

# REGIONAL NEEDS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND PRIORITIES

RVRC staff together with the regional plan steering committee used information gathered from community comprehensive plans, from the online survey, from listening sessions held around the region, and from the steering committee meetings to develop the regional needs and opportunities. The RVRC Council then utilized an audience response system to vote on the needs and opportunities that they felt should be the priorities of the Commission during the next five years.

This section groups the identified needs and opportunities into eight (8) categories. Each category has an overarching regional policy followed by the list of needs and opportunities and, finally, by the highlighted priorities.

## Economic Development

To achieve a growing and balanced economy, consistent with the prudent management of the region's resources, that equitably benefits all segments of the population.

### Needs

- Lack of affordable housing
- Infrastructure deficiencies
- Lack of labor force training opportunities
- Lack of community amenities
- Vacant main streets, town centers and/or shopping
- Declining industries
- Lack of access to capital
- Flight of younger generation from the region
- Ineffective existing government
- A well trained workforce
- Access/proximity to markets
- Renewable energy potential
- Strong existing businesses
- Effective economic development organization
- Place-based economic incentives
- Technology/communications
- Quality local/regional school system
- Housing options

### Opportunities

- Transportation network
- Raw materials/natural resources
- Tourism assets
- Strong community leadership
- Local health care facilities
- Attractive, livable communities
- Available Land
- Tourism attractions, including agritourism
- Attractive quality of life
- Availability of water resources
- Access to transportation, air, highway, rail

## Regional Priorities

- Diversify and Strengthen the Region’s Economy.
- Provide Quality, Genuine Places and Experiences for Visitors.
- Train the Regional Workforce.

## Housing and Neighborhood Development

To ensure that all residents of the region have access to adequate and affordable housing.

### Needs

- More stick-built homes instead of mobile homes
- Dilapidated property (often heir property)
- Need a regional land bank
- Affordable housing in good shape
- Too few rental units
- Code enforcement
- Lack of jobs perpetuates substandard housing conditions
- Positive growth from BRAC
- Better job opportunities bring better housing options
- Lack of money
- Lack of people
- Lack of jobs
- Generational cycle of problems
- Lack of knowledge
- Absentee owners

### Opportunities

- Affordable
- Variety--Rental or Owner-occupied
- Character variety of neighborhoods within cities
- Land banks (Muscogee & Sumter)
- Good housing programs (Vienna)
- Land is reasonably priced
- Quality development of waterfront property around the region’s lakes
- Land bank
- Regional building inspector to improve condition of housing stock
- Cheap and vacant land
- Regional Housing Authority
- Reforestation opportunities
- Farm-to-table
- Rehab and demolition programs
- Code enforcement
- Homeowner education
- Housing programs
- GICH
- Partnerships with Habitat for Humanity

## Regional Priorities

- Provide Safe, Standard, and Affordable Housing Options for All Residents of the Region.

## Community Facilities and Services

To ensure the provision of community facilities and services within the region to support efficient growth and development patterns that will protect and enhance the quality of life of the region's residents.

### Needs

- Age of infrastructure
- Small lots (prevent septic/well)
- Some places cannot afford public sewage, and not enough people to support
- Small local governments
- Non-participation
- No cooperation
- Lack of fiber optic network
- Lack of rural broadband
- Keeping membership in volunteer Fire Departments
- Lack of fire stations in some rural areas.
- Old sewer/water infrastructure
- Ems is challenged by hospital distance
- Education
- Decline in population
- Skewed demographics- large senior citizen population
- Lack of money
- Lack of education (Pre-K – 12)
- Lack of people
- Loss of federal money

### Opportunities

- Amount of natural gas
- Faith-based organizations
- Volunteer Fire Departments
- State Parks
- Andrew College
- SOWEGA STEM
- Lake Walter F. George
- Façade work in Richland
- Randolph County Welcome Center
- Purchasing of housing by hunters
- Broadband (rural; possibly EMC run)
- RV park
- Housing for hunters and families
- New programs at Andrew College
- Albany Tech

### Regional Priorities

- Improve Broadband/Internet Capacity.
- Improve Old or Inadequate Infrastructure Systems.
- Provide a Diverse Offering of Recreation Options for All Ages.

# Transportation System

To ensure the coordination of land use planning and transportation planning throughout the region in support of efficient growth and development patterns that will promote sustainable economic development, protection of natural and cultural resources and provision of adequate and affordable housing.

## Needs

- East to West linkages need help
- Rural transit connections
- Macon County = no four lane access
- Passing lanes on two lane
- Commuter rail
- Condition of rail lines
- Bridges
- Lack of usage of Pataula transit
- Signage on Hwy 27
- Condition of rail
- Lack of money
- State and National funding
- Stresses on existing infrastructure
- Lack of funds
- Cooperation among local governments and GDOT
- Prepare for new TSPLOST vote

## Opportunities

- Road network= good roads
- Easy access to airports
- Inland port
- Active rail lines
- North to South links= good
- Rural transit services
- I-185 and I-75
- Bike routes = Great
- Bus systems
- Every county covered by Safe Routes to School
- Pataula transit authority
- 4-lane of Hwy 27
- Commuter Rail
- T-SPLOST
- Vacant land around inland port
- Expand the bike routes
- Publicizing/marketing of transit routes and how to use it
- Bike/Pedestrian plan
- New signage

## Regional Priorities

- Road Maintenance and Expansion.
- Increase Awareness of Rural Transit Options.
- Support Continuation of a Regional TSPLOST.

# Natural Resources, Cultural Resources, and Land Use

To conserve and protect the environmental, natural and cultural resources of the region's communities ensuring efficient growth and development patterns that will promote sustainable economic development and provision of adequate and affordable housing.

## Needs

- Lack of infrastructure
- Lack of Code Enforcement
- Heir properties/ Absentee owners
- Absentee land owners
- Heir properties
- Lack of industrial parks
- Lack of sewer/water in groundwater recharge areas
- Lack of skilled workers for rehab of buildings
- Heir property/ Absentee owners
- Population decline
- Sprawl
- Rural areas
- Funding
- More engagement from local residents

## Opportunities

- Lots of land
- Inexpensive
- Variety of topography
- Beautiful viewsheds
- Unique downtowns= Revitalization
- State and National Parks
- Rivers
- Wildlife Areas
- Ag/Forestry (Weyerhaeuser)
- Arts council
- Art gallery
- Good historic buildings
- Historic preservation council in Randolph
- Festivals
- Regional Land Banks
- Regional Code Enforcements
- Housing
- Festivals/tourism
- Driving tours
- Rehab of historic buildings

## Regional Priorities

- Preservation of Prime Agricultural/Forestry Lands.
- Grow the Agricultural Resources in the Region.
- Protection of Groundwater Recharge Area/Aquifer.
- Maintain Environmental Integrity in the Region.
- Update Ordinances, Land Use Regulations, and Guidelines.
- Protection of Historic Neighborhoods and Buildings.

## Health and Human Services

To ensure that all regional residents, regardless of age, ability, or income, have access to critical goods and services, safe and clean neighborhoods, and good work opportunities. This may be achieved by providing services to support the basic needs of disadvantaged residents, including the disabled; instituting programs to improve public safety; promoting programs that foster better health and fitness; or otherwise providing all residents the opportunity to improve their circumstances in life and fully participate in the community.

### Needs

- Improve local Medical and Dental care
- Reduce, and where possible eliminate, high rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, gang and criminal activity, and abuse of prescribed and illicit drugs.
- The long-term decline in population and economic conditions along with the presence of hospitals in larger adjoining communities has contributed to the loss of access to local health care facilities.
- Lack of medical care services available after business hours in rural areas
- Increase public knowledge of Health and Wellness programming and activities in the region
- Increase public knowledge of Outpatient Dietitian services and Health and Wellness programming at regional clinics
- More partners and training for partners to reach senior citizens
- Recruitment of internal medicine and primary care providers to offer disease management
- Create fitness programs and opportunities for healthy activities and educate parents and children on exercise and healthy life choices
- Greater access to health department services; extended hours/expanded outreach

### Opportunities

- Emergency or Urgent Medical Care Facilities
- Existing health care infrastructure (SGRMC and West Georgia Public Health Department) for public health care and dietary programs
- Home health and transit services for the elderly
- Develop program/partners to perform minimum home repair/handicap ramps for senior citizens

### Regional Priorities

- Create a Statewide Focus on Reaching Underserved Persons.
- Expand Efforts to Support Individuals to Remain in Their Desired Residence as Long as Possible.
- Increase Professional Capacity of Georgia's Aging Network to Better Meet the Needs of Family Caregivers and At-Risk Adults.

## Educational Opportunities

Make educational and training opportunities readily available to enable all residents in the region to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, manage their finances, or pursue life ambitions. This can be achieved by expanding and improving local educational institutions or programs; providing access to other institutions in the region; instituting programs to improve local graduation rates; expanding vocational education programs; or coordinating with local economic development programs to ensure an adequately trained and skilled workforce.

### Needs

- Greater community support for strong tutoring and mentoring programs to keep children in school through graduation, subsequent completion of a technical and/or college education and promotion of GED
- The community has a poor perception of the quality of local education and as a result is not supportive of the system.
- There is a local need for additional secondary and post-secondary educational opportunities better tuned to local career training.
- Much of the adult population is not computer literate
- Increase education attainment levels and reduce the dropout rate
- Coordination of program initiatives with local colleges and universities
- Continue to support the GED program
- Encourage parental involvement in schools by assisting the Boys and Girls Club, Family Connections and other civic organizations
- Established workforce training programs in local schools
- Determine future needed workforce skills
- The legacy of low educational attainment has hindered efforts to recruit higher-paying industries because of the more highly skilled work force they demand and require. However, the community has an adult education infrastructure, highly performing two year, four- year, and university level post-secondary education institutions to facilitate improvement in educational attainment.

### Opportunities

- The community has access to numerous 'out-of-town' sources of post-secondary education.
- Partnerships between schools, businesses and civic organizations to create internship/ mentorship/job training opportunities
- Continue support of the Town and Gown program
- Encourage partnerships between schools, businesses and civic organizations to create internship/mentorship opportunities
- Support the establishment of a College and Career Academy
- Improve on the job training opportunities/career pathways to encourage students to stay following graduation
- Communicate and publicize available jobs
- Expand after-school programs
- Promote greater involvement/expand mentoring program (Scouting, Junior Achievement)
- Continued GED/adult literacy offerings
- Increased support for Family Connections programs

## Regional Priorities

- Educate the Region's Workforce.

## Regional Cooperation

To encourage local governments to cooperate with neighboring jurisdictions to address shared needs. This may be achieved by the following: actively participating in regional organizations; identifying joint projects that will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer; and/or developing collaborative solutions for regional issues.

### Needs

- More and better citizen participation
- Scheduled, joint meetings of local elected bodies
- Local, public entity websites maintained with current information
- Utilize current technology including social media to engage the community in council/commission meetings, planning efforts, and civic volunteering opportunities
- Stay abreast of Fort Benning activities and programs. Manage development in military base buffer areas
- Better coordination with E-911 services and invoicing/receiving payment from neighboring communities using this service.
- Coordinate closely with neighboring counties and cities to meet the State and Federal storm water management requirements.
- Water availability and impact of development on local and regional infrastructure systems and natural and cultural resources.
- Cost of transportation and development of mass transit in areas outside of Columbus/ Muscogee County.
- Align elected officials, local government staff, community based organizations and citizen leaders around implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.
- Keep line of communication open with neighboring jurisdictions.
- Improved communication with citizens.
- Actively participate in regional planning efforts.

### Opportunities

- Mutually beneficial relationship with Fort Benning
- Greater public recognition and appreciation of community achievements, success
- Additional opportunities for organized, scheduled constituent/government conversation
- With projected growth for area counties and cities; an opportunity exists for communities to develop stronger working relationships and to share resources when necessary
- Increase the number of business/civic leadership meetings held annually
- Service Delivery Strategy will need to be updated as part of the Comprehensive Plan process.
- Maintain the existing city, county, Chamber of Commerce, and Authority partnerships on projects that cross jurisdictional lines to insure cost-effective use of resources
- Continue to work with regional entities on leadership and economic development
- Participate in the semi-annual Tribal Consultation facilitated by Fort Benning.
- Regular meetings between decision-making entities: county, city, local boards, commissions and authorities
- Hold regularly scheduled local government town hall meetings

## Regional Priorities

Create a Balanced Sustainable Region.