



# Elbert County Comprehensive Plan

2019 Update



## Acknowledgements

### Steering Committee

Chris Alexander, Board of Commissioners  
Bob Thomas, County Administrator  
Patrick Hopp, Code Enforcement  
Pam Allgood, Keep Elbert County Beautiful  
Cosby Smith, Planning Commission  
Rusty Warner, Economic Developer

### Identified Stakeholders

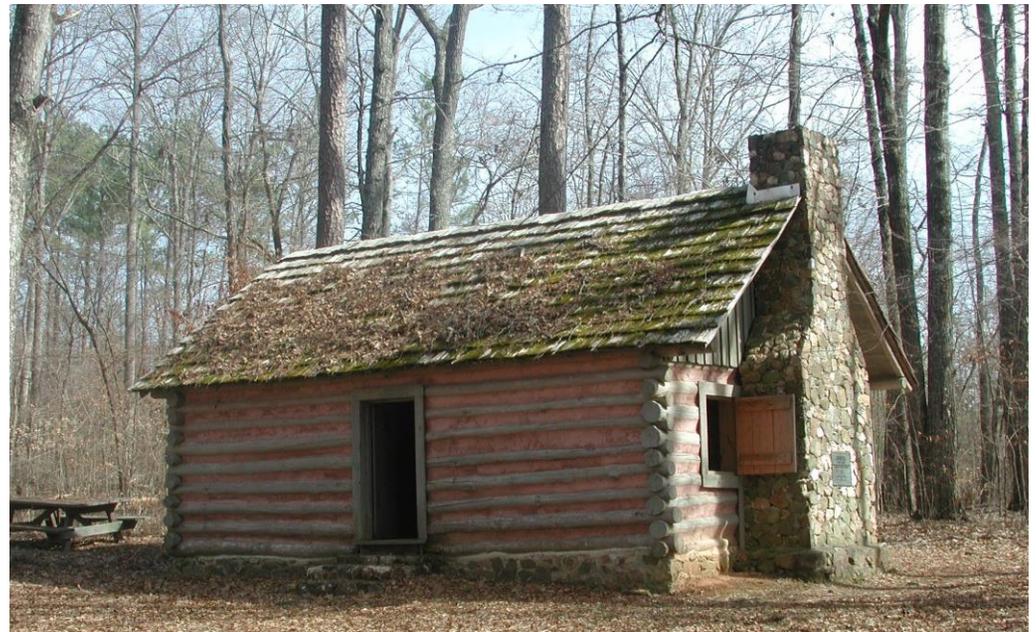
Board of Commissioners  
Planning Commissioners  
Elbert County School District  
Emergency Services  
Neighborhood Watch Groups  
Chamber of Commerce

### Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

Burke Walker, Executive Director  
Eva Kennedy, Planning & Government Services Director  
John Devine, AICP, Principal Planner  
Mark Beatty, Planner  
Stephen Jaques, Project Specialist

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction & Overview

### Purpose

This comprehensive plan serves as a decision-making guide for local government officials and community leaders. Based on input from the public, stakeholders, and a steering committee, the plan identifies needs and opportunities, goals and policies, land use practices, and an implementation framework for key elements.

### Process

The comprehensive plan process follows the rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning, effective 10/1/2018.

## Public Involvement

### Public Input & Steering Committee

The planning process began with a public hearing and was followed by a series of community input sessions during which the public and a local steering committee were invited to discuss local trends and aspirations. The availability of steering committee members to take questions and comments throughout the process provided additional input opportunities. A final public hearing was held before transmittal of the plan to the DCA for review.

### NEGRC's Role

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission's (NEGRC) Planning & Government Services Division oversaw the development of this plan, including facilitating input meetings.

# Chapter 2

## Needs & Opportunities

The following list of requirements and opportunities results from a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis conducted during the community input process, as well as professional analysis of relevant data.

*\*Italicized entries indicate high priorities (with STWP project number in parentheses)*



### Population

Elbert County's population of approximately 20,000 people is projected to see a slight decrease in the coming years. The median age of the population is 43 years and 35% of residents are over 55, matching various stakeholders' comments referencing the County's aging and declining population (ESRI BAO). Input meeting attendees also cited a lack of opportunities and activities for youth in the community as a concern to be addressed. *The County should develop a strategy for senior service delivery to help residents age in place and appoint a working group to consider programmatic and facility needs for youth recreation and development. (1, 2)*

At 22%, the poverty rate in Elbert County is above the state average (17%), substantiating stakeholder-cited needs to provide affordable housing and transportation (ESRI BAO).

Input meeting attendees pointed to Elbert's strength in its location in proximity to Athens, GA, and Anderson, SC; a good school system and the presence of Athens Technical College; local history; and good people. However, stakeholders also referenced poor citizen participation in government and community initiatives. *A program similar to the City of Oxford's (Newton County) model councilmember initiative, in which one elected official selects a resident to "shadow" her/him for a month, could be an effective tool. (3)*

### Planning, Land Use, and Housing

Elbert County's housing stock is almost entirely detached single-family houses and mobile homes. The majority of homes are owner-occupied (61%), while 22% of households rent. The County's 17%

vacancy rate and an aging housing stock may indicate a need for code enforcement and creative blight prevention strategies (ESRI BAO).

The Housing and Transportation Affordability Index (H+T Index) estimates that residents spend 27% of their income on housing, with 30% serving as the threshold for households that are said to be cost-burdened. Strategies for lowering the cost of housing include code reform and allowing accessory dwelling units, duplexes, and small apartments (2-8 units) in single-family neighborhoods.

Meeting attendees indicated that, while they count a sufficient base of developable land and a relatively affordable overall cost of living among Elbert's strengths, diversity in the housing market, especially as it relates to affordability, is a concern. *Developing a countywide status report and needs assessment focusing on quality, diverse, and affordable housing are appropriate implementation measures. (4)*

## **Transportation**

Given its rural setting, trips within and originating from Elbert County are made almost exclusively by car, with 86% of workers driving to work alone and 46% driving in excess of 20 minutes. This accounts for residents spending 36% of their income on transportation, tied for highest among Northeast Georgia with two other counties (H+T Index). Creating walkable and bikeable communities by improving non-automobile infrastructure and developing local businesses could help reduce the burden of high transportation costs and time spent commuting. *The County should develop a plan for bicycling and walking, as well as explore ways to promote and grow its rural transit system in cooperation with local employers, training facilities, and educational institutions. (5, 6)*

## **Natural and Cultural Resources**

Stakeholders continually noted Elbert County's strength in natural resources. Drinking water supply, Lake Russell/Richard B. Russell State Park, and other recreation areas were mentioned multiple times as key assets and sources of local pride. *Capitalizing on natural beauty and recreational resources to attract new residents and visitors should be a priority. (7)*

Meeting attendees also indicated that, while Elbert County is already very clean, maintaining a focus on beautification and litter control is important. Keep Elbert County Beautiful should be a key partner.

## **Community Facilities and Services**

Formerly a State Outdoor Recreation Area, Bobby Brown Park is now a county facility. *Along with Elbert County Parks and Recreation's other facilities, long-term maintenance, planning, and programming needs should be evaluated. (8)*

Data from the Federal Communications Commission indicate that Elberton and adjoining areas have access to high-speed internet from the City of Elberton, with download speeds up to 200 Mbps. Outside of this service area, however, the fastest speeds are in the 20-30 Mbps range. The nearest Charter Communications cable line, at 400 Mbps for downloads, appears to be located 3.5 miles from the Elbert County/Madison County line between Comer and Carlton. State of Georgia data indicate that 31% of the County's population is unserved by broadband. In addition to poor internet connectivity, stakeholders referenced inconsistent mobile phone service throughout Elbert's rural areas. *Local officials should work with the City of Elberton to develop a basic broadband and mobile communications plan and make*

*contact with providers to gauge potential for strengthening access within the County. (9)*

Meeting attendees cited law enforcement and a good airport with a runway of more than 5,000 feet in length as strengths, while offering signage as an opportunity for improvement. *The County will evaluate whether a wayfinding and identity signage initiative would be appropriate. (10)*

### **Intergovernmental Coordination**

As referenced in “Community Facilities and Services” above, the City of Elberton provides high-speed internet service within and outside of the city limits. Countywide expansion of the coverage area could result from the emergence of a potential partnership.

Stakeholders indicated that, generally, intergovernmental coordination provides opportunities for improvements to benefit the County and its municipalities. Specific suggestions for cooperation include downtown development and tourism promotion.

### **Economic Development**

The employment base of Elbert County comprises mainly manufacturing and services jobs. Within these groups, production, basic services, and professional services are the largest sources of employment (ESRI BAO). Since educational attainment lags behind state averages, workforce development may be a necessary component for community development. *The County should prepare a workforce development needs assessment. (11)*

*A basic economic development strategy with a focus on diversifying the base and retention/expansion of existing industry should be a priority, and the County should investigate the potential for federal Opportunity Zone designation. (12, 13)*

# Chapter 3

## Vision

Elbert County will be a community of growth, improvement, and values. We are building a county that attracts and supports diverse new residents, visitors, and businesses ranging from mom-and-pop stores to larger, community-supportive industry. Our public infrastructure and facilities, activity nodes, housing stock, and educational and transportation systems will provide high-quality experiences for everyone. Residents and leadership will work together to accentuate our strengths, becoming a model of a forward-thinking, scenic, and opportunity-ready county.

### Goals & Policies

1. Target opportunities for community development through smart use of public funds to generate private investment
2. Seek out expanded broadband internet access
3. Develop a comprehensive tourism program to capitalize on natural and cultural resources such as Lake Russell, Richard B. Russell State Park, and historic downtowns in Elberton and Bowman
4. Prioritize support and development of existing employers as an economic development strategy
5. Attract families by offering recreational and educational opportunities for children
6. Retain younger residents by training them to be ready to join the workforce in industries in which Elbert County is competitive
7. Create an all-ages community where “aging in place” is a natural, attractive choice for seniors
8. Establish a transportation system that connects people to destinations while allowing choices in travel mode
9. Keep Elbert County’s landscapes, corridors, and places clean, beautiful, and litter-free

# Chapter 4

## Land Use

Pursuant to the rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the following Future Land Use (FLU) classifications and map provide the physical planning component of the comprehensive plan. While zoning regulations vary, FLU represents a standardized approach to envisioning and planning for desired scenarios. *As such, inconsistencies between FLU and existing land use or zoning maps may arise because FLU presents a blueprint for what is to come.*

### **Parks, Recreation, Conservation**

Recreation areas, lands held for conservation, and floodplains.  
*Corresponding Zoning Districts: NA – No park-specific districts*

### **Agriculture**

Farms and forestland; residential development on very large lots.  
*Corresponding Zoning Districts: A, RR*

### **Residential**

Conventional housing applications that include concentrations of efficient density and preserved greenspace.  
*Corresponding Zoning Districts: RR, R1, R2*

### **Commercial**

Business and trade areas. Includes retail stores, shopping centers, dining establishments, and office buildings.  
*Corresponding Zoning Districts: GB*

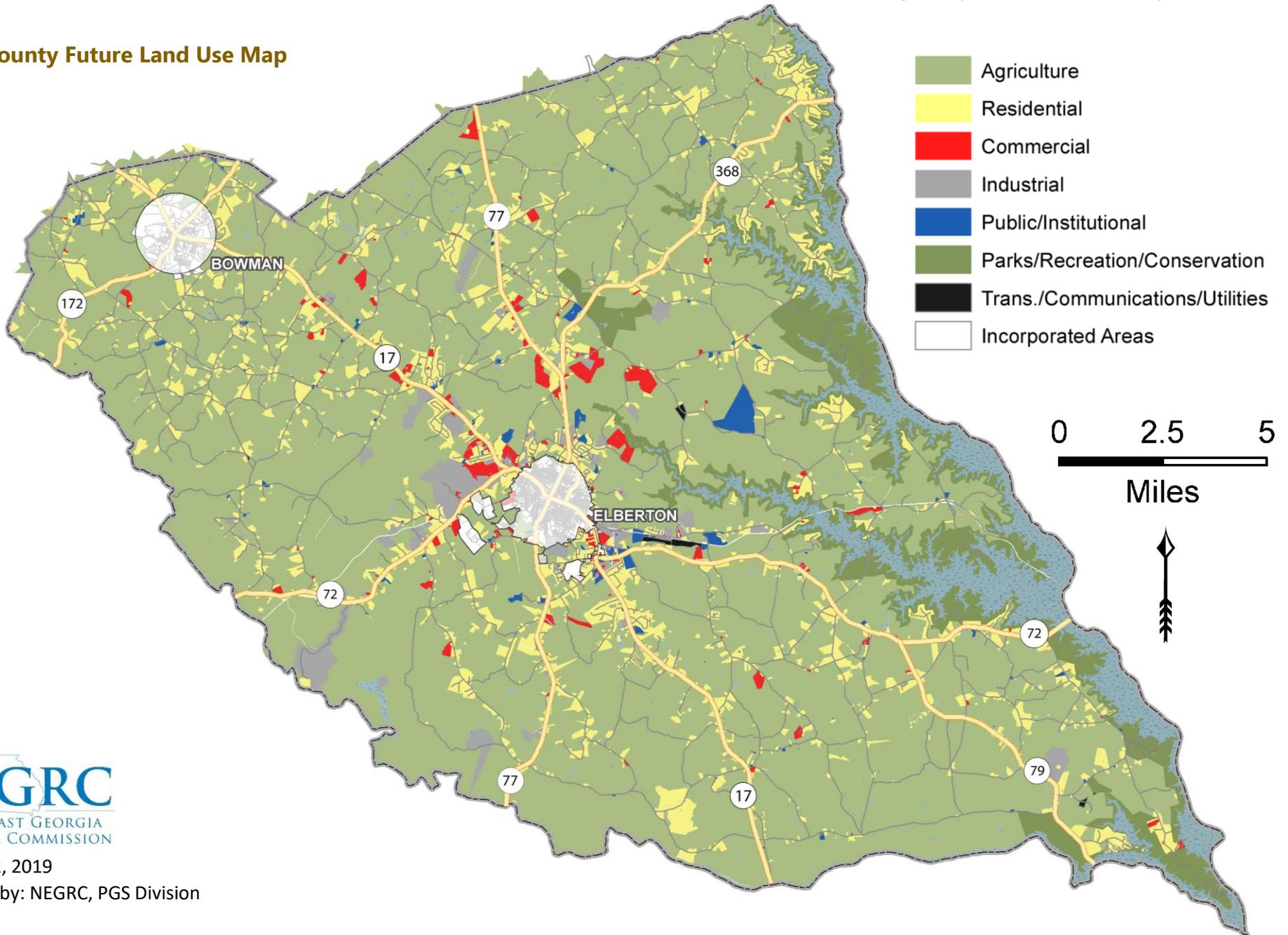
### **Industrial**

Property used for manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, trucking, etc.  
*Corresponding Zoning Districts: I*

### **Public/Institutional**

Local community facilities, general government, and institutional purposes. Examples include schools, government buildings, health facilities, and libraries.  
*Corresponding Zoning Districts: NA – No civic-specific districts*

### Elbert County Future Land Use Map



# Chapter 5

## Community Work Program

The Short-Term Work Program (2019-2023), updated every five years, provides a list of specific activities that the community plans to address as immediate priorities. A Report of Plan Accomplishments, which provides status commentary on the previous work plan (2012-2016), follows.



**Short-Term Work Program, 2019-2023**

(\*entries with an asterisk represent carryover items from the previous STWP)

#	Activity	Timeframe	Responsible Party	Cost Estimate	Funding Source
1	Develop needs assessment and plan for serving senior citizens	2022	Administrator, BOC	None	NA
2	Appoint working group to consider programmatic and facility needs for youth recreation and development	2020	BOC	None	NA
3	Consider and, if appropriate, implement model commissioner program to improve citizen participation in local government (see Oxford, GA)	2020	BOC	None	NA
4	Conduct countywide report and needs assessment focusing on quality, diverse, and affordable housing (including consideration of Georgia Initiative for Community Housing application)	2020-2021	Administrator, BOC, Community Development	\$5,000	General Fund, DCA
5	Develop and adopt countywide complete streets and trails plan	2021-2022	Administrator	\$1,500	General Fund, GDOT
6	Create plan to promote and grow rural transit system in cooperation with local employers, training facilities, and educational institutions	2022-2023	BOC, Transit	\$1,000	General Fund, GDOT
7	Prepare plan to attract new residents and visitors by capitalizing on natural beauty and recreational resources	2022-2023	Administrator, BOC, Community Development	\$2,500	General Fund, DCA
8	Prepare parks and recreation plan (facilities, maintenance, programming, etc.)	2021-2022	Parks and Recreation	TBD	General Fund, DCA
9	Create basic broadband and mobile communications plan, including working with providers to strengthen access; become Broadband Ready Community	2019-2020	Administrator, BOC, Community Development, Elberton	Minimal	NA
10	Evaluate potential for and, if appropriate, develop wayfinding and identity signage plan	2020-2021	Administrator, BOC, Community Development	TBD	General Fund, DCA
11	Prepare workforce development needs assessment	2021-2023	Community Development	Minimal	NA
12	Prepare basic economic development strategy to diversify base and retain/expand existing industry	2019-2021	Community Development	\$4,000	General Fund, DCA
13	Investigate potential for and, if appropriate, pursue federal Opportunity Zone creation	2020-2022	BOC, Community Development	Minimal	NA

#	Activity	Timeframe	Responsible Party	Cost Estimate	Funding Source
14	Establish regular coordination protocol with state agencies to identify opportunities for business and industrial recruitment	2020	Administrator, BOC	None	NA
15	Provide free books to 300 children through Read at Home Program	2019-2023	BOC	\$7,500/year	Corporate Sponsor
16	Nominate Nickville Community to National Register	2021	BOC	\$3,000	General Fund, DNR
17	Nominate Fortsonia Community to National Register	2021	BOC	\$3,000	General Fund, DNR
18	Complete expansion of SR 17 and SR 72	2019-2023	GDOT, BOC, Cities	\$20,000,000	GDOT, TSPLOST
19	Implement Bobby Brown Park master plan	2019-2023	BOC	Varies by project	General Fund, SPLOST, Grants
20	Implement 2016 Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan	2019-2021	BOC, EMA	Varies by project	FEMA, GEMA, General Fund
21	Redevelop the former Health Department building into a visual arts facility	2019-2021	BOC, Community Development	TBD	General Fund, SPLOST, Grants
22	Develop inland port with private-sector partners	2019-2023	BOC, Community Development	TBD	General Fund, SPLOST, Grants
23	Implement additional phases of the Porter Drive housing development	2019-2023	BOC, Community Development	TBD	General Fund, Grants, CDBG

**Report of Plan Accomplishments, 2012-2016**

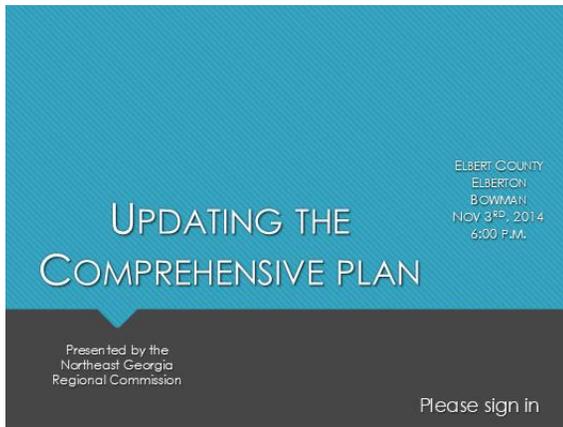
#	Activity	Status	Notes
1	Study local economic characteristics and conditions to address the potential for economic diversification	Underway	2020 completion
2	Continue to support the Economic Development Authority	Ongoing	Not for carryover into STWP
3	Continue cooperative relationship between local government, Athens Tech, and local businesses and industries to monitor labor force conditions and needs	Ongoing	Not for carryover into STWP
4	Work with state agencies to identify opportunities for business and industrial recruitment	Underway	2020 completion
5	Provide incentives for passing the Georgia High School Graduation Test	Ongoing	Not for carryover into STWP
6	Establish a Youth Advisory Committee to develop long-term strategies to address local issues that prevent students from reaching their full potential	Completed	
7	Provide free books to 300 children through Read at Home Program	Completed	
8	Improve graduation rates through Parent Communication Coordination high school program and "On Track" program in elementary school	Ongoing	Not for carryover into STWP
9	Coordinate new development with existing and planned community facilities and the Comprehensive Plan	Ongoing	Not for carryover into STWP
10	Utilize zoning ordinance for agricultural preservation	Ongoing	Not for carryover into STWP
11	Allow tax incentives for agricultural preservation	Completed	
12	Work with Elbert Memorial Hospital to expand services	Completed	
13	Continue participation in the Northeast Georgia Regional Solid Waste Management Authority	Ongoing	Not for carryover into STWP
14	Continue public education program to promote recycling	Ongoing	Not for carryover into STWP
15	Nominate Nickville Community to National Register	Underway	2021 completion
16	Nominate Fortsonia Community to National Register	Underway	2021 completion
17	Develop and adopt zoning ordinance	Completed	
18	Establish Planning Commission	Completed	

#	Activity	Status	Notes
19	Provide training opportunities for Planning Commission	Completed	
20	Utilize Future Land Use map to coordinate new development in appropriate areas serviced by necessary infrastructure	Ongoing	Not for carryover into STWP
21	Seek government funding to rehabilitate substandard housing and to ensure a continued supply of low-to-moderate income affordable housing options	Completed	
22	Expand emergency services personnel, facilities, and equipment as required to maintain an adequate level of service	Completed	
23	Assist the Hospital Authority to help raise money for a new facility	Completed	
24	Coordinate tourism and cultural resource development efforts to include all jurisdictions and appropriate state agencies	Completed	
25	Work with intergovernmental committee to coordinate four-laning of SR 17 and SR 72	Underway	Long-term completion; not for carryover into STWP
26	Coordinate new development with the local school board to minimize impacts on the school system	Ongoing	Not for carryover into STWP
27	Improve transportation infrastructure according to community needs	Completed	
28	Assemble and pass TSPLOST	Completed	
29	Develop an Urban Redevelopment Plan	Completed	City of Elberton updated and adopted a new plan in May 2017

# Appendix

## Appendix: Participation Records

### Public Hearings: 11/3/14 & 3/2/17



**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING**

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, on behalf of Elbert County, Bowman, and Elberton, will hold a Public Hearing on Monday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> at 6:00 p.m. at the Elbert County Board of Commissioners Meeting Room, 45 Forest Avenue, in Elberton. The purpose of the public hearing is to brief Elbert County and the citizens of Bowman and Elberton on the process to be used to develop the plan, opportunities for public participation in development of the plan, and to obtain input on the proposed planning process. All interested parties are encouraged to attend.

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING**

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, on behalf of Elbert County, will hold a Public Hearing on Monday, Thursday March, 2<sup>nd</sup> at 5:00 p.m. at the Elbert County Board of Commissioners Meeting Room, 45 Forest Avenue, in Elberton. The purpose of the public hearing is to gather public input on the Elbert County Comprehensive Plan before it is transmitted to the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission and the Georgia Department of Community affairs for official review. Copies of the draft plan can be viewed at the NEGRC website at [www.negrc.org](http://www.negrc.org). All interested parties are encouraged to attend.

 NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION			Elbert County: Comprehensive Plan Update March 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2017 5:00 p.m. Board of Commissioners Meeting Room, Elberton, GA
NAME	TITLE	EMAIL	
JUSTIN BRIGHTON	PLANNER - NEGRC	-	
Patrick Hadd	E.C. Planning	phadd@elberton.net	
PHILIP H	E.C. CFO	PHILIP@Elberton.net	

## Elbert County Comprehensive Plan Public Hearing #2

Presented by the Planning & Government Services Division of the  
Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

Thursday, March 2, 2017 | Elbert County Government Complex

**Input Meetings: 10/27/15 & 11/17/15**

 NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION		Elbert County: Comprehensive Plan Update October 27, 2015 – 1:30 p.m. Board of Commissioners Meeting Room, Elberton, GA	
NAME	TITLE	ADDRESS	EMAIL
Butch Smith	Planning & Zoning	Elberton	CosbySmith@earthlink.com
Sara Furr Schatz	Landscape Architect	Bowman	landsara@mac.com
Betty Jo Maxwell	Bowman City Council	Bowman	bettyjo_maxwell@yahoo.com
Patrick Hopp	Elbert Co. P&Z	45 Forest Ave. Elberton	phopp@elberton.net
Bob Thomas	Elbert Co. Admin	45 Forest Ave	bobthomas@elberton.net

 NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION		Elbert County: Comprehensive Plan Update November 17, 2015 – 1:30 p.m. Board of Commissioners Meeting Room, Elberton, GA	
NAME	TITLE	ADDRESS	EMAIL
Patrick Hopp	Code Enforcement		phopp@elberton.net
Allen Lee	City Code Enforcement		alee@cityofelberton.net
ROBERT WHITWORTH	CHM. PLANNING COMM		rwhdpu@hotmail.com
Bob Thomas	Administrator		bobthomas@elberton.net
Jammy Lyon	County Chairman		lyon@atlas-tech.edu

RESOLUTION OF THE  
ELBERT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSION

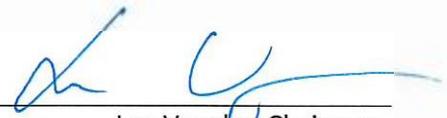
WHEREAS, the 1989 Georgia General Assembly enacted House Bill 215, the Georgia Planning Act, requiring all local government to prepare a comprehensive plan in accordance with the Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures promulgated by the Georgia of Community Affairs; and

WHEREAS, the Comprehensive Plan Update for the Elbert County Board of Commission was prepared in accordance with the Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Elbert County BOC that the Comprehensive Plan Update for Elbert County, Georgia dated 2019, as approved by the Georgia Department Community Affairs is hereby adopted, and furthermore, that the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission shall be notified of said adoption within seven (7) days of the adoption of this resolution.

Adopted this 20<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2019.

Elbert County, Georgia

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lee Vaughn, Chairman

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Tamara Butler, Clerk