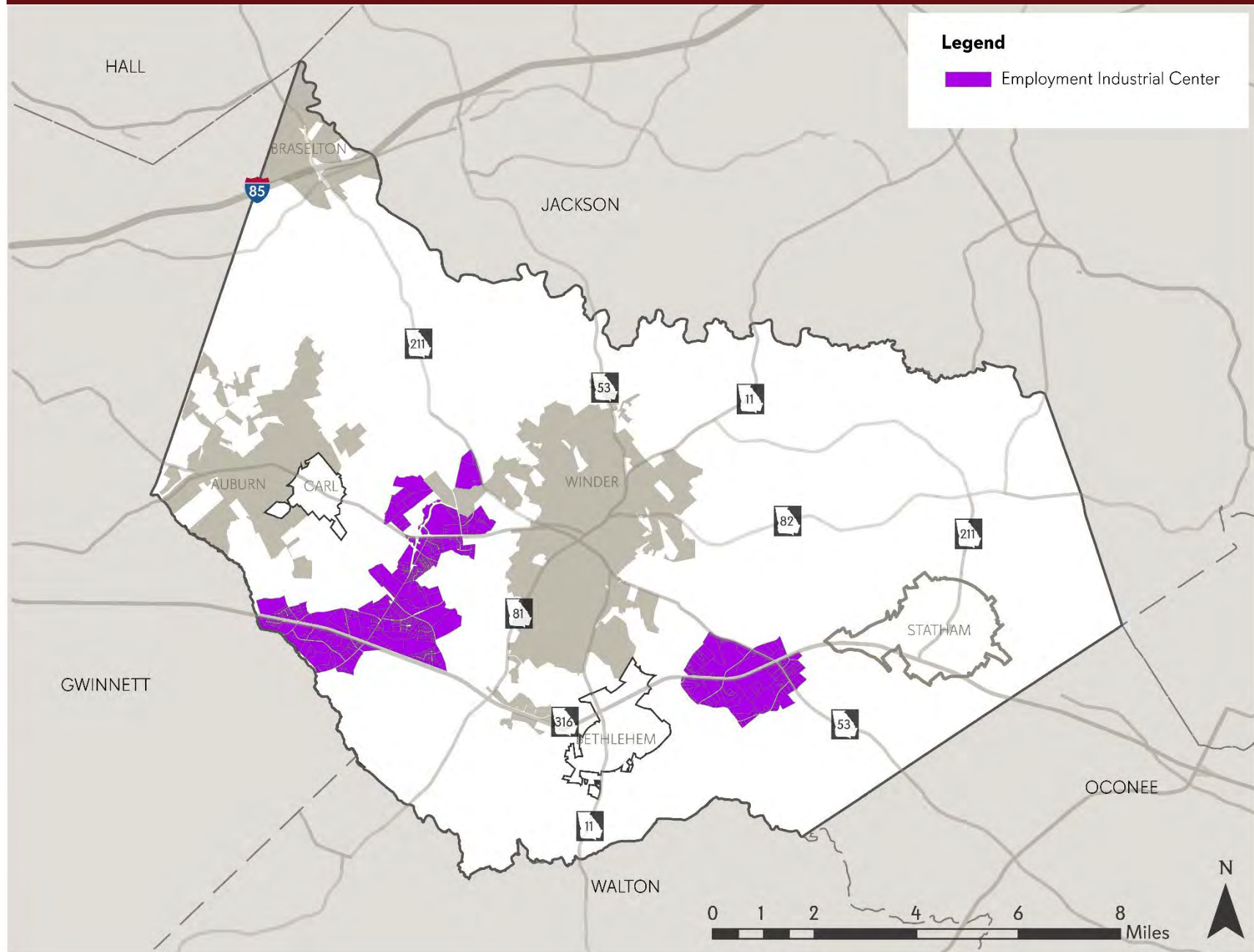


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## Chapter 5

### EMPLOYMENT INDUSTRIAL CENTER FUTURE LAND USE





# Chapter 5

## 316 INNOVATION CORRIDOR

**Intent:** Create opportunities for job-rich employment centers, large-scale commercial uses, and high-quality housing of a mix of unit types where a location benefits from SR 316 access.

### Future Land Uses

- Mid-rise office
- Large-scaled medical
- Commercial uses that serve a regional market
- Public/institutional
- Townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and cottage-style homes
- Multi-family residential (maximum 12 dwelling units an acre)

### Design Principles

- Master-planned campus preferred for non-residential uses
- Formal landscaping
- Right-sized parking—reduce amount of excess surface parking

- Screening along corridors/boundaries with adjacent residential
- Access management to facilitate traffic flow and pedestrian safety
- Tight grid or network of roadways that connect to the local roadway network
- High quality building and site design
- Limit clearing and grading
- Maximum block lengths of 1,000 feet

### Appropriate Zoning

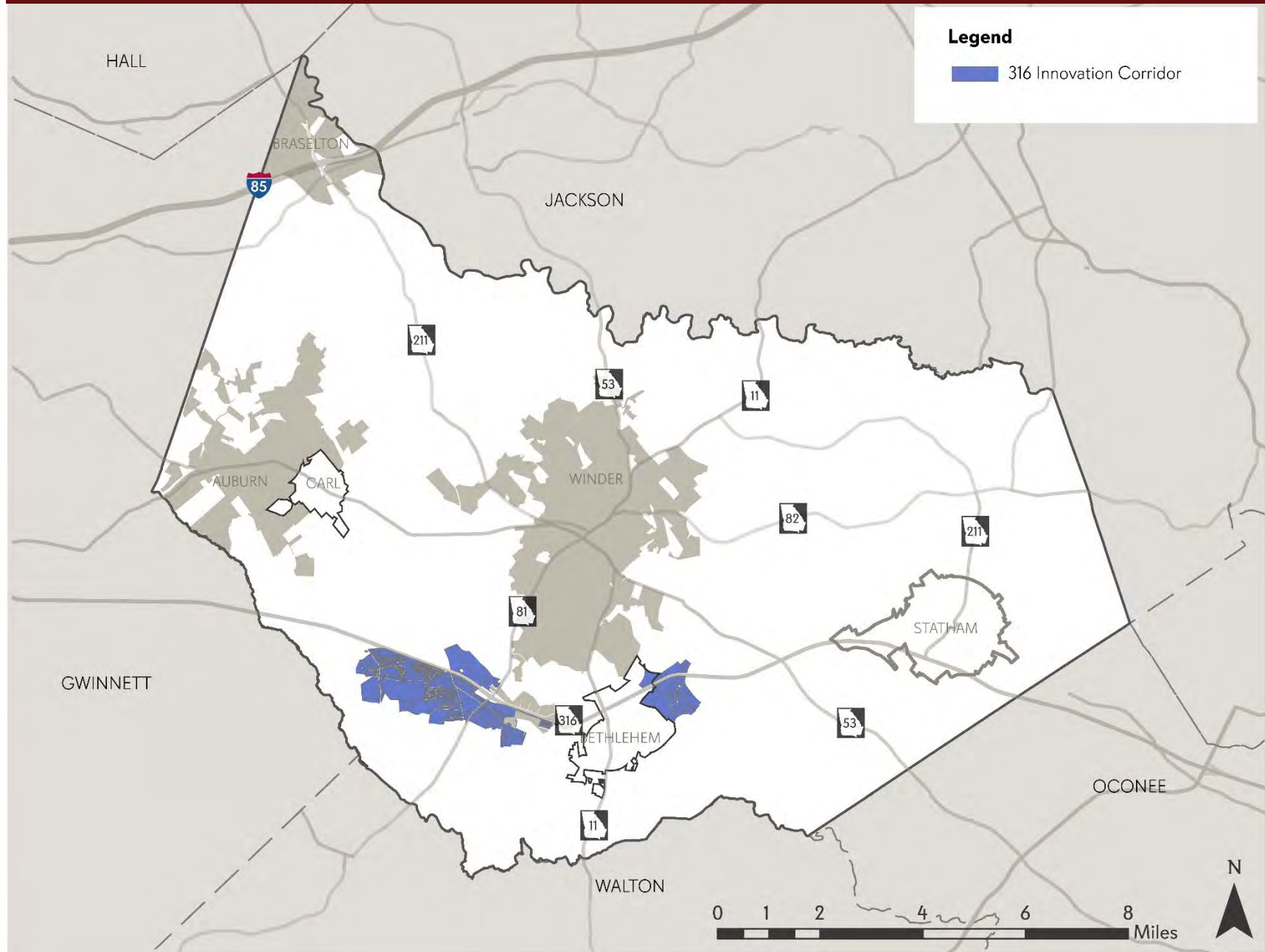
- O-1 Office and Institutional
- C-3 Intensive Commercial
- C-2 Community Commercial
- MX - Mixed Use (new)
- R-3 High Density Residential
- R-4 Multi-Family (new)



See appendix and reference number for character image photo credits.

## Chapter 5

### 316 INNOVATION CORRIDOR FUTURE LAND USE





# Chapter 5

## DESTINATION 211

**Intent:** Create opportunities for employment and large-scale commercial uses that are compatible with Braselton’s growing tourism industry.

### Future Land Uses

- Mid-rise office
- Clean industrial uses, like bio-tech and life sciences, R&D center, data centers, and advanced manufacturing,
- Large-scaled medical
- Commercial uses that support the tourism industry
- Multi-family residential
- Public/institutional
- Prohibited uses include car dealerships, car storage lots, distribution/warehousing, and truck refueling

### Design Principles

- Master-planned campus preferred
- Formal landscaping
- Right-sized parking—reduce amount of excess surface parking
- Screening along corridors/boundaries with adjacent residential

- Access management to facilitate traffic flow and pedestrian safety
- Tight grid or network of roadways that connect to the local roadway network
- High quality building and site design
- Limit clearing and grading
- Maximum block lengths of 1,000 feet
- No billboards

### Appropriate Zoning

- O-1 Office and Institutional
- M-1 Light Industrial (no distribution/warehousing)
- C-3 Intensive Commercial
- C-2 Community Commercial
- R-3 High Density Residential
- MX - Mixed Use

### Infrastructure/Community Facilities

- Sidewalks
- Public water and sewer

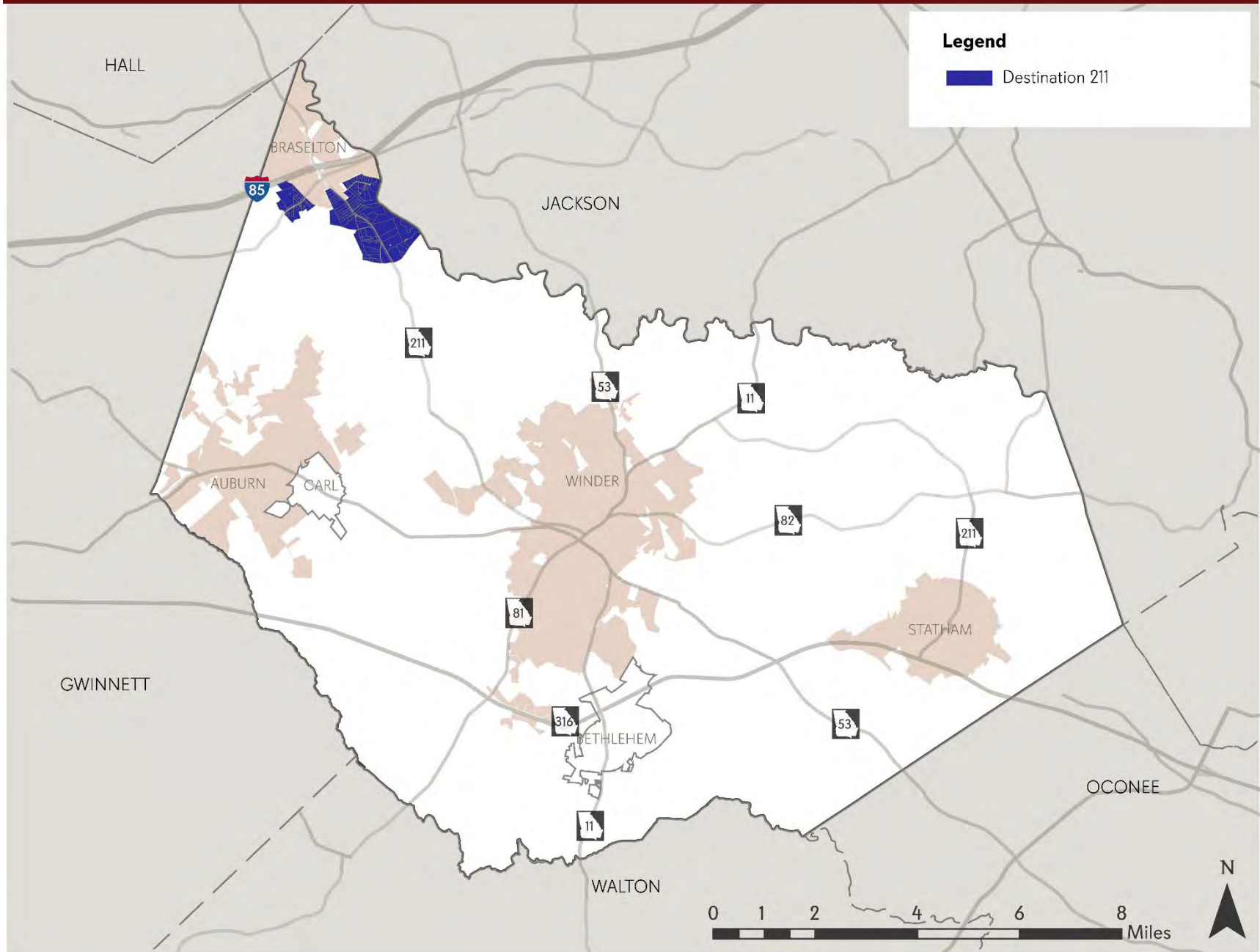


See appendix and reference number for character image photo credits.



## Chapter 5

### DESTINATION 211 FUTURE LAND USE



# Chapter 6

## CHAPTER 6: IMPLEMENTATION

Comprehensive plans are not just about identifying issues and creating future land use maps—addressing these issues, and defining strategies for making progress on their improvement, are equally important. After discussing two overarching strategies, this section takes each Barrow in Balance focal areas and identifies strategies and key actions for Barrow County, the Towns of Bethlehem and Carl, and the City of Statham to consider.

### 6.1 Overarching Strategies

#### IMPLEMENT IMPACT FEE PROGRAM

New growth can put an enormous strain on infrastructure. This can be particularly acute in counties that are historically rural and are rapidly transitioning to more suburban and urban-style land uses. The State of Georgia enacted the Development Impact Fee Act (DIFA) in 1990 that sets rules around impact fees, and enables local governments to impose exactions on developers to assist in financing infrastructure expansion. Impact fees can only go towards meeting the needs of new development—it cannot address existing problems and can only be a fair, proportionate share of the cost.

At the time of the Joint Comprehensive Plan Update, the Barrow County is evaluating implementation of an impact fee program for parks and recreation, animal control, fire protection, emergency medical services, emergency management, and road improvements. Impact fees should be pursued as much as feasible; additionally, the county should strongly consider evaluating impact fees for the wastewater system, as this is one of the most critical aspects of infrastructure that will need to be expanded to accommodate new growth.

#### REVISE THE UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT CODE (UDC)

The Unified Development Code (UDC) is one of the most powerful tools that Barrow County has to guide development. To best address the challenges illustrated across multiple Barrow in Balance Focal areas, several revisions to the UDC are recommended including:

- Establish a West Winder Bypass Overlay
- The 316 corridor is Barrow County's "waterfront" property. Although it is currently covered under the existing Highway Corridor Overlay, its land use vision differs substantially from the other corridors contained in the overlay, such as 211 which passes through rural areas envisioned to remain rural. The 316 Highway Corridor Overlay should contain stronger requirements for local roadway connectivity and sidewalks (see 6.3, below), street design standards more reflective of urban-style development (such as reduced lane widths), high-quality streetscape, and regulations that reduce excess surface parking.
- Creating a new, higher density residential district (R-4) for parcels in 311 Innovation Corridor, and revise R-3 and R-2 for more flexibility and allowing smaller minimum home sizes
- Create an explicit Mixed Use (MX) district
- Improving roadway and pedestrian connectivity through smaller maximum block sizes, requiring interparcel access, limiting cul-de-sacs and single-entrance developments, and adopting more robust sidewalk requirements,
- Revising materials requirements for workplaces in the 316 Innovation Corridor and Destination 211

## Chapter 6

### 6.2 Infrastructure Alignment Strategy + Key Actions

The number one priority of the Barrow County community is to better align infrastructure—particularly sewer and transportation—with growth.

#### STRATEGIES

##### Sewer

- **Clarify current capacity limitations.** The pace of growth in Barrow County in recent years has outpaced expectations. One of the primary concerns is sewer capacity; although there is capacity to service current growth, it is unclear how much capacity will remain once already-improved projects have come online. It is essential to clarify how much capacity remains to accommodate future growth, as the county's lack of water bodies for discharging treated wastewater is a limiting factor that is not solved by simply expanding facilities.
- **Prioritize sewer expansion to target areas.** Once remaining sewer capacity is clarified, priority of service expansion should be given to sites within the 311 Innovation Corridor. Specifically, extension of sewer service should be prioritized to site(s) identified as targets in the workplace uses strategy (see 6.3) if lack of sewer is one of the barriers. If there is capacity available beyond serving the 311 Innovation Corridor, the next priority should be Traditional Residential areas.
- **Evaluate new technologies for solving the discharge challenge.** The capacity of the current system—or more specifically, the amount of discharge the County is permitted for—is very unlikely to accommodate the growth demands of

the next 20 years. Should the county wish to continue to grow, it will need to find an alternative method of discharge that is not dependent on its limited natural waterways. The county should study alternative technologies to determine their feasibility and cost effectiveness.

- **Determine a hard line where sewer will not be extended.** Sewer service is one of the most powerful tools a jurisdiction has in growth management. Its presence can attract the types of growth that are desired, and its absence can help more rural parts of the county remain that way. One of the major desires of the community heard throughout the comprehensive planning process is to protect the rural character that remains in Barrow County; the County should consider a firm policy that it will not extend sewer into Rural Residential and Rural Reserve areas.

##### Transportation

- **Pursue TSPLOST to fund much-needed transportation improvements.** The county is currently updating its Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) in part to inform the project list for a likely Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST). Ideally the TSPLOST should include resources for the expansion of local roadway and sidewalk network around the 316 Innovation Corridor and other areas south of 316.
- **Create a denser, more multi-modal transportation network within the 316 Innovation corridor and Traditional Residential Areas.** Although widening roadways can help alleviate some congestion, a multi-modal approach that enhances overall network connectivity and route and mode choice will produce better results long term.



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- **Revise the Unified Development Code to improve roadway and pedestrian connectivity and reduce congestion:**

- ***Ensure sidewalk network is effective and comfortable for pedestrians by strengthening the sidewalk requirements and maintaining ADA compliance.*** The current UDC requires only 4-foot wide sidewalks on one side of the street in residential areas and on both sides in commercial areas, with no buffers required (though areas within the Highway Corridor Overlay require 6 feet). In the 316 Innovation Corridor, Traditional Residential, and Destination 211 character areas, the county should strengthen these requirements to a minimum 6-foot sidewalk along both sides of the street with a landscape buffer between the roadway and sidewalk to enhance safety. Additionally, certain sites have been developed under prior land development code standards that did not require the installation of sidewalks along the roadway frontage. Another way to strengthen the sidewalk network is to establish a threshold for commercial and office/institutional (re)development projects on existing developed sites where the project will require the sidewalk to be installed if the building footprint and/or parking is expanded by a certain percentage.
- ***Improve interparcel access and coordination with mutual access easements between adjoining commercial properties.*** Development and redevelopment must follow the inter-parcel access requirements of the development regulations for all non-residential projects. The county should develop and adopt access design criteria and recommendations for designing interconnecting

parking lots. This approach would not only improve the safety and efficiency of traffic coming from the street network to the development, but it would also provide opportunity for enhancing the visual character of the roadway.

- ***Promote connectivity to multiple roadways where feasible to relieve traffic congestion.*** Consider adopting standards on the minimum number of entrances into a subdivision that align with and reinforce Appendix D of the International Fire Code. For example, for single-family and duplex subdivisions with more than 30 dwelling units, two separate access roads are required in the International Fire Code; the current UDC allows up to 99 units to be served by a single entrance road.
- ***Enhance connectivity between uses for pedestrians and emergency services.*** Ensure sidewalks connect along adjacent properties even in different land uses and zoning districts. In streets that are developed and being used exclusively for residential access and are adjacent to proposed nonresidential and multi-family use, the street may connect to a proposed nonresidential or multi-family use street if it is not designed as the primary access point into the development. The current UDC prohibits these connections.
- ***Ensure the street network is expanded in an incremental way that aligns with the comprehensive plan.*** When a future street or road is proposed in the comprehensive plan and it traverses the development project, the right-of-way shall be platted as part of the subdivision or development project.

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- *Local neighborhood street systems are intended to provide multiple direct connections to and between local destinations such as parks, schools, and shopping.* These connections should knit separate developments together rather than form barriers between them. Where new development is adjacent to vacant land, all streets, bicycle paths, and sidewalks in the development's proposed street system shall continue through to the boundary lines of the area to provide for the orderly subdivision of such adjacent land or the transportation and access needs of the community.

### KEY ACTIONS

- Conduct a study on sewer capacity limitations and options for expansion, types of technologies, costs
- Expand sewer in the 316 Innovation Corridor
- Conduct a study to determine opportunities for improved roadway network, prioritizing improvements in the 316 Innovation, Target Residential, and Traditional Residential
- Begin investing in the sidewalk network, starting with plugging the gaps along Carl Bethlehem Road and Highway 81 near Barrow Crossing
- Revise the UDC to require stronger sidewalk and roadway requirements in 316 Innovation Corridor, Destination 211, Traditional Residential areas

### 6.3 Workplace Uses Strategy + Key Actions

To ensure a more balanced tax digest and provide job opportunities closer to home, it is critical that Barrow County attract more office and light/clean industrial uses.

### STRATEGIES

- **Develop a more detailed strategy for attracting target industries.** Barrow County Economic Development has identified electric vehicle (EV) Manufacturing and Suppliers, Data Centers, Advanced Manufacturing, and Biotech and Life Sciences as key target industries. As a next step, the County should invest in a study to better understand how to best attract these industries to Barrow County, as well as identify other potential target industries that are a good fit for the County's competitive advantages.
- **Identify 2-3 target sites for barrier removal.** As part of the target industry strategy, Barrow County should identify 2-3 "best fit" sites for the target industries, and actively work to remove their barriers. This may mean extending sewer service to the sites, assembly of multiple smaller lots, and improving transportation infrastructure such as upgrading nearby intersections or installing sidewalks.
- **Focus infrastructure improvements in 316 Innovation Corridor character area.** Although there are transportation and sewer needs across the county, infrastructure improvements should be prioritized near 316—particularly in the 316 Innovation Corridor character area, which has the premium sites for workplace uses.
- **For employment/industrial areas without sewer, focus on supporting incubators for local businesses and**

## Chapter 6

**entrepreneurs.** Several areas are designated for workplace uses that are not within sewer basins and/or do not have as strong of access to major transportation corridors. The lack of these characteristics, however, generally make these sites lower cost and can provide opportunities for new businesses to evolve and grow. The county should proactively encourage the growth of local businesses in these unofficial “incubator” spaces, assisting rising entrepreneurs in building their networks of contacts and customers.

- **Concentrate retail into nodes and discourage additional strip commercial/corridor sprawl.** One of the hallmarks of suburban development is strip commercial development. Although some of this already exists in Barrow County, the county is still at a point in its growth in which it can prevent its corridors from becoming miles of strip malls. The future land use plan reflects a strategy of concentrating commercial, particularly retail, in key nodes, with an emphasis on supporting the charming historic downtowns of Winder, Auburn, and Braselton, and investing in strengthened downtown cores at Statham, Bethlehem, and Carl.
- **Maintain and enhance aesthetics of workplace developments.** To maintain and enhance the aesthetic among nonresidential developments throughout the county, metal, synthetic stucco (EIFS) and wood siding should continue to be allowed but shall not be used as the primary exterior building material. To further enhance the streetscape along the most heavily traveled areas, the same façade standards should apply to industrial uses along arterial streets particularly in the 316 Innovation Corridor and Destination 211.

### KEY ACTIONS

- Conduct a target industry strategy
- Expand/enhance infrastructure in target sites
- Begin a small business incubator program
- Revise materials requirements in the UDC for workplaces in the 316 Innovation Corridor and Destination 211



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### 6.4 Housing Strategy + Key Actions

Housing in Barrow County is a polarizing issue. In part due to rapid expansion of housing developments throughout the county in recent years, many community members want to limit the construction of additional housing as much as possible. However, technical planning analysis suggests a very clear need for a broader range of housing types, ranging from smaller, more affordable units to higher end, suburban-style neighborhoods for families with higher incomes.

#### STRATEGIES

- **Update the UDC to promote attainable housing and accommodate diverse housing options throughout the county.**
  - **Add a new higher density residential zone, R-4.** This zone should allow density up to 12-16 dwelling units per acre, require landscape screening where adjacent to lower intensity residential districts, and high-quality landscaping along the front property line. Lot area and setback requirements for this multi-family zone can remain as currently defined in the UDC, but the county should consider establishing a minimum density in this area (such as 6 units per acre) and a low minimum unit size such as 600 square feet.
  - **Revise R-3 and R-2 zones.** Consider reducing the minimum lot size of R-3 to 8,000 square feet for single family detached homes and duplexes, and revising R-2 to match the current standard of R-3. Additionally, minimum floor areas for these zones should be reduced from 1,600 square feet to 1,000 square feet in R-3 and 1,300 square feet in R-2 or similar.
- **Allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) by right in all neighborhoods as long as allowed in private covenants.** This is a way to gradually diversify the housing stock and add to the housing supply. Regulations can be drafted to allow ADUs in the form of in-law units, granny flats, garage conversions, or as a backyard cottage unit.
- **Consider adding more flexibility in the townhouse development design** and remove the minimum personal outdoor space immediately adjacent to the unit that is required by the UDC for developments that include at least 25 dwellings when the recreation amenities are required.
- **Proactively prepare for increased housing demand from eastern Gwinnett County.** Just over the border from Barrow County, Gwinnett County is actively laying the foundation for a keystone development, Rowen. As currently envisioned, Rowen is a planned innovation and employment hub projected to bring over 18,000 jobs to the area by 2035. With those new jobs will come increased demand for housing, with likely spillover of this demand in eastern Barrow County. The time to plan and prepare for this increase in housing demand is now, with the consideration of transportation and sewer infrastructure being particularly important, as well as parks and schools.
- **Leverage public land to increase housing diversity and development.** In areas slated for targeted housing density, the county should identify county-owned land suitable for housing development, particularly for senior housing. Either through land donation or a partnership with a developer, a county-sponsored housing development is a way to provide needed housing at more affordable prices, exhibit best

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practices for housing diversity unique to Barrow, and encourage developers to replicate this approach.

- **Use infrastructure improvements to guide and encourage housing growth.** While the 316 Innovation corridor character area is the top priority, the county should also prioritize sewer expansion and transportation capacity improvements in Employment/Industrial areas and then Traditional Residential areas.
- **Conduct a housing assessment.** The county's housing situation is complicated and requires more in-depth study to better understand housing market gaps and needs. The high-level analysis identified gaps for lower-income and higher income buyers. Because of the shortage of higher-priced homes, higher income buyers "buy down the ladder, reducing supply for middle income buyers. A county-wide housing assessment should dig into the details of these shortages and identify specific action items to address these housing gaps.
- **Build internal capacity and devote resources to address housing needs.** Housing is a complex issue and requires dedicated staff and resources to addressing the issues. To start, a dedicated county staff person should manage and implement the county-wide housing assessment. Ultimately, the county should consider creating a Barrow County Housing Authority. A Housing Authority would allow the county to qualify for federal and state housing grant programs as well as develop its own housing at affordable prices, particularly for its growing senior population.

### KEY ACTIONS

- Revise residential standards in zoning code
- Expand/enhance infrastructure in 311 Innovation Corridor and Traditional Residential areas
- Conduct a housing assessment

## Chapter 6

### 6.5 Parks and Recreation Strategy + Key Actions

One of the areas with the strongest community support is in expanding the existing system of parks, recreation, and open space.

#### STRATEGIES

- **Invest in a Parks and Recreation System Master Plan.** There is a need for more detailed study of the county's parks and recreation needs. The preliminary analysis in this comprehensive planning process suggests a need for at least two, and possibly three more community-level parks to serve areas beyond central Barrow County. A Parks and Recreation System Master Plan would further evaluate these needs; provide guidance on preliminary facilities for these parks; and consider various models for developing a more robust, sustainable system of recreation programming.
- **Begin planning for the Apalachee River Greenway.** The Apalachee River is arguably the most important natural resource in Barrow County. It not only serves as an essential part of the County's wastewater system, it is a key opportunity for expanding access to natural resources. Working with Gwinnett County and the Northeast Georgia Regional Planning Commission, Barrow County should begin to actively pursue planning of this important greenway, evaluating options for conservation of land around the river and opportunities for public access.
- **Consider SPLOST funding for future parks.** To expand the parks system, significant funding will be needed. One of the most effective ways neighboring counties have paid for their parks system improvements is through passing a SPLOST that

includes parks projects, as opposed to the TSPLOST that just funds transportation projects.

#### KEY ACTIONS

- Invest in a Parks and Recreation System Master Plan
- Begin coordinating for planning the Apalachee River Greenway



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### 6.6 South Barrow Strategy + Key Actions

Southern Barrow County has struggled most acutely in the past five years to match infrastructure with rapid growth. The following strategies and key actions are recommended to help better align growth with infrastructure capacity.

#### UNINCORPORATED BARROW COUNTY STRATEGIES

- **Prioritize infrastructure investments in south Barrow.** The county should continue to invest in infrastructure in south Barrow; in particular, there is a need to capture remaining opportunities to build a better, more connected system of local roadways. The current system of rural roadways will not be adequate—even if widened—to serve the ongoing development in this area.
- **Continue investment and expansion of the innovation campus.** Just off of Highway 53, the Lanier-Technical College Winder-Barrow Campus, Innovation Amphitheatre, the Sims Academy of Innovation and Technology, and the Barrow Arts and Science Academy have formed a new core intent on developing the county’s workforce to support innovative businesses. These facilities are located immediately south of large tracts of land owned by the Winder Barrow Industrial Building Authority; projects developed on this land should be designed and built with the intent of creating a cohesive innovation campus.
- **Pursue opportunities for additional park space.** Southern Barrow County currently has no large public parks. As part of the recommended Parks and Recreation System Master Plan, acquiring land for parks in south Barrow should be a priority, including beginning the creation of a more formalized Apalachee River Greenway.

- **Formalize new “node” at Hwy 53 and Abbott Rd.** One way to reduce roadway congestion is to try shorten the daily trips people are making on a jurisdiction’s roadways. Having small, commercial nodes to serve residents in emerging residential areas can help reduce traffic by preventing the need for longer trips up to 316 and farther away, established commercial centers like Barrow Crossing. One example of an opportunity for this is at the intersection of Highway 53 and Abbott Road, where several new housing developments have recently been built or are underway at a considerable distance from the nearest retail center.

#### TOWN OF BETHLEHEM STRATEGIES

- **Strengthen the heart of Bethlehem.** As a small jurisdiction right in the line of direct growth pressure, Bethlehem is highly vulnerable to losing its small-town character. The Town of Bethlehem should apply to the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) to create a focused plan on how to strengthen its historic core, attract business, and help reduce congestion issues on its roadways.

#### KEY ACTIONS

- Evaluate opportunities to expand the local roadway network
- Create a master plan for the innovation campus
- From roadway network study, begin ROW acquisition for expansion of local roadway network
- Apply to the LCI program to study downtown Bethlehem

## Chapter 6

### 6.7 Small Town Strategies + Key Actions

Like the Town of Bethlehem, both the Town of Carl and the City of Satham have opportunities to strengthen their individual identities.

#### TOWN OF CARL

- **Establish mechanism for administering planning and zoning services.** Until recently, Barrow County provided planning and zoning services for the Town of Carl. The agreement for these services has run out, and the Town is currently in need of a staffing solution to address land use; the Town should consider hiring an “on call” contractor for these services, or discuss potential resources for planning support with NEGRC.
- **Work with Barrow County on a long-term plan for sewer service.** If the Carl community wants to grow and upgrade its amenities, sewer infrastructure will be necessary. The Town should continue to discuss sewer service possibilities with Barrow County.
- **Invest in core blocks at Carl Bethlehem Road, US 29, and Carl-Midway Church Road/Carl Cedar Hill Road.** Unless sewer is extended to Carl, large-scaled investment and development is unlikely. In the interim, Carl should focus on improvements to its main intersection at US 29, and aesthetic improvements to the small parcels located at the confluence of Carl Bethlehem Road, US 29, and Carl-Midway Church Road/Carl Cedar Hill Road.

#### CITY OF SATHAM

- **Develop a Strategic Plan.** With growth on the horizon and changes to 316’s access, the City of Satham would benefit from a focused planning effort for its next 5 to 10 years. A strategic plan should clearly identify a community vision and goals, as well as outline the actions required to make progress on these goals.
- **Invest in core downtown blocks and discourage corridor-style commercial sprawl.** One of Satham’s most important assets is its classic “small town” downtown core. This core could be significantly strengthened by streetscape investments, façade improvements, and enhanced public space. Given the lack of a strong market for retail and commercial uses, it would also benefit from the City discouraging retail uses from sprawling along its corridors and instead concentrating in the center. One important consideration is where to try to attract a grocery store in the future—a small footprint grocer, like an Aldi or a Lidl, could be appropriate near the downtown to bring more foot traffic nearby and help expand the potential customer base of small businesses.
- **Invest in a green belt.** In advance of the expected growth in Satham, the City should consider planning a green belt to better define the core of Satham, and provide a long-term opportunity for residents to enjoy natural space close to home.

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### KEY ACTIONS

#### *Town of Carl*

- Hire a planning contractor

#### *Town of Statham*

- Conduct a Strategic Planning process



### 6.8 Collaboration Strategy + Key Actions

This comprehensive plan update was conducted during a period of discord between Barrow County and its largest jurisdiction, the City of Winder. Many community members expressed deep concern for this rift, and communicated a strong desire for resolution and cooperation going forward. While this particular issue is being resolved through the judicial process, there are other strategies and actions that can help mend relationships between the jurisdictions.

- **Establish mechanism for all Barrow jurisdictions to come together and regularly plan in collaboration.** Barrow County should consider starting a land use working group in which all of its jurisdictions come together at a regular interval (ie: quarterly or twice per year) to discuss land use coordination and issues. When it is time to update comprehensive plans in 2028, all Barrow County jurisdictions should strongly consider a single joint plan.
- **Create a platform for community information and engagement.** Historically Barrow County was a smaller, close knit community. With growth and waves of newcomers, this fabric has become less tightly woven and the sense of community is perceived to be weaker. Barrow County should look into ways to create—or facilitate creating—an accessible clearinghouse for community information and interaction, such as an online hub.

### KEY ACTIONS

- Establish joint land use working group



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### 6.9 Community Work Program (CWP)

Community Work Programs are required by the State's standards for comprehensive plans. Essentially "a to-do" list for the next five years, this CWP contains the significant projects and initiatives to support implementation of this comprehensive plan. Note that this list is not inclusive of the final Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) project list, which was still in progress at the time of this study. The CWP table appears on the next pages.



*Spring Mountain Center headquarters groundbreaking in Barrow County. (Image Source: Main Street News)*

## Chapter 6

**TABLE 15. COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM**

PROJECT/INITIATIVE	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	AGENCY	FUNDING	ESTIMATED COST
<b>CROSS-ISSUE ACTIONS</b>								
Implement impact fees	X					BOC	n/a	n/a
Update the Unified Development Code	X	X				Planning + Comm Dev	General Fund	Staff time + \$150,000
<b>1. ALIGN INFRASTRUCTURE</b>								
Sewer capacity study and expansion plan	X					Public Works	TBD	TBD
Sewer extension to target 316 Innovation Corridor sites		X	X	X	X	Public Works	TBD	TBD
Continue coordination with GDOT on completing West Winder Bypass and 316 interchange projects	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation	n/a	Staff time
Coordinate with GDOT on traffic signal updates	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation	n/a	Staff time
Pursue TSPLOST	X					BOC	TBD	n/a
Annual road/bridge rehab/improvements	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation	LMIG/SPLOST	\$24,000,000
Miscellaneous sidewalk improvements	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation	LMIG/SPLOST	\$4,325,162
Bridge Replacement Projects from CTP	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation, GDOT	GDOT, LMIG, SPLOST	\$7,100,000
Roadway Rehabilitation and Resurfacing for Various Locations	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation	LMIG, SPLOST	\$24,000,000
Intersection Improvement Projects from CTP	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation, GDOT	GDOT, LMIG, SPLOST	\$29,204,042
Roadway Capacity and Widening Projects from CTP	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation, GDOT	GDOT, LMIG, SPLOST	\$25,000,000
Roadway Improvement Projects	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation, GDOT	GDOT, LMIG, SPLOST	\$19,000,000

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**TABLE 15. COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM (CONTINUED)**

PROJECT/INITIATIVE	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	AGENCY	FUNDING	ESTIMATED COST
316 Innovation Corridor sidewalks and bicycle facilities		X	X	X	X	Public Works, GDOT	TBD	TBD
Implement recurring items in the Upper Oconee Regional Water Plan	X	X	X	X	X	Public Works	n/a	Staff time
Continue development of the fire station location and deployment study	X	X				Fire/EMS	n/a	Staff time
Continue to research requirements needed to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)'s Community Rating System (CRS) program to potentially reduce flood insurance premium rates	X					Public Works	n/a	Staff time
<b>2. PRIORITIZE WORKPLACES</b>								
Develop Target Industry Strategy and identification of “best fit” sites	X					Economic Development	General Fund	\$75,000
<b>3. EXPAND HOUSING OPTIONS</b>								
Conduct a housing assessment	X					Planning and Community Development	TBD	\$20,000



**TABLE 14. COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM (CONTINUED)**

PROJECT/INITIATIVE	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	AGENCY	FUNDING	ESTIMATED COST
<b>4. INVEST IN PARKS AND OPEN SPACES</b>								
Complete Victor Lord Park expansion	X					Public Works	SPLOST	\$5,000,000
Develop a Parks, Recreation, and Trails Master Plan		X				Planning and Community Development	TBD	\$75,000
Begin implementation of Parks and Recreation System Plan			X	X	X	Planning and Community Development	TBD	SPLOST
<b>5. SOUTH BARROW PLANNING</b>								
Campus plan for innovation area			X			Economic Development	TBD	TBD
Apply for LCI funding for downtown Bethlehem Plan		X				Town of Bethlehem	TBD	\$20,000 (local match)
Bethlehem Citywide Roadway Resurfacing	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation	SPLOST, LMIG	\$2,034,012
Christmas Avenue and W Star Street			X	X	X	Transportation	SPLOST, LMIG	\$2,000,000
<b>6. TOWN OF CARL AND CITY OF STATHAM</b>								
Hire an as-needed planning consultant/engineer	X					Town of Carl	TBD	TBD
Town center sewer lines around US-29, Carl-Bethlehem Road, Carl-Midway Church Road, and Carl-Cedar Hill Road		X	X	X	X	Town of Carl	Grants and local funds	TBD
Carl Citywide Roadway Resurfacing	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation	SPLOST, LMIG	\$500,000
Atlanta Highway/SR 13 at Carl-Midway Church Rd/Carl Cedar Hill Rd Intersection Improvement		X	X	X	X	Transportation	SPLOST, LMIG	\$1,159,334
Develop a Strategic Plan	X					City of Statham	TBD	\$30,000
Downtown Connectivity Study	X					City of Statham	n/a	Volunteer/interest group
Statham Citywide Roadway Resurfacing	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation	SPLOST, LMIG	\$2,500,000

**TABLE 15. COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM (CONTINUED)**

PROJECT/INITIATIVE	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	AGENCY	FUNDING	ESTIMATED COST
Citywide Roadway and Pedestrian Safety	X	X	X	X	X	Transportation	SPLOST, LMIG	\$2,000,000
Hwy 211 and Atlanta Hwy Intersection Improvement		X	X	X	X	Transportation	SPLOST, LMIG	\$1,500,000
8 <sup>th</sup> Street, Atlanta Hwy, and Barber Creek Rd Intersection Improvement			X	X	X	Transportation	SPLOST, LMIG	\$1,500,000
Dooley Town Road and Atlanta Hwy			X	X	X	Transportation	SPLOST, LMIG	\$1,297,549
<b>7. IMPROVE COLLABORATION</b>								
Establish joint land use working grouping	X	X	X	X	X	Planning and Community Development	n/a	Staff time
Create community engagement platform	X					County Manager	TBD	Staff time
Explore implementation of a stand-alone Winder-Barrow MPO	X					County Manager, City of Winder	n/a	Staff time