

## **Purpose**

This document represents the first of two documents comprising the Towns County Joint Comprehensive Plan, 2010. Known as the Community Assessment and Participation Program, this document presents the inventory and analysis of information used for and in the planning process, enabling the community to plan for the period between 2010 and 2030. This material is the base for the development of the third and most important element of the comprehensive plan, known as the Community Agenda.

The purpose of planning and community development is to provide guidance for everyday decision-making by local government officials and other community leaders. To this end, the requirements for local comprehensive planning in Georgia emphasize involvement of stakeholders and the general public in preparation of plans that include an exciting, well-conceived, and achievable vision for the future of the community. When implemented, the resulting plan will help the community address critical issues and opportunities while moving toward realization of its unique vision for the community's future.

The Community Assessment presents a factual and conceptual foundation upon which the rest of the comprehensive plan is built. Preparation of the Community Assessment is largely a staff or professional function of collecting and analyzing data and information about the community and presenting the results in a concise, easily understood format, such as an executive summary, for consideration by the public and decision-makers involved in subsequent development of the Community Agenda.

The purpose of the Community Participation Program is to ensure that the local comprehensive plan reflects the full range of community values and desires, by involving a diverse spectrum of stakeholders in development of the Community Agenda. This broad-based participation in developing the Community Agenda will also help ensure that it will be implemented, because many in the community are involved in its development and thereby become committed to seeing it through.

## **Profiles of Towns County, Hiwassee and Young Harris**

Towns County is located in the northeastern corner of Georgia, nestled among the southern reaches of the Appalachian Mountains proper and home to Brasstown Bald, the highest point in the state. It is accessed from the south and east by traveling over the mountains and through Helen and Clayton, respectively, and from the west by traveling through Blairsville. Towns County is approximately 2 to 2.5 hours from metro Atlanta, and approximately 3-4 hours from metropolitan cities Asheville, NC, Greenville, SC and Chattanooga, TN.

The prevailing terrain divides the county into two major valleys, within each sits one of the county's two municipalities: Hiwassee and Young Harris. Towns County is known for this mountainous terrain, the scenic beauty it provides and the Lake Chatuge

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reservoir that encircles Hiawassee. As a result, it has grown into a burgeoning tourist community and as an idyllic rural area for retirees. Towns County also harbors the North Georgia Fairgrounds to anchor the seasonal tourist appeal.

The two cities serve as nodes for residential development on either side of one ridge line. Hiawassee is the larger city and the county seat, featuring elements of a historic main street intermixed with modern commercial and office development cultivated from a long-time role as a minor-regional center for medical care and professional services. Young Harris is a smaller scale mountain village but also hosts the college of the same name and is just 2 miles from popular Brasstown Valley Resort. The city has also become an alternative, rural residential center for people working in Hiawassee, Blairsville or across the state line in North Carolina.

All three communities have experienced steady growth in population and development over the past 20 years, with a total current population topping just over 11,000 people in 2009. Like many of Georgia's mountain communities, Towns County is now working through the impacts of the current recession, trying to better position itself to handle the next evolution of in-migration or economic restructuring. There is the desire to strengthen the overall local economy but a stronger desire to retain and build upon the rural, mountain character that defines Towns County, Hiawassee and Young Harris.

*(insert location map)*

## **Analysis of Development Patterns**

Land use management policies and programs represent guidelines for shaping development patterns that provide for efficient growth while also protecting sensitive social and environmental areas. This section presents an inventory of existing land use patterns and development trends for the community, allowing the local government to produce the most effective policies needed to manage the demands from projected development.

### **Historic Patterns**

Historically, the Cherokee Indians resided in the narrow valleys and high elevation coves of Towns County. Early transportation networks were established by the Cherokee Indians who followed the easiest terrain along stream valleys, mountain passes, and highland plateaus. Population increases in Georgia between 1790 and 1830 initiated a movement to eradicate the Cherokee Indians from their lands in north Georgia. In the late 1830's, gold was discovered in the north Georgia mountains and further strengthened the push for the complete removal of the Cherokee Indians. By 1838, the Federal Government had acquired the legal documentation needed to extradite the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, which was followed by an influx of white pioneers to Towns County. The early white pioneers utilized the settlement and transportation patterns established by the Cherokee Indians. During this time, the transportation system in Towns County became more established as population increased. The Unicoi Turnpike, which was originally developed by the Cherokee Indians, became an important transportation route for white settlers. This corridor linked eastern Tennessee with the Tugaloo River, which provided boat access to the important trade centers of Savannah and Augusta. In later years, the route along U.S. 76, heading east from Towns County across Dick's Creek Gap, was established to provide access to markets in Athens, and existing S.R. 515 was constructed to allow entry to markets in Blairsville. Country churches, gristmills, and general stores formed the nuclei of the first communities in Towns County and were located at major road junctions and provided services to local residents and travelers.

The physiographic features of Towns County were and continue to be the most influential factors impacting land use, settlement patterns, and economic development. The combination of difficult access and limited opportunities for development lead to a dependence on marginal activities such as the use and removal of natural resources, which include logging and mining. Typically, farming and pastures were located on moderate slopes in river valleys, while logging operations occurred on steeper slopes adjacent to pastures. Only the most remote and difficult to access areas, such as mountaintops and extremely steep slopes were passed over by logging activities. Some small, permanent, communities were formed high in the mountains when a few families stayed in place as logging operations moved onto new areas.

Logging and timber operations in the early 1900's resulted in the clear cutting of the majority of Towns County's virgin forests. Federal management of public lands was initiated in 1911 as a result of poor forest management practices throughout the southeast. Much of the existing public lands in Towns County were designated under the Chattahoochee National Forest in 1936. Today, the Forest Service manages approximately 53% of Towns County's land area.

The construction of the Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA) Chatuge Lake has also contributed to land scarcity in Towns County. Chatuge Lake, constructed and operated by the TVA, was erected in 1942 and covers 7,050 acres between Georgia and North Carolina; 3,500 acres of which are located in Towns County and 3,700 acres are located in Clay County, North Carolina. Originally designed for the production of electricity during WWII, the reservoir now serves dual

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purposes of flood control and energy production. Recreation in Towns County has also been enhanced by the existence of the reservoir, and Chatuge Lake currently plays an important role in attracting the County's vacation and second home residents.

Population characteristics are similar to other mountain communities where out migration of the young and better educated citizens occurs because of a lack of appropriate job opportunities. Long commutes are typical for educated residents in Towns County, as they are forced to work in distant job markets to sustain an acceptable standard of living.

Part time residents inhabiting retirement homes and second homes have increased since the 1970's, and now account for a considerable portion of the total population of Towns County. The County population increases dramatically during summer months, weekends, and holidays. The growth of the retirement and vacation homeowner markets in Towns County has largely been spurred on by new technology that is making access and home construction on steep slopes more affordable.

Indigenous growth is taking place along transportation corridors, with the most intense urban-type development occurring along S.R. 75 and U.S. 76. Retiree developments are being erected away from the main transportation corridors. These residential developments are increasingly being placed at higher elevations along streams and mountainsides due to their pleasant natural settings. Conversion of farm and forestry lands to residential uses is common with retiree developments.

S.R.75 and U.S. 76 also form the basis for the commercial sector in Towns County, especially in areas with access to water and sewer services. Traditional crossroads are experiencing an increase in commercial development due to the rising consumer base associated with recent residential development.

### *Existing Land Use*

The vast majority of land within Towns County is owned by the US Forest Service or in some other form of rural land use, such as agricultural. The prevailing topography prohibits advanced distribution of utilities and roads, minimizing the ability to host severe urban densities or some types of industrial activities. The result is that almost all of the non-rural uses are clustered along the major roadway arterial corridors, including the development in and around the cities of Hiawassee and Young Harris. Towns County does feature a significant volume of residential use, though most of it is large lot residential conducive to recreational farming or for personal livestock. This, too, is clustered along the arterial corridors in the lower elevations, particularly now that building above the 2,200' line is restricted. Some commercial and industrial activity is scattered around the edges of the municipalities, particularly southeast of Hiawassee. Parks are also within these areas, typically around access points to the lake shoreline.

| Within the cities, there is a higher concentration of residential use and some traditional neighborhood forms. Hiawassee features several blocks of smaller scale commercial and professional development mixed with a variety of civic, medical and educational facilities. Young Harris has the college occupying the majority of land south of the main drive, with some older housing and varieties of commercial use along the roadway and on the north side.

| Between the two cities, there are pockets of commercial uses, seasonal residential developments and lake homes, and the occasional farm.

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As a distribution of uses this is comparable for many rural counties in northern Georgia. The topography and appeal of rustic scenery have yielded a balance of activity diverse enough to sustain the current form but proposing some challenges for economic growth. There are plans for expanding utility capacity and distribution but serviceable space will remain at a premium. Further, the connectivity to other communities is restricted, which may hamper commercial growth but at the same time work to preserve the favored rural character. As a result, the general trends projected for land use do not show any marked changes from existing ratios, save for more land giving way from primarily agricultural use to residential. As the need / demand, increases the three communities can work to identify new and more land for industrial development or expanded commercial and service areas.

**Land Use, 2010**

Land Use Type	Towns County		Hiawassee		Young Harris	
	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%
USFS Forests	57,293	54.0%				0.0%
Residential	18,648	17.6%	358	28.5%	122	21.5%
Agriculture/Forestry	13,662	12.9%	49	3.9%	196	34.6%
Undeveloped/Vacant	10,787	10.2%	415	33.0%	22	3.9%
Water	3,340	3.1%	268	21.3%		0.0%
Commercial	1,245	1.2%	95	7.6%	20	3.6%
Park/Rec/Conservation	568	0.5%	27	2.2%	7	1.2%
Public/Institutional	296	0.3%	24	1.9%	185	32.7%
Industrial	192	0.2%	2	0.2%		0.0%
Transportation/ Utilities	42	0.0%	13	1.1%	15	2.7%
Multi-Family		0.0%	5	0.4%		0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>106,072</b>		<b>1,257</b>		<b>567</b>	

Source: GMRDC, 2010

**Areas Requiring Special Attention**

This section provides a brief assessment of select issues and concerns around the county based on geographical reference. This will help each jurisdiction recognize those specific locations in need of special attention through physical investment or change of policy. A map is included to help reference each area.

**Areas of significant natural or cultural resources, particularly where these are likely to be intruded upon or otherwise impacted by development**

- The County should continue to explore potential within the Macedonia area for improved utilities and additional civic uses as this side of the county experiences more growth. (*Map reference – Macedonia*)
- Due to location, infrastructure and utilities, the area around the schools should continue to grow rapidly, impacting the traffic patterns and the ability for the schools to expand. The Towns County School Board and City of Hiawassee are exploring continued sidewalk improvements for the corridor, but both organizations must also work with the County to ensure long range plans for their facilities are coordinated with future land use plans. (*Map reference – Impact of Development*)
- The County must build on efforts to conserve the lands identified as part of the Mountain Protection Act (land above 2,200 feet in elevation), for both the value of the scenic vistas and for erosion control. (*Map reference – Mountain Protection*)
- The Lake Chatuge waterfront is nearing immediate capacity for development and has recently been confronted with new development types, including high density and high activity land uses. The County and City of Hiawassee are working with TVA but must also develop a long-range plan for the land use surrounding the lake and develop a means for implementing that plan. Unincorporated areas of Towns County have adopted a 50 foot setback around the lake and also have a 35ft building height restriction. (*Map reference – Waterfront Protection*)
- The Brasstown Valley area around Young Harris is attracting more attention of various land uses and increasing pressure for utilities impacting the prevailing development trends. Depending on the ambitions for the city, the college and the county, there may be calls to better integrate this development into a more coordinated scheme. (*Map reference – Brasstown Valley*)

**Areas where rapid development or change of land uses is likely to occur**

- The Lake Chatuge waterfront and the mountainsides are currently experiencing the most development pressures. This includes volumes and scales of development different from current forms that must be better addressed through continued code enforcement or will likely change the character of the community. Mountain Protection, building codes, and setback rules are being strictly enforced through the Towns County Building Department. (*Map reference – Waterfront Protection/ Mountain Protection*)
- State Highway 76/ Zell Miller Parkway and SR 17 heading into North Carolina continue to experience severe development pressures, some of which can be considered inconsistent with current patterns and sustainable infrastructure. This area is considered to be the area in which future commercial development will take place. (*Map reference – Impact of Development*)

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- Young Harris College is early into its life as a four-year institution and is expected to grow in enrollment and mission. As such, it will yield a greater impact on the shape and culture of the city of Young Harris, requiring the community to be more proactive in order to preserve and shape its own destiny. (*Map reference – Redevelopment*)

### **Areas where the pace of development has and/or may outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation**

- The area around the City of Hiawassee is experiencing development outside of current sewer service areas in addition to requests for increased service within the City. The Public Works Department has plans for improving and expanding the sewer capacities and service areas but they are years away from completion. (*Map reference – Impact of Development*)
- Within the City there is a more immediate need for upgrading the water system to both maintain existing levels of service and provide for any possible expansion. (*Map reference – Inside Hiawassee City Limits*)

### **Areas in need of redevelopment and/or significant improvements to aesthetics or attractiveness (including strip commercial corridors)**

- The City of Hiawassee is producing a redevelopment plan for several areas that could greatly benefit from redevelopment and/or revitalization. The downtown area and town square is in need of some redevelopment for both private structures and public features (sidewalks, lighting). The main corridor of Highway 79 has received some new construction and redevelopment that has improved the roadway's scenic value and commercial appeal, but it is also taxing the infrastructure and several sites remain vacant or impoverished. (*Map reference – Redevelopment*)
- Walker Street in Young Harris contains several lots that are vacant and/or in disrepair. The City has expressed an interest in fostering reinvestment along this corridor. The City would also like to see more sidewalks throughout the community, particularly along SR 66. The SR 76 Corridor will also need improvements as the area develops. (*Map reference – Redevelopment*)

### **Large abandoned structures or sites, including those that may be environmentally contaminated**

- Not applicable in Towns County; No large abandoned structures or sites present

### **Areas with significant infill development opportunities (scattered vacant sites)**

- As referenced elsewhere, there are pockets of vacant properties or underutilized sites within downtown Hiawassee or Young Harris, though nothing as a significant concentration.

### **Areas of significant disinvestment, levels of poverty, and/or unemployment substantially higher than average levels for the community as a whole.**

- Not applicable in Towns County

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Character Areas

To further assist in identifying development needs and target areas it is crucial to understand not only the land use patterns but also the prevailing character and context of a community. It is possible to identify these sub-areas within the community defined by architectural scale and style, functions and roles, traffic flow, and other factors that differentiate one area from the next. These can include the areas requiring special attention identified above and/or existing community sub-areas for which plans have already been prepared.

Character area planning incorporates the concept of community function and feel to identify neighborhoods or communities of similar interaction, process, and character. Defining character areas is useful for identifying unique characteristics that provide a sense of community and to discern localized functions within the larger city or county context. Once character areas are established, community leaders can develop and implement strategies to promote the unique qualities of each character area.

The following character areas and there definitions are considered preliminary, and will be further assessed and refined in the Community Agenda.

*Towns County Preliminary Character Areas*

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<b>Russell Brasstown Scenic Byway</b>	This is the existing Scenic Byway that runs by the entrance to Brasstown Bald and into Union County. Vistas are limited by the surrounding mountains but the drive does run through some cherished forests and typifies the rustic setting loved by Towns County residents. The Byway has a management plan that will need updating in order to protect the rural character from any adverse development, particularly signs or increased presence of structures.
<b>National Forest Service Land</b>	The bulk of Towns County, this is the volume of mostly undeveloped land along the county's southern and eastern boundaries, and most of this is the actual mountain range and higher elevations. This land is managed and conserved by the US Forest Service in cooperation with the State. Access is permitted but limited, though several key spots like Brasstown Bald and various hiking trails also comprise some of the county's most important recreation amenities. There is no desire to change the boundaries or conditions of this district at this time, but there have been calls to improve upon the restriction of development along ridgelines throughout the area, including within the USFS lands.
<b>Lake Chatuge</b>	This is the existing reservoir and shoreline managed by the Tennessee Valley Authority. The lake is considered an overwhelming benefit to the community and there is a consensus to see it protected. Shoreline management is a critical issue going forward, as more and more homes and other development seek to capitalize on the asset. Most of the shoreline features conventional homes, either for seasonal visitors or full time residents. There are several points of public access, including beaches, boat launches, the fairgrounds and some commercial docking. Along the Hwy 76 corridor north of Hiawassee, there have been some higher density developments on/near the shoreline, including some condominiums, which have led to speculation about structures with more than 3 stories. Such densities would be difficult for the County to manage at present, and existing residents have hinted at fears of overcrowding. There is recognition that the lake must be protected as an environmental resource



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as well as for economic development, and these uses must be balanced accordingly with other objectives for the community.

**Brasstown valley**

This is the western portion of Towns County that sits across the ridgeline from Hiawassee, and features Young Harris, the Brasstown Valley resort and some burgeoning commercial uses along the Hwy 76 corridor. The valley is predominantly rural, with a defining scenic view of the entire valley as you drive west/south along 76. There are several residential areas, including many houses along the mountainsides taking advantage of the views. As Hwy 76 has been widened and the resort grows in popularity, some businesses have cropped up along the roadway, including a day spa. To date these are mostly rural in style, mimicking barn/farm architecture and avoiding the conventional frontage parking lot. The rest of the valley around Young Harris is sparsely developed and includes a significant amount of agricultural activity.

**Commercial Corridor**

This is the run of Hwy 76 that goes through Hiawassee and runs west along the lakeside, and the stretch of SR 17 as it turns northward into North Carolina. This corridor has seen the most aggressive development for commercial activity and auto-oriented designs within the county, including shopping centers, the fairgrounds, a movie theatre and several larger scale residential developments. The portion of Hwy 76 outside of Hiawassee is two lanes for either direction, with limited capacity for pedestrian crossing but potential for managing higher traffic volumes. This corridor also features some of the community's highest levels of utility capacity, with further improvements already planned. There will be a need to minimize the potential volume of new development along this corridor, however, both for maintaining traffic flow and to retain the sense of rural character within the community.

**Northern Lakefront**

This is the area surrounding the larger body of Lake Chatuge, north of Hiawassee. It includes the fairgrounds and some public beach access, several larger, private residential developments along the shoreline, and a variety of residential uses. Most of the residential units in this district are at the higher economical end, with a scattering of older and lower-end units throughout. There are some major utility lines that serve this area and the bisecting commercial corridor.

***Towns County's  
Rural Districts  
(overview)***

*Towns County is a sparsely populated county whose development is overwhelmingly directed by the lay of the land. Most of the 10,000 residents live in rural, unincorporated Towns County within one of several districts defined less by architecture or individual traits but rather the geographic features that form their boundaries. Unless otherwise indicated, these districts share the general traits of residential land use mixed with agricultural activity and a small portion of appropriate commercial use and churches. Dynamic change would only be expected as utilities experience severe upgrades, and even then is not always considered desirable or only restricted to the main arterials. New development would be expected to match the general massing and scale of existing structures, preferably with design traits that match the prevailing rural elements within the immediate vicinity. (Such as height, roof lines, etc.)*

**Fodder Creek Rural District**

This is one of the county's rural residential districts, tucked along the mountainsides and valleys feeding towards the lake and/or SR 75. Located south of Hiawassee and the Hog Creek District, Fodder Creek features a sparsely developed patch of woodland and larger lots, an abundance of

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unpaved roads and several smaller homes, including manufactured housing. There are some seasonal homes within the district but it is primarily housing for full time residents, with only Fodder Creek Road providing access in or out. There is less agricultural activity compared to some other parts of Towns County due to topography, as well.

**Gumlog Rural District**

Gumlog is the agricultural and rural residential district that comprises the bulk of the Brasstown Valley. It features a variety of housing types and scales, though mostly larger lot residential for full-time residents. There is a healthy amount of farming and some livestock, both for personal use and light commercial purposes. The through roads are active enough to sustain 2 produce stands, and the connectivity suggests a potential for more residential development. There are a couple churches in the area and growing attachment with Young Harris, such that residents within Gumlong could drive additional commercial and service related growth within the city.

**Hiawassee River Community**

This is the largely residential and agricultural district defined by SR 75 as it winds northward from Helen to Hiawassee. A narrow corridor nestled on the mountainsides, with only one other outlet, includes several developments of seasonal homes along the streams, residential housing of all economic levels, a gas station and several farms. There are a couple comparably nice subdivisions off the main road, as well as some unpaved roads and many driveways. It is a picturesque drive that provides the transition from the mountains to more populated Hiawassee. The drive in is often celebrated for its views of the mountains and for the occasional run alongside, and over, the river at several junctures, and is being considered as part of the Unicoi Turnpike Scenic Byway. However, it is also one of the most heavily traveled for both tourists and some commercial traffic.

**Hightower Community**

This district is defined by the access to Hiawassee from the east and Rabun County via Hwy 76. Like the Hiawassee River district, it has a blend of residential and agricultural activity, with a few churches and a handful of shops or services mixed in. Several of the intersecting roads lead to subdivisions or collections of houses, including some that reach into the mountainsides for homes overlooking the valley and Lake Chatuge. This corridor is the least traveled of the main routes connecting Hiawassee with the rest of Georgia.

**Hog Creek Rural District**

The Hog Creek district is essentially the other side of Lake Chatuge from Hiawassee. It features a variety of smaller residential units along the roads and mostly larger seasonal and year-round homes right on the lake front. There are a couple developments that have group access for their residents, plus a public access park and point along the western portion of this district. The area has received increased development pressures because of the lake, and future projects will need to incorporate more modern standards for construction, septic systems and access. Other portions of the district feature some of the most exclusive homes along the lakefront. Pending utility capacities in the future this district will likely compliment the residential demand for commercial and service activity within Hiawassee.

**Macedonia**

This district just east of Hiawassee is defined by the intersection of Hwy 76 and SR 75. The traffic volume is substantial, and while there is an abundance of housing within the area, it is also home to some commercial activity, churches and the county schools, and it has the potential for higher levels of development. The County is projecting the probable development

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of a fire station and EMS facilities in the area, as a means of gaining easier, faster access to the southern and eastern portions of the community. Most of the housing in Macedonia is in the upper tiers of price ranges, including lakefront lots and some larger agricultural properties.

**North Ridge**

This is the pocket of residential development that is north of Hiawassee but not affiliated with the lakefront. It is primarily residential in use, but traditionally smaller lots and units than many other parts of the county, with fewer seasonal homes and minimal amounts of agricultural activity. It is essentially a modest residential enclave of Hiawassee, with no major utility but include some scenic views of the lake. This area is expected to see little change going forward, though possibly some additional residential development.

**Northwest Ridge**

This is the residential area associated with the higher elevations north of Brasstown Valley and adjacent to the Commercial Corridor of Hwy 76 N. It does include some scenic vistas of either the valley or the lake, and some properties do include personal livestock, farms and gardens. However, it is largely rural residential housing built within the past 20 years, with small to medium size lots and no major utility capacity. Ready access means residents of this district can work, shop or play in Hiawassee, Young Harris or even North Carolina.

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*Hiawassee Preliminary Character Areas*

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**City Square**

This is the formal, original downtown area of Hiawassee that includes the town square, the surrounding few blocks of shop-front buildings and other commercial structures, the courthouse, library and other assorted offices and service buildings. It also includes the peninsula formed by Bell and River Streets reaching out to the lake. The square itself has suffered as a destination, due to both contours, marginal surrounding commercial use and the impact of Hwy 76 as a linear corridor. Thus, while the district has some elements to be a traditional downtown it lacks the critical mass of activity and attractions to be its own destination.

This is the portion of Hiawassee that does feature some classic public architectural forms, including zero-lot line structures and shop-front buildings. There is also some on street parking and sidewalks to enable pedestrian accessibility, though crossings of the highway are ill managed and there is little in the sense of coordinated signage or elements to reinforce the image of the district. Some residential use rings the periphery to the north, but otherwise this is primarily the government district with some commercial activity added in.

Immediately prior to this planning process the City of Hiawassee embarked on a master planning process specifically for the downtown and city square. The goal is to properly recognize and define and the character of this district and draft proposals that will give the community direction and progression.

**South City Center**

Immediately across and adjacent to the City Square is the South City Center, which is generally reserved for professional and medical offices. Prominent uses include the Bank of Hiawassee, McConnell Church, and the hospital complex. Additionally, there is limited mixed use with limited residential development. These are the tallest structures within the

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urbanized portion of Hiawassee, though the sunken topography mitigates their impact against the overall scale of the community.

**South Business Center**

This area is viewed as a mixed-use business center including offices, church, city hall and legal businesses. It also includes some of the general, auto-oriented commercial forms along Hwy 76, featuring deeper setbacks, conventional parking and shopping center forms. There is expansion area available for future post office, courthouse or police station. As the transition space between less developed portions of Hwy 76 and downtown Hiawassee, there is a current problem with vehicles moving too fast and poor merging of traffic between the Admiral Point development and the City Hall complex. This area is also to be addressed within the new Hiawassee Master Plan for redeveloping downtown.

**South Main Street**

This is the portion of Hwy 76 as it transitions from the conventional commercial corridor into a more rural arterial. Some commercial activities remain, including some gas stations and a feed store, but not the same density as closer to downtown. Utility capacities in the area are proposed for an upgrade, and this is considered an area of future development with good access, scenic views and developed lots.

**South Gateway**

This area denotes the formal transition from southern/eastern rural Towns County into Hiawassee, abutting the same transition category for the County called Macedonia). The density and scale of public operations increases to signify the presence of larger customer demands and available utilities. It also has the first signs of formal beach access on the lake. Features a variety of uses running from commercial to residential to boat launch. Additionally there are restaurants, a church, home sites and some professional services. Increased utility capacity and infrastructure could see some goods production and civic uses introduced into the area.

**Admiral Point**

This is an established residential subdivision, and should be limited to single family structures only. Conventional in layout and featuring a very urbanized scale of small lots and harmonized architecture, this subdivision is considered a healthy part of modern Hiawassee, and offers both lake access and easy proximity to the City.

**Big Sky**

This area is named for the road intersecting North Main Street, and includes a variety of uses from fast food and grocery stores to some residential and multiple independent shops. As with the South Business Center district, Big Sky features a transition from the urbanized downtown and infiltration by some auto-oriented development. Moving forward the City should continue to encourage a mix of business use (shopping & restaurants) and residential development, and seek to better fuse the district with the City Square.

This district will also be included in the new Master Plan for revitalizing Hiawassee.

**Whiskey Mtn.**

This is the sparsely populated residential area atop the hillside north of downtown. The terrain restricts development to mostly smaller forms and prohibits agricultural activity. This area should be limited to single-family residential development only, and will require improvements to the roadway if more development is pursued in the district.

**Bel Aire Mtn.**

This is another of the established residential districts on the northern slopes

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overlooking Hiawassee. Like Whiskey Mtn. this district features mostly homes and smaller lot sizes. This smaller district, however, lacks the land for significant new development and the access road is further away from downtown. This area should be limited to single-family residential development only, and will require improvements to the roadway if more development is pursued in the district.

- Hiawassee Estates** This is an established residential area in northwest Hiawassee, just west of Hwy 76 and with volumes of homes with lake frontage. Homes here lack the architectural homogeneity of Admiral Point, but are generally of comparable size and market value save for lake access. This area should be limited to single-family residential development only.
- North Main Street** This encompasses the stretch of Main Street running from the City Square to McDonalds, with a mix of uses and differing building designs and materials. There is little in the way of a common theme and usage runs from commercial, business, food produce, hardware, many restaurants, banking to fast foods. There is a need for improved sidewalks, bike trails and pedestrian traffic, public parking, and improved signage and lighting. This district will also be included in the new Master Plan for revitalizing Hiawassee.
- North Commercial Corridor** This is the portion of Hwy 76/Main Street reaching north from McDonalds' to the Towns County Recreational Center. This area has developed into a commercial district that includes successful shops and restaurants, and features the beginning of Hwy 76 as a four-lane arterial. Development is conventional in form with regards to frontage parking, low scale structures with common commercial designs. There is a need for improved streetscapes and lighting. Importantly, this is an area of high problem traffic. Decreasing speed limits and encouraging car traffic to stop and shop should be a priority. Improved access to the lake, picnic grounds, bike and foot traffic should be encouraged.
- Bell Creek Road Corridor** This the area reaching northward from the Big Sky district, denoting the transition from urbanized Hiawassee to more rural Towns County. The area has a mix of uses including business, agriculture and residential, including some residences with lakefront access. There is no discernable theme though no immediate needs either, as this is a stable part of the community harboring the variety of uses that need to be just outside of downtown. The first mile is primarily business and then residential thereafter. Traffic issues are a concern. A Slower speed limit would also benefit the area.

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*Young Harris Preliminary Character Areas*

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**Bald Mountain District**

This is the largely undeveloped mountainside that sits just south of the college campus. Apart from the handful of existing structures within this district, this is the rising backdrop to the community and part of its scenic mountain heritage. The intention is to preserve the area as a sparsely used natural landscape that helps to define the character of the city as it grows alongside.

**College District**

This is the campus proper for Young Harris College, and includes their academic, athletic and all other ancillary facilities. The college is in the early stages of a planned growth into a more formal and diverse 4-year institution. This will include plans for more dormitories, classroom space as well as facilities for the arts and administration. Much of this is planned for the existing campus footprint but preliminary plans show ambition for expansion.

The general character of the college is defined more by the scale than the architecture, with the exception of the original church near the main entrance. This structure and setting are the symbol of the campus and should be preserved. Beyond that the college intends to develop several structures ranging from 1-3 stories, and will use the new master plan to define their architectural style.

The campus is known for having greenspace for passive use and both the college and the City wish to see this aspect preserved if not expanded in the future.

**College Residential**

This is a small housing district just behind the college, with mostly modest sized homes of various design types. The scale and setting typifies rural homesteads nestled into the hillside, with most lots on the larger side and fairly wooded. Traffic is minimal and access to the open space within the campus. This area is considered stable and the community would like to keep it intact, with some possible improvements; An additional road access point that does not send traffic through the campus is preferred, as is an extension of sidewalks in the area.

**Commercial Young Harris**

This is the southern tip of the community along Hwy 76 and Brasstown Creek Road, and features the most industrial scale activity within the city. The location, which is somewhat shielded by the slope, makes it the most conducive place in Young Harris for uses that won't adversely impact the character of downtown or the college, but still has access to the main arterial and available utilities.

**Downtown Young Harris**

This is a v shaped district that includes the small stretch of Hwy 76 considered as Young Harris' main street, and the block formed by Maple and College Streets that veer eastward from Hwy 76. This includes the vast majority of the city's commercial structures, including a hotel, shops and restaurants. Most structures are 1-2 stories with a range of 60's-80's architectural styling. There is no prevailing style for architecture or signage, however, but is defined mostly by the concentration of commercial activity. Most buildings along the highway are within 50' of the roadway, reminiscent of true urban districts, but the massing of structures is less dense than Hiawassee due to some vacant lots and parking areas. There is a desire to build upon this, however, to improve the pedestrian viability of the area and maintain the small town character rather than give way to conventional

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auto-oriented designs. The struggle is to maintain this area for a downtown while also accommodating the traffic that uses Hwy 76.

**Rural Young Harris** This is the part of the incorporated city that features traditional large lot residential and agricultural activity. Along the City's northern or western periphery and defined by existing farms and only a few houses, this is where Young Harris and the rural county come together. Proximity to the city center and some utilities allows for future redevelopment, but for now this is a viable district for farming or raising animals on a smaller scale. The northern arm of this district could be considered for different development in the future pending other plans and objectives, as it offers continued close proximity to the highway.

**Urban Mixed Use** This is the area west of downtown and across Hwy 76 from the college campus, providing a variety of existing housing and some commercial and service uses along or near the highway. It is bordered on the west by Sycamore Street, which provides this part of Young Harris with blocks for urban scale uses, and features some of the earlier auto-oriented commercial development that would not have been found downtown. The location, street layout and form, plus the variety of existing structures (houses, shops, larger buildings) makes the district viable for different types of growth, including possible infill development at vacant lots and structures and the possibly for expanding the downtown character area.

**Urban Neighborhood** This is a set of three areas around the City center that compliments the existing and proposed urban environment for Young Harris but also exhibit a more residential scale and base.

To the north is the established residential district comprised of Meadow, Miller and Dean Streets north of the downtown area. These roads connect with the highway do feature some non-residential activity along that corridor, but away from Hwy 76 this area provides a more traditional neighborhood setting in terms of lot size and residential structures, including some smaller lots, common yard sizes and structural locations. There are some opportunities for infill development that could strengthen the district's residential role, and an expansion of this district might be called upon depending on plans for other parts of the community.

To the east is a two block stretch alongside Maple Street between downtown and the college that includes City Hall and the adjoining park and several houses. Portions of the corridor may evolve into commercial use or other public activity centers, but it will be more reserved than a conventional commercial road due to the adjoining uses.

To the south is the existing neighborhood on and behind Sycamore Street, including portions of Walker and School Streets. This area features several homes with urban scale yards and lots in a pattern that could be easily extended and complimented with sidewalks. The residents consider the area stable and desire to preserve the existing characteristics and residential nature.

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*Consistency with Quality Community Objectives*

In 1999, the Board of the Department of Community Affairs adopted 17 Quality Community Objectives (QCOs) as a statement of the development patterns and options that will help Georgia preserve her unique cultural, natural and historic resources while looking to the future and developing to her fullest potential. This assessment is meant as a tool to give a community a comparison of how it is progressing toward these objectives set by the Department. but no community will be judged on progress. The questions focus on local ordinances, policies, and organizational strategies intended to create and expand quality growth principles. A majority of positive responses for a particular objective may indicate that the community has in place many of the governmental options for managing development patterns. Negative responses may provide guidance as to how to focus planning and implementation efforts for those governments seeking to achieve these Quality Community Objectives. Should a community decide to pursue a particular objective it may consider this assessment as a means of monitoring progress towards achievement.

***Development Patterns***

<b>Traditional Neighborhoods</b>	
<b>Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged, including use of more human scale development, compact development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity.</b>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Our zoning code does not separate commercial, residential and retail uses in every district.	Young Harris is the only community with zoning, which has recently been updated to include references to conservation design and preferential design forms. Additional revisions are being considered.
2. 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.	No.
3. We have a street tree ordinance requiring new development to plant shade-bearing trees appropriate to our climate.	No.
4. Our community has an organized tree-planting campaign in public areas to make walking more comfortable in summer.	Young Harris and Hiwassee do support, but do not actively coordinate, tree planting campaigns.
5. We have a program to keep our public areas (commercial, retail districts, parks) clean and safe.	There is a Keep Towns Beautiful program in place and several organized efforts to support litter control.
6. Our community maintains its sidewalks and vegetation well so that walking is an option some would choose.	The Cities do actively manage landscaping and maintain sidewalks as best as possible.
7. In some areas, several errands can be made on foot, if desired.	Only applicable to select areas within the Cities; Remaining County is too rural.
8. Some children can and do walk to school safely.	Only applicable to select areas within Hiwassee.
9. Some children can and do bike to school safely.	Only applicable to select areas within Hiwassee.
10. Schools are located in or near neighborhoods.	All public schools are located on a central campus within Hiwassee.



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Towns County has historically been a rural community with marginal growth pressures, minimizing the need for land use management. As the communities experience increased development pressures there have been calls for some types of land use regulation to ensure larger, and more dynamic, land use types are compatible existing land use patterns. Among the types of regulations being considered are height restrictions, increased mountain protection regulations, subdivision regulations and general managements of development densities.

<b>Infill Development</b>	
<i>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.</i>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Our community has an inventory of vacant sites and buildings available for redevelopment and/or infill development.	Not at present.
2. We are actively working to promote Brownfield redevelopment.	Not applicable
3. Our community is actively working to promote greyfield redevelopment.	Not applicable
4. We have areas that are planned for nodal development (compacted near intersections rather than spread along a major road.)	This type of development is desired but at present there are no mechanisms in place for implementation.
5. We allow small lot development (<5000 SF) for some uses.	This type of development is desired but at present there are no mechanisms in place for implementation.

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<b>Sense of Place</b>	
<i>Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is 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</i>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. If someone dropped from the sky into our community, he or she would know immediately where she was, based on our distinct characteristics.	Considered “Yes” for all communities, as the form and context of the area has not changed in recent history. This condition is threatened by new development, however.
2. We have delineated the areas of our community that are important to our history and heritage and have taken steps to protect those areas.	Multiple areas are generally recognized as needing protection but no formal measures have been undertaken to achieve this.
3. We have ordinances to regulate the aesthetics of development in our highly visible areas.	No.
4. We have ordinances to regulate the size and type of signage.	All three communities do have some fashion of sign control, with little or no change needed at present.
5. Our community has a plan to protect designated farmland.	This idea has received increased interest amidst current development trends. The County encourages farm and mountain land to be placed in Conservation Use Covenants. Should be coordinated with plans to identify and preserve the county’s rural character.

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<b>Transportation Alternatives</b>	
<i>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.</i>	
Statement	Comments
1. We have public transportation in our community.	The County does have a 5311 rural transit program.
2. We require that new development connects with existing development through a street network, not a single entry/exit.	Not currently, but there is interest.
3. We have a good network of sidewalks to allow people to walk to a variety of destinations.	Not currently, but this is desired.
4. We have a sidewalk ordinance in our community that requires all new development to provide user-friendly sidewalks.	Not currently, but this is needed.
5. We require that newly built sidewalks connect to existing sidewalks wherever possible	Not currently, but this is needed.
6. We have a plan for bicycle routes through our community.	Only via the GMRC Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Towns County and the Board of Education are currently applying for grants to construct bicycle and walking trails.
7. We allow commercial and retail development to share parking areas wherever possible.	Yes for all three communities.

<b>Regional Identity</b>	
<i>Each region should promote and preserve a regional "identity" or sense of place, defined in terms of traditional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.</i>	
Statement	Comments
1. Our community is characteristic of the region in terms of architectural styles and heritage.	Yes, for all three communities.
2. Our community is connected to the surrounding region for economic livelihood through businesses that process local agricultural products.	There are economic ties between the three communities and the larger region, but there is no singular direct tie considered more important.
3. Our community encourages businesses that create products that draw on our regional heritage (mountain, agricultural, metropolitan, coastal)	There are economic ties between the three communities and the larger region, but there is no singular direct tie considered more important.
4. Our community participates in the Georgia Department of Economic Development's regional tourism partnership.	Yes, for all three communities.
5. Our community promotes tourism opportunities based on the unique characteristics of our region.	Yes, for all three communities.
6. Our community contributes to, and draws from, the region, as a source of local culture, commerce, entertainment, education.	Yes, for all three communities.

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**Resource Conservation**

**Heritage Preservation**

*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 local character.*

Statement	Comments
1. We have designated historic districts in our community.	Yes.
2. We have an active historic preservation commission.	Yes, there is a Towns County Historic Society.
3. We want new development to complement historic development, and we have ordinances in place to ensure such.	This is desired by all three communities but there are no measures currently in place to achieve this.

**Open Space Preservation**

*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. Compact development ordinances are one way of encouraging this type of open space preservation.*

Statement	Comments
1. Our community has a greenspace plan.	There is no formal plan but there are provisions for open space within environmental regulations and the covenants of select subdivisions.
2. Our community is actively preserving greenspace – either through direct purchase, or by encouraging set-asides in new development.	Towns County is pursuing greenspace protection as identified above, and is considering land purchases.
3. We have a local land conservation program/ work with state or national land conservation programs to preserve environmentally important areas in our community.	There are measures in place to preserve trees but not land. There is a demand for broader conservation measures.
4. We have a conservation subdivision ordinance for residential development that is widely used and protects open space in perpetuity.	Conservation subdivisions are encouraged and allowed within Towns County.

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<b>Environmental Protection</b>	
<i>Environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development, 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.</i>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1. We have a comprehensive natural resources inventory.	Accomplished through the Comprehensive Plan.
2. We use this resource inventory to steer development away from environmentally sensitive areas.	Applied for mountain protection and environmental regulations.
3. We have identified our defining natural resources and have taken steps to protect them.	Yes, for all three communities.
4. Our community has passed the necessary Part V Environmental Ordinances, and we enforce them.	Yes.
5. Our community has and actively enforces a tree preservation ordinance.	Young Harris does have this in place. Towns County currently relies on mountain protection regulations.
6. Our community has a tree-replanting ordinance for new development.	Only Young Harris.
7. We are using stormwater best management practices for all new development.	The State currently manages the NPDES program for Towns County, and there is a demand for drainage protection from new development.
8. We have land use measures that will protect the natural resources in our community (steep slope regulations, floodplain or marsh protection, etc.)	There are E&S control measures in place for all three jurisdictions.

**Social and Economic Development**

<b>Growth Preparedness</b>	
<i>Each community should identify and put in place the pre-requisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These might include infrastructure (roads, water, and sewer) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities and managing new growth when it occurs.</i>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. We have population projections for the next 20 years that we refer to when making infrastructure decisions.	Yes.
2. Our local governments, the local school board, and other decision-making entities use the same population projections.	Yes.
3. We have a Capital Improvements Program that supports current and future growth.	Applicable for Young Harris, desired for Towns County and Hiawassee. All communities will improve application of STWP updates.
4. We have designated areas of our community where we would like to see growth. These areas are based on the natural resources inventory of our community.	In progress as part of the Comprehensive Plan process.

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<b>Appropriate Businesses</b>	
<i>The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, long-term sustainability, 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.</i>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Our economic development organization has considered our community's strengths, assets, and weaknesses and has created a business development strategy based on them.	These organizations will develop a new strategy based on the Comprehensive Plan. This will include cooperation with other stakeholders, reviews of marketing campaigns for Hiawassee, and a refined approach to business recruitment and retention.
2. 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.
3. We recruit businesses that provide/ create sustainable products.	There is not an active targeting approach for these businesses, but they would receive special consideration.
4. We have a diverse jobs base, so that one employer leaving would not cripple us.	The job base is diverse but the overall size of the market is considered small enough that the loss of one of several employers could damage the economy.

<b>Employment Options</b>	
<i>A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.</i>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Our economic development program has an entrepreneur support program.	There are some programs available through colleges and the State.
2. Our community has jobs for skilled labor.	More of these jobs are desired, but it is also understood the labor force must continue to improve as well.
3. Our community has jobs for unskilled labor.	Yes.
4. Our community has professional and managerial jobs.	Some but more jobs of these types are desired.

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<b>Housing Choices</b>	
<i>A range of housing size, 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 (reducing commuting distances), to promote a mixture of income and age groups in each community, and to provide a range of housing choice to meet market needs.</i>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Our community allows accessory units like garage apartments or mother-in-law units.	Yes, for all three communities.
2. People who work in our community can afford to live here.	There is a need for quality, affordable housing.
3. Our community has enough housing for each income level (low, moderate, and above-average incomes)	There is a need for quality, affordable housing.
4. We encourage new residential development to follow the pattern of our original town, continuing the existing street design and recommending smaller setbacks.	This is desired but only Young Harris has measures in place for implementation. Hiawassee is considering such as part their new downtown Master Plan.
5. We have options available for loft living, downtown living, or “neo-traditional” development.	Not at present.
6. We have vacant and developable land available for multifamily housing.	Yes, pending available utilities.
7. We allow multifamily housing to be developed in our community.	Yes, for all three communities. Yet there is a growing need for more apartments within the county.
8. We support community development corporations building housing for lower-income households.	There are low income housing options available and there are housing authorities within the cities.
9. We have housing programs that focus on households with special needs.	There are limited options for special needs housing within the County. There is a growing need for housing for the elderly.
10. We allow small houses built on small lots (less than 5,000 square feet) in appropriate areas.	Only permitted within Hiawassee.

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<b>Educational Opportunities</b>	
<i>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.</i>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Our community provides work-force training options for our citizens.	Yes (See two blocks down)
2. Our workforce training programs provide citizens with skills for jobs that are available in our community.	Yes, as described above.
3. Our community has higher education opportunities, or is close to a community that does.	Young Harris College is located within the County, North Georgia Technical College has a campus in neighboring Union County, and the Mountain Learning Center is available for youth alternative education programs. Residents can also readily attend Tri-Counties Community College in North Carolina.
4. Our community has job opportunities for college graduates, so that our children may live and work here if they choose.	There is growth within the construction and service sectors, but limited options outside of that.

**Governmental Relations**

<b>Local Self-determination</b>	
<i>Communities should be allowed to develop and work toward achieving their own vision for the future. Where the state seeks to achieve particular objectives, state financial and technical assistance should be used as the incentive to encourage local government conformance to those objectives.</i>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. We have a citizen-education campaign to allow all interested parties to learn about development processes in our community.	Hearing notices are publicized and copies of select materials are available for public review, but there is no formal campaign.
2. We have processes in place that make it simple for the public to stay informed on land use and zoning decisions, and new development.	Yes, though the increased intensity, variety and scale of new development has made this effort more complicated and less effective.
3. We have a public-awareness element in our comprehensive planning process.	Yes. Public hearing opportunities were scheduled and promoted.
4. We have clearly understandable guidelines for new development.	Yes.
5. We offer a development guidebook that illustrates the type of new development we want in our community.	No.
6. We have reviewed our development regulations and/or zoning code recently and are sure that our ordinances will help us achieve our QCO goals.	Not applicable.
7. We have a budget for annual training for planning commission members and staff, and we use it.	Yes for Towns County.
8. Our elected officials understand the land-development process in our community	Yes.



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<b>Regional Cooperation</b>	
<i>Regional cooperation should be encouraged in setting priorities, identifying shared needs, and finding collaborative solutions, particularly where it is critical to success of a venture, such as protection of shared natural resources or development of a transportation network.</i>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. We plan jointly with our cities and county for Comprehensive Planning purposes	Yes.
2. We are satisfied with our Service Delivery Strategies	Yes.
3. We cooperate with at least one local government to provide or share services (parks and recreation, E911, Emergency Services, Police or Sheriff's Office, schools, water, sewer, other)	Yes.

Greatest level of regional coordination comes with Union and Fannin Counties.

**COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM**

**ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The planning process asks communities to assess the information outlined in an effort to identify issues and opportunities that should be considered when trying to plan for the future. In doing so the communities can more effectively define their objectives and actions to as to better achieve the desired vision.

The following represents a preliminary listing of Issues and Opportunities for Towns County, the City of Hiawassee and the City of Young Harris. These were submitted or raised during the early discussions about each community, or were identified based on the numeric and other data collection as part of the process. These lists will eventually be refined, added to, prioritized and then used to establish long-term policies and work program items for the next 5 years. By working to resolve their issues and make the most of their opportunities, Towns County, the City of Hiawassee and the City of Young Harris will be in position to realize their respective Visions.

<b>POPULATION</b>	<b>Towns County</b>	<b>Hiawassee</b>	<b>Young Harris</b>
<b>Issues</b>			
• Need people coming in to help support all public services	X	X	X
• Impact of uncontrolled growth	X	X	X
• Elderly share of population increasing, demanding more services	X	X	X
• Younger population moving out/staying out	X	X	X
<b>Opportunities</b>			
• Positive impacts from tourism	X	X	X
• Probability of continued growth in the future	X	X	X

<b>Housing</b>	<b>Towns County</b>	<b>Hiawassee</b>	<b>Young Harris</b>
<b>Issues</b>			
• Need more housing for growing elderly population	X	X	X
• Disconnect between affordable housing and local job market and wage scales	X	X	X
• Limited options for multi-family living	X		X
• Ratio of home values among supply indicates need for more higher-income housing/households	X	X	X
• Need to balance college students with City residents			X
• Overbuilding has diluted home values	X	X	X
• Balancing growing demands for mixed use and apartments with existing height restrictions	X	X	
• Roadsides and residences need to be kept clean	X	X	
• Possible growing volume of older, leaking septic systems	X		
• Walker Street in Young Harris contains several lots that are vacant/ in disrepair			X
• Need for housing market forum; Education & communication about detailed conditions and trends	X	X	X
<b>Opportunities</b>			
• Market still promising for new housing	X	X	X
• Opportunities for infill development		X	X
• Towns County is still comparably very affordable	X	X	X
• Large inventory of homes and lots still available	X	X	

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<b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>Towns County</b>	<b>Hiawassee</b>	<b>Young Harris</b>
<b>Issues</b>			
• Civic events could be better coordinated	X	X	X
• Need to build Towns County as more of a destination	X	X	X
• Lack of land use management to attract development desired	X	X	
• Need improved coordination of econ. development and land use mgmt	X	X	X
• Need an updated, comprehensive econ. development strategy	X	X	X
• Need for improved/expanded water and sewer service	X	X	X
• Location/Accessibility often a liability in luring new businesses	X	X	X
• Lack of many job options for youth, young adults; Particularly salaried career options	X	X	X
<b>Opportunities</b>			
• Tourism remains strong and could grow in off season	X	X	X
• Potential for farmers markets, or other events	X	X	X
• Good/Improving telecommunications infrastructure	X	X	X
• County not dependent on any single industry for employment	X	X	X
• Young Harris as 4-year college	X	X	X
• County considered to have a high quality of life	X	X	X
<b>TOURISM</b>			
<b>Issues</b>			
• Need for more public docks/ marina	X	X	
• Demand for alcohol sales	X	X	X
• Growing too dependent on tourism	X	X	
<b>Opportunities</b>			
• Growing tourism brand, but more potential for off-season	X	X	
<b>EDUCATION</b>			
<b>Issues</b>			
• Concerns about illegal behavior at schools	X	X	X
• Library needs more parking and meeting space; Saturday hours	X	X	
<b>Opportunities</b>			
• Young Harris as 4-year college	X	X	X
• TCCS is considered a successful school	X	X	X
• Library is respected and successful	X	X	X

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<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Towns County</b>	<b>Hiawasse</b>	<b>Young Harris</b>
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**Issues**

• Need a traffic light at 76 & 288 East at Macedonia Church	X		
• Need to consider by-pass of Hiawasse	X	X	
• Balancing the needs of through traffic and local traffic		X	X
• Location/Accessibility often a liability in luring new businesses	X	X	X
• Pedestrian infrastructure limited, aging		X	X
• Need for bicycle paths	X		
• Growing need for transit options for elderly and disabled			
• Work to reject the I-3 proposal	X		
• Consider a pedestrian bridge in Young Harris	X		X

<b>Community Facilities</b>	<b>Towns County</b>	<b>Hiawasse</b>	<b>Young Harris</b>
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**Issues**

• Need for a mental health facility	X	X	
• Need to replace existing equipment in Public Works Dept.	X		
• Possible need for new satellite recycling facilities; Consider Sunday hours	X		
• Need to improve/ expand sewer and water capacity	X	X	X
• Needs land for a new Senior Center	X	X	
• Continue expanding recreational opportunities	X		
• Future need for a new EMS/Ambulance Center for eastern county	X		
• Immediate need for upgrading the water system		X	
• Possible impacts of HB 277; Need for a formal transportation plan	X	X	X
• Demand to maintain low cost of living	X	X	X
• Pedestrian infrastructure limited, aging		X	X
• Need to update Service Delivery Strategy	X	X	X

**Opportunities**

• Inmate labor program doing well at recycling centers	X		
• Plans for improving and expanding the sewer capacities underway		X	
• Utility providers actively planning for expansion		X	X
• Water supply source considered abundant and secure	X	X	X

<b>Intergovernmental Coordination</b>	<b>Towns County</b>	<b>Hiawasse</b>	<b>Young Harris</b>
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**Issues**

• Need to update, amend Service Delivery Agreement	X	X	X
• Need to continue networking with neighboring counties	X		

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<b>Land Use</b>	<b>Towns County</b>	<b>Hiawassee</b>	<b>Young Harris</b>
<b>Issues</b>			
• Lack of comprehensive land use mgmt. policies	X	X	
• Demand for more access to public lands (USFS & TVA)	X	X	X
• Competing focus of utility providers	X	X	
• Need to maintain 35' building height	X	X	
• Consider revising min. lot size for housing	X		
• Need long-range land use plan for lake front	X	X	
• SR 69 experiencing development considered incompatible, unsustainable	X		X
• Downtown Hiawassee downtown area in need of redevelopment		X	
• Housing still being built in inappropriate areas (Mtns.; Flood plains)	X		
• Minimal space to accommodate industrial activity	X	X	X
<b>Opportunities</b>			
• Hiawassee is developing a Downtown Master Plan		X	
• Quality views and natural amenities available	X	X	X
• Interest in downtown revitalization plan for Young Harris			X

<b>Cultural Resources</b>	<b>Towns County</b>	<b>Hiawassee</b>	<b>Young Harris</b>
<b>Issues</b>			
• Need museum/cultural center with multipurpose options	X	X	
• Possible need for auditorium to seat at least 1000	X		
• Need to explore protection measures for historic resources	X	X	X
<b>Opportunities</b>			
• The County awaiting updated inventory of historic and cultural sites from UGA	X	X	X
• Hiawassee is developing a Downtown Master Plan		X	
• Support and coordination from Industrial Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Authority	X		

<b>Natural Resources</b>	<b>Towns County</b>	<b>Hiawassee</b>	<b>Young Harris</b>
<b>Issues</b>			
• Demand for more access to public lands (USFS & TVA)	X	X	X
• Need improved water quality mgmt. for Lake Chatuge	X	X	
• Impacts from failing septic systems	X		
• Competing focus of utility providers	X	X	
• Need improved implementation of Mtn. Protection Act	X		
<b>Opportunities</b>			
• Potential to mold image as a resort community	X	X	
• Resources available to assist with water resource management	X	X	

## **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM**

The Community Participation Program outlines the basic public involvement process that will be used to ensure Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan represents the values and desires of the residents. Ensuring the participation of a variety of stakeholder groups in developing the Community Agenda will also improve efforts for implementing the Plan by securing wider public understanding, support and cooperation.

The completion of the Community Assessment provides a baseline of information about the community to assist with the public involvement process, assuring the participants have a better, understanding of the conditions and issues involved. The Community Participation Program will guide how this information is presented to the open public and various stakeholder groups, whose responses will refine the information, prioritize the issues and goals and identify the preferred alternatives for achieving those goals.

### **Identification of Stakeholders**

The planning process for Towns County, Hiwassee and Young Harris will be coordinated to involve as many population groups and stakeholders as possible. The community is relatively homogenous in its residential make up, and remains a small, isolated community compared to more metropolitan counties in the region. This may benefit the process by streamlining communication and allowing for efficient outreach.

All three governments will feature regular involvement and input from their *elected officials, chief administrators* and *departmental managers*. Several meetings throughout the process will be called specifically to hear input from these people and their respective offices. Comment from government staff will be more critically assessed as the process moves towards the development of the implementation program in order to ensure proposed work items are realistic for each community.

Specific efforts will be made to involve business and civic organizations throughout the process, as well. Members of the *Towns County School Board*, the *Chamber of Commerce* and the *Development Authority* will be invited to every function and may appoint a representative to assist with the process. Key business leaders and larger employers will also be called upon for their comment, including *Young Harris College*, *Chatuge Regional Hospital*, *Blue Ridge Mountain EMC*, and *Ingles Markets, Inc.* Each community will strive to consider all demographic groups and organizations as they collect comments, establish their visions and begin to define objectives.

Each community will pursue their portion of the planning process with guidance from a Plan Advisory Committee. All three committees will be comprised of key citizens whose input is not only deemed critical by the elected officials but also provide a strong cross section of the community and do well in soliciting public comment.

Each committee will be sized in accordance with the demands of their respective communities and will meet as able and directed by the local government. These committees will be used to steer discussion, review information and surveys and ultimately provide material for drafting the formal plan documents. Additional sub-committees may be created at their discretion to address different plan elements in greater detail.

**COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM**

**Plan Advisory Committee Members**

City of Hiawassee	Towns County	City of Young Harris
<u>Steering Committee</u> Barbara Mathis, Chair Janet Allen Carl Schultz	(To be filled in)	Andrea Gibby Jennifer Mulkey Meg Gring-Whittley Janice Cochran
<u>Economic Development</u> J. Chastain, Jr., Chair Connie Fisher Hugh Hoodenpyle		Deborah Edwards Tom Jeffery
<u>Community Facilities</u> Janet Allen, Chair Randy Warne Michael Christopher Carl Grizzle		
<u>Downtown Development</u> Joan Crothers, Chair Susan Wyman William Scott Susan Devires		
<u>Natural Resources</u> Howard Cunningham Alan Driskoll Bob Crawford Larry Owen		
<u>Public Safety</u> Stephen Smith, Chair Jimmy Wright Ricky Mathis Mitch Floyd		

An additional consideration for the public involvement process for Hiawassee is recalling the input already developed as part of their ongoing effort to develop a Downtown Hiawassee Master Plan. This is part of a year-long study to assess the community’s special development issues and needs as they look to create a stronger identity for downtown, revitalizing the district for enhanced commercial use, preserving the historic structures and building a more pedestrian friendly destination. Going into the comprehensive planning process Hiawassee will have had two large public hearings and multiple stakeholder work sessions to develop the Master Plan.

Mtg. #1 – July 9, 2009

- Present analysis of existing conditions
- Explore ideas and constraints

Mtg. #2 – February 11, 2010

- Present preliminary plan & establish guidelines
- Continue building resolutions to priorities

The process has already developed several Guiding Principles for Hiawassee’s Downtown Master Plan. These principles and all aspects of the Master Plan effort will be will be incorporated into the full Comprehensive Plan.

- Downtown Hiawassee is a place for people
- The City has an opportunity to establish a unique sense of place
- Downtown Hiawassee is a good place to do business
- Accessibility and safety are priorities
- A strategic approach to revitalization is key
- The City can and must use regional connections
- The City can and must work together to attain common goals

## **COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM**

### **Public Involvement Process**

A variety of measures will be employed to secure involvement from each group of stakeholders, with the emphasis being on communication between and through the members of the Planning Committees.

#### **Surveys**

Given the small, rural nature of Towns County and the Cities of Hiawassee and Young Harris, there is a consensus that a form of conventional survey will be utilized by a sizable percentage of the population. Select locations have been identified for the distribution and collection of survey forms, including both City Halls, the County Courthouse, the Library and the Senior Center. Additional locations may be identified as the effort is begun, and government staff and Planning Committee members will champion the process as best as possible. Each government will promote the surveys through their regular public meetings, and an effort will be made to use the local paper to not only tout the surveys but possibly include them within a printed edition. Surveys will also be made available on local web sites where possible.

#### **Promotional Outreach**

Towns County has two printed media outlets and 2 local radio stations. Planning Committee members will approach each with aspirations of using these forums to actively promote, and educate people about, the planning process. Committee members and government staff will also look to speak at/with local civic and social groups including neighborhood associations, churches, garden clubs or service organizations. Copies of plan materials will also be made available at select display areas where the original surveys will be placed, including a prominent spot within the Towns County Courthouse lobby.

#### **Public Forums**

Because Towns County and the cities are so comparably small and isolated, open public hearings remain the most effective method to solicit involvement in civic programs. According to government staff and Committee members, county residents are generally close enough to participate and prefer personal interaction, particularly key stakeholders. The County has several locations available for public hearing opportunities capable of up to 100 people, and could use a school facility or consider the Fairgrounds if larger spaces might be needed. For Hiawassee and Young Harris, their respective City Halls will be used for most events but staff and Committee members will consider sessions at additional locations to encourage involvement from different stakeholder groups.

#### **Open Comments**

In addition to the prescribed comment period and opportunities, it will be made known that the general public can submit questions or comments at any time to select government staff at each community. Planning Committee members will reinforce the message that all comments are welcome and will be considered.



## **Development of the Community Agenda**

Development of the Community Agenda will focus on using the information generated in the Community Assessment for confirming and prioritizing issues and opportunities, developing the Visions for each community and then crafting the goals and objectives that will address the issues and advance the communities towards the stated Visions. This will be done between January and September of 2010, with a variety of public hearings and workshops throughout for each community. In addition, each of the three Planning Committees will host general and topical meetings to advance discussions and develop the formative information that will go into the Plan. As requested GMRC staff will be on hand to assist with facilitating discussions and analyzing data and information.

The general flow of the Agenda development Process will feature four major phases. While there may be some actual overlap in the activities for each phase, this will represent the general progression of discussions and ensure the Vision and resulting work program are developed in response to public input. At least one open public hearing will be held during each phase, possibly in conjunction with Planning Committee meetings. The Committees will also meet as needed and able throughout the process as directed by their respective chairs and elected officials.

### *Phase #1 - Community issues; Collect ideas for community vision*

This phase will feature the public surveys, initial public meetings designed for open discussion about the communities, and preliminary discussions about community visions. Each Planning Committee will assess the comments and make beginning progress towards categorizing issues and opportunities.

### *Phase #2 - Confirm community vision; Prioritize issues; Propose character areas*

Having reviewed public comments and concerns, the Committees will work to confirm the Vision statements for each community and then refine and prioritize the various issues and objectives. In doing so the Committees will also begin identifying recommended policies and work items for inclusion in the Implementation Program, which will be reviewed and considered by the government staff and local stakeholders.

### *Phase #3 - Discussion of alternative development scenarios; Establishment of goals*

This phase will assess the impact of previously identified issues and objectives on future land use and development. Each community will explore options and concerns with respect shaping the various character areas while trying to achieve the stated Vision. The goal of this phase is to produce any and all recommended policies and implementation measures needed to ensure the planning process objectives can be realized through realistic land use management.

### *Phase #4 – Review draft Community Agenda*

This final phase involves the completion of the document and its circulation for final review and comment. Public hearing opportunities, as well as open review via copies available on the web or in select locations, will be held to ensure the complete cycle of participation. Comments received after this formal review period will still be considered for possible future inclusion/ amending of the Plan as needed.

**COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM**

***Generalized Time Frame for all Communities  
Development of the Towns County Joint Community Agenda***

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<b><u>Activity</u></b>	<b><u>Timeframe</u></b>
<i>Initial Planning Committee meetings</i>	January 2010
<i>Create and distribute surveys and promotional material</i>	January 2010
<i>Initial public forums and Committee meetings</i>	Weeks 2-8
<i>Review Survey Results; Begin Visioning Sessions</i>	Weeks 8-16
<i>Confirm Visions; Refine Issues and Opportunities</i>	Weeks 16-22
<i>Discuss Future Development Scenarios</i>	Weeks 22-28
<i>Develop Community Agenda</i>	Weeks 28-34

**FROM THE GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION**

**NOTICE OF LOCAL PLAN SUBMITTAL  
AND PUBLIC HEARING/ COMMENT OPPORTUNITY**

<b>Submitting Local Government:</b> <u>Towns County</u>	<b>Date plan received:</b> <u>10/15/10</u> <b>Date ruled complete:</b> <u>10/19/10</u>
<b>Local Contact:</b> <u>Rick Stancil, City Mgr., Hiawassee</u> <b>Phone:</b> <u>706.896.2203</u> <b>Address:</b> <u>229 Chatuge Way</u> <u>Hiawassee, GA 30546</u>	<b>Plan Type</b> <b>New</b> _____ <b>Update</b> <u>X - CAPP</u> <b>Amendment</b> _____ <b>STWP</b> _____
<b>Is this a joint plan?</b> <u>No</u> <b>List jurisdictions:</b> _____ _____	<b>Public Hearing</b> <b>Date:</b> <u>11/9/10</u> <b>Time:</b> <u>10:00 AM</u>
<b>RDC Contact:</b> <u>Adam Hazell, AICP; Planning Dir.</u> <b>Phone:</b> <u>770.538.2617</u> <b>Fax:</b> <u>770.538.2625</u> <b>e-mail:</b> <u>ahazell@gmrc.ga.gov</u>	<b>Location:</b> Georgia Mountains RC 1310 West Ridge Road P.O. Box 1720 Gainesville, GA 30503 Visit <a href="http://www.gmrc.ga.gov">www.gmrc.ga.gov</a> for directions

**General Description of the Plan**

This is the Community Assessment and Participation Program for the required 10-year update for the Towns County Joint Comprehensive Plan.

**Copies of this notice have been sent to the following local governments and organizations:**

Counties of Union, Lumpkin, White, Habersham and Rabun	Ga. Department of Community Affairs Ga. Department of Transportation Ga. Environmental Protection Division Ga. Historic Preservation Division Local Chamber of Commerce Local School System Local Development Authorities
--	---

- All comments must be received by date of the Public Hearing identified above
- Copies of any materials not distributed with this notice may be reviewed at the GMRC offices or may be acquired by contacting the GMRC as indicated above.

RESOLUTION

**WHEREAS**, Towns County has prepared a Community Assessment and Participation Plan as part of the Comprehensive Planning process; and

**WHEREAS**, a public hearing was held for public comment on said Plan on September 28, 2010; and

**WHEREAS**, said Plan shall be submitted to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for review and approval; and

**NOW THEREFORE**, the Community Assessment and Participation Plan attached hereto and incorporated here in by reference, is hereby adopted as the subject Plan for Towns County and is to be submitted for review by the Georgia Mountain Regional Commission and the review and approval of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

**SO ADOPTED**, this 15<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2010.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Bill Kendall, Commissioner

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Linda Hedden, Clerk

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF  
HIAWASSEE, GEORGIA**

**WHEREAS:** The City Council, as the governing authority of the City of Hiawassee, Georgia is performing the required 10-year update of its Comprehensive Plan; and

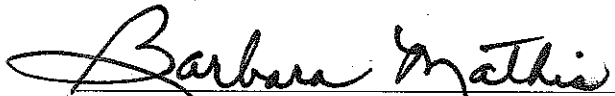
**WHEREAS:** As part of the comprehensive planning process the City is required to complete the Community Assessment and Participation Program and submit the same to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for review and approval; and

**WHEREAS:** The City, in conjunction with Towns County and the City of Young Harris, has completed the Towns County Joint Community Assessment and Participation Program 2010 in accordance with the minimum requirements and standards required by the State of Georgia.

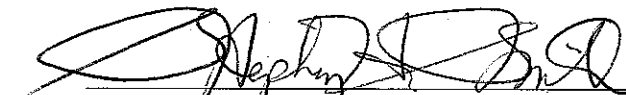
Now, therefore, **IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED** by the City Council that the Towns County Joint Community Assessment and Participation Program 2010 be approved for submittal to the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission to initiate the regional and State review process.

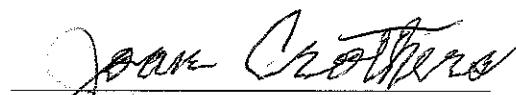
**ADOPTION & EFFECTIVE DATE.**

Adopted, this the 30<sup>TH</sup>. Day of September 2010.

  
BARBARA MATHIS, MAYOR

  
JANET ALLEN, COUNCILMAN

  
STEPHEN H. SMITH, COUNCILMAN

  
JOAN CROTHERS,  
COUNCILMAN

\_\_\_\_\_  
JAY CHASTAIN, JR. COUNCILMAN

Adoption, Certified by:   
Wynne White, City Clerk

[CITY SEAL]

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF  
YOUNG HARRIS, GEORGIA**

**WHEREAS:** The City Council, as the governing authority of the City of Young Harris, Georgia is performing the required 10-year update of its Comprehensive Plan; and

**WHEREAS:** As part of the comprehensive planning process the City is required to complete the Community Assessment and Participation Program and submit the same to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for review and approval; and

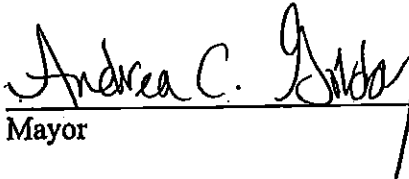
**WHEREAS:** The City, in conjunction with Towns County and the City of Hiawassee, has completed the Towns County Joint Community Assessment and Participation Program 2010 in accordance with the minimum requirements and standards required by the State of Georgia; and

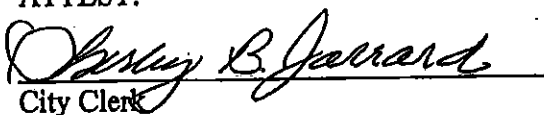
**WHEREAS:** The City wishes to make the following amendments to the document prior to final submittal, to be affirmed by the City Administrator:

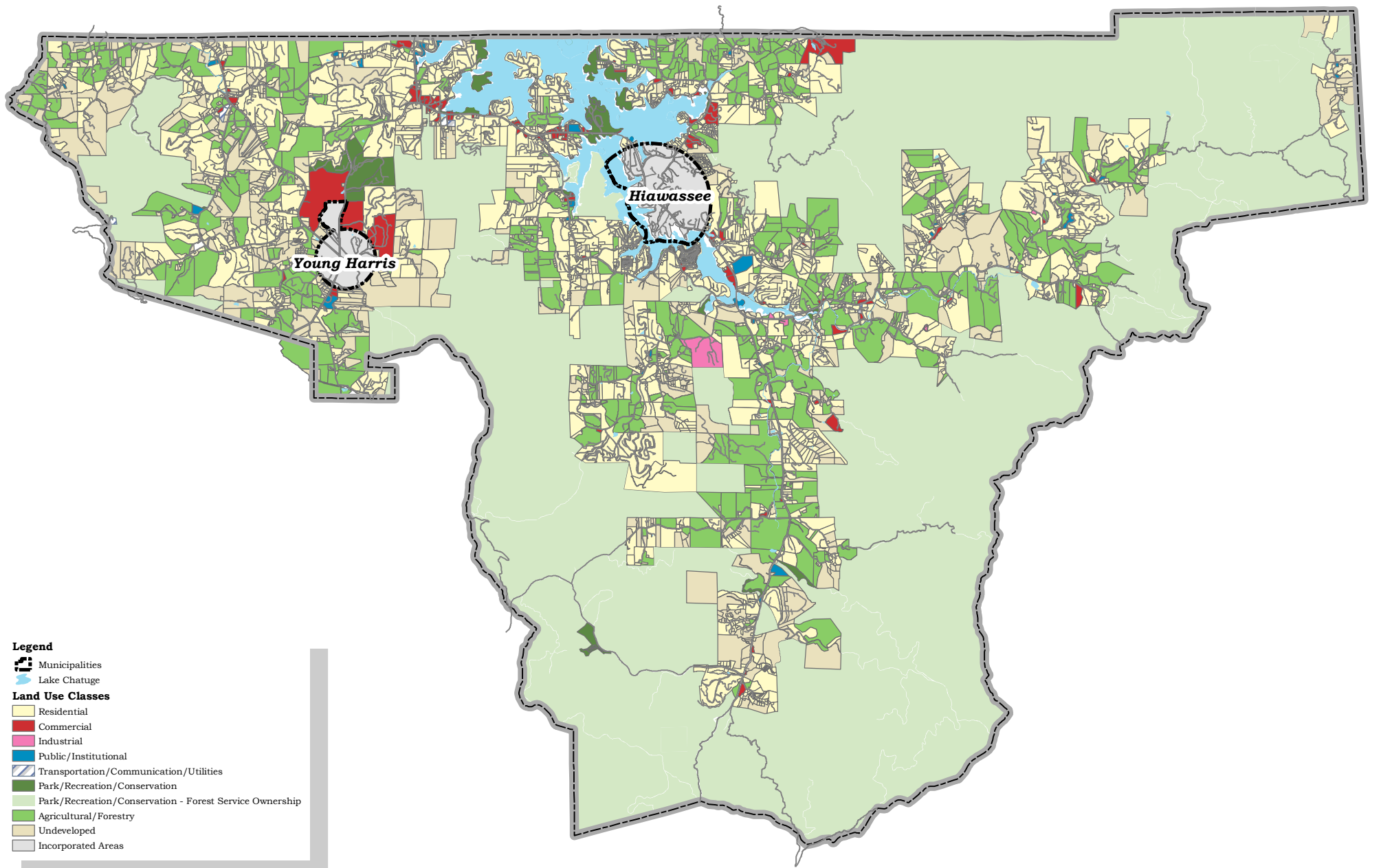
- Updated boundaries of Character Area map to reflect expansion of Urban Neighborhoods;
- Added language promoting sidewalks along 66 and improving the 76 corridor within the Areas Requiring Special Attention

Now, therefore, **IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED** by the City Council that the Towns County Joint Community Assessment and Participation Program 2010 is approved as amended for submittal to the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission to initiate the regional and State review process.

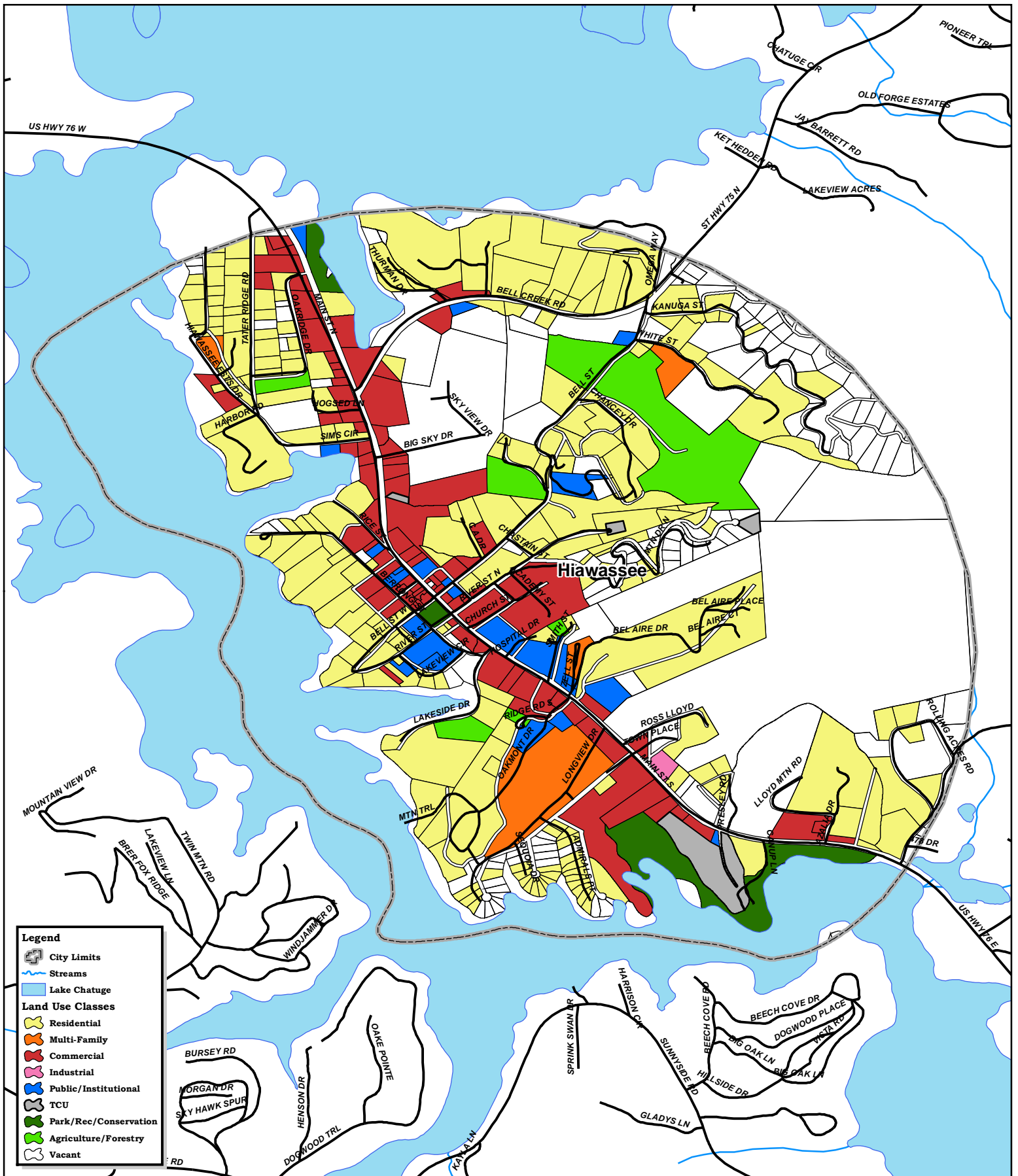
Adopted by the City Council this 21 day of September, 2010.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor

ATTEST:  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
City Clerk

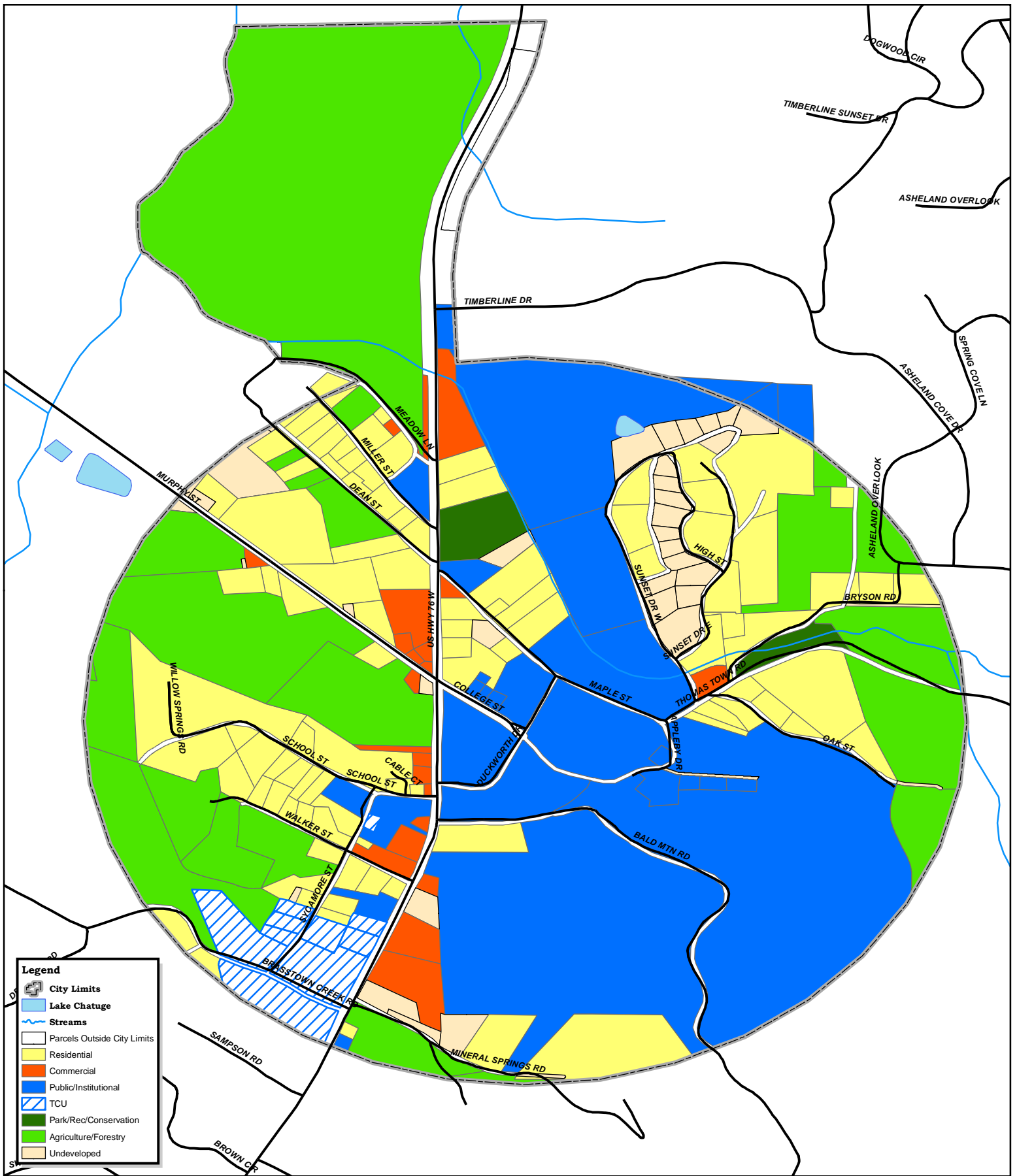


## Generalized Existing Land Use Towns County

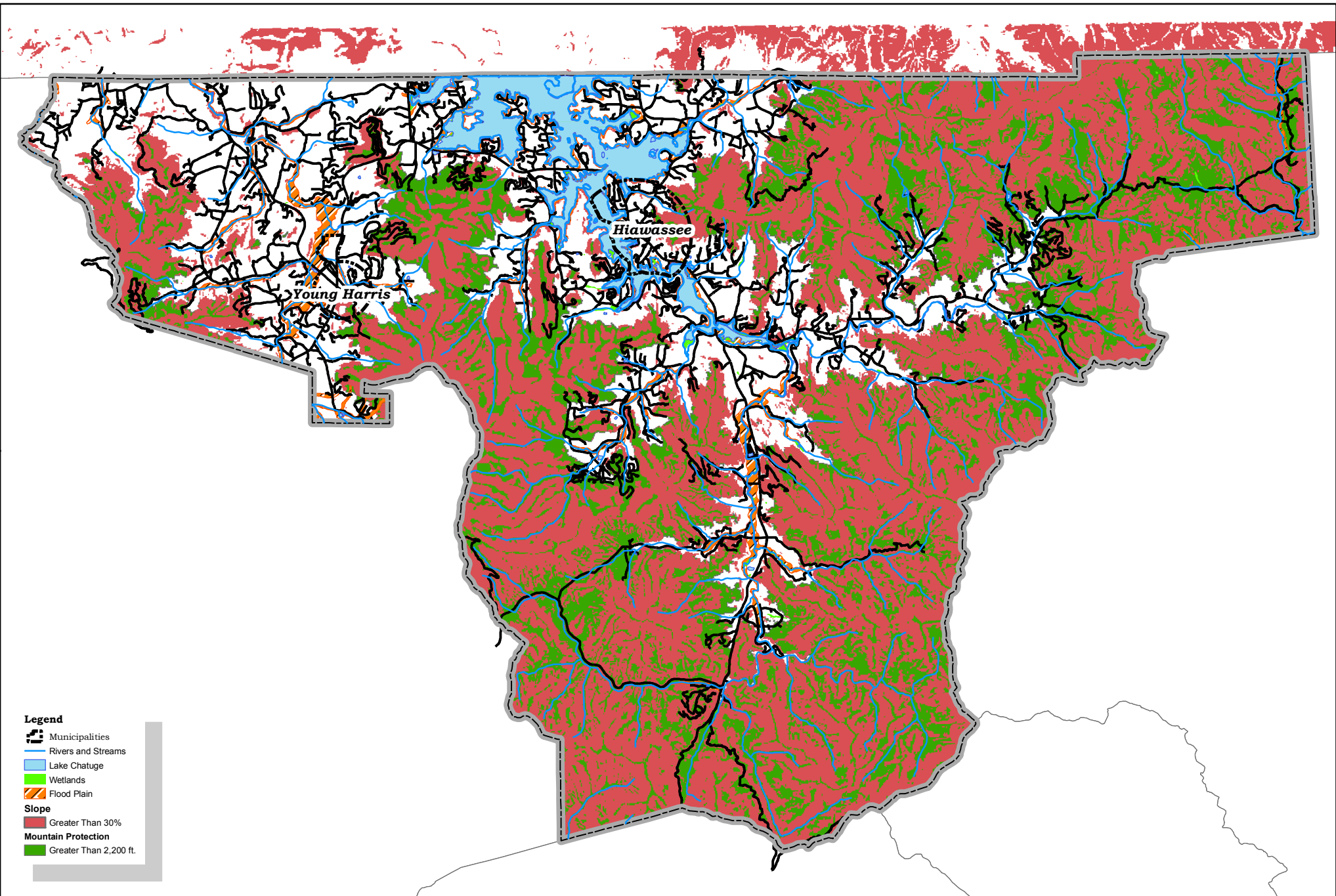








## Generalized Existing Land Use City of Hiwassee





## Generalized Existing Land Use City of Young Harris

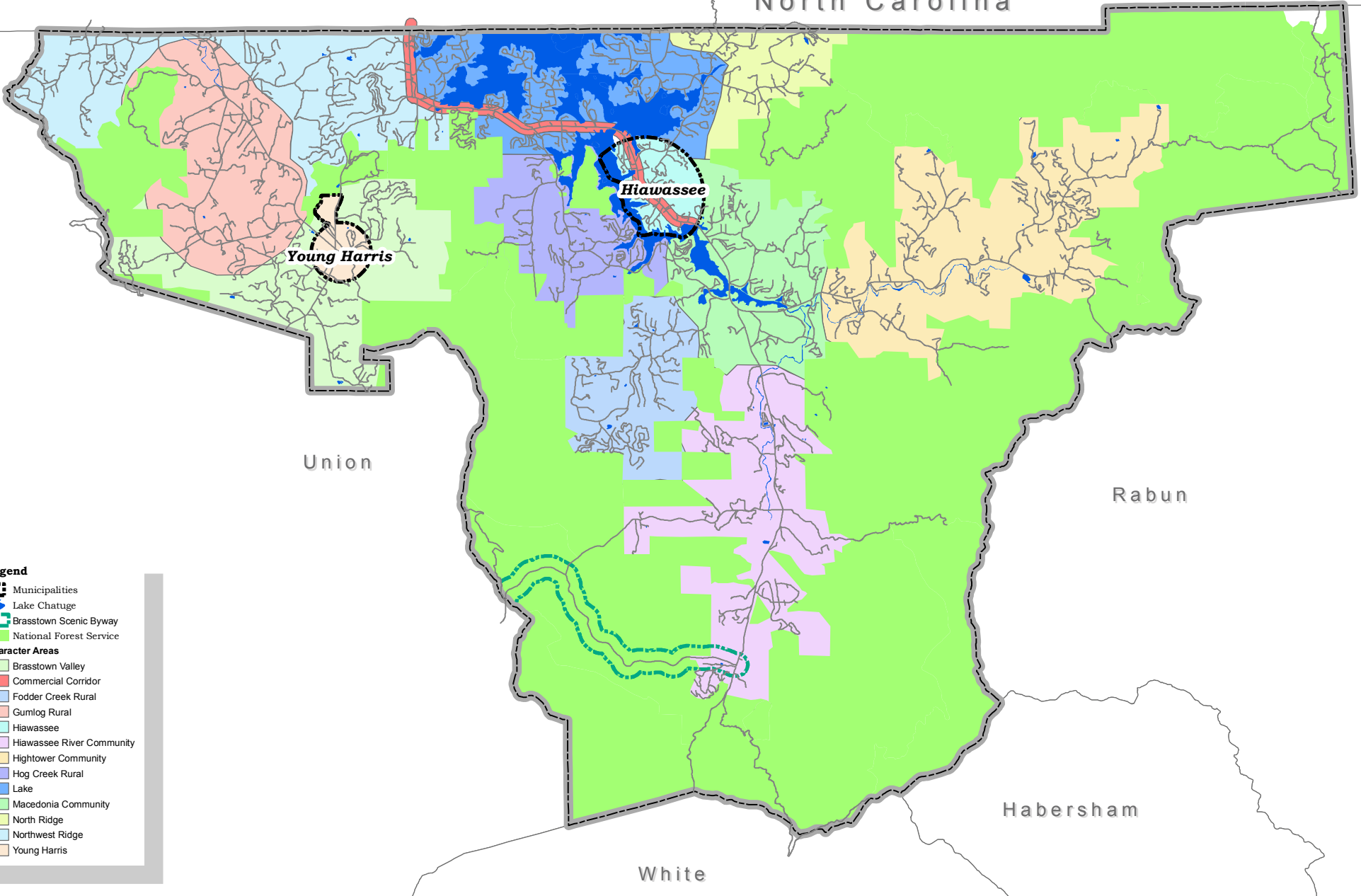


- Legend**
-  Municipalities
  -  Rivers and Streams
  -  Lake Chatuge
  -  Wetlands
  -  Flood Plain
- Slope**
-  Greater Than 30%
- Mountain Protection**
-  Greater Than 2,200 ft.

## Environmentally Sensitive Areas Towns County



North Carolina



Young Harris

Hiwassee


















Union

Rabun

Habersham

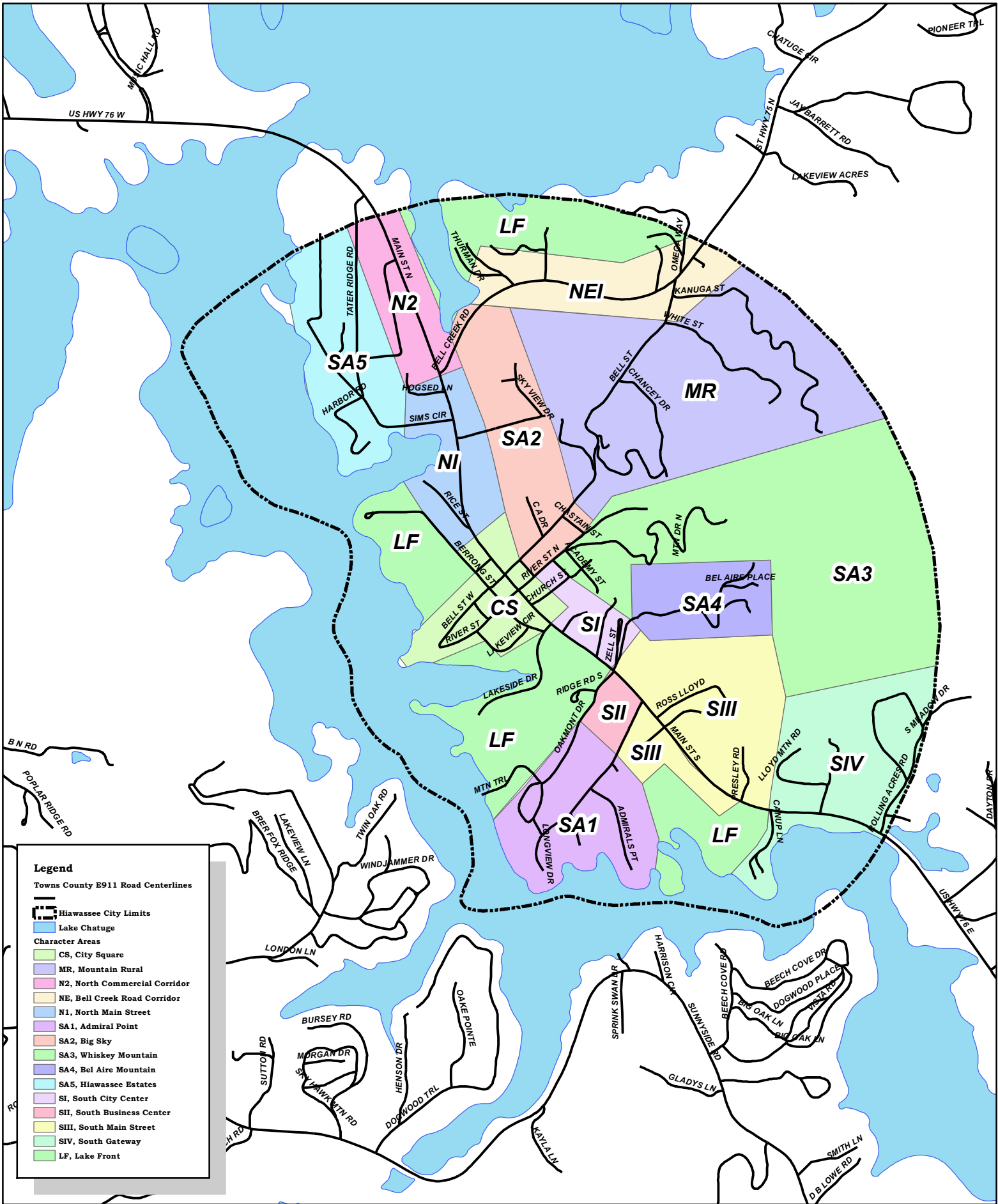
White

**Legend**

-  Municipalities
-  Lake Chatuge
-  Brasstown Scenic Byway
-  National Forest Service
- Character Areas**
-  Brasstown Valley
-  Commercial Corridor
-  Fodder Creek Rural
-  Gumlog Rural
-  Hiwassee
-  Hiwassee River Community
-  Hightower Community
-  Hog Creek Rural
-  Lake
-  Macedonia Community
-  North Ridge
-  Northwest Ridge
-  Young Harris

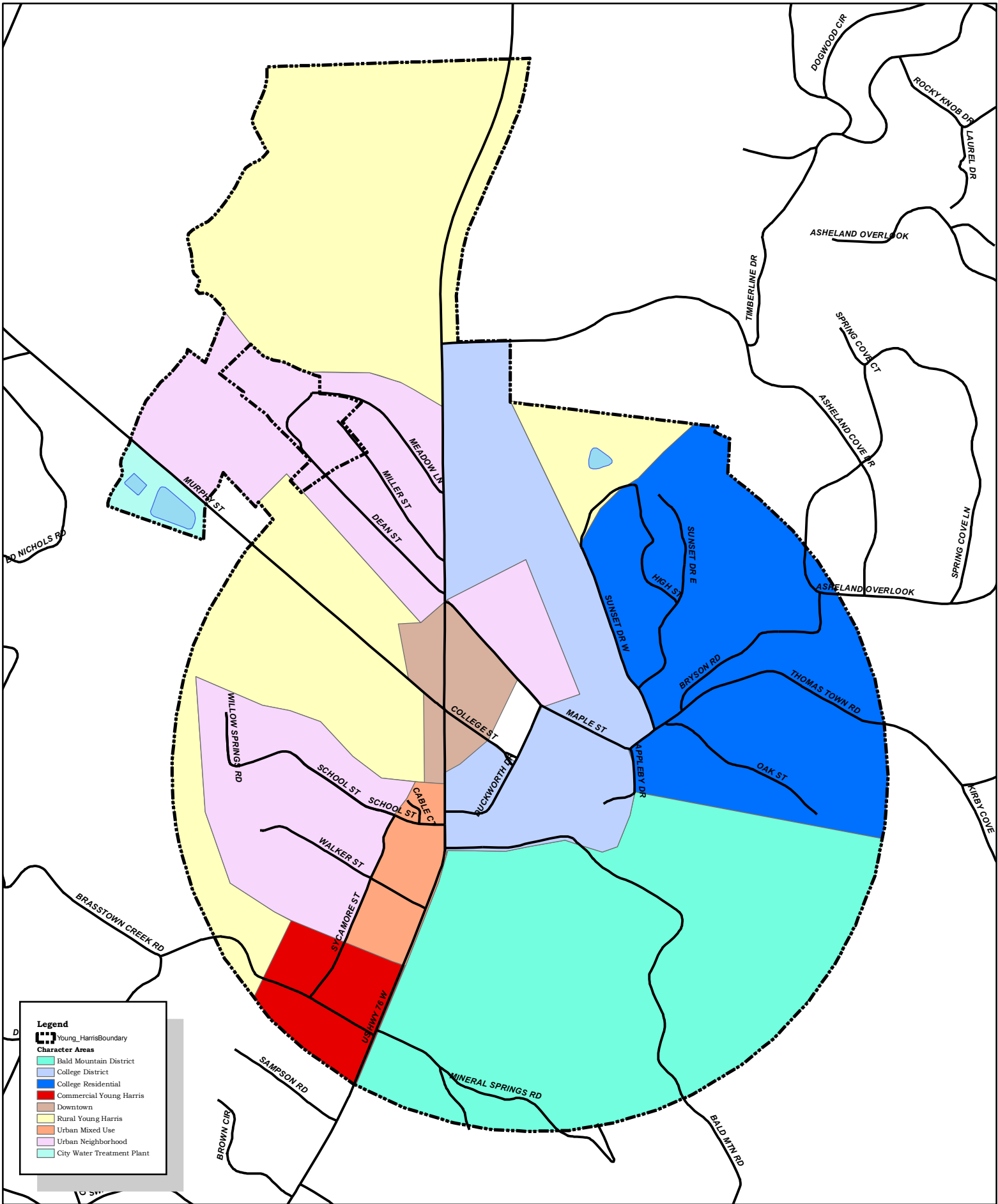
**Character Areas  
Towns County**



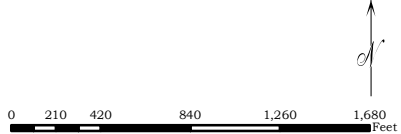


## City of Hiwassee Character Areas

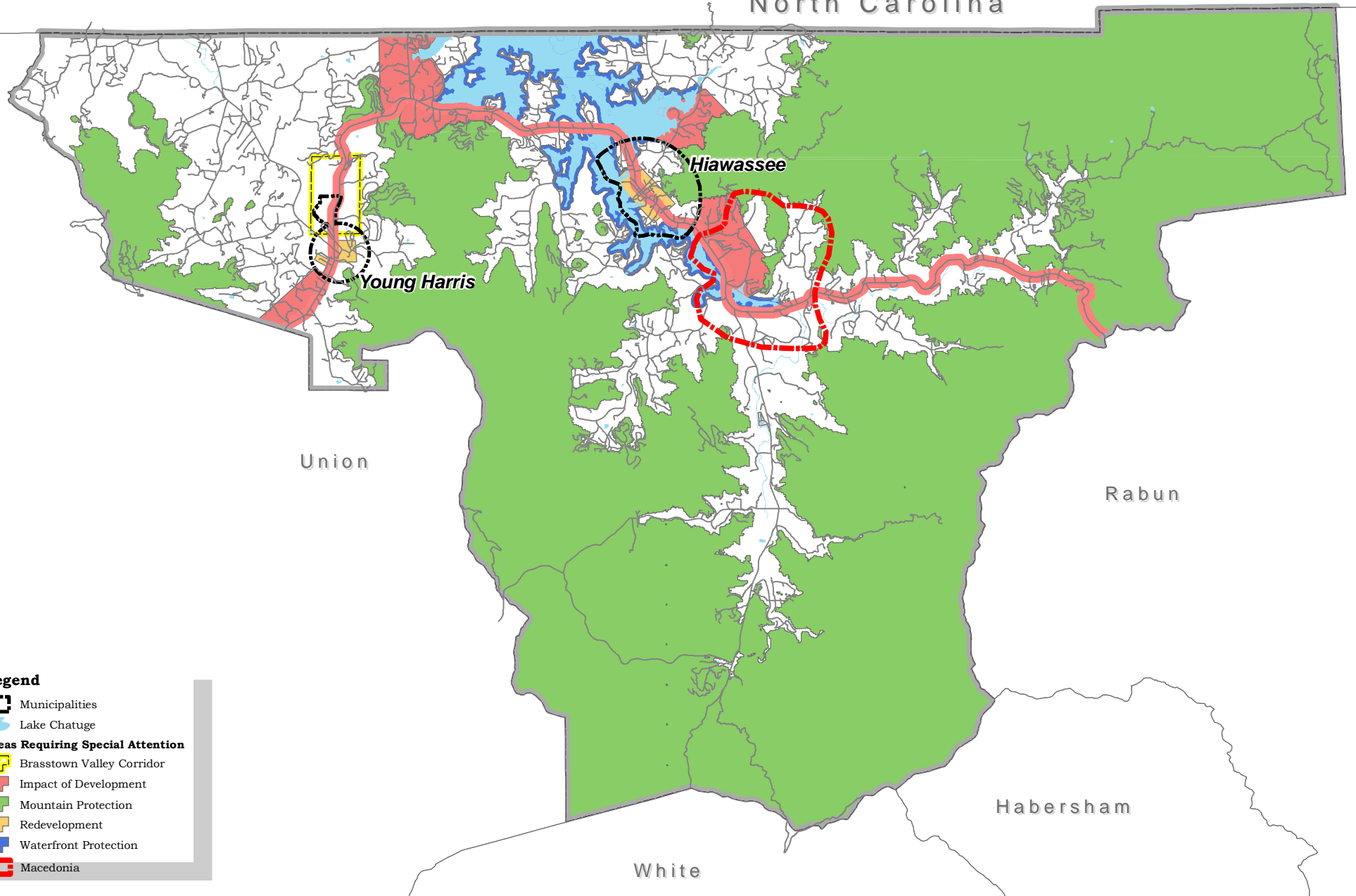












# City of Young Harris Character Areas



North Carolina



**Legend**

-  Municipalities
-  Lake Chatuge
- Areas Requiring Special Attention**
-  Brasstown Valley Corridor
-  Impact of Development
-  Mountain Protection
-  Redevelopment
-  Waterfront Protection
-  Macedonia

**Areas Requiring Special Attention  
Towns County**

