

2020 Comprehensive Plan
Executive Summary

A message to the residents of Oconee County

Oconee County has prepared a new Comprehensive Plan that guides the County's growth and development decisions over the course of the next 10 years. The Plan is required, by State law, to be revised every five years. It is a living document that should be updated regularly as conditions change and shifts occur in public policy.

Primary input for the Comprehensive Plan was developed with input from the residents. Over the course of seven months, nine public outreach meetings were held in all five voting districts. Approximately 500 citizens attended these meetings and 250 comments were received. Five surveys were included as supplements to the Upstate Journal which resulted in over 1,100 completed surveys with an additional 350+ survey comments. In short, the County reached out for citizen input using radio and newspaper advertisements. The following pages describe the results of public participation that informed and guided this planning document.

The Comprehensive Plan is the County's principle guiding or vision document designed to formulate a coordinated, long-term planning program to maintain and enhance the managed growth and viability of the County. The Plan lays out the desired future for the County and relates how that future is to be achieved. It serves as a resource to both the public and private sector by projecting how land will develop, housing needs met, training developed to attract businesses with well compensated jobs, how recreational interests are developed while protecting the environment, and how public services and facilities will be provided and improved.

The County will use the Comprehensive Plan in the following ways:

- **Goals, Objectives, and Strategies**

The Comprehensive Plan provides objectives and strategies that guide short term actions to reach long term goals. These strategies, which are reflections of County values identified through public outreach efforts, will be used as guidelines in the analysis of managing growth and other capital investment decisions.

- **Future Land Use Map**

The Future Land Use Map shall be referenced in making managed growth and capital investment decisions. It provides a representation of the County's vision helping to guide development based on citizen input, development needs and preferences and indicates areas where various types of land uses should be encouraged to grow.

- **Implementation Plan**

The Executive Summary includes an Implementation Plan that will direct public investment and private initiative: Plan implementation is carried out through the adoption or revision of ordinances and through the completion of projects and programs outlined in the goals, objectives and strategies sections.

A call to action

This is a dynamic time for Oconee County. Rapidly changing technology, national demographic shifts, and changing market preferences are reshaping our county. Many of the changes Oconee County has experienced over the last decade present daunting challenges. But at the same time, the County has had successes addressing needs and cultivating its unique assets. The Plan's recommended actions include more visionary efforts to address our challenges and build upon our assets.

Challenges to Overcome:

- ☐ Stagnant workforce growth
- ☐ Transportation Infrastructure planning for cars, bikes, and pedestrians
- ☐ Need for more higher paying careers.
- ☐ Lack of emphasis on training for skilled jobs
- ☐ Critical shortage of affordable & obtainable housing
- ☐ Shortage of housing and planning for housing and care for our aging population
- ☐ Limited internet availability
- ☐ Divided population regarding managing growth
- ☐ Limited entertainment options

Assets to Build On:

- ☐ Growth Region
- ☐ I-85 corridor
- Clemson University and Tri- County Technical College
- ☐ Retirement communities
- ☐ Agricultural areas
- ☐ Mountain, lakes, and rivers
- Strong light-industry base
- Geographic placement and mild climate
- Quality tourist-areas
- Quality K-12 education
- Recreational activities - biking, hiking, boating

How to measure progress

The many strategies in the Comprehensive Plan vary widely by their very natures. Some are relatively easy to measure; while others are more complex and subjective, reflecting such words as “encourage”, “leverage” or “promote.” Consequently, there is no single uniform system of measuring the success of all these strategies. As progress of a strategy is identified, regular updates will be made to the County Council. Once experience is gained completing a strategy, the lessons learned will be adapted to the remaining similar strategies.

How can citizens become involved

The foundation of the Comprehensive Plan rests on input from the County’s citizens. Once the plan has been accepted by the County Council, the Planning Commission will begin addressing the goals, objectives and strategies that fall within their purview. Other boards, committees and commissions, along with the County Council will address other identified priorities. Continued input from citizens and nongovernmental organizations will be critical to success. This can be accomplished by attending and speaking at meetings of the Planning Commission or County Council. Additionally, making written comments to these groups, meeting with Commission members, or any combination of these means is encouraged. Meeting dates and times of these groups can be found on the county’s web site: oconeesc.com

Who we heard from

The Comprehensive Plan is revised based on citizen input. To encourage citizens to attend upcoming meetings, newspaper advertisements and radio announcements were used. Nine public outreach meetings were held in all five voting districts. Approximately 500 citizens attended these meetings and we received over 250 comments. Additionally, five newspaper inserts were published with surveys to 10,000 addresses, of which 1187 surveys were returned with an additional 350+survey comments. There were 14 initial focus-group meetings held with stakeholders representing industry, business, environmental, social and community groups. Additional meetings were held with 15 interested stakeholder groups. Multiple emails were received from individuals and groups. Lastly, there were 20 planning commission meetings dedicated in whole or in-part to the Comprehensive Plan process.

What we heard

The topics listed below are some of the primary concerns we heard from the citizens and citizen groups during the planning process. The comments that received the most attention are listed and grouped under the general topic. These were identified based on citizen input and are not intended to be in a ranked order.

- **Transportation:**
 - Build a road system for the future
 - Improve maintenance of existing road system
 - Bicycle & pedestrian infrastructure incorporated and expanded into our transportation system
 - Rural transportation options including expansion of CAT bus service
- **Jobs:**
 - Rewarding sustainable careers and jobs
 - Workforce development efforts on "skills for the future"
 - Technical or "Blue-Collar" job training is every bit as important as "White-Collar" job training
- **Housing:**
 - Affordable and obtainable
 - Aging in place with a proximity to services
 - Reduce housing and property blight
- **Law Enforcement:**
 - Increased law enforcement presence
 - Substations in rural areas
 - Increased monitoring and enforcement of safe-driving laws
- **Natural Resources:**
 - Protect lakes, mountains and natural beauty
 - Protect drinking water supply
 - Ordered growth and buffers around these areas
 - Preserve rural view

- **Plan for Future:**
 - Increase availability of high-speed internet access countywide
 - Managing growth and protection for agricultural, commercial, community and residential development
 - Sewer expansion
 - Offer youth opportunities for personal and professional growth
 - **Tourism:**
 - Promote tourism
 - Expand/maintain parks and recreational sites
 - Promote shopping and sit-down restaurants.
 - Review fee structure for sites and how those fees are distributed throughout the County and municipalities
 - Expand entertainment options
 - **Quality Development:**
 - Encourage citizen participation in process
 - Manage sprawl
 - Develop design standards and incentive to encourage
 - Major Corridor standards for safety and aesthetics
 - Facilitate municipality development
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Elements

Each element is addressed listing objectives or strategies most commonly mentioned by citizens or citizen groups during the creation of the Plan. These were identified based on the frequency of citizen input and are not intended to be in a ranked order. The numbers represent an objective or strategy found in that element. The text following the number is a brief summary of the related objective or strategy.

The Comprehensive Plan is comprised of an Executive Summary, 10 Elements, or chapters, and an appendix of community input. These 10 Elements are:

1. Executive Summary
2. Population
3. Housing
4. Transportation
5. Community Facilities
6. Cultural Resources
7. Economic
8. Natural Resources
9. Priority Investment
10. Agricultural
11. Land Use

The numbering system is *Element.Goal.Objective.Strategy* For example; 2.2.2.2 is Population Element, Goal two, objective two, strategy two

Population:

- a) 2.1.2.4/2.2.2 ☐ Coordinate and develop programs with available agencies for quality education to include advanced training.
- b) 2.1.2/2.1.2.3/7.3.1.4 ☐ Seek opportunities for entertainment and recreation options for young adults and families.
- c) 2.2.1 ☐ Ensure access to adequate health care and preventative services.

- d) 2.3.1 ☐ Coordinate planning efforts among the county, municipalities and neighboring jurisdictions.

Housing:

- a) 3.1.2/3.1.2.2 ☐ Encourage housing development that will allow residents to ☐age-in-place☐ such as higher density, multi-family, assisted living and nursing facilities.
- b) 3.2.1.2/3.2.1.3 ☐ Develop housing options that are affordable for low- and middle-income families.
- c) 3.2.2.1 ☐ Expand water and sewer facilities for new residential development.
- d) 3.1.1.1 ☐ Development of a range of housing types to include single-family, multi-family developments and manufactured homes.

Economic development:

- a) 4.3.1.1/4.3.1 ☐ Promote the development of downtown retail and commercial markets.
- b) 4.3.2.4 ☐ Improve high speed internet access to all areas of the County.
- c) 4.1.1.3 ☐ Continue to develop the I-85 industrial corridor.
- d) 4.3.2.1 ☐ Support small business start-up and expansion and assist in clearing key steps in the development process.

Cultural resources:

- a) 5.1.1/5.1 ☐ Emphasize the importance of the historic and cultural resources of the County thru plans and ordinances.
- b) 5.3.1.1/5.3.2.3 ☐ Develop and promote tourism and recreation.
- c) 5.2.2.4 ☐ Encourage volunteer involvement in cultural programming and civic groups.
- d) 5.1.2.4 ☐ Explore the reuse of the Utica Mill site.

Natural resources:

- a) 6.2.4.4 ☐ Promote programs to discourage littering; encourage litter pickup programs; review ordinances for littering.
- b) 6.2/6.2.1/6.2.3 ☐ Preserve, protect and enhance County's land resources.
- c) 6.2.3.1/6.2.3/6.2.4.3 ☐ Protect natural resources for recreational uses and develop opportunities for recreational access.
- d) 6.3.3.1/6.3.4.2 ☐ Adopt measures for erosion and sediment control to preserve watersheds around lakes.

Community facilities:

- a) 7.2.1.3 ☐ Expand and upgrade library facilities.
- b) 7.3.1.4 ☐ Explore ways to increase recreational opportunities for residents of all ages.
- c) 7.3.1.3 ☐ Evaluate, amend, and implement recreation plans as necessary.
- d) 7.3.1.1 ☐ Develop a Countywide greenway system and connect existing parks to enable safe cycling routes.

Agriculture:

- a) 8.1.2.7 ☐ Promote farm stands and farmers markets in rural and urban areas.
- b) 8.1.1.2 ☐ Support collaboration between landowners and the public in the development of plans for preservation of farmland and forests.
- c) 8.1.1.5 ☐ Support state legislation that links incentives to continue farming with controls preventing conversion of agricultural land to non-farm uses.
- d) 8.3/8.3.1 ☐ Ensure access to healthy, fresh food.

Transportation:

- a) 9.2.1.2/9.2.1.1 ☐ Develop ongoing systematic road maintenance and upgrade program based on steady revenue sources.
- b) 9.3.2/9.3.2.1/9.3.2.2 ☐ Provide and maintain safe and accessible trails, sidewalks and bicycle lanes in appropriate areas.
- c) 9.2.1.7 ☐ Establish coordination and communication between local and state transportation departments.
- d) 9.2.1.4 - Limit curb cuts in high traffic areas.

Priority investment:

- a) 10.1.1 ☐ Plan for and prioritize public infrastructure and facility needs.
- b) 10.1.2.1 ☐ Encourage development that protects and preserves our natural resources.
- c) 10.1.2.9 ☐ Expand bicycle and pedestrian routes to allow for recreational and greater use of alternative forms of transportation.
- d) 10.1.2.3 ☐ Enhance access to affordable housing through both public and private cooperation.

Land use:

- a) 11.1.2.2. Coordinate urban/suburban development.
- b) 11.1.2.5. Use corridor overlays, design guidelines, and performance standards while respecting private property rights.
- c) 11.1.5.2. Work with developers and other public and private agencies and organizations to enable the revitalization of dilapidated and unsafe housing in declining residential areas.
- d) 11.1.4.3. Promote development consistent with the scenic character of S.C. Hwy. 11.

How to implement the Plan

Comprehensive Plan priorities should be an agenda item at the annual County Council strategic planning session. The County Administrator will present a priority list of Plan strategies, funding needed, progress goal timelines and estimated completion dates to County Council. These annual items for funding and completion will be taken directly from the Comprehensive Plan. Funding (and lead time for funding) is a critical component for priorities and will communicate to the citizens of the County that their priorities are being addressed each year, both objectively and financially.

Acceptance of priorities by County Council should be publicized to demonstrate the County's effort to address the citizens input to the Comprehensive Plan.

The County, along with other agencies, is listed in the Comprehensive Plan as an "Accountable Agencies". For the strategy to be effectively completed, all the listed agencies must devote the resources and cooperation to complete the strategy. It is the responsibility of the County staff (Administrator and department heads) to identify the individuals in these organizations who are accountable for "partnering" to accomplish the strategy.

The County Administrator should assign action items to department heads for coordination with the responsible individual in the "Accountable Agencies". The department heads should report at regular intervals on the expense status, timeline status of key goals and if help is needed with outside agencies.

The strategies noted as "On-Going" are projects, relationships and activities that should be reviewed by the planning commission and looked at dynamically and not held to a specific point in time. The strategies noted as "Annually" are projects, relationships and activities that may be linked to other organization's timelines and may need to be addressed on a yearly basis by the planning commission.

The County Administrator should report progress to County Council on a regular basis as a part of the performance review process.

Consequences of inaction

- Loss of trust in government to respond to residents
- Missed opportunity to keep residents involved in long term planning
- Disillusionment by public after such a major public effort to revise the Comprehensive Plan
- Continued unmanaged sprawl with business/population growth
- Cost to correct problem increases with delay
- Perception that another study will go on the shelf
- Short term actions causing long term problems