

“People”

Strengthening the lives of citizens and visitors through Health, Safety, and Social Services.

Health

A healthy community is one that is educated about the mind and body, and has the opportunity to pursue lifestyle changes should citizens choose to do so. By partnering with our local and regional health providers, Athens-Clarke County can continue to provide not only basic health needs, but advanced initiatives aimed at securing a holistic approach coupled with state-of-the-art services and technology.

Goal

A culture of healthy lifestyles and inclusive access to affordable, holistic and state-of-the-art services and facilities for physical health, mental health, and general wellbeing.

Policies

- Coordinate communication on health care issues to increase the public's understanding of service providers, translation services, and program requirements for clients.
- Continue to support healthy living.
- Create education programs to help citizens make healthy lifestyle choices.
- Identifying mental health issues in youth and put preventive measures, services, and interventions in place.
- Create more opportunities and coordination of services for people moving back to the community from incarceration – transition programs and resources from short-term and long-term incarceration.
- Develop an effective mental health crisis response team.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. **Support** affordable healthcare for all ages that provides regional access for patients through an adequate number of providers and associated services, equally distributed by location as based on the population served, including specialists. **Zoning should be examined to account for this need.**

- ~~b. Increase the number of options for affordable childcare, and integrate healthcare services into said facilities, like schools, to ensure that all youth have access to necessary treatment.~~
- c. ~~Advance case management coordination to not only support direct medical initiatives, but also~~ Promote awareness for associated issues involving behavioral health, development disabilities, addiction, HIV/AIDS, among other by eliminating stigmas and marketing available programs.
- ~~d. Additional services and programs for the homeless will assist in decreasing the number of those people found in such a situation. An increased number of facilities that go beyond just sheltering at night are needed.~~
- ~~e. The area has been identified as having various “food deserts”, where there is a lack of healthy, fresh food within reasonable distance to residences and should be remedied.~~
- f. Athens-Clarke County is considered the regional provider for healthcare in Northeast Georgia, where it has become one of the dominant industries outside of public education. As such, focus should be maintained and/or increased on this sector to capitalize on the full potential of such offerings.
- g. Due to its larger population, the county can reach a greater number of people to promote not only healthcare, but a healthy lifestyle. This may include offering incentives to spur behavioral changes, including those non-traditional, health-based offering like financial literacy and homelessness. It should also mean increasing greenspace, promoting walkability, and access to clean air.

Safety

Public safety ensures the protection of citizens from physical and financial harm, but also through the promotion of constitutional rights. Our laws and efforts to uphold them will be based in part on community values and expectations. Safety will be provided through a number of methods and techniques in an effort to be fair, transparent, and successful.

Goal

Residents and visitors feel safe and secure in the community, whether in residential areas, public places or on transportation routes.

Policies

- Provide and identify sufficient funding to implement ACC Police Department Strategic Vision Plan.

- Develop and fund retention incentives for public safety officers.
- Develop Fire & Emergency Services Strategic Plan.
- Review and enhance safety programs for at-risk populations to reduce sexual, financial, and emotional abuse.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. Development of a street-light master plan and policies for pedestrian safety.
- b. Increase in funding to advance public safety recruitment, education, and higher pay.
- c. ~~Limit the number of bar and alcohol licenses Downtown.~~ Work to reduce the consumption of alcohol Downtown.
- d. Enhance a more equitable neighborhood traffic-calming program that promotes safe walkability to various destinations like schools (Safe Routes to School).
- e. Increase coordination amongst A-CC Emergency Services to provide a safer environment for children involved in physical activities, like parks, ~~as weapons seem too readily available within the community.~~
- f. Continuation of crime reduction through non-traditional means like community policing, volunteerism, mentorships, restorative justice, and Community Protection through Environmental Design.
- g. Expand safety programs to reverse the role that family violence is having on the community ~~through an expansion of safety program offerings.~~ Specifically, those initiatives aimed at reducing the sexual, financial, emotional and physical abuse upon women and children.
- h. Expansion of the existing Citizen Police Academy program into local schools will work to improve public understanding and perception while tailoring discussion toward youth members on topics like pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Social Services

Institutions throughout the county support and sustain services and facilities that respond to the needs of our population, especially social welfare. Services provided assist in the daily quality of life for our residents and visitors, contributing to the community's vibrant live/work mentality.

Goal

Effective and accessible social service delivery that enables people to reach their full potential. The community is open to, aware and supportive of social services, and the nonprofit community is connected and communicative, with ever increasing collaboration.

Policies

- Nonprofits collaborate, convene productively, and effectively communicate services.
- Develop and expand youth development programming that is accessible and provide adequate and affordable child care.
- Address poverty by targeting unemployment and under-employment, as well as our limited ability to attract employers to ACC by training and preparing individuals for vocational success.
- Create a community that is effectively supportive of and provides accessible and productive opportunities for individuals with limited access to opportunity and who are underrepresented in quality of life indicators such as income, food security, stable housing, community inclusion, etc.
- Develop a clearinghouse to more easily access to programs and social services.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. Promote and formalize a time-bank system for trading skilled services.
- ~~b. Additional after school programs and evening/night daycare options.~~
- c. Reduction in the high levels of poverty throughout the community, especially for school-age children and the elderly. This issue threatens not only human life but also the character of the community.
- d. Full, life-cycle coverage for individuals in need, from childhood to adulthood to the elderly, would ensure programs and services are available to ease hunger and poverty and support family welfare.
- e. Stronger focus should be placed on equity so that the most vulnerable get necessary services. There should also be an equalization of services and their distribution between the east and west sides of the county. Investigate those uses and facilities that appear to be lacking from one side of the county or the other.

- f. Allow homeless individuals an opportunity to work on projects throughout the county like beautification efforts.
- g. Harness the knowledge and experience of the senior population with respect to volunteerism and community services.
- ~~h. Athens-Clarke County has, and continues to provide a high level of urban services.~~
- i. Athens-Clarke County is a vibrant community that is diverse and welcoming to immigrants, in addition to caring for those in need and will likely continue to support social services.
- j. Regional collaboration and contributions are key in supporting the social safety net and to avoid duplication of services. A network manager could help coordinate programs, organizations, and services. An annual conference for all providers would also assist in collaboration and avoid duplication. "Service fairs" could be held at targeted locations throughout the county.
- k. Additional services and programs for the homeless will assist in decreasing the number of those people found in such a situation. An increased number of facilities that go beyond just sheltering at night are needed.

"Prosperity"

Create, sustain, and advance the livelihood of citizens through Education and Economic Development.

Education

As a community, Athens-Clarke County provides educational opportunities at all levels of learning, from early childhood through high school, to advanced doctoral research. Both public and private institutions provide a foundation for life-long learning, and the following list identifies areas to support and encourage our educational system.

Goal

Effective and respected early childhood through high school education that prepares students for life, including career learning and education opportunities, traditional college, or the workforce. In general, life-long learning is highly valued, resources are widely available, equity in opportunity is improved, and success is communicated.

Policies

- Educate, train and develop young people in Athens-Clarke County so that they will graduate from high school prepared to enter the local workforce, and to be successful in the world of work and in their lives.
- Enhance the learning environment to provide student support for the variety of needs within our community.
- Support teachers through a variety of methods in order to retain quality teachers who feel appreciated and valued by the larger community, and are afforded with opportunities for professional growth.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. A higher retention of quality teachers must be achieved if educational initiatives are to succeed. The local government can assist by offering incentives like affordable housing in neighborhoods with associated schools. Additionally, teachers could be entitled to reduced rates for A-CC facility and program usage.
- b. By establishing and securing a well-rounded job market, the local government can assist in providing opportunities for all skill and education levels.
- c. Additional early childhood care, learning, and transitioning, especially for infants and toddlers, is of vital importance for establishing a sound foundation for educational success. Programs offered by the Leisure Services Department should be examined to enhanced opportunities outside of the typical school day, particularly geared toward younger children.
- d. Increase the number of options for affordable childcare, and integrate healthcare services into said facilities, like schools, to ensure that all youth have access to necessary treatment.
- ~~e. Higher retention of quality teachers through incentive offerings like housing or reduced rates for ACC facility and program usage.~~
- f. Additional afterschool organizations and activities, especially those that take place at schools, can make these facilities neighborhood focal points that function as community centers afterhours. This may also create opportunities for more active and engaged parents. A-CC can assist with providing a number of varied offerings through departments like Leisure Services.
- g. The local government can help promote a more positive marketing of the school system since its perception impacts the county's ability to be a regional economic leader. Issues impacting the community are directly related to both the school system and local government.

- h. Education is essential and should be provided throughout a person's lifetime, and that includes those individuals in need like the homeless or those willing to learn like the incarcerated. The local government must continue to offer opportunities in areas outside of the local school board's typical realm.
- ~~i. Promotion and expansion of ACC programs that provide educational opportunities within the community. Leisure Services offers afterschool initiatives that can mentor youth. Green Schools introduces students to sustainability.~~
- ~~j. Promotion of school farming that can in turn contribute to nutritional options on-site.~~
- ~~k. Embrace the needs of college students instead of continuous opposition.~~
- ~~l. Increased promotion of skilled labor jobs by means of Athens Technical College.~~
- m. Through increased collaboration with all local colleges and universities, A-CC can help promote a well-educated community and workforce while highlighting the various options for additional learning for our youth upon graduation.
- n. An increased number of internships could be offered by A-CC departments for both high-school and college students, similar to that of the Great Promise Partnership program. Also, an organizational development certificate could be awarded to students that learn about local government functions while the local government get an opportunity to promote its facilities through participant tours. Focus could be on the varying positions within local government that do not necessarily require advanced education, emphasizing life skills.

Economic Development

Athens-Clarke County strives to be one of the best places to not only to live or retire, but also work. Through a resilient and diverse economic base, the community should provide a broad range of jobs, including entrepreneurial endeavors that provide an opportunity for anyone to be successful. Already an economic hub for the region, Athens-Clarke County will use its strengths and unique qualities to support existing and new enterprises, all while continuing to foster a strong and capable workforce.

Goal

Greater prosperity for the entire community – individuals, businesses and local government – with diverse, quality jobs and a ready workforce. This also means entrepreneurship and small businesses flourish in a collaborative environment and that

unemployment and underemployment are reduced [and full time workers are able to meet daily needs and live in assured, self-sufficiency (housing, food and life necessities).

Policies

- Continued improvement of coordination and cooperation of Athens entities concerned with economic growth and the attraction and creation of jobs which offer wages that support a normal standard of living for Athens-Clarke County workers.
- Implement ordinances, policies, and infrastructure to address impediments to locating or expanding business and industry.
- Provide the facilities and services necessary to attract, incubate, and grow businesses across a variety of sectors.
- Leverage Athens' most distinctive products - like the music scene - to further position it as a destination and brand.
- Create a marketing plan that will better position Athens to successfully compete for in-state and regional leisure and conventions travel.
- Continue building a comprehensive, complementary entrepreneur development program to the existing retention attraction initiatives.
- Improve the accessibility of Downtown as everyone's neighborhood.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. Athens-Clarke County has low unemployment but high poverty which may contribute to the need for higher paying, living-wage jobs, but should not be viewed as the sole reasoning for this condition.
- b. Existing zoning, geographic location, and the perception of a “no growth” attitude have seemingly affected Eastside development, continuing to the debate over how each side of the county is favored.
- c. Better wayfinding is needed throughout Downtown in assisting businesses with customer attraction.
- d. “Incubator” space in general has become a possible solution for various businesses, but in particular can benefit artists and musicians by providing free studio space as well.

- ~~e. A franchise clearinghouse for young entrepreneurs interested in starting an associated business.~~
- f. Athens-Clarke County appears to be in direct competition for retail with Oconee County, leaving too many empty retail spaces. Use various incentives like Commercial Improvement Districts (CID's) to help counter this trend.
- g. There is a need for workforce development that connects qualified talent with employers' expectations. It is difficult to maintain a consistent and reliable workforce due to high turnover. Attracting and retaining middle income jobs should lead to a more sustainable economy.
- h. A business-friendly perception has become challenging, including processes for government approval needed in development. A "one-stop shop" for development services may help assist with this reputation and actual review process.
- i. Retain local residents, particularly of the younger generation, who receive an education here, and could contribute significantly to the workforce in areas like government, business, and non-profit.
- j. There is a need to assist local businesses and industries with a targeted action plan for engaging the community. This in turn can also provide coordination that leverages the resources available for entrepreneurial and small-business support, encouraging an increasing trend of start-up businesses.
- ~~k. Use various incentives like Commercial Improvement Districts (CID's).~~
- l. Capitalize and improve upon the unique "foodie scene" that Athens has to offer.
- m. Follow-up with Home Occupation applicants to offer advice and guidance from the Economic Development Department.
- n. Adjust and plan for changes in technology that alter the way we shop or even travel (transportation modes).
- o. Increase in the amount of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP's) involving local government facilities. Start by examining the list of government-owned land for the purpose of increasing the tax base.
- ~~p. Examine the list of government owned land for the purpose of increasing the tax base.~~

- ~~q. The airport should be viewed as its own mode of transportation, not in addition to other traditional modes.~~
- r. There is an opportunity to expand upon the strong economic base anchored by our regional healthcare activity and higher education institutions.
- s. The number of utility patents produced within Athens-Clarke County presents an opportunity for continued success, but may require the need for a dedicated research park.
- t. Athens-Clarke County has dozens of private properties totaling over half a million square feet of available commercial and industrial building space that need to be marketed and taken into consideration when rezoning for such uses.
- u. Over 40,000 workers are estimated to commute into the community each day. Increasing the number of jobs will allow Athens-Clarke County to function as the career hub for the region, with workers living both in and outside of the county.
- ~~v. Young adults want to stay in Athens and grow careers by envisioning a pathway that can lead them out of poverty and decrease that rate within the next generation. This starts by securing jobs for high school age children.~~

“Place”

Making a great place for people to live, work, or simply enjoy through Housing, Land Use, Neighborhoods, Agriculture, and the Environment.

Housing

Athens-Clarke County will foster neighborhoods and housing opportunities that address the following list. Support for and preservation of diversity should be continued as it contributes to our rich history and the overall character of the community. As the population continues to grow, sustainable housing will be key for both new development and revitalization to protect environmental quality and manage costs.

Goal

Housing options that reflect the diversity and meet the needs of the community, including housing for families and a diverse workforce. These are quality options with a variety of types, prices, and locations.

Policies

- Increase the amount of and provide access to affordable housing.

- Acknowledge and develop strategies to address issues related to gentrification.
- Support and expand the Housing Rehabilitation Initiative.
- Provide more options for homeless.
- Create quality housing for seniors - accessory dwelling units.
- Target troubled multi-family developments for major redevelopment especially mixed-income.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. Pursue a reduction in the minimum floor area requirement for dwellings.
- b. Obtain and direct additional rehabilitation funds for abandoned single-family homes.
- c. Allowance of in-law suites or studios for owner-occupied parcels. Examine the current definition of family and whether it is too restrictive.
- d. Infill housing should be promoted and concentrated in areas near commercial nodes, providing easy access to everyday services.
 - a. Creation of a Renter's Bill of Rights as the community seeks to embrace the rental trend in housing over that of ownership. Focus on education as it pertains to rentals, specifically, providing students with information brochures that outline rental rights and responsibilities.
- e. Affordable or subsidized public housing options are too few with long waiting lists. Everyone should have a quality place to live.
- f. A regulated encampment for those in poverty that provides a safe, clean place to establish temporary housing.
- g. Plans developed in advance for the renovation and repurposing of older buildings (not necessarily designated historic).
- h. Identification of ways in which to address student housing development concerns. This includes everything from aesthetics to function to the concentrated population.
- i. The average income of households does not match-up with the average sales price for homes in terms of affordability. This strengthens the call for workforce housing, as well as affordable senior housing.

- j. Housing options that reflect the diversity and meet the needs of the community, including housing for families and a diverse workforce. These are quality options with a variety of types, prices, and locations.
- k. Examine options for affordable housing with regard to public servants.
- l. Explore various property tax relief options for those most financially vulnerable populations.
- ~~m. There exist opportunities for everyone in Athens-Clarke County to have a quality place to live by diversifying housing options and allowing citizens to age in place.~~

Land Use

The Future Land Use category focuses on the physical or built environment. Ideas pertaining to how each parcel of land in Athens-Clarke County should be developed and used tend to get the most attention. Still, it is important to keep in mind that land use is influenced by a number of factors, including overall land mass, topography, economics, social aspects, architecture, functionality, accessibility, and density to name a few. Through a balance of new and redeveloped sites, the community aims to keep Athens-Clarke County attractive and inviting.

Goal

A vibrant and physically attractive community with a variety of places and equitable access to parks, open space, and other community gathering places. Development and redevelopment—and redevelopment is a priority—are well considered, appropriately placed, and have a positive and thoughtful economic, social and environmental impact.

Policies

- Create quality housing for seniors - accessory dwelling units.
- Re-examine Future Development Map.
- Establish Corridor Redevelopment incentives or zoning policies for gateway and other important corridors.
- Create Nodal development tied to transportation, healthcare, schools, jobs, workforce, and housing.
- Develop zoning standards and incentives to include greenspace and other public amenities.

- Establish incentives for new development to incorporate environmentally sustainable standards including, but not limited to, material re-use, responsible management of construction waste, etc.
- Incentivize and incorporate the arts and greenspace into all new commercial developments and redevelopment.
- Re-examine density allowances in all zoning districts.
- Develop incentives to reuse existing development before new developments in Greenfields.
- Encourage the use of incentive options such as TDRs, CIDs, TADs, and BIDs for development.
- Create an inventory of local public-owned land that could be developed.
- Develop zoning standards and incentives to develop and/or redevelop quality multi-family options for a diverse group.
- Create a River District Plan and development strategy.

Needs and Opportunities

- ~~Respect for the rights of private property owners while enforcing zoning regulations.~~
- Implementation of inclusionary zoning techniques, like density bonuses and a relaxed mix of uses, if utilized in new development or redevelopment.
- Proactive planning for the anticipated population and demographics expected while coupled with various community facilities we have or want. This must take into consideration multiple generations of citizens that encompass Athens.
- ~~Multi-generational community development.~~
- ~~Continued preservation of additional historic buildings.~~
- A vibrant downtown with less vehicles, but more open space, that is clean, walkable, and park-like.

- g. Establishment of gateway corridors that leave an impression upon visitors and provide access to necessary destinations for citizens.
- h. Examine the Highway 78/316 Industrial Park or an eastside location for a Bio/Office park.
- i. Consider the use of impact fees related to development that can help offset the costs of providing associated services.
- j. Expand upon the Firefly Trail Program and couple it with a possible zoning overlay for the Greenway.
- k. Establish a credit system with respect to development that can be used for tree or plaza space requirements that in turn offset difficulties in current or future projects.
- ~~l. Alternatives to the existing Planned Development process that reduce the schedule and costs.~~
- m. Consider contingency plans for the mall, including what it could eventually be used for: movie studio, senior living, or revitalized neighborhood.
- n. Reexamine density allowances in all zoning districts. A transitional commercial/low density "RM" zone may be warranted to buffer existing neighborhoods from heavier commercial.
- o. Ensure zoning for a grocery store downtown and in other areas identified as food deserts that are of an appropriate neighborhood scale. This type of use would include specific percentages of fresh food, pharmacy, and minimal sign advertisement.
- p. Establish incentives for new development to incorporate environmentally sustainable standards including, but not limited to, material re-use, responsible management of construction waste, etc.
- q. Reexamine the zoning ordinance with a focus on building height; appropriate locations for urban design versus areas with suburban design; mandatory mixed-use retail space; and smaller dwellings.
- r. Develop incentives to reuse existing development before new development in greenfields, including TDR's, CID's, TAD's, and BID's. Given the county's small geographic area, redevelopment should be prioritized over greenfield development as plenty of opportunity exists to improve blight along corridors and gateways, strip malls, industrial sites, and aging apartments.

- s. Attempt to reconfigure large, existing or proposed commercial centers into “blocks” that promote walkability. There are many available lots along corridors that could be purchased directly by A-CC in order to achieve this and in turn be marketed for development.
- t. The Greenbelt has a tendency to focus development inward, which can contribute to infill housing and higher land value. As such, easy, undeveloped land is becoming scarce, meaning the market will continue to turn to redevelopment of parcels and general infill practices. However, mobility is better in these areas and it prevents sprawl, which signals a need to prepare for such actions in the future.
- u. Development has an opportunity to locate outside of Athens-Clarke County, just over the county line in an effort to avoid county regulations and land value, but still claim proximity to the county and its population. Practices to prevent this type of occurrence are needed.
- ~~v. Redevelopment of grayfields.~~
- w. Develop the riverfront with stores, concert venue, and additional nature walks. This in turn would help spur the creation of a downtown parks program.
- ~~x. There exists a significant amount of untaxable property.~~
- y. Consider the redevelopment of Atlanta Highway as a technology corridor.
- ~~z. Provide a part of the community that caters to the students unable to go downtown.~~
- aa. Install district-specific design and use themes across the county. There exists an Athens look and feel that new development should adapt to, not vice versa.
- bb. Tie land development to designated drinking watershed areas while considering water recharge.
- cc. The area has been identified as having various “food deserts”, where there is a lack of healthy, fresh food within reasonable distance to residences and should be remedied.

Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods are often identified by a sense of place, but in reality, are more than just a defined geographical boundary. The people who call them home experience a sense of belonging, a location that allows them to live freely, often alongside others who share the same sense of comfort. Neighborhoods can cultivate a shared sense of opinion, one

that provides direction for the future and voices concern over perceived or real threats to their quality of life. The following list relates directly to what our neighborhoods face in the future and the goal of keeping them primarily residential.

Goal

Vibrant, stable, and safe places—primarily residential—for where and how to live, including neighborhoods with a range of integrated housing types.

Policies

- Educate tenants about their rights and responsibilities.
- Expand sidewalk network in neighborhoods and other infrastructure such as lights, trees, neighborhood businesses, and basic infrastructure for neighborhoods.
- Incentivize neighborhood grocery stores, farmer's markets, co-ops, etc.
- Increase and promote communication among neighborhoods via listservs and other communication.
- Create neighborhood planning units, neighborhood councils, and promote neighborhood leaders program.
- Create incentives to encourage progressive revitalization in neighborhoods and commercial developments.
- Utilize neighborhood schools as hubs for diverse school and neighborhood engagement.
- Evaluate current process for addressing identification, adjudication, education, and funding clearance of nuisance properties.

Needs and Opportunities

- b. Create inviting city entrances that embrace community character and promote a sense of pride through beautification efforts.
- c. Establish formal associations in minority neighborhoods that build upon the pursuit of a diverse and inclusive community, while sponsoring a program for neighborhood leaders.
- d. Examine the use of Neighborhood Planning Units and identify potential areas for installation. that can in turn sponsor a neighborhood leaders program.

- e. Attempt to correct the stigmas that exist about public housing residents and neighborhoods.
- ~~f. Development regulations and review should focus on form, appearance, context, and use. Examine the current definition of family and whether it is too restrictive.~~
- g. Promote intra and inter-connectivity within and between neighborhoods while discouraging cul-de-sac development.
- h. Basic infrastructure (roads, utilities, sidewalks, etc.) should be the standard for all neighborhoods, and a lack thereof threatens prosperity.
- i. Additional gathering/recreation facilities north of Downtown are needed.
- j. Identify areas that could potentially be developed for unique neighborhoods with smaller houses and a cohesive theme.
- k. Create a public database for educating residents on neighborhood issues and zoning items.
- ~~l. Focus on education as it pertain to rentals, specifically, providing students with information brochures that outline rental rights and responsibilities.~~
- m. There is a perceived and/or real threat to Athens unique culture and reputation. Part of this stems from socioeconomically segregated neighborhoods that prevents interconnectivity opportunities among cultures.
- n. Creation and recognition of a Downtown Neighborhood that is inclusive of students and provides an opportunity for civic engagement.
- o. Faith-based organizations are a strength in promoting neighborhood engagement and representation.
- p. University of Georgia collaboration can always be strengthened through communication or perhaps more formal agreements as decisions can have an impact on neighborhoods and should be discussed and mitigated accordingly.
- q. Public gathering and meetings spaces that are free and open to all, like that of public schools which can be used as centers for civic engagement. Open street events also provide an opportunity for neighborhood interaction and promote vitality.

Agriculture

Though the smallest geographical land mass in the State of Georgia, Athens-Clarke County boasts an urban population. Still, past efforts have been made and proven successful at preserving agricultural practices. The Greenbelt has fulfilled its purpose of allowing the county to still claim a share of the agricultural economy and highlight sound sustainability initiatives like food production. Increased stewardship will negate harmful impacts, and farming practices will be encouraged, especially those embracing modern trends that result in responsible production.

Goal

Agriculture remains a viable and productive component of the local economy by leveraging use of agricultural land for economic development, such as for eco-tourism, beautification projects, support of plant nurseries, etc.

Policies

- Support the initiatives of the Cooperative Extension Service programs.
- Identify and evaluate tax incentives on AR zoned property to incentivize maintaining AR land.
- Enhance and further develop connections with UGA Agriculture program, CCSD, and Young Urban Farmers Program.
- Establish an eastside Farmers Market.
- Further develop the idea of "local flavor".
- Evaluate, establish, and expand community gardens to include "vertical farming," farming in small places.
- Mobilize fresh food.
- Create an Ag Council to be made up of landscape companies, nurseries, bee owners, and animal farmers.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. Audit the viability and practicality of the AR zone.
- b. Examine a transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program.

- c. Create a Food Policy Council to recommend actions regarding local agricultural and nutrition practices.
- d. Define and permit farmer's markets as a zoning use and identify existing parks to also locate them.
- e. Promote school farming that can in turn contribute to nutritional options on-site.
- f. Support both traditional and urban agriculture. This includes programs tied to farming and stewardship, both for the young and older generations.
- g. Increase opportunities for food trucks to provide affordable meals and fresh food options to underserved, low-income areas of the community. This should include box truck locations for mobile vending.
- h. Partner with surrounding counties to help preserve the Greenbelt by decreasing development pressure.
- i. Build a reputation for pioneering innovative techniques (vertical farms, etc.). Government buildings and sites can be a location for these initiatives.

Environment

The environment is a topic that citizens hold dear and have highlighted as an important part to of the community's future. The list compiled directly aims to address how Athens-Clarke County will be an environmentally healthy, sustainable, and aesthetically pleasing place. Through protection efforts, air, water, soil, plants and wildlife will be enhanced.

Goal

Stewardship of the natural environment, including improved water and air quality and conserved areas – woods, farms, streams and wetlands.

Policies

- Decrease water consumption per capita.
- Improve the health and quality of rivers and streams to meet local standards for public use and enjoyment.
- Reduce landfill disposal of solid waste by diverting 75% through management, education, collection, and enforcement.

- Provide safer, affordable transportation options including walking, biking, and clean transit.
- Decrease single-occupancy car rides by incentivizing alternative transportation.
- Increase energy efficiency, sources, and use of renewables.
- Identify and protect rare, threatened, and unique natural resources.
- Achieve goal of 20% of county as protected greenspace.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. Examine atypical ways for stream protection besides natural buffers. Continue restoration of urban streams.
- b. Development of an air-quality warning system.
- ~~c. Enhanced septic system education and maintenance.~~
- ~~d. A permanent (year-round) household hazardous waste recycling center.~~
- e. Increase efforts related to greenspace management, including acquisition, which can also promote beautification.
- ~~f. Reduce pollution and its effects through education, like that of water, especially the upstream/downstream connection.~~
- g. Sustain a culture of conservation that maximizes waste reduction, increases the life of our landfill, and ensures waste is properly handled.
- h. Install composting bins/educational material around town in strategic areas.
- i. Create a tree credit program for ensuring adequate trees in specific areas as applied during development.
- j. Provide incentives for construction of energy-efficient buildings that make it feasible and affordable to do.
- k. Consider the number of private garbage haulers and whether to eliminate or alter general service district operations for pick-up.
- l. Mandatory recycling and composting (extending the life of the landfill). Recycling facility should be updated, and installation of a C & D Landfill is warranted.

Capitalize on the existing landfill's bio-gas and use closed areas for solar energy. Landfill tours may be an incentive for a reduced bill.

- m. Protect potentially historic plant materials and landscape structures surrounding historic properties by considering these elements when reviewing historic site plans.
- n. Encourage xeriscaping as a means of water conservation.
- o. Permit and promote the use of specific graywater systems.
- p. Make greenspaces more accessible by incorporating roadway design, bringing visibility and awareness.
- q. A Greenbelt that accommodates changes but preserves most areas.
- r. Encourage existing local industries to install effective pollution abatement technology.
- s. Support the latest Greenway Network Master Plan through land use and transportation initiatives.

“Vitality”

Invigorating the community spirit through Arts and Culture as well as Civic Engagement.

Arts and Culture

Athens-Clarke County has always been rich in cultural resources that contribute to its unique character and increase its reputation in the world. Cultural resources may include art, music, film, and historic preservation, but will not be limited to those interests. In an effort to protect, support, improve, and generate the resources of our unique culture, Athens-Clarke County has identified the following list of needs and opportunities related to this aspect of quality of life.

Goal

All aspects of culture and the arts – including music, theater, visual arts, heritage resources and other cultural initiatives – are the authentic expression of the people and place, representing an ever-present community good that contributes to nurturing and attracting diverse talent.

Policies

- Achieve goal of 20% of county as protected greenspace.
- Develop, foster, implement and fund a historic and heritage resources master plan.
- Identify barriers to inclusion/engagement in the arts through an assessment tool.
- Measure economic impacts of arts, culture and heritage tourism and evaluate the current health of the local arts economy and set 5, 10, and 20 year growth goals accordingly.
- Promote, fund, and implement public art master plan.
- Develop an inclusive approach to the arts.
- Create a public space and venue for the arts.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. Incentivize and incorporate the arts and greenspace into all new developments.
- b. Attract and develop “creative” jobs.
- c. Attraction of more large festivals and entertainment, including sports tournaments.
- d. Development of an outdoor amphitheater that can help increase tourism related to arts and music.
- e. The preservation and adaptive reuse of existing structures offers benefits both financially and environmentally. Historic structures also contribute to heritage tourism.
- f. Downtown has seemingly become unaffordable for musicians and accompanying venues though it is clearly the hub for associated events and concerts. Affordable housing and commercial space is needed to maintain the music scene.
- g. Music needs to be recognized and embraced for its contribution to the community. Too often generational differences can be a challenge in understanding the various cultural resources available, like music, which signals a lack of effective communication and promotion. One solution could be increased collaboration between local college programs and local schools.
- h. Athens has much to offer in the form of existing facilities, like the art museum, theaters, and botanical garden, but more could be done. A large, comprehensive

destination arts complex; free studio space; education centers for business aspects; or even integrated arts and cultural assets into the surrounding environment (Greenway) are strong possibilities. Arts exhibits could be incorporated into every A-CC building lobby.

- i. Embrace and preserve the Athens identity of uniqueness and keep it local. There exists a “special vibe”, or energy within the creative scene. The culture, history, and environment of the community continue to promote Athens as an arts and cultural destination. Commitment must entail defining core values and principles and develop outcomes from there.

Civic Engagement

Each and every citizen of Athens-Clarke County is entitled to experience a strong sense of vitality through civic participation. By protecting and practicing those aspects of life held closely by individuals, families, friends, neighborhoods, etc., society as a whole is lifted to an advanced level of invigorating engagement.

Goal

Residents feel a strong connection to each other, are engaged in the overall well-being, and enjoy the unique identity of their neighborhoods and larger community.

Policies

- Create a collective identity that reflects our unique diversity.
- Continue to identify common goals among UGA and Athens.
- Create gathering spaces that are available and accessible to all.
- Encourage a more easily navigable government system.
- Identify the relationships and connections between neighborhood groups and the broader community.
- Expand and coordinate local leadership academies.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. Expand the Neighborhood Notification Initiative (NNI) to include information beyond planning and zoning alerts.

- ~~b. Support for a Human Rights Festival, demonstrating a community spirit that is inclusive.~~
- c. Improve the local government websites. Create an app for A-CC.
- ~~d. Single point of contact coordinator between UGA and A-CC that informs relevant departments about studies/results taking place between the two entities.~~
- e. Both indoor and outdoor accessible gathering spaces that will provide civic engagement opportunities. Close College Avenue to develop a city square.
- f. Improvements to government openness and responsiveness, especially with regard to policies that directly impact neighborhoods that will assist in allowing additional advocacy opportunities.
- g. Coordinate the multiple marketing techniques for Athens by UGA, CVB, Chamber, Economic Development, and ADDA.

“Foundation”

Building and maintaining a solid foundation from which services are rendered to the public through Transportation, Infrastructure, and Government Operations.

Transportation

The community seeks a balanced approach to transportation initiatives that are influenced by a number of factors. Multiple modes of transportation are encouraged for the pedestrian, bicyclist, transit rider, and automotive driver. Incorporating street infrastructure that accommodates all users will not only relieve traffic congestion, but accomplish the movement of goods and services. Through context sensitive street design, health and safety are promoted, and the desired sense of community is maintained.

Goal

Increased range of transportation options – including walking, biking, transit, and driving – that provide efficient, safe, affordable and equitable access throughout the community and connect to the region and the world (rail and air service).

Policies

- Support bike and pedestrian infrastructure through respective master plans.
- Grow and advance commercial air service in Athens-Clarke County.

- Pursue sustainable coverage of transit within community.
- Develop an over-arching transportation plan.
- Pursue comprehensive transportation safety program.
- Explore commuting options to Atlanta.
- Continue to buildout fiber, Tech etc.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. Improve upon the efficiency of bus stop times.
- b. Provide better transportation accommodations for the disabled.
- c. Recognize existing in-town alleys and the need to keep them.
- d. There is a demand for passenger rail service to Atlanta.
- e. Support a shuttle service that connects passengers in Athens with MARTA several times per day.
- f. Embed the Greenway Network Plan into transportation decisions.
- g. Create a pedestrian/bicycle network separate from roadways. Support a bicycle rental program.
- h. The airport should provide travel to distance places and multiple hubs. Industrial usage of the airport is often overlooked.
- i. Resolve vehicular congestion throughout the county. The Loop 10 interchanges need modification and are often backed-up.
- j. Develop an innovative transportation infrastructure that supports transportation diversity, equitable access, and environmental stewardship.
- k. Repair streets and sidewalks that will in turn increase safety while beautifying streets. A sidewalk bank should be used to help with costs.
- l. Offer incentives for use of park and ride lots, like allowing flexible work schedules to help with traffic congestion or a successful and sustainable carpool program.

~~Parking spaces should be designated downtown for ride programs to easily pick up and drop off customers.~~

- m. Align future transportation initiatives with already existing or proposed services.
- ~~n. Encourage alternative transportation and infrastructure.~~
- ~~o. Partner with the area colleges to offer a freshman driver safety course specifically tailored to Athens.~~
- p. The airport should be viewed as its own mode of transportation, not in addition to other traditional modes.
- q. Provide high quality transportation nodes, or transit-oriented developments in association with previously completed studies. This may also spur the use of underutilized transit routes.
- r. No person should have to have a vehicle to get from place to place within the county. Retail establishments should be accessible by all modes of transportation.

Infrastructure

Adequate infrastructure, including all utilities, should be an essential part of our growing, diverse population. Keeping environmental sustainability in mind, emerging utilities should be available to all areas of the county. Emphasis should be placed on technologically advanced initiatives and incorporating those utilities into proposed construction to ensure Athens-Clarke County remains ready to provide the services needed for the future.

Goal

Well-maintained infrastructure is strategically expanded and upgraded to unlock economic potential and help meet the needs of individuals in full consideration of environmental practices.

Policies

- Ensure adequate water supply to meet current and future demand.
- Repair and replace infrastructure assets commensurate with physical depreciation.
- Reduce the risk of flooding events and improve the quality of streams and rivers through a proactive and innovative stormwater program.

- Increase communications and information connectivity.
- Improve downtown streetscape and infrastructure and downtown physical and IT infrastructure.
- Coordinate sanitary sewer expansion with land use framework.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. There is a need for better and smarter utilities including internet and improved mobile access, benefitting the next generation of business.
- b. Attain cleaner air throughout the county, which can also mean reducing unpleasant smells, beginning with Downtown.
- c. Coordinate sewer easements with greenways to improve connectivity.
- d. Promote the placement of utilities underground as services are repaired or installed to move away from overhead facilities.
- e. Address deficiencies in water/sewer distribution while also exploring sale of any excess capacity.
- f. Install pods for garbage storage with green roofs and solar panels. Also must address needed restroom facilities downtown.
- g. Small lot sizes make storm water compliance challenging. Maintenance within neighborhoods with regard to existing facilities is also difficult to keep up with and must be addressed.
- h. Create a Technology Infrastructure Commission that can look into issues regarding contracts and number of utilities offered in Athens, as well as provide openness to the public.
- i. Significantly increase sustainable energy practices.
- j. Examine the quarry for possible reuse as a reservoir and leisure amenity.
- k. Consider simple dirt paths to expand walking and biking connectivity.
- l. Practice land use that is directly linked to watersheds.

- m. Provide clearer explanation of how stormwater fees are calculated and why a per lot impervious surface rate is not utilized. Make a stormwater easement GIS layer available to the public.

Government Operations

The local government plays a crucial and necessary role in setting the foundation for community success and sustainability. Although many initiatives pertaining to the comprehensive plan are the responsibility of the local government, operations within this institution are not immune from examination and improvement. By consistently challenging the traditional norm in public administration, the community will achieve sustainability and a greater future.

Goal

Local government is both a necessary and foundational institution from which community success and sustainability should be encouraged. Through responsible, but innovative initiatives, operations shall adapt to change and consistently challenge the traditional norm in public administration practices.

Policies

- Provide opportunities for citizens to learn about local government services, initiatives, and events.
- Document and share our actions to cultivate a culture of innovation by piloting new ideas and adopting those with demonstrated benefits.
- Improve internal efficiency and effectiveness.
- Promote transparency through improved access to information.
- Attract, retain, and reward talented and empowered employees.
- Foster opportunities for citizens to engage with their local government.

Needs and Opportunities

- a. Create or establish an inventory of local government-owned land that could be developed.
- b. Acceptance of online payments government-wide.
- c. Understand that Athens-Clarke County no longer functions as a “small town” anymore and cannot keep operating as such.

- d. More career ladder opportunities for employees along with greater retirement plan match.
- e. Examine tiered water system payments for departmental functions.
- f. Promote a neighborhood score card that allows for self-scoring of the services but then gives insight into the scoring conducted by the government and allows comparison of the two.
- g. The local government needs to advocate for more community resources as distributed by the state and federal governments.
- h. Intergovernmental collaboration is often seen as a weakness due to extenuated timelines, duplication of efforts, or conflicting goals.
- i. Consolidation of government departments into more strategically located facilities that are modernized to meet growing space constraints and provide improved customer service.
- j. Examine new public/private partnerships similar to the Washington Street Parking Deck.
- ~~k. Involvement of the public from the beginning of planning processes.~~
- l. Offer various incentive programs for employees including a program for which money saving ideas are rewarded. Additional conference attendance if presenting and marketing A-CC. Perhaps flexible work schedules and free transit would help boost morale.
- m. Explore opportunities to increase diversity within the government.