



**IMAGINE SOCIAL CIRCLE
VISION 2040**

**Draft
March 11, 2017**

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Introduction

Communities with a sense of place, a shared community vision, and a commitment to achieving that vision through public and private action are those that will thrive through changing times.

A Comprehensive Plan is an organized way of determining community needs and setting goals and objectives to address them. The comprehensive plan provides guidance to orchestrate resources and events to achieve the desired vision of the community.

Under the Georgia Planning Act, 1989...

“Coordinated and comprehensive planning by all levels of government within the State of Georgia is of vital importance to the state and its citizens. The state has an essential public interest in promoting, developing, sustaining, and assisting coordinated and comprehensive planning by all levels of government. This article is intended to provide for the coordination of planning, at the direction of the Governor, by departments, agencies, commissions, and other institutions of the state, and this article shall be liberally construed to achieve that end.”

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs is designated to facilitate the oversight of Plans.

The adoption of a compliant Comprehensive Plan enables the City to be a qualified local government (QLG) with access to incentives such as CDBG grants and GEFA loans.

Walton County Comprehensive Plan

Walton County, and the cities of Between, Good Hope, Jersey, Loganville, Monroe, Social Circle, and Walnut Grove joined together to complete a Comprehensive Plan in June 2007.

Under State Law, a Comprehensive Plan for these jurisdictions requires update and adoption by June 30, 2017.

Walton County has contracted with the Northeast Regional Commission (NEGRC) to prepare this plan update.

Social Circle Comprehensive Plan

The development of a City Comprehensive Plan was identified by the City as an objective in the Annual Operating Budget for FY2016/17.

Objectives for Fiscal Year 2016-17

“ City Comprehensive Plan will be developed, with extensive community input, which will add to the previously adopted Future Land Use plan a specific Vision for Social Circle. In addition, the elements of the future land use plan will be described and details of intended timing, balance of uses, type of development, and long term infrastructure elements to support the vision will be included. A Comprehensive Plan will provide additional written detail and dimension to the Future Land Use map to communicate to the public, future residents, potential industries, and commercial investors how the community desires to guide the growth of Social Circle, to preserve its character unique identity and protect its historic fabric. “

Process

Under the Georgia standards, public participation must include

1. Identification of Stakeholders
2. Identification of Public Participation Techniques
3. Involvement with the Stakeholders with those techniques
4. Legally required public hearings

A steering committee must be used which includes elected officials and economic development professionals.

Walton County designated a steering committee for the 2017 update of the Countywide Comprehensive Plan. The Steering Committee included from Social Circle two elected officials, and Mike Owens. The NEGRC has held three meetings with the designated steering committee towards the plan update. These meetings were held at the County Courthouse as follows

	-overview of Process and input
January 10, 2017; 2:30 pm	- review of Goals, Vision, and SWOT Analysis
January 26, 2017; 2:30 pm	-review of Work Program

Following the second steering committee meeting, the NEGRC determined that the overall Walton County Comprehensive Plan would consist of a separate component for each City. With this approach, the individual City identities and Vision could be reflected, while also coordinating a Countywide perspective.

March 27, 2017	-NEGRC Submission of Draft Plans to County and City
April 12, 2017	-Public Hearing on Comprehensive Plan (Countywide)
May 2, 2017	-Submission of Plan to DCA for Compliance Review
June, 2017	-Adoption by each Governing Body

City of Social Circle Process

Embedded within the NEGRC work on the Comprehensive Plan, a robust public input process was developed to gain community insight into the Plan. A summary of the public input is provided below:

Date, Time, Place	Invitees	Topics	Attendees/ Respondents
July 25, 2016 12 pm-1pm Magnolia Manor	Rotary Club	City Vision	20
December, 2016	Online Survey by UGA	Downtown	246
January 6, 2017	Mayor & Council, School Board, Sr. City Staff, School Admin	City School Collaboration Strengths & Opportunities	25
January 7, 2017 10 am- 2 pm, Saturday Community Room	Mayor & Council, Sr. City Staff Planning Commission Downtown Development Auth Main Street Board	Overview Stakeholder Identification Public Participation Techniques Vision Elements, SWOT	23
January 16, 2017 Web Page	Public	Plan Process Upcoming Meetings Notes from Prior Meetings Survey Opportunity	-
January , February Newsletters	Public- Mailed with Utility Bills	Plan Input Information Offer to Attend Group Meetings	-
January, February Facebook Blasts	Public- CityofSocialCircle Facebook	Notice of Meeting Schedule Input Opportunities	-
January 23, 2017 5 pm, Monday Community Room	Public, Planning Commission	General Vision SWOT Analysis	19
January 26, 2017 6 pm, Thursday Social Circle Community Room	Public, Tree Board, Garden Clubs	Natural Resources Vision SWOT Analysis	10
January 23-31, 2017	High School Student Focus Groups in Advisory Classes	Vision SWOT Analysis	50 +/-
January 31, 2017 11 am- 1pm, Tuesday Social Circle Theater	Public, Industry Representatives and Economic Development Professionals	Economic Development Focus Vision SWOT Analysis	21
February 6, 2017 7 pm, Monday Social Circle Methodist Church	Boy Scout Troup	General Vision SWOT Analysis	17
February 9, 2017 11 am- 1 pm, Thursday Magnolia Manor	Public, SCDDA, Downtown property owners and business owners	Downtown Focus Vision SWOT Analysis	18
February 13, 2017 8:30 am, Monday Welcome Center	Public, MS/HS PTO	General Vision SWOT Analysis	6

February 13, 2017 2:00 pm, Monday City Hall	City Department Heads and Senior Staff	Infrastructure & General Vision SWOT Analysis	10
February 13, 2017 6:00 pm, Monday Gunter Hall	Historic Preservation Society of Social Circle, Historic Preservation Commission, Public	Historic Resources Vision SWOT Analysis	17
February 15, 2017 3:15 pm, Wednesday Social Circle Elementary School	Elementary School PTO	General Vision SWOT Analysis	7
February 18, 2017 9 am – 1pm, Saturday Welcome Center	Public- Drop In Opportunity	General Vision SWOT Analysis	4
February 20, 2017 7:00 pm, Monday Mars Hill Fellowship Hall	Public, Communities of Faith, Neighborhood Organizations	Neighborhoods Vision SWOT Analysis	18
February, 2017	Web Based Survey	Vision SWOT Analysis	26
	DRAFT REVIEWS		
February 27, 2017	Planning Commission	Vision & Future Land Use	
March 6, 2017	Social Circle City School Board	Vision & Future Land Use	
March 9, 2017	Downtown Development Auth	Vision & Character Area	
March 13, 2017	Historic Preservation Commission	Vision & Character Area	
March 14, 2017	Main Street Commission	Vision Review & Character Area	
March 23, 2017	Tree Board	Vision Review	
April 18, 2017	Mayor & Council	Vision Review, Land Use, Character Areas, Work Plan	

Vision 2040

Social Circle is a picturesque city, which retains its Victorian charm and authentic historic downtown, within the historic Georgia Heartland. Social Circle is a rare city within commuting proximity to Atlanta that remains separated from the urban sprawl, and welcomes economic activity and growth in a manner and form that strengthens its sense of place. Social Circle is a sustainable, adaptable community with abundant natural resources nearby. It is a walkable, friendly, community that retains its small town charm and hometown feel with a high quality of life for residents.

Social Circle is a complete community with a variety of attractive neighborhoods, a highly rated independent school system, abundant recreation and activity opportunities for all ages, and a variety of commercial areas including an authentic historic downtown, with unique shops and restaurants and frequent festivals and entertainment, as well as larger commercial centers at the North end of the City, and along the Social Circle Parkway to the east, and at the I-20 interchange. The Social Circle Parkway provides convenient access via a scenic tree lined corridor through rural countryside to an Athens Technical College Campus, and an expansive industrial sector which provides a wealth of employment options and is well served with power, rail, natural gas, and water and sewer.

Surrounded by rural countryside, each gateway into the City provides a sense of arrival, and displays attractive welcoming and colorfully landscaped signage that indicates residents' pride in their community. The City enjoys clean air, clean water, protected natural water ways, and is within a short drive to the Hard Labor Creek Reservoir, Golf courses, Hard Labor Creek State Park, and Charlie Elliott Nature Center. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources is headquartered in Social Circle, and promotes and provides opportunities for citizens to enjoy Georgia nature.

The authentic historic downtown is located within the center of the City and is the heart of the community. Vibrant with activity, variety, shopping, dining and downtown living, it is an attraction to residents and tourists alike.

Spanning out from the downtown is a well preserved residential historic district in which homes predominate and Bed and Breakfast Inns are sensitively tucked providing a delightful accommodation for visitors without changing the residential character of the district. The character of the historic district is protected through preservation and restoration of all contributing buildings.

Neighborhoods radiate from the downtown in all directions, such that all are walkable to the downtown and sidewalks are continuous along the streets. Street trees line the roadways providing shade and clean air, and attractiveness. Housing of all price ranges and many styles is provided within the City, and every neighborhood is well maintained and safe and secure. A perimeter roadway extends from North Cherokee Road around the west side of the City to South Cherokee, providing access between neighborhoods.

Community parks are located throughout the City, with trail and roadway connections providing for easy access from neighborhoods. A trail and bicycle path network encircles the city adjacent to the Parkway, and connects to the downtown, school campuses, parks and recreation areas, and neighborhoods. The trail network winds through and around neighborhoods by following creeks and water ways, and minimizing roadway crossings.

A City Transit system provides service throughout the community, enabling easy access to schools, industry, shopping, and other destinations.

The independent City School system is exceptional as compared nationally and is a key attraction to the City. The school facilities are current and progressive, the curriculum is responsive to the needs of all students, and the school provides a strong foundation for college bound as well as skilled labor. There is partnership between the school and local industry and business which provides for mentoring, internships, and development of the future work force needed in the Social Circle.

The Athletic complex at the High School provides exceptional facilities for competitive sports and the School sports activities are supported by the community with high attendance and sponsorship. In addition, athletic parks are located within the city to provide for baseball, softball, soccer, and football. A recreation center serves the community and provides for basketball, volleyball and other health and wellness programs.

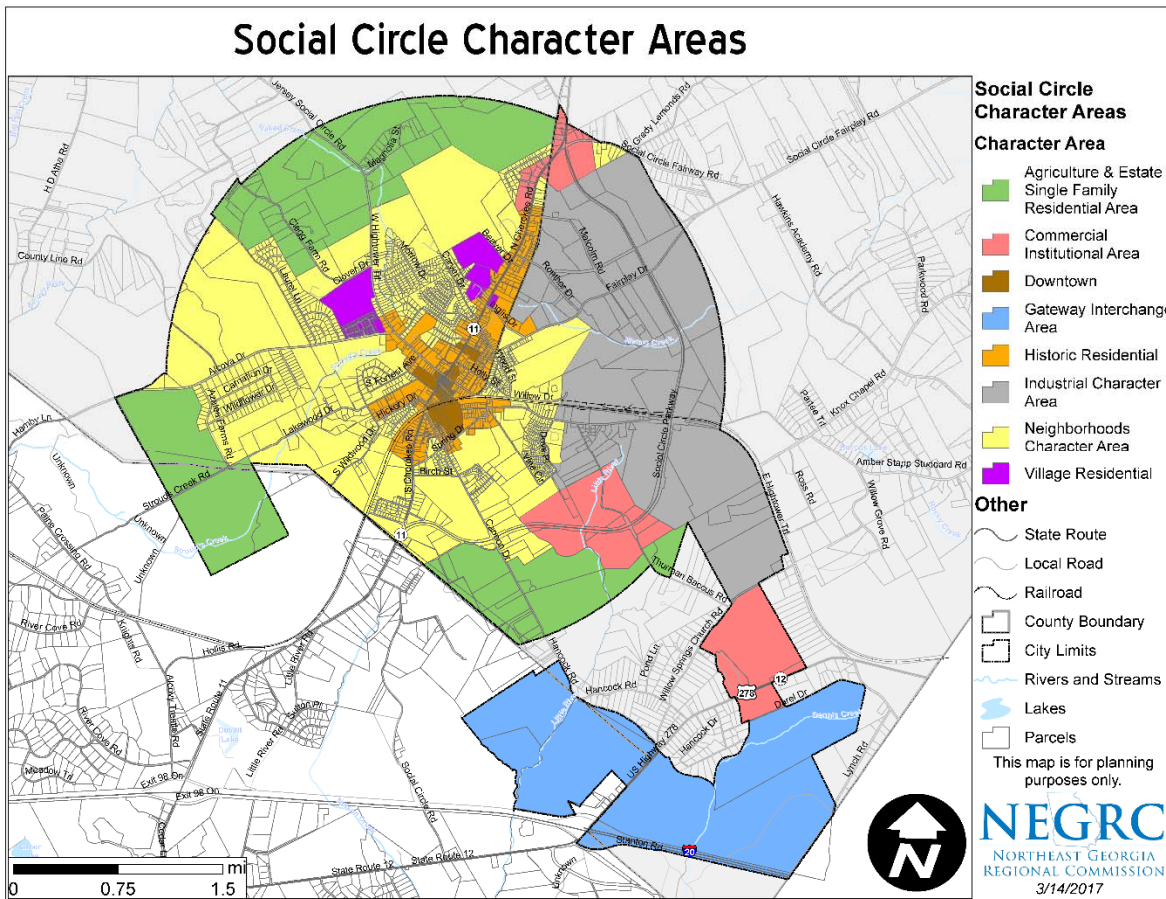
Youth activities abound, with opportunities for organized team sports, as well as dance, theater, hiking, biking, and more. Community focus groups promote youth involvement and develop leadership opportunities.

A commercial area is centered around the intersection of North Cherokee Road and Route 11, providing a high visibility attractive center which ample parking around the stores, and landscaped street frontage which fosters the Social Circle gateway image.

The Social Circle parkway provides a convenient route for traffic from I-20 to the thriving Industrial area located to the northeast of the City center. The Industries are clustered in this area, and are identified with high quality buildings, corridor landscaping which provides a campus like feel to the Parkway and attractive well landscaped monument signage. The industries are energy efficient and environmentally sensitive providing a clean and healthy environment for those working in and living around the industry.

Transparency and fiscal conservatism in government and a high level of volunteerism and engagement in Civic organizations characterize the community. The varied civic groups continue a strong tradition of working together to provide for the needs of the community. City services are efficient and effective and responsive to the needs and priorities of the community. Infrastructure is reliable, sustainable, and compliant and continually updated to support economic growth and environmental considerations.

Land Use – Character Areas



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Agricultural and Large Lot Residential Character Area

The City of Social Circle is nestled within a rural area, and surrounded by Agricultural zoning in the adjacent unincorporated County areas. The Agricultural and Large Lot residential character area provides an opportunity for farms and estate homes to protect the rural edges of the City and provide the transition into the City center while maintaining the sense of entry into a historic community and small town atmosphere.

Within the Agricultural and Large Lot residential area homes and buildings are set back from the roadways, and off road trails may meander adjacent to the roadways but are separated from them. Farms, forests, and pastures characterize the area and livestock is common. Agritourism type businesses are encouraged in this character area which are sensitive to and reflect the rural character. Examples may include farm setting catering or wedding venues, large animal veterinary clinics, beds and breakfasts, or farm to table restaurants. The structures in this character area should be residential or rural agricultural in style and drives and parking areas sensitively placed and out of view from the adjacent roadways.

Compatibility

Zoning: *Agricultural, Agricultural -2*

Land Use: *Residential, Agricultural, Agri-tourism,*

Implementation Measures

- *Maintain buffer areas between agriculture and residential neighborhoods*
- *Plan and implement an off-road trail network that spans throughout the city, connects to parks, schools, neighborhoods and the downtown.*
- *Create a western perimeter roadway route with a stakeholders group that will provide for connections between neighborhoods and facilitate traffic circulation*

Neighborhoods Character Area

Neighborhoods radiate from the downtown in all directions, such that all are walkable to the downtown and sidewalks are continuous along the streets. Street trees line the roadways providing shade and clean air, and attractiveness. Housing of all price ranges and many styles is provided within the City, and every neighborhood is well maintained and safe and secure. Golf carts are a popular mode of transportation within neighborhoods and along City streets to the downtown, parks, and recreation areas.

Neighborhood residents and associations are active in looking out for each other, participating in community cleanups and improvement activities, and other volunteer and civic activities.

Properties are well maintained, trees and flowers and gardens and forests greet the eye, where civic engagement is reflected in every neighborhood.

Small neighborhood convenience stores and historic markets are located in some neighborhoods to provide for convenience and maintain the history of these micro communities, but remain small, and limited in hours and activity so as to not detract from the residential quality of life. These shops are conditional uses, such that the impact of each is evaluated individually and restricted to maintain the residential character of the area.

Paths and recreational amenities such as pools, clubhouses, and playgrounds are located within neighborhoods to foster quality of life and informal gatherings and fellowship.

A citywide trail and bicycle path network encircles the city adjacent to the Parkway, and connects to the downtown, school campuses, parks and recreation areas, and neighborhoods. The trail network winds through and around neighborhoods by following creeks and water ways, and minimizing roadway crossings.

A City library is located centrally, walkable from the City schools and most neighborhoods. The library is well supported by the community and provides a variety of activities for families, seniors, students and youth.

Social Circle City Schools are located adjacent to neighborhoods facilitating community involvement in the schools and easy pedestrian and bicycle access by students.

Compatibility

Zoning: *R15, R25, Residential Medium Density, Planned Unit Development*

Land Use *Single Family residential*

Implementation Measures

- *Encourage development of residential neighborhoods which fill market needs and are consistent with the character of the City and provide amenities such as trails, playgrounds, and other community recreation or gathering areas.*
- *Develop a comprehensive trail plan to identify the future trail network so that it is implemented with development and through grant opportunities.*
- *Create neighborhood watch and partnership with Police to enhance safety and security in all neighborhoods.*

- *Use code enforcement and consider derelict property millage rate increase to facilitate the correction of code violations and derelict structures.*
- *Provide speed enforcement and driver education to minimize speeding traffic and enhance bike, pedestrian, and golf cart safety.*
- *Require stormwater management facilities that are attractive and effective and are an attraction, rather than a detriment to neighborhoods, consider rehabilitation of existing facilities accordingly.*
- *Create a western perimeter roadway route with a stakeholders group that will provide for connections between neighborhoods and facilitate traffic circulation*

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Urban Village Character Area

The Urban Village character area provides for small areas of more dense or clustered housing with micro-commercial shops. The village character area allows for live work housing where a small shop may be located below with a residence above. Within the urban village character area, buildings are close to the streets and sidewalks are provided throughout. Parking is in the rear or in alleys. Street trees are provided throughout the area, and small squares or pocket parks are interspersed. The Urban village harkens to Charleston or Savannah type row houses and traditional neighborhood patterns with a grid street network. The Urban Village character areas are small, not more than 30 acres in size, and retain architectural style and character that is consistent with the Social Circle small town feel. Individual residences may be smaller than found elsewhere in the City, however quality and detail of design is high such that these neighborhoods maintain their value over time. The walkways within the neighborhood connect to the Citywide trail system.

Compatibility

Zoning: *Residential Medium Density, NC, Residential High Density, Planned Unit Development*

Land Use: *Residential, Neighborhood Commercial*

Implementation Measures

- *Encourage development of urban village neighborhoods which fill market needs and are consistent with the character of the City. These neighborhoods may meet the desires of young professionals and those attracted to urban living within the Social Circle area.*
- *Evaluate Zoning and Subdivision ordinance provisions to assure they provide for the desired character area attributes.*

Historic Character Area

Spanning outward from the downtown is a well preserved residential historic district in which homes predominate and Bed and Breakfast Inns are sensitively tucked providing a delightful accommodation for visitors without changing the residential character of the district. The character of the historic district is protected through preservation and restoration of all contributing buildings.

The structures in the district represent the major architectural styles and periods of the time. Included are examples of Greek Revival, Plantation Plain, Gothic Revival, Second Empire, Queen Anne, American Victorian, Victorian Eclectic, Italianate, Colonial, Georgian, NeoClassical, "Half-Houses," Federal, Bungalow, Tudor, Craftsman, and Ranch.

The tree lined streets and well-kept public and private properties are reflective of the early 1900's. Sidewalks are located along all streets and are shaded with street trees. Driveway connections are narrow, and parking is typically beside or behind the homes and buildings.

The iconic Gunter Hall, an 1840's era building which has adorned three different sites within the City, is preserved by the Historic Preservation Society of Social Circle and available for rent to the public for meetings and events.

New construction, fences, landscape and driveways are sensitive to and complement the historic district character. The community history and heritage is exhibited through the beauty of the buildings and placement.

With the historic homes, are located Churches and small shops which retain the character of their construction. Noteworthy are the Methodist church and the Mill Village store. In addition, there are some structures along the main roadways which are preserved in their historic character, while used for low intensity office or commercial, as a conditional use. The scale and number of these conditional uses is small so as not to change the historic character of the corridor.

Within the historic character area, signage, streetlights, and historic information markers area located to emphasize the significant history specific to Social Circle. Two historic cemeteries are located within the district. These manicured sites, with markers dating back over 200 years, provide an attraction for tourism and reflect the generations of many families still a part of the community.

The size of the historic character area, and the level of preservation of the building fabric is unique to Social Circle and highly valued throughout the community. The local historic district zoning, overseen by the Historic Preservation Commission serves to guide activities within the district to maintain this cherished identity.

Compatibility

Zoning: R-25, R-15, NC, Residential Medium Density

Land Use: Residential, Office, Commercial, Institutional

Implementation Measures

- *Continue use of the Local Historic District to preserve existing buildings, and maintain the character of the district.*
- *Promote and educate the community on the rich local history to encourage rehabilitation and maintenance of structures and properties*
- *Expand advertisement of the historic properties and settings to promote tourism and business.*
- *Remove aged and dying oak trees in the right of way and plant understory trees and encourage planting of large canopy trees within front yards*
- *Provide sidewalks along the frontage of all streets within the historic character area, and maintain existing sidewalks to remain accessible and attractive.*
- *Encourage infill development, and assure the compatibility with the surrounding properties*
- *Use code enforcement and consider derelict property millage rate increase to facilitate the correction of code violations and maintenance of historic properties, to avoid demolition by neglect.*

- From the Social Circle Historic District Design Guidelines

Downtown Character Area

In the center of the City, the authentic historic downtown is filled with shops and restaurants and businesses that are unique and home grown. Every storefront is active and the sidewalks are full of activity and energy and people of all ages. Sidewalk cafes dot the streetscape, colorful plants adorn the storefronts and hanging baskets adorn the post top streetlights. A City Square is located in the downtown which provides for a farmer's market, a gathering space for picnics and lingering in the mild climate, a venue for frequent festivals, and a stage which supports live music events in a gently sloping amphitheater.

The iconic City Well is a focal point, well landscaped and lit and seasonally decorated which reminds of the history of the City. Vehicle traffic is slow, yet steady, providing a steady stream of customers. Golf carts, bikes, strollers, and pedestrians abound due to the proximity of the downtown to neighborhoods.

Churches are dotted around the downtown and bolster the family atmosphere, the weeklong activity, and the safety and stability of the area while respecting the scale of the buildings in the district and do not dominate the adjacent properties.

The Social Circle Theater is located to the east of Downtown, providing a venue for live theater and dance and youth productions.

On the southern end of downtown, the historic depot, mill, and warehouses around the train tracks are restored and active with small businesses and downtown living. The train tracks are in active use and the locomotives, and train cars draw tourists viewing the historic cooling tower, and relics of commerce and passenger movement of the past.

The Mill area extends adjacent to a large green space with springs that provide pleasing water features and native landscaping in the shadow of the downtown.

An entrepreneurial atmosphere is apparent in the downtown where modern businesses, film industry, and marketing and service proprietors share space with arts and crafts, restaurants, clothing stores, and unique storefronts. Broadband and high speed internet service support business growth.

Parking is plentiful, but hidden in small lots throughout the area, and shared lots in the Churches and Schools adjacent to the downtown, and golf cart and horse and carriage shuttles provide practical and enjoyable shuttles between the parking and the stores.

New construction within the historic downtown is sensitive in context and design so as to complement the charm and character of the downtown and provides for loft living opportunities.

Sidewalks are wide and shaded with street side dining and information gathering spaces. The architectural character of the buildings is preserved and signage is visible, while consistent with the historic styles. A variety of displays activate the storefronts and invite shoppers.

Compatibility

Zoning: CBD, NC, PUD, RMD

Land Use: Commercial, Office, Residential, Government, Recreation

Implementation Measures

- *Create an environment for business vitality downtown. Use National Main Street Program, incentives, entrepreneur development, business recruitment, shop local, festivals, decorations, and other programs to generate activity and interest downtown. Consider iconic businesses such as Blue Willow which have national identity, and support and enhance that presence through marketing.*
- *Identify and remove barriers to repurposing historic buildings. Facilitate the improvement of downtown buildings, and development of new and rehabilitation of vacant structures using the Downtown Development Authority, historic tax credits, and other incentive programs.*
- *Facilitate new business activity downtown through expedited issuance of permits, incentive programs to address code compliance (façade grants, fire and electrical upgrades,) and consider grants for A/E assistance through DDA.*
- *Improve the public spaces downtown to beautify the area, and to attract residents, and invite tourists and facilitate commercial activity. Recognize that small changes can have major positive impact. Walkability of the downtown should be enhanced, with sidewalk maintenance, and well-lit expansions to promote pedestrian friendliness.*
- *Create a square, gathering area, in the downtown to facilitate events, lunch time activities, a farmer's market, concerts, and casual enjoyment of the area.*
- *Create the identity of Social Circle downtown as the “home town” of the surrounding region, to build ownership and support of businesses and activities downtown.*
- *Implement code enforcement and blight tax rates as necessary to effect building maintenance of historic downtown structures being neglected.*
- *Consider a program to encourage the division of larger spaces to smaller areas to enable more business variety on a more affordable scale. Consider creating business fronts on the alleys to divide spaces and expand storefront opportunities.*
- *Engage the downtown property owners and business owners to update the downtown master plan to include sidewalk widening and street side cafes, parking areas, downtown square, lodging, mill area, and downtown living opportunities.*

Commercial and Institutional Character Area

The commercial and institutional character areas are planned to provide for convenient larger scale businesses which cannot be accommodated downtown. The mix of uses should be such that they do not duplicate or draw from the downtown, but provide additional larger scale stores or entertainment venues such as movie theaters.

The commercial and institutional character areas provide for larger scale commercial or institutional uses clustered together with consolidated access points and shared or connected parking. Large expanses of parking are discouraged. Buildings and parking should be arranged to create an integrated village type layout. Landscaping is provided along the road frontage and within parking areas to provide shade and aesthetic appeal. Signage at the consolidated entries is encouraged which identifies the center and the businesses within the center. Architecture which is conducive to the business, yet also reflects and enhances the small town feel of the area is encouraged.

Commercial properties are grouped together in nodes located at the north end of the City at the intersection of North Cherokee and the Social Circle Parkway (State Route 11), and clustered together adjacent to the Social Circle Parkway (State Route 11) and including the Athens Technical College Campus. Each of the two areas has a unique focus.

The northern Commercial and Institutional Character area provides the opportunity for a strong sense of entry into the city. The intersection of Rte. 11 and North Cherokee provide the setting for highly landscaped and attractive Gateway signage welcoming visitors and reinforcing the sense of place. In addition, this gateway signage should route Industrial traffic to the Parkway. The northern Commercial and Institutional character area supports medical offices and facilities as well as grocery stores and similar larger retail. Attractive signage, and Street trees and landscaping are encouraged. Trails should be provided adjacent to the parkway and along North Cherokee that are safe and inviting for pedestrian and bicycle use. Sidewalks provide connections within the commercial and institutional area from parking to buildings and between buildings such that it is safe and inviting for shoppers to walk from store to store within the Center.

The eastern Commercial and Institutional Character area spans both sides of the Parkway . A parkway perimeter trail is planned and trail system connections should be provided which follow natural drainageways and streams and which lead radially back to the downtown to promote connectivity and the ability for residents to walk and bike throughout the City. The parkway bridges within this character area provide opportunity for trail crossings under the parkway to provide for safety. The Athens Tech Campus is a key element of this character area. This campus feel will set the tone for the surrounding commercial and institutional development in terms of architecture, landscaping, and sensitivity to the topography of the area.

Compatibility:

Zoning: *Office/ Institutional, General Commercial, Mixed Use Business Park*

Land Use: *Commercial, Office, Institutional, Recreation,*

Implementation Strategies:

- *Plan and provide utility service (water, sewer, gas) to support desired uses*
- *Consider regional stormwater management plans which provide opportunity for a recreational amenity and trail route*
- *Develop a city wide trail plan which identifies trail routes prior to development proposals*
- *Require construction of trails and sidewalks during development of sites*
- *Maintain current AG zoning of area and use rezoning process to assure the character area elements are in place and included in a development proposal.*
- *Evaluate GC and OI and MUB Zoning Regulations to assure consistency with these goals.*

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Industrial Character Area

The Industrial character area provides for large scale industries conveniently served with public utilities and rail and easily accessed with tractor trailers via the Social Circle Parkway.

Industries in Social Circle are clean and environmentally sensitive with practices and technology that protects clean air and water.

The industries are set well back from the roadway, and present an attractive front façade and obvious main entrance with a park like approach. Landscaping is prevalent along the parkway and shade trees are provided within parking areas. Loading docks and storage areas are strategically and aesthetically located to the side and rear of buildings with appropriate landscaping and fencing. Identification signage is prominent on the buildings and at the entrances.

Off road trails are provided adjacent to the parkway which connect to a Citywide trail network that follows water ways and creeks. This network provides for lunchtime recreation for employees and pedestrian and bicycle access to the downtown.

Compatibility

Zoning: I-1 Light Industrial, I-2 Heavy Industrial, MUB Mixed Use Business Park

Land Use Industry, Offices

Implementation Measures

- Collaborate with existing industry to identify and meet their needs to support job growth and industry viability.
- Provide gateway signage at the north and south end of the Social Circle Bypass which creates a sense of entry into the “Social Circle Industrial Center”, identifies the Industries, and direct industrial traffic to remain on the parkway.
- Partner with Walton County Economic Development Authority, Social Circle Development Authority, Newton County Development Authority, and Stanton Springs Joint Development Authority to market the area for Industrial growth and new industry.
- Provide Transit commuting routes to Shire and other industries to facilitate commuting of employees from Social Circle and to provide ready access to downtown.
- Plan and provide utility service (water, sewer, gas) to support Industry growth
- Consider regional stormwater management plans which provide opportunity for a recreational amenity and trail route

Gateway Interchange Character Area

The Gateway interchange character area presents prominent distinctive well landscaped City entrance signage that greets visitors and commuters as they exit Interstate 20. The entrance signage provides a strong sense of arrival, reflects the character of Social Circle and invites and entices the visitor to continue into the City center.

This mixed-use area is appropriate for attractive uses that cater to interstate travelers near I 278, such as hotels, restaurants, well placed and attractive gas stations, and large scale retail. Like the Commercial and Institutional character area, strip development is discouraged and consolidated entries and signage are encouraged. The commercial elements have related architectural elements and parking areas are interconnected and buildings and parking is arranged to not present an expanse of asphalt apparent from the road frontage.

Also appropriate in this character area are large scale industrial uses and employment centers due to the ready access to I20 and railroad and utilities, and proximity to the Stanton Springs Industrial Park. Large scale industries should be well set back from the roadways, and present attractive façade and attractive landscaping. Prominent signage is appropriate on the industry for identification. All industrial site development, and parking areas should be well set back from I20 and screened and landscaped. Large parking areas should be landscaped or arranged on the site such that a sea of asphalt is not the prevalent view provided to I20 or I 278 traffic.

Compatibility

Zoning - *General Commercial, Light Industrial, Heavy Industrial, Mixed Use Business Park*

Land Use – *commercial, industrial, office, institutional*

Implementation Measures

- *Develop a plan for Gateway signage and landscaping at the interchange that can be accommodated within proposals for development.*
- *Facilitate water and sewer services with adequate capacity for large scale commercial and employment centers.*
- *Encourage location of a full service hotel to accommodate corporate visitors, with shuttle access to downtown*

Needs & Opportunities

Gateways

Needs:

- *The edges of the City are not apparent, and some of the approaches into the City could be much improved.*
- *Community, downtown activities are not well promoted with signage.*

Opportunities:

- *The city is surrounded by rural areas, which presents an opportunity to create a sense of arrival and a strong first impression which reflects the values of the community. Each roadway entrance into the City limits should be accommodated with a sign, with a consistent design motif, scaled per the roadway, and extensively landscaped and maintained like a front entry. Each gateway sign provides an opportunity for a special event banner or placard which can be changed, creating interest and attention.*
- *The Exits off I-20 to Social Circle provide the strongest opportunity to create a sense of arrival and draw traffic from the interstate into the city. These gateway signs should be carefully placed to create a terminated vista, should be sized per the roadway and traffic volume, should have a consistent motif which reflects the community character, and should be well set back from the roadway with extensive and manicured landscaping. The gateway signage at the interstate exits should be the dominant visual element greeting the driver as they enter the City.*

Infrastructure

Needs:

- *The City water treatment plant is limited in capacity to 1 MGD. Future growth in industry and population will require additional water supply.*
- *The City water distribution system is aged and the network suffers from lack of interconnection internally and to adjacent water systems. This results in areas of poor water pressure and flow.*
- *The City wastewater treatment plant is aged and limited in capacity. Future growth in industry and population will require additional treatment capacity.*
- *The City wastewater collection system is aged and constrained by an excessive number of pump stations which load the collection system. High inflow and infiltration during heavy rain events exacerbates capacity constraints.*
- *Areas of the City storm water drainage system and waterways are subject to overflow and flooding during heavy rains. Erosion is apparent in some locations. Water quality measures are needed to protect the waterways within the City.*
- *Roadways within the City need pavement restoration. Current funding levels are inadequate to maintain pavement condition.*

Opportunities:

- *Walton County, the City of Monroe, and Newton County Water and Sewer Authority have excess water treatment capacity and distribution systems that are feasible for interconnection. Regional water treatment capacity is available.*
- *The Newton County Water and Sewer Authority has excess sewer treatment capacity available, and is located topographically downstream from the City, providing an opportunity for regional cooperation and removal of a significant number of pump stations from the City system.*
- *A master plan which details short and long term water and sewer system improvements with priorities will position the City well for implementation of critical improvements in a logical sequence and will maximize opportunities for state and federal grant assistance, and public private partnerships through the development process, and consideration of impact fees.*
- *Establishment of a storm water utility fee would provide revenue related to property impact which would enable funding of storm water improvements to address flooding and water quality treatment.*
- *Walton County owns and operates paving equipment. City taxes support the County labor and equipment for paving streets. A partnership between the City and County in which the City pays for paving materials, and the County provides labor and equipment would extend the amount of roadway pavement maintenance provided.*

Community Facilities, Parks & Recreation

Needs

- *There is a shortage of parks and recreational opportunities for residents. Passive parks are needed within neighborhoods and public passive parks are needed in all areas of the City.*
- *An off road trail system is needed which provides for bike, and pedestrian access throughout the City with a minimum of roadway crossings. This trail system should provide for connections between the downtown, neighborhoods, parks, schools, and employment centers to serve for recreation and non-vehicle access options.*
- *A public recreation facility is needed within the City which provides a gym, indoor exercise equipment, rooms for fitness classes, rooms for wellness and nutrition education, and other related needs.*
- *The Senior Center is currently a shared space with the courtroom. A space is needed in which more services can be provided to the seniors, such as health and wellness classes, games, recreation and fitness, and activity centers.*
- *Recreation programming within the City is provided by Walton County, and is limited. Additional programming is needed to provide local youth an opportunity to participate in organized sports and activities without need to commute to neighboring Cities.*
- *The library needs expansion to serve the current and future residents and integrate opportunity for access to technology into the facility.*
- *Public meetings, including Council meetings and appointed Boards and Commissions, are held in the Community Room. Audio visual and sound equipment is needed to enhance the ability for the audience to follow presentations and discussion.*

Opportunities

- *There is much open space and undeveloped land within the City which provides an opportunity for a park network to be planned, which can be implemented prior to or in conjunction with future development. This enhances public private partnership opportunities and the ability to set aside sensitive environmental areas for passive park use, and other areas for active recreation uses.*
- *Extensive Citizen interest in a trail network provides the opportunity to develop a trails master plan for the community. There is much open space and undeveloped land within the City which provides an opportunity for a trail network to be integrated into sensitive environmental areas such as stream corridors, and to connect to parks, schools, and neighborhoods.*
- *A recreation center in Social Circle would serve a regional County need, and would fulfill the past County plans for a recreation center in each City in Walton County. This project would be SPLOST eligible.*
- *A recreation center in Social Circle would facilitate the programming of additional recreational opportunities for youth and Seniors in the City. This would serve senior center and activity needs.*
- *The City and Uncle Remus Library Board have funded the local share for the Library expansion, and the site parking has been reconfigured to accommodate the building expansion. Preparation of Schematic and Design Development plans will strengthen the attainment of State funds for the expansion project.*
- *Rehabilitation of the community room to better serve AV needs for public meetings would also enhance the opportunity to film and broadcast public meetings.*

- *Stephens Park is an opportunity for more community recreation and activity. The fencing, lighting and restroom and press box facilities in place provide the basic infrastructure for significant community festivals, recreation, and concerts.*
- *The County owned Pond site opposite the South Walton Recreation Park and Ballfields creates an opportunity for a passive park, native landscaping, an educational water feature, and an internal trail system that connects to the Citywide trail network.*
- *Consider a community pool or splash pad park.*
- *Teen activity areas are needed, such as indoor trampoline, rock climbing, gametime, skyzone, etc.*

Community Involvement

Needs

- *There is significant involvement by civic groups and volunteers in community activities, however there is less awareness of opportunities for appointment to Boards and Commissions.*
- *Opportunities to develop youth leadership are limited.*
- *Interaction relating to community issues between youth, professionals, and seniors and retirees is limited which leads to lack of understanding between generations.*
- *More interaction is needed between City Schools and City Government and local employers to build internship opportunities and provide for professional skill development and work ethic training.*
- *Local residents are not aware of local employment opportunities by businesses and industries.*
- *Communication from City government to residents is lacking. Website, Facebook, and monthly newsletters provide some information, but more is needed on ongoing issues.*
- *City Council meetings and Boards and Commissions are not broadcast, thus it is difficult for residents to stay informed.*

Opportunities

- *A community leadership program would educate citizens on Social Circle government services and provide an opportunity for citizens to apply for consideration to Board and Commission appointments.*
- *Focus groups could be created for specific issues or plans which include youth and all ages, to build leadership in the community and obtain broad input and consensus on community issues.*
- *An internship and mentoring program at Social Circle City Schools by local professionals and employers could build job opportunities for graduates, and provide experience and development of critical work skills while strengthening the match between the local residents and employment needs of current employers.*
- *A local facebook page or employment posting could facilitate the match of the local population with available jobs in the community. This enhance workforce development and employee retention for local industry, reduce unemployment within the City, and reduce commuter traffic.*
- *A periodic town hall type meeting relating to City business would be beneficial to maintain community dialogue and provide updates on ongoing programs or projects.*
- *Through a partnership with the Social Circle School system, or adjacent Technical Colleges, public meetings could be filmed and broadcast via youtube and linked to the website providing the ability for those who cannot attend meetings to stay informed. A local radio show or “e-news” paper could also be created through such a partnership providing valuable experience and exposure to students.*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Needs

- *More activities are needed for corporate visitors after hours.*
- *Local industry growth rates need to be projected and communicated to the school systems so they can create the training program and capacity that will fill the need at the time needed.*
- *More entertainment options are needed for youth.*

Opportunities

- *Walton Economic Development Authority is promoting a program for workforce development that would create a training pipeline between the public high schools, at the technical colleges and the local industry.*
- *There is a need by the movie and tv industry for filming locations.*
- *Interest in Social Circle tourism can be created through promotion of the films that have been located in Social Circle, as well as future films. For example, a baseball themed focus could link area tournaments with the filming of "42".*
- *A weekend, drive in theater may be an attraction for area entertainment that can be located in a rural area, separated from neighborhoods.*

Housing

Needs

- *A shortage of housing exists in the \$250,000 - \$500,000 range. Potential homebuyers are looking for housing within the City within this range and it is not available. There is ample housing in the starter home range of affordability.*
- *Code enforcement is needed to address run down homes, lack of lawn and building maintenance in some neighborhoods, and zoning violations and abandoned vehicles. Citizens take pride in every neighborhood and additional enforcement support is needed to address the occasional problem property which affects the attractiveness of the neighborhood.*
- *The Rental housing market is very tight, making it difficult for those who do not wish to buy to locate in the area.*
- *While there is housing around the downtown, there are no downtown living options.*

Opportunities

- *The City is attractive to new residents due to area employers, the strong school system, and easy access to the Atlanta metropolitan area. This demand supports the provision of attractive neighborhood development, and enables property values in existing neighborhoods to be maintained.*
- *Citizens' desire for stronger Code enforcement indicates pride in the community and creates an opportunity to build community involvement within neighborhoods for cleanup days and neighbor assistance.*
- *Demand for rental housing creates an opportunity to reduce vacant homes and creates financial feasibility for investor improvement of existing housing stock.*
- *The demand for rental housing and desirability of downtown living for some residents supports the feasibility of developing downtown housing in the Mill area.*

Short Term Work Program

#	Activity	Timeframe	Responsible Party	Cost Estimate	Funding Source
	Develop a pattern book of pictures the provide examples of the types of development characteristics encouraged in each character area to educate applicants and developers regarding the type of growth desired	2017-18	City Staff	Minimal	City GF
	Fund, Design, and construct a Recreation Center in Social Circle in partnership with Walton County which provides for all ages activity needs and includes a Senior Center.	2017-18- funding plan 2023 construction	Walton County Social Circle	(Monroe and Loganville cost?)	SPOLST- County CDBG
	Create a pattern book of storm water management approaches such as low impact design and water feature creation and encourage use of such through the development process.	2018-19	City	\$20,000	City GF (Grants?)
	Study the feasibility of a storm water utility fee to fund public storm water system improvements and rehabilitation of unsightly ponds	2018-19	City Staff	Minimal	City GF
	Develop a City wide trail master plan through the use of a stakeholders group that includes youth, and other interested parties. Publish the plan.	2017-18	City Staff	\$5000	City GF
	Study western perimeter roadway route with a stakeholders group that will provide for connections between neighborhoods traffic circulation	2017-18	City staff	Minimal	City GF
	Review the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance to assure the districts and regulations support the vision and character areas.	2017-18	Planning Commission	Minimal	City GF
	Develop City Industrial growth incentive program criteria for adoption which can be offered when appropriate, rapidly.	2017-18	City Leadership	Minimal	Utility Funds
	Complete a comprehensive wastewater collection system master plan which identifies and prioritizes system expansions and rehabilitation .	2017-18	City Staff	\$100,000	City Utility Fund
	Design and construct wastewater collection network to serve Industrial growth areas	2018-19	City	UnKnown	Utility Fund GEFA
	Partner regionally to provide for wastewater treatment to meet future wastewater needs	2017-18	City	Unknown	Utility Fund
	Complete a comprehensive water distribution system master plan which identifies and priorities system expansions and rehabilitation.	2017-18	City	\$50,000	Utility Fund
	Partner regionally to provide for water treatment in excess of existing plant capacity to meet future water needs	2017-18	City	Unknown	Utility Fund

	<i>Tourism should be promoted to attract visitors to downtown. Create a Geocach to attract and guide regional visitors to the rich history and things to do in Social Circle.</i>	2018-19	City, Main Street	Minimal	Main Street
	<i>Place uniform signs on all Downtown parking areas. Provide attractive landscaping and lighting to encourage use.</i>	2018-19	City, Main Street	\$5,000	Donations
	<i>Designate Golf cart parking areas downtown which are convenient and close.</i>	2018-19	City	\$1,000	City GF
	<i>Additional small downtown parking areas should be developed which are convenient to the center, yet which do not detract from or remove historic building stock.</i>	2019-20	City	Unknown	GF, SPLOST
	<i>Consider developing shared use parking agreements with churches and schools in and around the downtown to reduce need for additional pavement and assure current parking areas are used to the maximum extent possible.</i>	2020-21	City	Minimal	GF
	<i>A market study is needed to assess the market potential and niche most appropriate for the downtown. Potential emphases may be arts, gateway to the outdoors, pub atmosphere, etc.</i>	2018-19	DDA	\$30,000	GF, DDA, DCA Grants
	<i>Business incentives should be considered to attract the types of businesses identified in the market study.</i>	2018-19	DDA, City	Unknown	DDA, City
	<i>Develop a comprehensive marketing plan for the downtown which benefits all the businesses in the area.</i>	2017-18	City staff, consultant	Unknown	City, Main Street
	<i>Develop a plan for lodging (hotels, beds and breakfasts,) in the downtown , amend ordinances as needed to implement the plan</i>	2018-19	City	Minimal	City GF
	<i>Research and develop a financial incentive package which can be provided to potential business owners to facilitate and encourage development of the desired business mix in the desired locations. Provide an example pro forma for redevelopment of the Mill area.</i>	2018-19	DDA	Minimal	DDA
	<i>Implement a regular late night downtown to attract shoppers who commute during the day.</i>	2017-18	Main Street	Minimal	
	<i>Promote shop local programs and events through Main Street to build community support for downtown businesses</i>	2017-18			
	<i>Establish a focus group to evaluate current City Codes and ordinances to recommend streamlining and amendments to facilitate business development downtown.</i>	2017-18	DDA		
	<i>Provide a “build a business” program to educate potential entrepreneurs on business plans, marketing, financing, and other needs to establish businesses downtown.</i>	2017-18	City Staff	Minimal	Main Street, DDA

	<i>Establish high speed internet downtown, and free wi fi</i>	2021-22	City	Unknown	SPLOST
	<i>Enhance social media presence to promote the downtown</i>	2017-18	City	Minimal	
	<i>Engage the downtown property owners and business owners to update the downtown master plan to include sidewalk widening and street side cafes, parking areas, downtown square, lodging, mill area, and downtown living opportunities</i>	2018-19	City	\$75,000	GF
	<i>Create Financial incentives to help establish downtown businesses Local crowdsource funding, DDA low interest loan pool, local bank funded</i>	2019-20	City, DDA	Unknown	DDA, Private, Grants
	<i>Create a museum downtown with a rotating display and which is related to City history. Include childrens museum items of interest and activities</i>	2020-21	City	Unknown	Grants
	<i>Create marketing materials which attract visitors to downtown, provide the marketing materials to local industries, as well as regional hotels, visitor centers, restaurants, etc.</i>	2018-19	City	Unknown	City GF
	<i>Evaluate downtown angled street parking to provide safer backing into traffic. Consider as part of a downtown streetscape plan.</i>	2018-19	City	Minimal	City GF
	<i>A prominent sign or marquee or regular banner location is needed to advertise downtown events.</i>	2018-19	City, DDA	Unknown	USDA Grant
	<i>Consider creating a “kitchen creation incentive” through DDA to facilitate the location of restaurants in the downtown historic buildings.</i>	2019-20	DDA	Unknown	Grants and Revolving Loans
	<i>Consider a regular transit route from industry, college campus, and employment centers to the downtown to support lunchtime restaurant traffic.</i>	2019-20	City	Unknown	City/GDOT
	<i>Encourage private development of train cars as lodging to expand the train tourism draw downtown.</i>	2020-21	Private	Unknown	
	<i>Encourage development of a private “Tiny Business” village downtown</i>	2020-21	City	Unknown	
	<i>Evaluate rent rates downtown and consider whether there are programs that could be implemented to incentivize start up businesses with a deferred or ramped rental rate.</i>	2020-21			

	<i>Study the infrastructure downtown and create a plan to improve and separate water, sewer, and gas services to each building while meeting service needs.</i>	2020-21	City	Unknown	Utility Funds
	<i>Consider HPC providing design services to assist business owners in proposing appropriate signage to facilitate their business activity.</i>	2017-18	City , HPC	Minimal	
	<i>Develop an “Address the Negative” program, where issues are raised or dropped in a box and addressed by the DDA , Main Street program or City.</i>	2017-18	City	Minimal	
	<i>Review programs in surrounding communities for successful ideas:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Madison ○ Monroe ○ Covington ○ Porterdale ○ Rutledge ○ Suwanee 	2018-19	City, DDA, PC, Main Street	Minimal	
	<i>Create a changing downtown decoration, seasonally , which generates interest and atmosphere.</i>	2017-18	Main Street	Unknown	Donations
	<i>Create a program to advertise art, events, or history in vacant storefronts to create a sense of vibrancy and progress.</i>	2018-19	Main Street	Minimal	
	Design and construct a library expansion to meet current and future needs	2017-18	City, Uncle Remus Library	\$2.3 m	GPLS, SPLOST, Uncle Remus
	Develop a shared use plan for Stephens park with SCCS which maximizes value and efficiency for the community and school system and implement improvements	2018-19	City, SCCS	Mimimal	City GF, SCCS
	Implement AV improvements in the City Community Room to facilitate effective meetings, transparency and ADA compliance.	2020-21	City	Unknown	City GF
	Increase Police Staffing to increase from 2 to 3 officers on all shifts	2020-2021	City	Unknown	City GF
	Increase Fire Staffing to increase from 3 to 4 officers on all shifts	2020-2021	City	Unknown	City GF
	Design a passive park with trails and water feature in partnership with County across from South Walton Park	2021-2022	City, County	Unknown	Grants

	Implement a City Leadership Academy to build awareness of City programs and involvement in boards and commissions	2018-19	City	Minimal	City GF
	Advertise annually for applicants for City Boards and Commissions	2017-18	City	Minimal	City GF
	Consider Annual Town Hall meetings or Citizen address opportunities at each Council meeting for Citizens to provide input on City issues	2018-19	City	Minimal	City GF
	Host a local bulletin board for City employers to post job openings	2017-18	City	Minimal	City GF
	Develop a Gateway signage plan which is scalable to all gateways and reflects the community vision and sense of place	2017-18	City	Unknown	CLG Grant
	Construct Gateway Signage at north and south end of PArkway	2018-19	City, SCDA	Unknown	GDOT Grant
	Construct Gateway signage at historic district	2019-20	City, HPC	Unknown	CLG Grant
	Construct Gateway signage at I-20 and 278	2020-21	City, SCDA	Unknown	GDOT Grant
	Construct Gateway signage at Alcovia, E Hightower, W Hightower	2021-22	City	Unknown	City GF
	Provide for conditional uses within the Agricultural zoning districts which allow for appropriate agri-tourism and agri-businesses	2017-18	City, PC	none	City GF
	Create a welcome packet for the City which can be updated annually which promotes City businesses and the amenities and activities of the City	2017-18	City staff	Minimal	City GF
	Promote establishment of Boys and Girls club in City and other after school youth activities	2019-20	City, SCCS, Civic Groups	Unknown	Private
	Participate in Georgia initiative for Community Housing (GICH) program	2018-19			
	Initiate a farmers market downtown	2017-18	City, GFMA	Minimal	Private
	Initiate student internship program in City Government with SCCS	2018-19	City	Unknown	City GF
	Study opportunities to improve internet/broadband service throughout the community	2018-19	City	Unknown	City GF
	Create a master plan for parks throughout the City	2018-19	City, NEGRC	Unknown	Grants
	Implement parks plan	2019-20	City	Unknown	SPLOST
	Fund sidewalk extensions annually, prioritizing from the downtown outward	2020-21	City	Unknown	SPLOST, CDBG
	Develop a master plan for Gas system extensions and interconnections to serve growth areas and provide redundant feeds. Implement projects annually.	2017-18	City	\$20,000/ Unknown	City Gas Fund
	Create a Fire Training Center at the PW lot, to move training activities away from neighborhood areas.	2020-21	City	Unknown	SPLOST

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