Part B
Community Issues and Opportunities
Final List

The Gwinnett Unified Plan Joint County-Cities Community Assessment identified numerous countywide planning challenges to be addressed by the updated Comprehensive Plan. As required by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), eight separate sections were addressed. The Community Assessment went on to identify unique local issues and opportunities that needed to be addressed by each of the nine cities that participated in the County-wide Community Assessment.

The Community Agenda process for the City of Dacula examined the list of issues and opportunities that related specifically to the city of Dacula and to the County-wide list as it applied to the City. The potential issues and opportunities list on the Georgia DCA website was used as a tool to introduce the City of Dacula Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee to the planning process and to assist in confirming the issues and opportunities that should be considered in the City's Comprehensive Plan.

The Steering Committee worked in small groups with a guiding worksheet to review each issue or opportunity and consider how they applied to Dacula. The Steering Committee was also asked to identify any potential priorities, opportunities, or threats that might affect the City's health, safety, and welfare.

The Steering Committee ranked each issue or opportunity in order of importance, striking issues that were not considered applicable within the City and focusing on those issues deemed most important to the community through the Community Agenda process and in considering recommendations for future capital investments, transportation, land use, zoning, development, and construction codes.

Sidebar: *The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) identified the Dacula area as the edge of a "mega-corridor" for growth along Georgia 316 in the ARC Unified Growth Policies Plan draft map prepared in 2007. The surrounding areas were identified as "suburban neighborhoods" by ARC, and much of the area is also designated as an environmentally sensitive area.*

The committee noted that the City is at the edge of the Georgia State Route 316 "mega-corridor" and discussed the ARC mega-corridor designation of the area in terms of potential opportunities and threats to Dacula that could be attributed to mega-corridor growth.

1. Population and Demography

- Although County population will increase at a slower pace than in the past few decades, the City of Dacula provides a location where the projected 42% County population increase by 2030 can still occur.
- The population will become more diverse in Dacula as it will throughout the County and the Atlanta Region.
- The increasing elderly population will create new planning priorities regarding housing options, recreation opportunities, and social services needs.
- The anticipated future population of the City will change with decisions regarding the annexation of land for development and choices for the types, location, and density of future residential development.

2. Land Use and Development Patterns

- The City of Dacula is located near the point where several regional transportation facilities come together. The addition of the Sugarloaf Extension will increase accessibility to and from the City. The improvements to accessibility will support more intensive development options.
- The City's zoning and development regulations should require new development to contribute to needed future infrastructure, and high environmental and aesthetic quality growth for the City.
- The City lacks a strong local identity and needs improvements to the existing aesthetic environment.
- As older developed areas age, they may suffer economic decline that may spread to other areas of the County.
- The City's zoning and development regulations should provide incentives to encourage redevelopment of depressed areas.
- The County's reserve of developable land will be consumed over the next 25 years and in concert with rising land values will slow the rate of growth or significantly increase densities.
- Segregation of different land uses adds trips to the transportation system.
- Mixed use development where high income residents live generates favorable tax revenue.
- The City will become more urban and should plan to reduce the impacts of local higher intensity development on the rest of the County by providing a combination of places to live, places to work, and places to play.

- A community level mixed use and commercial center is proposed along Harbins Road south of SR 316 between the Alcovy Road and Ace McMillan Road intersections. This area is designated as the Alcovy Center Character Area on the City of Dacula Future Development Map.
- A community level mixed use and commercial center is developing along Dacula Road between Fence Road and Hurricane Shoals Road. This area is designated as the North Town Center on the City of Dacula Future Development Map.
- The development of two mixed use and commercial centers to the north and to the south of the City provides an axis for development with Downtown Dacula at the center and the two community level centers at either end. Together, these two community centers can reduce the number of local north/south trips through the City and permit Dacula's downtown to develop as the cultural and educational center for the City.
- Redevelopment of Downtown Dacula requires a plan to address narrow streets and traffic demands into and around the schools and across the CSX Railroad.
- The potential development of an Employment Center at the Drowning Creek interchange with SR 316 will provide a location with access to SR 316 for research, office or light industrial development and potential access to the CSX Rail corridor.
- Future development patterns should encourage interaction with neighbors.
- Appropriate design and signage standards can support the City's efforts to rehabilitate areas which are unattractive.

3. Economic Development

- The County's employment base is expected to increase by 53% adding 169,000 jobs. Land is available along SR 316 to accommodate some of that growth in employment.
- The County will try to attract more research centers to support higher paying technology jobs, and since Dacula is located on the University Parkway/Brain Train corridor, the City is in a positive position to attract such development.
- Dacula should work with Gwinnett County's efforts to attract affluent and educated singles to the County and assume a combination of support systems for families and singles.
- The City should take advantage of the growth of Georgia Gwinnett University to offer a location for administrators, teachers and students to live, work and play.
- Dacula should emphasize its ability to establish relatively compact urban services close to highway, rail and airport facilities.
- Dacula should try to maintain a balance between auto-oriented commercial centers and neighborhood and community level centers to promote a variety of commercial structures to

meet local demand. There should also be active encouragement of maintenance or replacement of older shopping areas. This may include specific architectural standards to encourage design quality and sustainability and include location of curb cuts, vehicle parking, and outside display elements in the design review process to enhance appearance and desirability.

- New commercial areas can be developed that reflect current market choices for buildings, access, and design.
- The construction industry will become less influential as residential developers move from Gwinnett into adjacent counties.
- Dacula would benefit from the identification of new economic development opportunities for mixed use, office park, or industrial development areas in and around the City. These may include sites that have access to the CSX Railroad line that passes through the City.
- Dacula should establish and maintain "Gateways" for the community to promote visitor awareness and citizen pride and commitment. Gateways should provide visual information to new arrivals that they are entering a "unique" place and "way-finding" resources that help promote events, citizen pride, and visitor awareness.
- Dacula needs to create more jobs and economic opportunities for local residents to provide fewer travel trips, reduce travel congestion, and serve local commercial and employment needs.
- Too little competition for too many stores may result in vacant structures as businesses relocate to minimize leasing costs.
- The City supports creating well-designed, sustainable commercial centers through ensuring that new construction meets or exceeds local standards and balances the short term costs of construction with the long term costs of maintaining operational sustainability.
- New funding sources are anticipated to be needed to help implement appropriate improvements identified by the Comprehensive Plan. Potential methods may include establishing impact fees for future development, expanding the Downtown Community Improvements District, establishing a "Livable Centers Initiative" (LCI) Program, creating Infrastructure Development Districts (if/when allowed by the State Constitution), and other methods that may be considered by the City.

4. Transportation

- Many existing roadways are at or near capacity as measured by "Level of Service" for the corridors, and the cost to build all the lane miles necessary to relieve congestion problems is prohibitive. The City may desire to consider developing a comprehensive transportation plan to address the multiple modes of transportation and access for the City's residents.

- Measures of transportation service may also need to consider "Complete Street" design elements to address bicycle, pedestrian, and transit mode services in addition to automobile volumes as appropriate measures of service.
- Transportation safety, circulation, and congestion can be improved by selective lane widening, turn lanes, additional traffic signals, and improved timing of signals. Better coordination of transportation and road investments with land use decisions will also improve transportation efficiency.
- Transportation projects should consider accommodating the physically challenged including older populations which may have less physical mobility or less acute vision. This may include additional warning signage and markings for motorists and pedestrians, and special signalization improvements including multi-phased and/or count-down signals at frequently used crosswalks. Signage improvements may include additional warning signs identifying entry into congested areas, larger print (for emphasis) signs, and easily-interpreted signage to adjust motorist and pedestrian expectations for increased pedestrian populations in the mixed use and residential village centers. Pedestrian-oriented improvements should consider design requirements consistent with ADA standards and older persons and the references for design standards should include the Highway Design Handbook for Older Drivers and Pedestrians as an additional resource.
- Transportation improvements need to be made concurrent with development.
- The City needs some specific incentives to encourage developers to build quality roadways in that exceed minimal requirements (especially on future arterial and collector corridors).
- The City needs to improve the internal and external connections between activity centers, neighborhoods, and local residential streets.
- As automobile travel becomes more constrained by increased operational and congestion costs, alternate means of mobility may be needed to maintain existing relationships of local residents with schools, churches, social clubs, and neighborhood organizations.
- The CSX Railroad provides an opportunity to develop some additional industrial uses along the rail corridor.
- A regional commuter rail corridor may also provide a boost to ancillary development for residential and "live-work-play" growth along the rail corridor through its links with Atlanta and Athens. A commuter rail station located in or adjacent to the City would increase the accessibility of Dacula to regional metropolitan centers.
- Access across the CSX Railroad should be improved with new grade separated crossings and additional connecting corridors between northern Gwinnett and SR 316.
- Context-sensitive design for roadway corridors would allow additional access and reduce congestion at intersections, curved sections of roadway, or other locations where the design can significantly improve traffic flow without requiring the widening of the entire corridor. These improvements include providing better signage to maintain appropriate connectivity and design speeds.

- The City wishes to create appropriate requirements to minimize obtrusive signage and undesired visual clutter along roadways to encourage attractive aesthetics and protect buffers for residential and commercial development.
- Dacula supports multi-modal access to commercial centers that includes bicycle, pedestrian, transit, and other means in addition to the automobile to allow persons with limited mobility choices (i.e. too young or old to drive, those without cars, etc.) to access goods and services which would otherwise be beyond their reach.
- Regional/county-wide road improvements should be expedited to acquire rights of way and complete engineering and design. Construction of these regional improvements should be priorities for the County's transportation system. Specific improvements include:
    - Georgia State Route 316 should be reconstructed as a grade-separated, limited access highway from the Apalachee River to State Route 120 in Lawrenceville. In addition to other interchanges to the west, new interchanges should be provided at Winder Highway/SR 8, Sugarloaf Parkway Extension, Harbins Road, and Drowning Creek Road.
    - The Sugarloaf Parkway Extension Phase One should be built as a limited access, grade separated highway to provide access from SR 316 to Grayson Highway and beyond. Interchanges should include access to SR 316 and Campbell Road.
    - The Sugarloaf Parkway Extension Phase 2 should be built as a limited access, grade separated highway from SR 316 to I-85 near the Mall of Georgia with interchanges at SR 316, Winder Highway/SR 8, and Hurricane Shoals Road. The design of this corridor should allow east west connections to stay open at (or near) Stanley Road, Fence Road, and a relocated connection to Old Peachtree Road. This road should be constructed as an alternative to increased traffic and less viable services along Old Peachtree and Dacula Roads.
- Frontage Roads (including connecting segments of existing roads) should be built on the northern and southern sides of the improved SR 316 corridor.
- The County should continue to explore commuter rail to improve air quality and reduce potential traffic on the road corridors. A Commuter Rail Station for the "Brain Train" between Atlanta and Athens should be located on the CSX Railroad/Winder Highway corridor between SR 316 and the Apalachee River. A specific site needs to be selected and coordinated with ground access improvements.
- Opportunities for additional pedestrian and bicycle mobility should be explored along new connecting corridors or improved existing corridors or along the Apalachee River corridor and its tributaries. Connecting links should be identified and preserved as development occurs.
- Roadway improvements should be designed to be context-sensitive to allow improved level of service, reduce the congestion bottlenecks at intersections and other locations that may impede safe traffic flow. Improvements can include a variety of measures from providing better signage to deliver information about what to expect around the next bend to physical reconstruction to allow vehicles to travel safely at design speeds.

- Dacula is subject to relatively high volumes of through trips compared to the volume of traffic generated by the local population. It is adjacent to US 29 (Winder Hwy), GA 316 (University Parkway), and other major roadways. Furthermore, a Sugarloaf Parkway extension is slated to bring even more traffic through the vicinity of the City. The most immediate local issue affecting mobility is congestion at many of the local intersections and the inadequate pedestrian infrastructure.
- On-street parking in urban areas offers many benefits relative to surface parking lots. Surface parking interrupts the urban fabric, is hostile to pedestrians, and results in vast expanses of impervious surface. On-street parking reduces the need for surface parking, provides a buffer of parked cars along the roadway between automobile traffic and sidewalks, and encourages travelers to reduce their speeds through congested areas.
- A "Livable Centers Initiative" (LCI) Plan may provide an opportunity for the City to identify the best possible locations for a commuter station relkated to the "Brain Train" concept proposed to come through Dacula.
- The City should develop dedicated bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to promote alternate travel modes.

5. Housing and Social Services

- Single family, large lot developments will not address all future housing needs.
- Zoning and development regulations should accommodate the anticipated mix of diverse housing needs.
- The City would like to create mixed use districts that include mixed types of housing that promote revitalization in designated areas.
- Special needs for seniors, smaller households, low-income and moderate-income households are expected to increase throughout the next two decades. The City may desire to adopt a senior housing ordinance or other similar method to ensure that the needs of the elderly population are properly planned for.
- Research is needed to identify the types of future housing needed in and adjacent to the City of Dacula and if they are being provided through current resources.
- The City needs to coordinate with other governments and with non-profit, public, and private sector providers to deliver appropriate social services.
- The City needs to identify and support public, private, and non-profit services that provide shelter, housing, and accompanying services to homeless persons (specifically including single female parents with children) that help them become self-sufficient.
- Owner occupied housing is increasing as a percentage of total households and, although rents in Dacula are lower than in other parts of the County, they are increasing.

- A detailed, comprehensive housing assessment would help identify current and future housing needs.

6. Natural and Cultural Resources

- Existing trends of low density residential infill on one-acre lots will consume more land per household unit and may limit accessibility of the remaining woodlands, pastures, stream corridors, and steep slopes that are included in one-acre lots to private use.
- The City owns one park (Maple Creek Park), but has access to County parks both within and outside of the City.
- The County has acquired a number of significant open and green spaces near Dacula that will provide a diverse choice of natural and recreational experiences.
- The Apalachee River corridor and its tributaries provide a potential "greenway" corridor on the east edge of the County that could complement the Chattahoochee River greenway on the west.
- The City has adopted the use of Stormwater Best Management Practices to comply with water quality regulatory requirements and enhance stream quality. The adopted practices are consistent with the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District Model Stormwater Ordinances.
- The City lacks a traditional downtown square and is interested in creating such a space for public use. A Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) project may provide a means to realize this issue as an opportunity.
- The current City Hall is located on Harbins Road approximately one (1) mile from "downtown" Dacula. Whereas the existing City Hall is appropriate in size for existing and "short-term" future needs, the feasibility of relocating the City Hall is considered a "long-term" opportunity that may be deferred until after the Five-Year Short Term Work Program attached as part of this plan.
- A community/cultural arts center was identified as a desirable item. However it was not considered as essential to the recommended Short Term Work Program" due to the economic cost. The City should explore the feasibility of creating a community/cultural arts center for its residents as part of the "long-term" recommendations of the plan.
- The terrain in the vicinity of the Alcovy and Apalachee River basins provides dramatic ridgeline views of the surrounding countryside. Preservation of the existing scenic pastures, wooded areas, and other resources requires a balance between preservation and development. The identification of existing scenic views that should be preserved must be documented before the community can weigh whether new development uses the scenic resource or obstructs it.

- Members of the community have expressed interest in a community center or cultural arts facility as an amenity to the City similar to the Aurora Theater in nearby Lawrenceville.
- Trees can provide shade for the southern or western side of the house, reducing air-conditioning costs in the summer, intercepting and reducing water flow, and moderating the heat-island effect caused by extensive pavement and buildings.
- The leaves on deciduous trees absorb or deflect radiant energy from the sun during the summer and allow the sun to shine through in winter providing a more temperate micro-climate and indirect economic benefits through lowered electric bills for energy users and providers.
- Natural vegetative areas along stream corridors and adjacent wetlands provide diverse wildlife and vegetative cover for songbirds and small amphibians, reptiles and mammals, and provide a natural filter for pollutants introduced into the ecosystem. Wooded stream corridors also provide visual barriers that provide better privacy for adjacent development and create corridors for wildlife to travel across the built environment.
- Knowledge regarding potential losses before they occur provides the opportunity to demand that future development limit its impact on the aesthetic nature of the community by promoting appropriate development that enhances the scenic views and pastoral feel of the community instead of development that detracts from the existing landscape.

7. Community Facilities and Services

- New sources for funding new infrastructure facilities and expanding existing ones should be explored.
- A more balanced and productive tax base is needed to fund appropriate facilities to serve the needs of the local population and employment.
- A strong commercial property tax base will help avoid over reliance on residential property taxes.
- Maintaining a strong bond rating will help local government keep the costs of financing new facilities affordable.
- Timely acquisition of land needed for future public facilities will help to keep costs down and preserve needed land before it becomes scarce and more expensive.
- The City desires the expansion of Gwinnett County sewer lines, pump stations, and force main lines to wastewater treatment facilities within the City and adjacent areas to reduce reliance on septic tank systems and to create the opportunity for development of the SR 316 corridor between Winder Highway/SR 8 and the Apalachee River.
- Stormwater and its impacts on the environment will become increasingly important and will require coordination between the City and the County.
- Fire and police services will require additional personnel and facilities as the population and development grow in and adjacent to the City.

8. Intergovernmental Coordination

- The City needs to better coordinate its land use, economic, housing, annexation, and environmental priorities and actions.
- Future land uses and the provision and timing of infrastructure development in the sphere of influence around the City should be coordinated between the City and the County.
- The City is interested in working with Gwinnett County, Barrow County, and the City of Auburn to address issues regarding water and sewer infrastructure, land use, transportation, and protection of the environment along the Apalachee River between Harbins/Patrick Mill Road and SR 324/Auburn Road. Water, wastewater and environmental issues also require participation by the North Georgia Metropolitan Water District and the two regional development centers (ARC and Northeast Georgia).
- The City desires to maintain water, sewer, fire, police, health, and other services through continued service delivery agreements with the County as long as the value provided by the County meets with the desires of the City's residents.
- The City desires to maintain a positive working relationship with the Gwinnett County Board of Education to serve local education needs and maintain the health, safety and welfare of the schools and school attendance districts located in and adjacent to the City.
- Intergovernmental relationships such as those between fire, police, EMS, and other services provide redundancies in order to ensure residents' health and well-being.
- The City needs to maintain cooperative agreements with water and power utility providers, planning agencies, and regulators such as Georgia Power, Oglethorpe Power, MEAG, the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District, Gwinnett Water services, the Atlanta Regional Commission, and other public elements of State and federal agencies and private entities that encourage coordination between providers and assist in deciding on shared infrastructure and promotion of the best interests of local citizens.
- The City should establish an annexation process that is coordinated with Gwinnett County to support the annexation of the properties identified by the Comprehensive Plan.
- The City needs to maintain cooperative agreements with transportation and transit providers, planning agencies, and regulators such as the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA), the Georgia Department of Transportation, MARTA, the Atlanta Regional Commission, Gwinnett County Transit, and other elements of State and federal agencies that coordinate transportation improvements to, from,. And within the City in addition to other transit and alternate modal planning methods, such as the "Brain Train".
- A city-wide bicycle and pedestrian plan is needed to support alternate transportation modes in and adjacent to the City. The city can work with organizations such as PEDS to assist in coordinating "safe route to school" programs and PATH to support bicycle and pedestrian connections.
- The City should expedite and update its Service Delivery Agreements with Gwinnett County to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of current and future residents.