

1. Community Goals

The purpose of the Community Goals Element is to lay out a road map for the future of Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald; to generate local buy-in to the plan; and to ensure that the plan is implemented. Communities are encouraged to amend and update the goals as necessary.

- Goal 1: Protect, preserve, and promote the historic and cultural resources of Ben Hill County through such measures as regulations, adaptive reuse, and tourism and education programs focused on historic preservation.
- Goal 2: Improve the Ben Hill County economy by developing and enhancing new and existing strengths that will draw new business, expand existing businesses, diversify the local economy, and help Ben Hill County compete in the regional economy.
- Goal 3: Provide opportunities for homeownership and housing resources for all residents of Ben Hill County through public/private partnerships.
- Goal 4: Conserve and protect the functions and values of the natural resources of Ben Hill County for future generations' appropriate use and enjoyment.
- Goal 5: Ensure the highest quality living environment possible through a mixture of compatible land uses and character areas reflecting the needs and desires of the local residents and their vision for Ben Hill County. This goal shall be implemented through strict enforcement of the zoning ordinances and building codes, based on the objectives and policies that follow.
- Goal 6: Ensure that needed community facilities such as water, sewer, solid waste, police, fire, and EMS are provided in an effective, environmentally sound, safe, and economic system, consistent with present demand and future growth.
- Goal 7: Provide a safe and efficient transportation system which addresses the future needs of Ben Hill County for movement of people and freight, while taking into consideration the social, economic, energy, and environmental effects of that transportation system.

Consider adding a health care goal.

2. Issues and Opportunities

The Issues and Opportunities listed in this section were developed through discussions with stakeholders and residents; from the experiences of stakeholders and residents; through analysis of statistical data and information; and through review and revision as applicable of the issues and opportunities identified in the Greater Ben Hill County 2031 Comprehensive Plan. Each of the following issues and opportunities is addressed by corresponding policies in the "Community Policies" section.

Development Patterns - Housing

Issues

- Vacant parcels downtown
- Clearing of housing debris
- The area needs more diversity in housing choices
- The current zoning ordinance was developed in 1980 and was more of a boilerplate ordinance that does not meet the current needs of the community **revisit**
- **There is too much government-subsidized and low-income housing**

Opportunities

- Eliminate slum/blighted old homes to create new affordable housing

- Provide a diversity of housing choices in various geographic locations in the county
- Continue successful demolition program that demolished 300 blighted homes and constructed 450 new homes **update numbers**
- Continue downtown façade renovation program which has so far renovated 30 facades
- Continue to support Habitat for Humanity Fitzgerald/Ben Hill Affiliate, which has built 3 homes so far and **has 1 more home under construction**
- Utilize the domino effect of restoration and renovation to bring in new life to investments and increased revenues
- Continue to encourage redevelopment through private/public partnerships.
- **Promote Ben Hill County and Fitzgerald as a retirement community**

Development Patterns - Land Use

Issues

- The county's small size requires that development needs to concentrate on quality of land use rather than quantity in order to create higher land values and growth to the tax digest
- Need to plan to minimize incompatible uses
- The area needs more dining and entertainment uses
- There is a need to instill more pride in the citizens of this county and to increase beautification efforts in the area
- The area needs more shopping and commercial activity
- **Blighted strip malls**

Opportunities

- Utilize more Planned Developments **revisit**
- Improve planning for residential subdivisions – define where they are needed and most suitable
- Direct the growth to where water and sewer lines are located
- Collaboration by the City and County to plan for future utilities
- Maintain the rural quality of life
- Review and update the zoning regulations to fit the City and County better than the current ones

Resource Conservation - Cultural Resources

Issues

- Continual upkeep and rehabilitation of historical and cultural resources is needed

Opportunities

- The City of Fitzgerald is a name brand for historic resources
- The Arts Council is very active
- The Grand Theatre and its relationship to the Fox Historic Theatre Group
- The Carnegie Center
- The Chicken Festival
- The Grand Homecoming is a weeklong traditional event which occurs every three years. It is a homecoming reunion of the African-American Community.
- Blue & Gray Museum
- Bryant Theological Seminary
- Evergreen Cemetery (includes burial site of original founder of the City of Fitzgerald)
- Fitzgerald Cemetery
- Westwood Cemetery
- Kiokee Cemetery
- Grand Theatre Barton Organ Society installation of historic 1926 Barton Theatre Organ
- Encourage and promote participation in the Georgia Civil War Heritage Trails program
- Regional cultural coordination with such area attractions as the Tifton Agrirama

- Currently archaeological research is being conducted on a campsite of Hernando DeSoto along the Altamaha River
- **Involve the Arts Council in preservation activities**
- **Hominy Jubilee**
- **Pig Pickin' Festival**
- **St. Patrick's Day Air Show**
- **Blues Festival**

Resource Conservation - Natural Resources

Issues

- The natural resources in the county are not sufficiently marketed
- Mixing private and public rights of using the river shorelines
- Lack of "No Polluting" education and awareness for recreational users of the local rivers
- Lack of marketing of agricultural and natural resources of the county

Opportunities

- Ben Hill County has a good supply of ground/drinking water
- Create a long range utility plan to protect groundwater sources
- Ocmulgee River
- Bird Viewing Area behind the Hospital
- Promote the use of Paulk Park, including the wetlands walking trail and the bird sanctuary
- Hunting Land
- There are several Wildlife Management Areas that are in driving distance
- Promote the two Wildlife Preserves of Horse Creek and Mobley Bluff
- Promote the use of existing public fishing docks
- Investigate the potential for an Agricultural Arena to promote the area's agricultural resources
- **Food processing water treatment plants**

Community Facilities and Services

Issues

- Water and sewer line expansions are needed in the county
- SR 107 needs to be four-laned as the main access to I-75
- The area lacks recreation opportunities for young people, especially teenagers
- The area lacks transportation opportunities for transportation disadvantaged residents **revisit**
- **Railroad line is at capacity**

Opportunities

- Create a long range utility plan to protect groundwater sources
- Ben Hill County has a large water capacity
- Ben Hill County has water and sewer lines in place for future development
- Continue to maintain and improve the existing EMS services
- **Review the Emergency Plan**
- There is a good quality school system
- There is a good quality education system
- Create an assessment survey for public transportation (**ongoing**)
- Provide a public transportation system
- The airport is an asset for the community
- Senior citizens' center is state of the art
- The railroad spur connections are good for the area
- **Investigate opportunities for an inland port**

- Investigate opportunities for freight connections to the Port of Brunswick

Economic Development (This section still needs to be reviewed and updated)

Issues

- The county is not retaining its young people
- Young families are not attracted by the pay structure and are therefore moving out of the county
- Loss of the locally educated workforce
- Increased promotion of the Hospital is needed, in order to attract more retirees to the area
- Growth and development have slowed considerably due to the economic situation
- Most jobs have low-paying salaries
- High unemployment rate
- The City and County do not have enough tax revenue
- The area is not retaining or attracting enough young professionals
- The area needs more commercial retail facilities
- The hospital has financial problems and steps need to be taken to keep the hospital operating in the area to preserve a minimum quality of life
- The State has a misconception of the area and its needs, especially when federal funds are passed through the State

Opportunities

- The area, with its slower pace and peace, can be promoted as a good retirement area
- Attract more technology industry with higher salaries
- Provide more support and development for agriculture (ag-economy)
- Increase & improve public education to create a better workforce
- Continue the Literacy Program (certified literacy community)
- Work Ready Program
- Increase recruitment of businesses, especially biomass or other alternative energy/fuel industry
- Expand the tax digest by attracting more business and increasing property values
- Attract emergency housing construction industry
- Utilize the airport to attract more industry and better workforce
- Create a technology center to provide assistance to area businesses
- Utilize and improve on the existing timber, cotton, and soybean industries
- Encourage the local banks to offer their good mortgage programs
- City and County are entrepreneurial friendly
- Promote the area as a sportsman's paradise
- Retain the hospital to attract business
- Promote the area's quality school system, from Pre-K to College
- Promote the area's planted pine timber industry
- Promote the area's easy railroad access
- Promotion of Millennium Technology Pointe Park adjacent to ECTC/Wiregrass Tech

Governmental Relations

Issues

- The city and county need to work together to annex some properties
- The city, county, and school system need to work together better
- Relationships with neighbor to the south could be improved
- Increasing regionalization of services is a problem (longer commutes, loss of control over opportunities)
- Coordination with the State
- Consider consolidation/unification of services
- Educational opportunities need to be improved in order to prepare people for the workforce

- People need an incentive to become more educated

Opportunities

- Increased outreach to involve people and recruit volunteers
- Collaboration by the City and County to plan for future utilities
- The Community has good leadership
- The Mayor's and County Commissioners' offices have an open door policy
- Establish closer coordination with the Hospital Authority through a hospital agreement.
- Establish a dialogue with Tift County and Coffee County (City of Tifton and City of Douglas) to coordinate services in ways that eliminate duplication of services and encourage services to complement each other
- Education forum
- Through coordinated efforts, make the marginally employable and unemployable more employable.
- Ben Hill County Policy Council for families and children (Family Connection)
- Hope for Now is an educational organization that works to encourage students to stay in school