



County
Effingham
Georgia

Effingham County



NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES



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INTRODUCTION

Chapter 110-12-1-.02 of the Georgia State Statutes requires local governments to evaluate its immediate needs and opportunities while addressing long-term goals. The method used to understand the needs and opportunities for Effingham County was through public engagement sessions focused on asking questions and providing activities. The results have helped support not only the short-term goals as identified by this chapter, but also the policy goals within the Future Land Use Element.

Effective public engagement and technical data analysis is paramount in identifying the needs and opportunities for a Comprehensive Plan. The public engagement plan centered around professionally accepted planning and visioning practices is what drives the goals within the plan. Stakeholder committee meetings, a public workshop, and a community engagement webpage with multiple interactive exercises were the cornerstones of the engagement plan.

The information provided was then analyzed and guided the description of needs and opportunities for the County.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public participation is the most critical component of any comprehensive planning project. There must be ample and diverse opportunities for public engagement participation. This is to ensure that citizens and stakeholders are aware of the project, understand the planning process, and have an opportunity to comment on the community's vision, goals, objectives, and policies.

There were multiple public input opportunities held during the planning process. Two of which were focused on the stakeholders, which included members of the County Commission, City officials, realtors, developers, residents, clergy, non-profit representatives, and design professionals. A workshop was held for the general public's input, which had strong online and in-person attendance. These forums were used to provide citizens and other stakeholders with the chance to offer input on the future of Effingham County. This included discussion on the County's regulations, development environment, and anticipated changes.

During the first stakeholder's meeting, the following items were brought up by the participants:

- A need for low-income housing construction and the prevention of low-income family displacement
- Temporary Zoning or Conditional Uses
- More opportunities for administrative approvals
- Infrastructure sustainability
- Future wastewater needs coordinated through the Comprehensive plan and on-going master planning efforts
- Transportation connectivity between developments as the community grows
 - The need for increased roadways
 - Wayfinding to support tourism
 - A need to focus on smart growth and to recognize the differences between Character Areas
- Consider tourism & development/economics as regional and leverage the location of Effingham
- A need for improved control of tax revenue payment collections
- Define community character
- Emphasis on preservation
- Industrial development – Challenge is wanting job creation & growth, with retaining character
- Limited options for local recreation activities, keeping people in a live, work & play environment

The first stakeholder's meeting was followed up with a public workshop.

The public engaged in two activities. The first was a short group discussion on land uses, as described below:

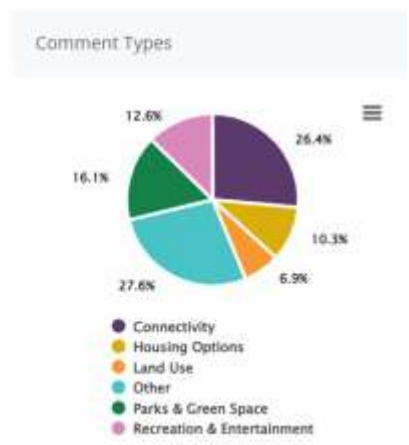
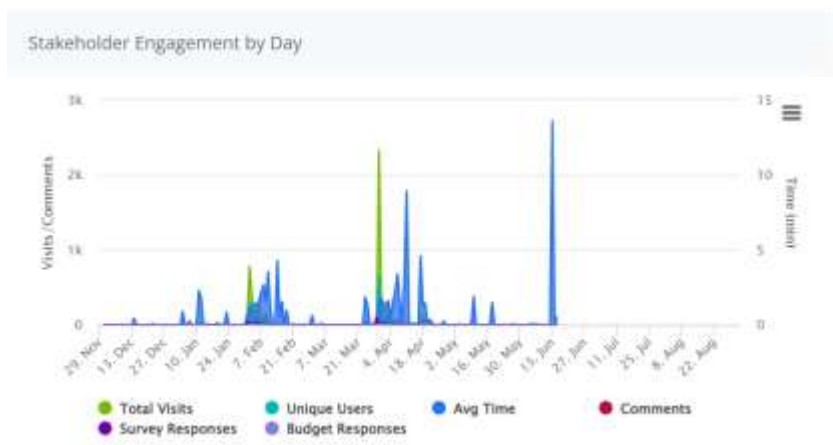
- Whether buffer requirements should be according to use rather than zoning
- Whether landscape area is equivalent to required green space
- Transition between industrial, residential areas, and schools; how are the latter uses being allowed between and around industrial complexes? Should the future land use map be adjusted to guide certain types of development towards more appropriate areas?
- The authority of the Industrial Authority versus the County's responsibility and limitations for zoning
- Effective methods of reducing industrial noise (distance buffer, or vegetation?)

- Whether underground utilities are permitted in buffers
- Enforcing a freeze on growth in the County; the moratorium on multi-family housing
- Removing land use decision power from County Commissioners
- A review is need of the brokerage agreement for the research tract (*Georgia Pacific Forest Research Tract, owned by ECIDA and being developed as Savannah Gateway Industrial Park*) regarding a warehousing versus manufacturing focus
- A need to prevent more warehouse construction due to a lack of net benefits, especially a lack of job opportunity increases
- Undelivered promises of water (infrastructure?)
- Methods of wastewater treatment need to be updated
- Swampland and trees being cleared for housing development - this is perceived negatively
- A need for high end jobs in manufacturing
- Land prices are increasing too quickly
- A need to attract kids to stay in Effingham County after they grow up
- School population sizes are growing too fast for the number of existing schools to keep up with

This was followed up with a voting activity. The public was provided numerous boards relating to character, design, and overall look & feel of development. The feedback from the meeting contributed to shaping the proposed changes to the land use districts as well as the understanding that additional attention was needed for the Character Areas.

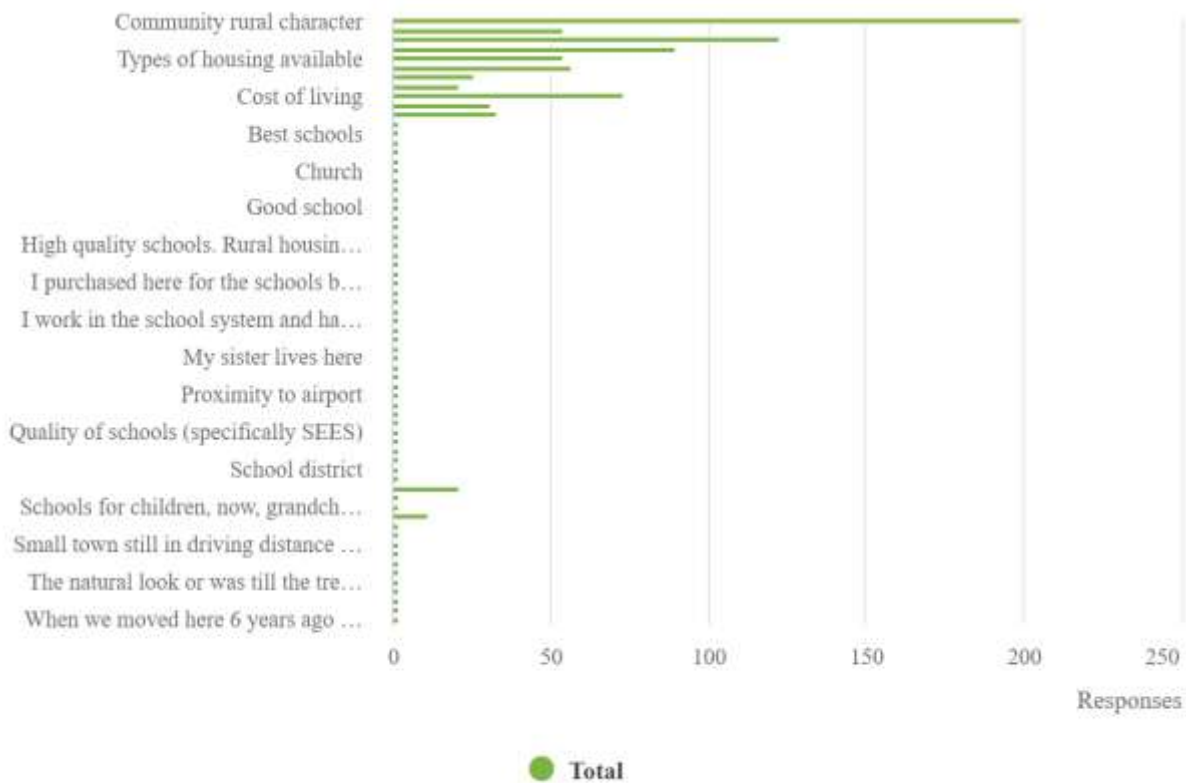
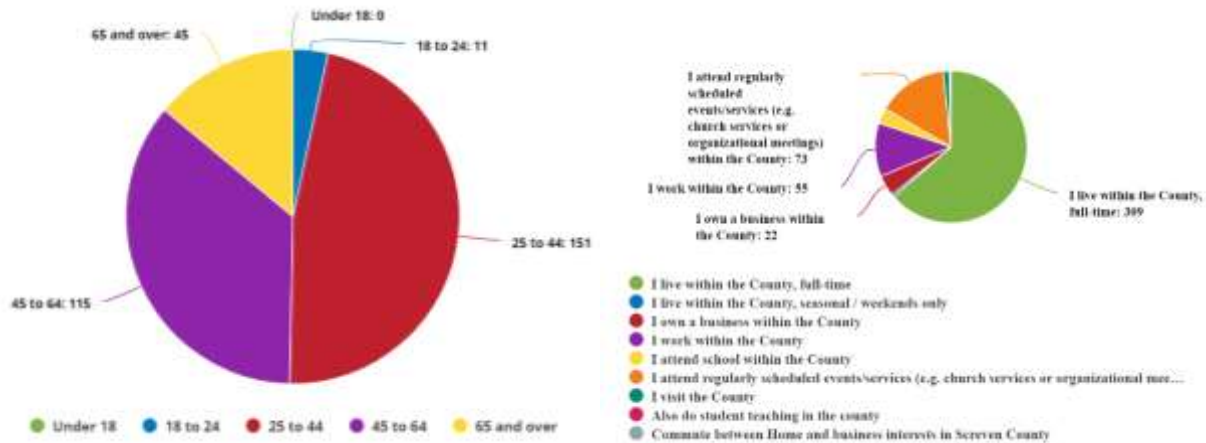
The second stakeholder meeting included a detailed evaluation of the proposed Character Areas, with the intention of integrating the feedback received into the proposed Character Area & Development Node map. The participants were instructed to answer specific questions relating to Character Area and Development Node characteristics. The results provided valuable and specific input to update the County's planning document assets.

In addition to the public meetings, an interactive website provided a platform for input throughout the project. The project website's public input activities included an interactive map and a survey. The survey explored the ideas and concerns regarding future development of Effingham County. The map allowed respondents to mark certain points on the County's map and add comments. A total of 322 people responded to the survey, and the map received 161 unique comments – many comments received several votes in support or against the comment.



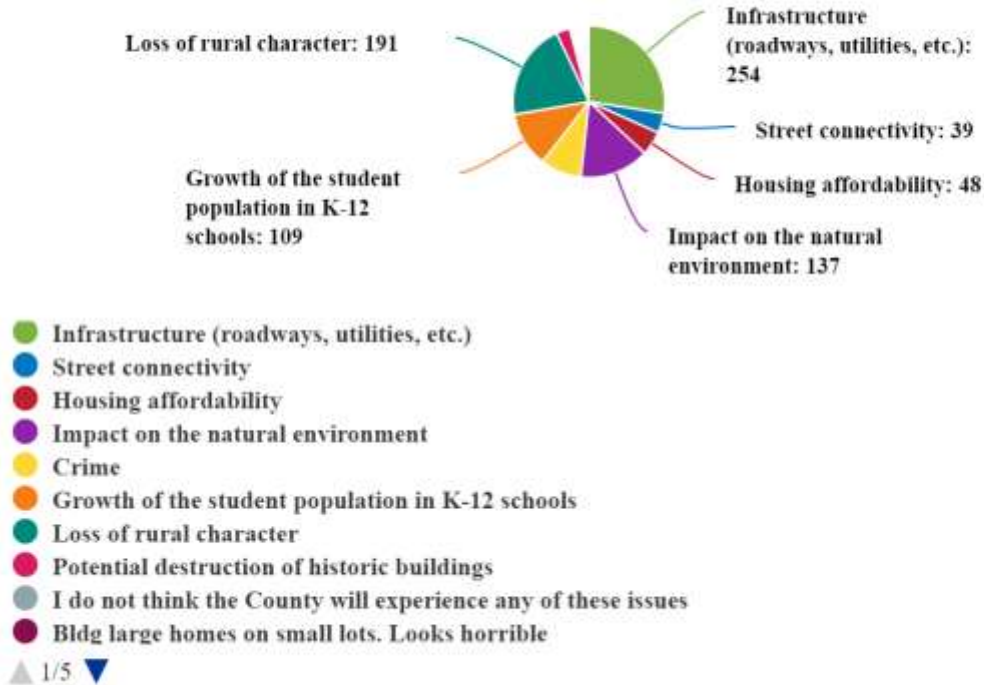
Respondent Demographics

Most of the survey respondents are residents, workers, and frequent visitors of Effingham County aged 25 to 44 and 45 to 64.



Future Concerns

In measuring the top Future Growth Concerns, the loss of the rural feeling, environmental impacts, growing K-12 school populations, infrastructure, and crime were the top five (5) concerns.

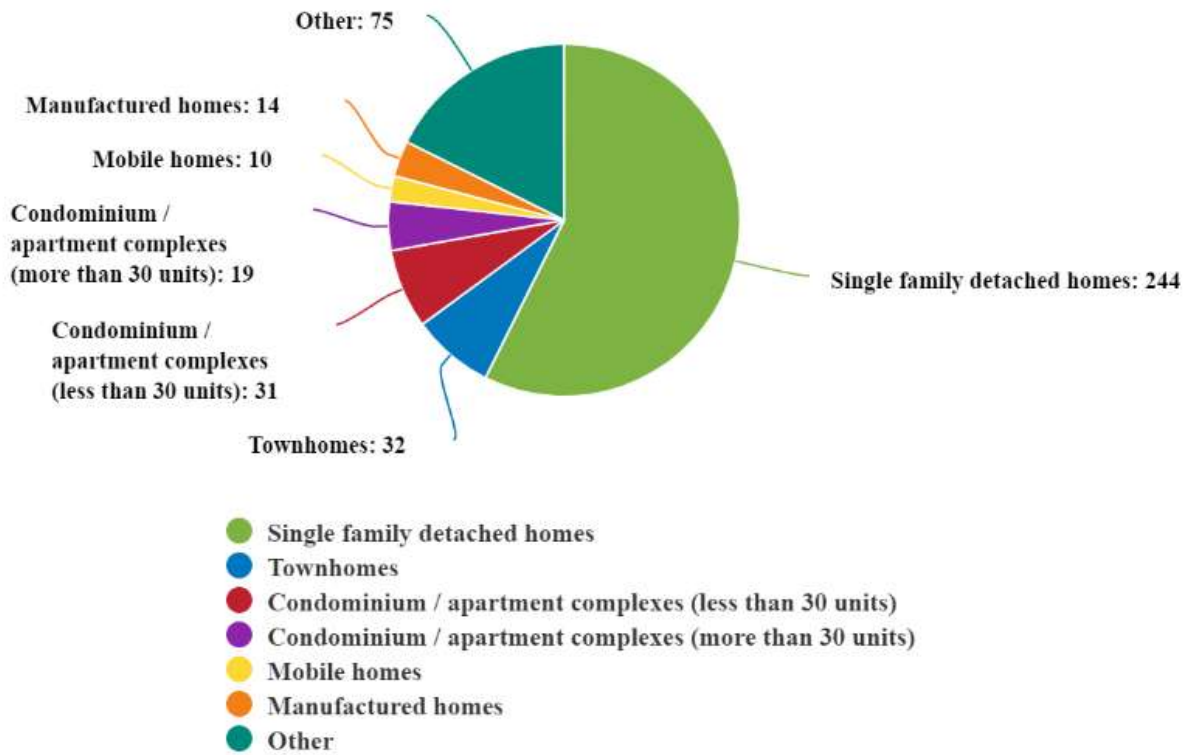


Housing

Even though the majority of survey respondents preferred single-family homes, nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that they were open to multi-family housing options such as townhomes, apartments, and condominiums. Based upon survey results, the location of multifamily housing development would be preferred in communities such as Springfield, Rincon, Guyton, Hodgeville, and southern parts of Effingham County near Chatham County. Housing affordability and workforce housing was marked at least "somewhat important" by the more than half of the respondents.



Housing Preferences

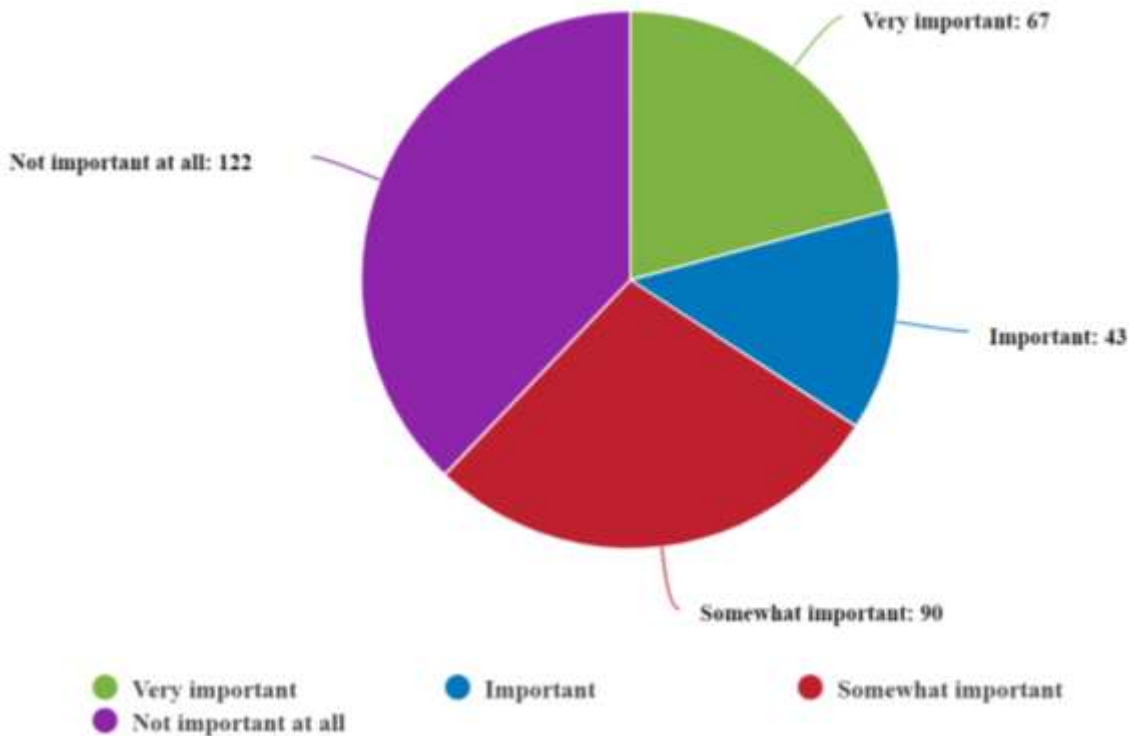


Multifamily Housing – Locational Preferences

Q16. 12. Where in the County would you like to see multifamily housing (ie, duplexes, apartments, condos, etc)? If you can, specify communities, intersections, or roadway corridors.



Housing Affordability/Workforce Housing



NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Like much of coastal Georgia, Effingham County is seeing significant growth. Residential projects, commercial development, and industrial activity as an offshoot from the Georgia Port have all come into the County with force. Residents looking for a more rural, affordable option with good access to industry and employment is a draw, as well as its beautiful natural resources. Residential housing at increased densities as well as warehouse logistics operations are creating challenges that the County is currently facing.

Over the last five years, Effingham has been seeing requests for denser multi-family units as well as a decline in owner-occupied housing units. The County wants to maintain the stability within its neighborhoods as well as providing housing options for its residents. However, design and maintenance concerns have affected multifamily housing, including townhouses. In an effort to continue supporting a variety of housing options, the County adopted regulations addressing concerns over the common areas and density.

The public engagement process identified three areas of focus for the residents of Effingham County. These three topics represent shared ideas and concerns that came out of the survey, meetings, and listening to public input:

Environmental Stewardship

Preserving Rural Character

Balanced Growth

The following Needs & Opportunities relate to those themes.

Strengths: Rural lifestyle, availability of preferred housing options, schools, and cost of living

Weaknesses: Job creation, truck traffic, lack of recreational options, limited transportation connectivity

Opportunities: Interest in providing more housing type options and mixed use, address the perception of lack of character in developed areas

Threats: As the County continues to development housing affordability will be impacted, infrastructure sustainability and limitations,

NEEDS	OPPORTUNITIES
Define all land uses to encourage development where appropriate and preservation where it is no. This includes updating current uses to categories and definitions that fit current trends	Create an updated Future Land Use Map to guide development based on available and proposed infrastructure (transportation, water, & sewer, and stormwater)
Provide a transitional category to accommodate mixed-use opportunities and act as a buffer between less intense commercial and industrial uses from heavier uses	Implement mixed-use opportunities through zoning strategies such as overlay districts and support of higher density and intensity of uses in these areas

Better define the purpose of each districts	Implement Character Districts with guidance on the types and style of development including nodes to further define character
Avoid sprawl and protect natural areas & wetlands	Focus growth towards areas with existing and proposed infrastructure and preserve areas without these amenities. Work with the incorporated areas as well as GDOT to understand the needs as well as future expansion of these amenities
Encourage more recreation and leisure amenities and businesses to provide the residents with local options to spend their downtime	Review zoning to ensure there are locations within the County that offer private investment that will allow residents to live, work, and play in Effingham County
Preserve farmland and support farmers	Coordinate with local farmers to have conversations around their industry. Support training programs to encourage advancement and continuation of farming in the County
Encourage green infrastructure	Review land development standards to ensure there are not limitations to green infrastructure
Provide connectivity to enhance pedestrian access	Create districts that include mixed-use and design standards that encourage walkability. Require sidewalks for new construction. Maintain the County's Transportation plan with a focus on ways to encourage connectivity between sites. Prepare standards within the ordinances that discourage additional curb cuts in an effort to avoid a break in the flow of pedestrian access