

I. Introduction

Purpose

The primary purpose of this portion of the joint Bacon County Comprehensive Plan is to assess Bacon County and the City of Alma's condition; in addition, this assessment allows the county and the cities to determine what steps need to be taken to protect the county and to ensure quality growth within Bacon County. Projected population figures illustrate the growth Bacon County will experience in the next twenty years. The Community Assessment will present a factual and conceptual foundation upon which the rest of the comprehensive plan is built and will allow current and future community leaders to guide Bacon County and the City of Alma into a future period of smart growth.

Scope

This assessment includes the four basic components as required by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

1. List of issues and opportunities from analysis of available data
2. Analysis of existing land use and development patterns.
3. Analysis of current community policies, actions, and development patterns for consistency with the Quality Community Objectives.
4. Analysis of supporting data.

In-depth data for this assessment is included in the Technical Addendum.

Included in this assessment is the Comprehensive Plan Schedule. The initial hearing will be held in April. At this meeting, the community will begin organizing a Steering Committee composed of various stakeholders and interested citizens. The Steering Committee will hold monthly meetings. During the months of May, June, and July the RDC will complete the Community Assessment and submit to the citizens for approval, before submitting the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program to DCA in October. Work will begin on the Community Agenda during September and will end by March 2007.

Public hearing to submit the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program will be held in October. The public hearing for the submission of the Community Agenda will be held in April 2007.

Figure 2 Comprehensive Plan Schedule

	2006										2007				
	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	
Initial Hearing															
Community Assessment															
Community Participation Program															
Community Agenda															
Transmittal/ Adoption															
Steering Committee															
Scenario Building															
Visioning															
SWOT															

II. Issues and Opportunities

Economic Development Issues

- ❖ We do not have a vision for the future economic development of the community.
- ❖ We do not have a cost benefit analysis of economic development projects.
- ❖ We recruit businesses that provide or create sustainable products.

Economic Development Opportunities

- ❖ Our community does have an inventory of vacant sites and buildings that are available for redevelopment and/ or infill development.
- ❖ We recruit businesses that provide or create sustainable products.

Population Development Issues

- ❖ We do not have a Capital Improvements Program that supports current and future growth.

Population Opportunities

- ❖ We have population projections for the next 20 years that we refer to when making infrastructure.

Natural and Cultural Resources Issues

- ❖ Our community does not have enough greenspace or parkland.
- ❖ Our community does not have a greenspace plan.
- ❖ Our community does not have a comprehensive natural resources inventory.
- ❖ Our community has not passed the Part V Environmental Ordinances.

Natural and Cultural Resources Opportunities

- ❖ We are using storm water best management practices for all new development.
- ❖ Our community is actively preserving greenspace through direct purchase and/or encouraging set-asides in new developments, examples are residential parks.
- ❖ Create an active Historic Preservation Commission to promote and protect historic areas in Bacon County.
- ❖ Enact ordinances to ensure that new development complements Bacon County historic development.

Facilities and Services Issues

- ❖ City of Alma's waste load is almost at maximum capacity. The city will be looking to upgrade in the future.

- ❖ The County and City need to analyze the impact of proposed development projects on public facilities.

Facilities and Services Opportunities

- ❖ Current facility extension policies do not promote sprawl.
- ❖ Police, educational, and fire service will meet current needs and are capable of expanding to meet future development and industrial needs.

Intergovernmental Coordination Issues

- ❖ We do not share plans or planning information with neighboring communities.

Intergovernmental Coordination Opportunities

- ❖ Elected officials should be indoctrinated into the land-development process in the community promoting a better understanding of this process in order to make better decisions affecting their community.

Housing Issues

- ❖ We do not encourage new residential development to follow the pattern of our original town, continuing the exiting street design and recommending smaller setbacks.
- ❖ We do not have options available for loft living, downtown living, or “neo-traditional” development.
- ❖ We do not allow small houses built on small lots of less than 5,000 square feet in appropriate areas.

Housing Opportunities

- ❖ We have many multifamily housing available in our community.
- ❖ We have vacant and developable land available for multifamily and single family usage.
- ❖ We have housing programs that focus on households with special needs.

Land Use Issues

- ❖ We do not have a conservation subdivision ordinance for residential development that is widely used and protects open space in perpetuity.
- ❖ Our community does not have a local land conservation program.

Land Use Opportunities

- ❖ The county has the opportunity to activate land development codes to maintain new growth and development.
- ❖ We have clearly understandable guidelines for new development.

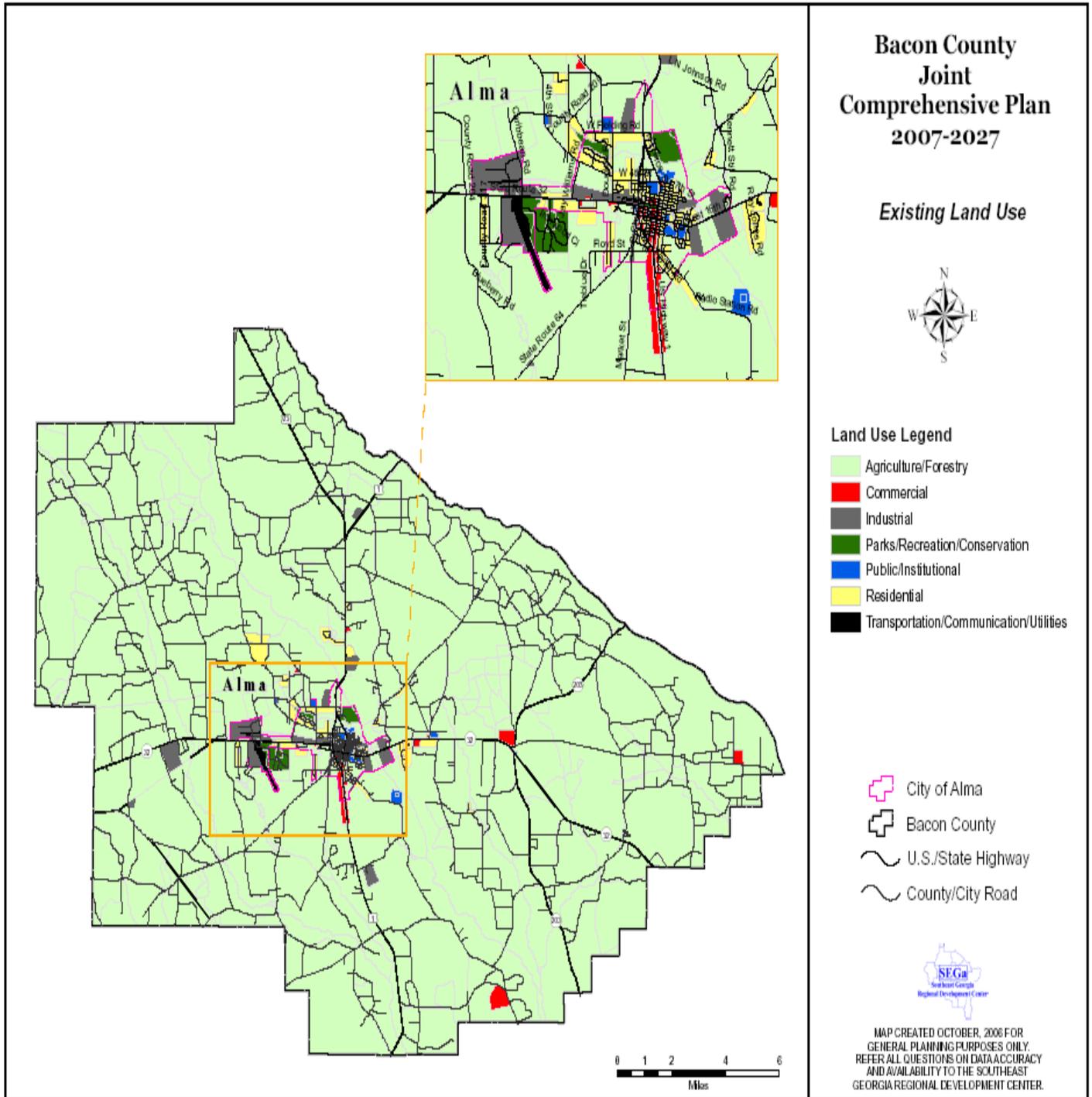
III. Analysis of Existing Development Patterns

The purpose of this analysis is to gain a clear understanding of the geographic setting within Bacon County and the City of Alma. The following analysis looks at three aspects of the existing development patterns in Bacon County and the City of Alma, Existing Land Use, Areas Requiring Special Attention, and Character Areas.

Existing Land Use

The map illustrates uses found within the incorporated and unincorporated areas of Bacon County. These uses were categorized using a variation of the standard category system prescribed by the Georgia DCA.

Figure 3 Existing Land Use Map



The following table presents the definitions of each land use category found in Bacon County and the City of Alma.

Figure 5

Existing Land Use Category	Definition
Residential	Single-family residential uses at less than 0.2 units per acre (less than 5-acre lots).
Agricultural/Forestry	Land used for agricultural purposes such as cropland or livestock production and all land used or potentially used for commercial timber production.
Commercial	Commercial and office uses; including strip malls, big-box retail, auto-related businesses, restaurants, convenience stores, and office buildings.
Industrial	Industrial uses.
Parks/Recreation/Conservation	Active and passive recreation areas, parks, and protected lands. Includes land owned by a land trust or public agency and preserved from future development as maintained as open space.
Cemeteries	Areas dedicated for the burial of human remains.
Public/Institutional	Community facilities (except utilities), general government, and institutional uses. Examples include schools, public safety stations, city halls, courthouses, jails, health facilities, churches, and libraries.
Transportation/Communication/Utilities	Land used by transportation, communication or utility facilities; such as airports, cell towers, power stations, sewer plants, water towers, and water treatment facilities.
Undeveloped/Vacant	No active use on the property, includes property improved for real estate sale (cleared and graded buy on structure) and property with vacant or abandoned structures with which no employment or residence can be associated.



Areas Requiring Special Attention

Over the next twenty years, Bacon County and the City of Alma will face several challenges.

Areas of rapid development

Bacon County currently has a new development “Wilderness” at the north end of the county off US Highway 1. This development is expected to grow at a fast pace over the next few years. Due to the expected growth, areas such as housing, community facilities and services, natural and cultural resources will be impacted. In the future, the County and City will need to address items, such as schools and water/sewer services.



Areas in need of improvements to aesthetics or attractiveness

The US 1/ US 23 corridor leading into Bacon County is an area that would benefit from improvement to aesthetics and will be among the character areas for Bacon County. This corridor holds great potential for business locations and to create a pleasant picture of Bacon County and the City of Alma.

Abandoned structures or sites



The historical Bacon County Elementary, located within the City of Alma, is a prominent landmark within the community. Although, the school is in disrepair, the building can be restored and can serve as a multi-purpose building. Bacon County recently received a State Heritage Grant to help restore the school.





Areas of significant cultural resources

The old Alma hotel eludes the charm and character of a bygone era in the City of Alma. The historical value of this building along with its benefit as a valuable economic resource makes it a must to protect.



Areas of significant infill development

Currently the City of Alma has several scattered vacant sites that show potential of being converted to parks and/or green space. Some of these sites are also excellent sites for future businesses to locate in the City bringing an economic boost to both the City and the County.



Analysis of Consistency with Quality Community Objectives

This section includes an evaluation of Bacon County and the City of Alma’s current policies, activities, and development patterns. Each of the 15 Quality Community Objectives is listed below with a brief summary of Bacon County and the City of Alma’s strengths. The objectives are organized around the six statewide planning goals.

Land Use and Transportation Goal

Sense of Place Objective: Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment.

Quality Community Objective	Status
If someone dropped from the sky into our community, he or she would know immediately where she was, based on our distinct characteristics.	No.
We have delineated the areas of our community that are important to our history and heritage and have taken steps to protect those areas.	No
We have ordinances to regulate the aesthetics of development in our highly visible areas.	Yes
We have ordinances to regulate the size and type of signage in our community.	No.

Traditional Neighborhood Objective: Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged; including use of more human-scale development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity.

Quality Community Objective	Status
If we have a zoning code, it does not separate commercial, residential, and retail uses in every district.	Yes
Our community has ordinances in place that allow neo-traditional development “By right” so that developers do not have to go through a long variance process.	Yes
We have a street tree ordinance that requires new development to plant shade-bearing trees appropriate to our climate.	Yes, The City of Alma requires a 10’ buffer between new constructions.
We have a program to keep our public areas (commercial, retail districts, parks)	Yes



clean and safe.	
Our community has an organized tree-planting campaign in public areas that will make walking more comfortable in summer.	No
Our community maintains its sidewalks and vegetation well so that walking is an option some would choose.	Yes.
In some areas, several errands can be made on food, if so desired.	Yes.
Some of our children can and do walk to school safely.	Yes
Some of our children can and do bike to school safely.	Yes
Schools are located in or near neighborhoods in our community.	Yes

Infill Development Objective: Communities should maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the conversion of undeveloped land at the urban periphery by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the downtown or traditional urban core of the community.

Quality Community Objective	Status
Our community has an inventory of vacant sites and buildings that are available for redevelopment and/or infill development.	Yes.
Our community is actively working to promote Brownfield redevelopment.	No.
Our community is actively working to promote greyfield redevelopment.	No.
We have areas of our community that are planned for nodal development (compacted near intersections rather than spread along a major road).	No.
Our community allows small lot development (5000 SF or less) for some uses.	No Not in housing.

Transportation Alternatives Objective: Alternatives to transportation by automobile, including mass transit, bicycle routes, and pedestrian facilities, should be made available in each community. Greater use of alternate transportation should be encouraged.

Quality Community Objective	Status
We have public transportation in our community.	No. Bacon County has recently received a 5311 grant and will soon begin work on

	implementing a public transit system.
We require that new development connect with existing development through a street network, not a single entry/exit.	No.
We have a good network of sidewalks to allow people to walk to a variety of destinations.	Yes Sidewalks are located along major thoroughfares.
We have a sidewalk ordinance in our community that requires all new developments to provide user-friendly sidewalks.	No.
We require that newly built sidewalks connect to existing sidewalks wherever possible.	No
We have a plan for bicycle routes through our community.	Yes. The plan is part of the Southeast Georgia Regional Bike and Pedestrian Plan.
We allow commercial and retail development to share parking areas wherever possible.	Yes.

Economic Development Goal

Appropriate Business Objective: The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, linkages to other economic activities in the region, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher-skill job opportunities.

Quality Community Objective	Status
Our economic development organization has considered our community's strengths, assets, and weaknesses and has created a business development strategy based on them.	No.
Our ED organization has considered the types of businesses already in our community, and has a plan to recruit business/ industry that will be compatible.	Yes.
We recruit businesses that provide or create sustainable products.	No
We have a diverse jobs base, so that one employer leaving would not cripple us.	No.



Educational Opportunities Objective: Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community – to permit community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.

Quality Community Objective	Status
Our community provides work-force training options for our citizens.	Yes.
Our workforce training programs provide citizens with skills for jobs that are available in our community.	Yes.
Our community has higher education opportunities, or is close to a community that does.	Yes.
Our community has job opportunities for college graduates, so that our children may live and work here if they choose.	Few.

Employment Options Objective: A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.

Quality Community Objective	Status
Our economic development program has an entrepreneur support program.	No.
Our community has jobs for skilled labor.	Few
Our community has jobs for unskilled labor.	Yes.
Our community has professional and managerial jobs.	Few.

Housing Goal

Housing Opportunities Objective: Quality housing and a range of housing sizes, cost, and density should be provided in each community to make it possible for all who work in the community to also live in the community.

Quality Community Objective	Status
People who work in our community can afford to live here, too. Our community has enough housing for each income level.	Yes.



We encourage new residential development to follow the pattern of our original town, continuing the existing street design and recommending smaller setbacks.	No.
We have vacant and developable land available for multifamily housing.	Yes.
We allow multifamily housing to be developed in our community.	Yes.
We have housing programs that focus on households with special needs.	No

Natural and Cultural Resources Goal

Environmental Protection Objective: Air quality and environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development. Environmentally sensitive areas deserve special protection, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or quality of life of the community or region. Whenever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area should be preserved.

Quality Community Objective	Status
Our community has a comprehensive natural resources inventory.	Yes.
We use this resource inventory to steer development away from environmentally sensitive areas.	No.
We have identified our defining natural resources and have taken steps to protect them.	County has identified defining natural resources but is not protecting them.
Our community has and actively enforces a tree preservation ordinance.	No.
We are using stormwater best management practices for all new development.	No.

Open Space Preservation Objective: New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors.

Quality Community Objective	Status
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Our community has a greenspace plan.	No.
Our community is actively preserving greenspace - either through direct purchase, or by encouraging set-asides in new development.	No.
We have a local land conservation program, or, we work with state or national land conservation programs to preserve environmentally important areas in our community.	Yes.
We have a conservation subdivision ordinance for residential development that is widely used and protects open space in perpetuity.	No.

Heritage Preservation Objective: The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural features that are important to defining the community’s character.

Quality Community Objective	Status
We have designated historic districts in our community.	No.
We have an active historic preservation commission.	Yes.
We want new development to complement our historic development, and we have ordinances in place to ensure that happening.	No.

Community Facilities and Services Goal

Growth Preparedness Objective: Each community should identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These may include housing and infrastructure (roads, water, sewer, and telecommunications) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances to direct growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities.

Quality Community Objective	Status
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We have population projections for the next 20 years that we refer to when making infrastructure decisions.	Yes.
Our local governments, the local school board, and other decision-making entities use the same population projections.	Yes.
We have a Capital Improvements Program that supports current and future growth.	No.
We have designated areas of our community where we would like to see growth.	Yes.

Intergovernmental Coordination Goal

Regional Identity Objective: Regions should promote and preserve an “identity”, defined in terms of traditional regional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.

Quality Community Objective	Status
Our community is characteristic of the region in terms of architectural styles and heritage.	Yes.
Our community is connected to the surrounding region for economic livelihood through businesses that process local agricultural products.	Yes.
Our community encourages businesses that create products that draw on our regional heritage (mountain, agricultural, metropolitan, and coastal).	No.
Our community participates in the Georgia Department of Economic Development’s regional tourism partnership.	No.
Our community promotes tourism opportunities based on the unique characteristics of our region.	Very little.
Our community contributes to the region and draws from the region, as a source of local culture, commerce, entertainment, and education.	Yes.



Regional Cooperation Objective: Regional cooperation should be encouraged in setting priorities, identifying shared needs, and finding collaborative solutions; particularly where it is critical to the success of a venture such as protection of shared natural resources.

Quality Community Objective	Status
We plan jointly with our cities and County for Comprehensive Planning purposes.	Yes.
We are satisfied with our Service Delivery Strategies.	Yes.
We cooperate with at least one local government to provide or share services (parks and recreation, E911, Emergency Services, Police, Sheriff’s Office, schools, water, sewer, or other).	Yes.

Regional Solutions Objective: Regional solutions to needs shared by more than one local jurisdiction are preferable to separate local approaches, particularly where this will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer.

Quality Community Objective	Status
We plan jointly with our cities for transportation planning purposes.	No.
We have a regular meeting process with the County and neighboring cities to discuss solutions to regional issues.	No.

Recommended Character Areas

The following chart and map define the character areas found within Bacon County and the City of Alma

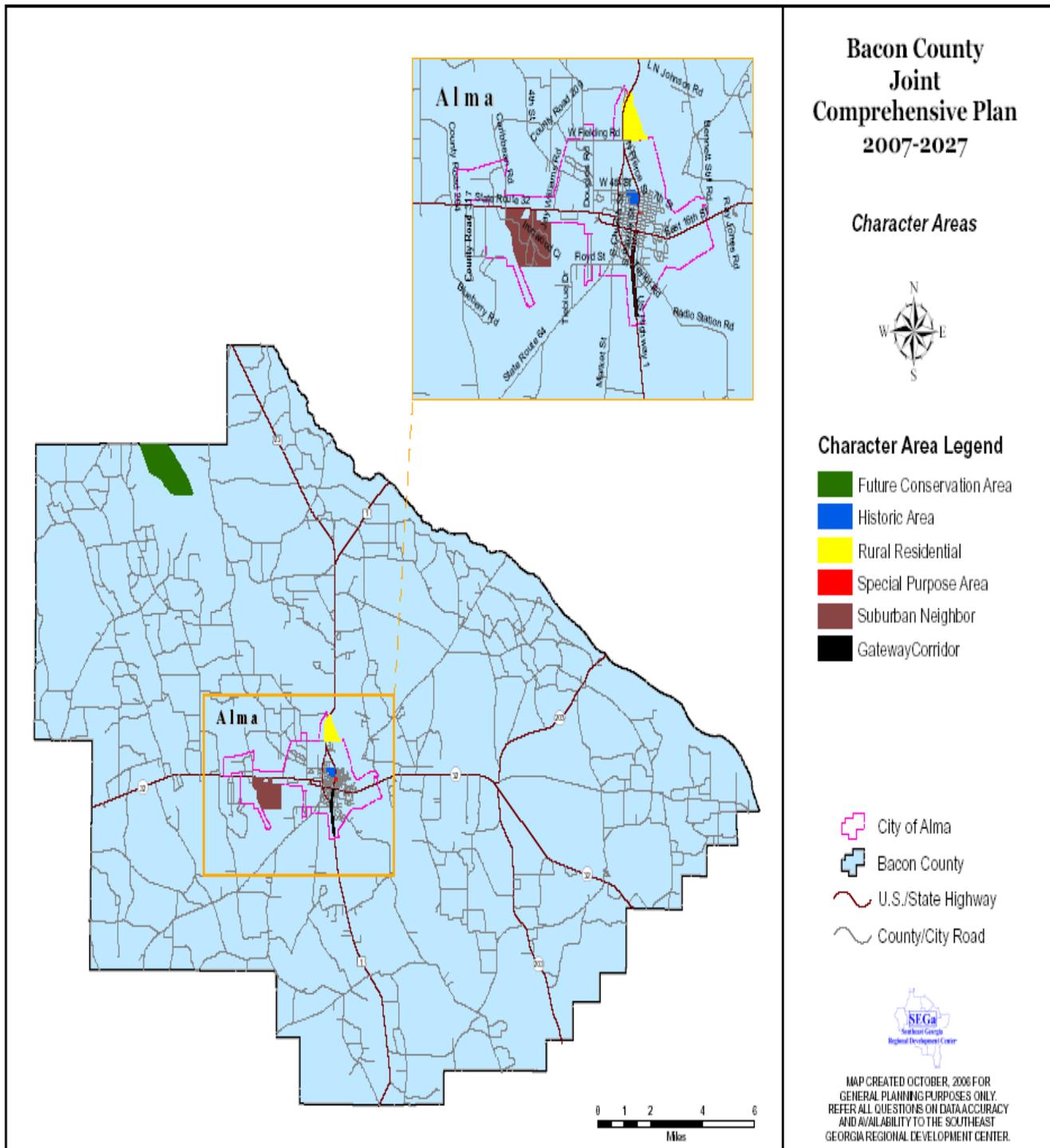
Character Area	Description/Location	Development Strategy
Rural Residential Area	Rural undeveloped land likely to face development pressures for lower density residential development. Typically will have low pedestrian access, large lots, and open space, pastoral views.	Whenever possible, connect to regional network of greenspace and trails available to pedestrians. Encourage compatible architecture styles that maintain regional rural character



Suburban Neighborhood	Low pedestrian orientation, little or no transit, high open space, predominantly residential.	There should be strong connectivity and continuity between each planned development. Promote street design that fosters traffic calming.
Historic Area	Contains features, landmarks, and civic or cultural uses of historic interest.	Protect historic properties from demolition and encourage rehabilitation with appropriate incentives.
Gateway Corridor	Developed or undeveloped land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that serves as an important entrance or means of access to the community.	Focus on appearances with appropriate signage, landscaping and other beautification measures. Use directory signage to clustered developments.
Special Purpose Area	Area that presently does not fit into other categories may have singular characteristics and not be replicated elsewhere in the community.	The County and City will work together using this area as possible new site for Post Office.
Future Conservation Area	Undeveloped natural lands and environmentally sensitive areas	Promote this area as passive-use tourism and recreation destination as in proposed future lake project.



Figure 4
Character Area Map



Bacon County Joint Comprehensive Plan 2007-2027

Areas Requiring Special Attention



Special Attention Legend

-  Abandoned Structure/Site
-  Cultural Resource
-  Infill Development
-  Rapid Development
-  Gateway Corridor

-  City of Alma
-  Bacon County
-  U.S./State Highway
-  County/City Road



MAP CREATED JANUARY, 2007 FOR
GENERAL PLANNING PURPOSES ONLY.
REFER ALL QUESTIONS ON DATA ACCURACY
AND AVAILABILITY TO THE SOUTHEAST
GEORGIA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER.

