

## **PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

A Comprehensive Plan is a community's guide for growth, development, and improvements to the character of the built environment. The Plan should represent the preferred vision for the community's future and provide a reasonable, rational, and tangible list of actions that the community is committed to undertaking in order to achieve that vision. It is intended to provide guidance to local elected officials on land use patterns, the location of facilities and services, protection and enhancement of the quality of life, and the preservation of the community's character in both now, and in the future.

The Plan seeks to establish the ground rules for the manner in which the community will develop and invest by asking three simple questions:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we want to be?
3. How do we get there?

By considering current needs and existing opportunities the plan provides a solid foundation for decision-making in support of achieving the community's short and long-term goals and vision.

## **PLANNING PROCESS**

The Comprehensive Plan process follows the Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs ("DCA"), O.C.G.A. Chapter 110-12-1, Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning, effective March 1, 2014. The DCA rules state that the Comprehensive Plan consists of the following three distinct components:

### **NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

An analysis of the community's needs and opportunities will help determine the existing conditions of the city. This will assist the community in identifying the issues that it needs to address and the opportunities on which it can capitalize.

## **COMMUNITY GOALS:**

Through public and committee meetings, the City's vision, goals, and policies are developed to determine the community's future direction. As a part of this component, policies are identified to assist in making decisions that are consistent with community goals. Additionally, character areas, or focused areas of planning with special conditions or needs, are defined. This will help determine which parts of the community are to be enhanced or preserved, and how to guide zoning and policies in the future.

## **COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM:**

The final component of the comprehensive plan, the Community Work Program, outlines steps and strategies for achieving the community's goals and implementing its plans. The Work Program will include a short term work plan, identifying priority projects, potential collaborations, and funding strategies.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission's Planning and Government Services Division facilitated the update of Elbert County's plan. Leading community input sessions and Citizen Advisory Committee meetings, the NEGRC team gathered feedback and guidance from the public, and used this information to assemble the Comprehensive Plan and make recommendations that are reflective of the community's desires. The Board of Commissioners hold ultimate responsibility and authority to approve and direct the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

## **PUBLIC INPUT AND CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Comprehensive Plan Update relied heavily on public involvement. The planning process began with a community input session where the public was invited to discuss the assets and challenges found in the County, and their hopes for its future. Following the initial public meeting, several work sessions were held with a Citizens Advisory Committee, a group of citizens representing various communities and interests throughout the County. This Committee provided valuable feedback, guidance, and recommendations and served an integral role in developing a plan representative of the community's vision.

## **REVIEW PROCESS**

According to the DCA's new rules for comprehensive planning, effective March 1, 2014, the City must transmit the plan to the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) when all three components are complete. The transmittal must also include the community's certification that it has considered both the Regional Water Plan and the Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria. Once it completes its review, the NEGRC will forward the plan to the DCA for review. Once the plan has been found by the DCA to be in compliance with the Minimum Standards and Procedures, the approved Plan may be adopted. Adoption must occur at least 60 days, but no more than one year, after submittal to the NEGRC for review.

## **DATA & STATISTICS**

The facts, figures, and statistics used to develop the Plan were generated from data compiled throughout the planning process. A large proportion of that data was gathered in the beginning stages, primarily late 2015 and early 2016. The data and analysis was used to identify general trends, and provide a reliable quantitative context to describe existing conditions and assist in informing the recommendations and policies. The data can be found in the Data Appendix of this document.

## **NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES**

The following Needs and Opportunities were identified using the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' Quality Community Objectives Local Assessment Tool, and a survey of community leaders and stakeholders who undertook an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that face Elbert County and its municipalities.

The overall idea is for the list to capture the most prescient needs that the community will have over the next 5 to 10 years, in order to establish a set of goals the community can work towards achieving in order to address those issues.

These are intended to apply to the County as well as the Cities of Bowman and Elberton unless otherwise noted.

## **Economic Development**

Approximately 915 businesses currently operate in Elbert County, representing about 7,500 jobs. Currently the Manufacturing Sector provides the most jobs in the County employing approximately 19% of workers followed by Wholesale and Retail Trade at 14.3 and 12.6% respectively.

42% of the jobs within Elbert County employ non-residents that is they live elsewhere and commute into the county, while 71.4% of Elbert County residents commute to another county. Most residents commute 20 minutes to work.

### **Needs**

- Develop and train workforce with skills to meet the needs of Elbert County's current and potential employers.
- Improve pathways into the workforce for skilled trades and technical jobs.
- Actively support existing businesses and industry in all sectors.
- Recruit new employers to complement and enhance the local economy by offering a more diverse range of employment options

### **Opportunities**

- Available industrial property with utilities including water, sewer, natural gas, and telecommunications infrastructure in place
- Access to incentive programs for new and existing industries from the State, County, and City of Elberton are in place to foster economic growth. These include Job Tax Credits, tax exemptions, and a designated DCA Opportunity Zone
- Existing workforce development programs include: Elbert County Comprehensive High School's Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education Program, and the Elberton Campus of Athens Technical College.
- Both Elberton and Bowman have appealing downtown business districts with an existing critical mass of buildings and businesses to serve as destinations
- The number of natural and cultural attractions, coupled with the historic downtowns and districts make further development of tourism component of economy possible.

## **Transportation**

### Needs

- Complete 4 lane connection of GA-17 through county with the goal of linking I-20 & I-85 east of Atlanta
- With completion of 4 lane connection of GA-17 improve circulation for truck traffic in downtown Elberton.
- Work to improve transportation infrastructure in support of economic development goals.

### Opportunities

- Leverage the opportunity around the new Norfolk Southern-CSX rail switch, possibly for inland port or freight transfer facility.

## **Land Use**

### Needs:

- Manage the interface between agricultural and potentially conflicting land uses.

### Opportunities:

- Lingering stalled residential developments beginning to come back online.

## **Other Needs & Opportunities**

### Needs

- Population loss
- Aging population
- Decreasing enrollment in public schools

### Opportunities

- Ongoing planning initiatives:
- Downtown Bowman Blueprints Strategy
- Bobby Brown State Park Master Plan
- Porter Drive Neighborhood Revitalization

## **VISION, GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

The Vision Statement incorporates the recurring themes that were the focus of the discussions throughout the planning process. It is the basis for the goals, objectives, policies and recommendations that follow.

### **Elbert County's Vision**

Elbert County's resources evidence its past, provide a wealth of community amenities, and distinguish it from other places. While growth is inevitable, managing growth so it does not come at the expense of the county's resources will conserve the unique qualities of our community. We should promote orderly development, provide safe, sanitary, and affordable housing, conserve and protect our natural and cultural resources, and work to foster relationships among local and regional governments and quasi-governmental entities within and outside Elbert County so our community will continue to thrive.

The goals and objectives below are designed to help Elbert County and its cities in the decision-making process. They are based on the Georgia Department of Community Affairs State Planning Recommendations and address the identified needs and opportunities. The policies apply to all jurisdictions within Elbert County unless noted.

Economic Development – Continue to support existing businesses and local employers while working to attract additional employers.

- We will support programs that retain, expand and create businesses that provide a good fit for our communities' economies in terms of job skills required and links to existing businesses.
- Increase local employment opportunities through the promotion of orderly economic growth fostering both the attraction of new and retention of existing businesses and industries that diversifies the local economy and maximizes the strengths of the local labor force.
- Improve the talent of the local labor pool and improve high school graduation rates.
- We will carefully consider costs as well as benefits in making decisions on proposed economic development projects.
- Prioritize expansion of facilities and services into development areas that are close to existing resources first before extending utilities and services to areas that require longer extensions.
- Support the use of planning studies, value studies, cost/benefit studies and analyses of sustainability to identify cost effective projects.
- We will consider the employment needs and skill levels of our existing population in making decisions on proposed economic development projects.
- Recruit diverse and environmentally sensitive industries that will provide jobs for residents.
- Support the growth of knowledge based industries in new development areas.
- Work with County and regional agencies to encourage business education support to small business owners.
- Strengthen cooperative effort with Athens Technical College to identify training resources to train and re-train local residents for prospective industries.

## Land Use

- We want development whose design, landscaping, lighting, signage, and scale add value to our community.
- Provide incentives to rehabilitate existing buildings and to construct new buildings that are compatible with the period and feel of the existing exterior architecture.
- We will guide new development in suitable locations in order to protect natural resources, environmentally sensitive areas, and agricultural lands.
- Provide education programs for developers and property owners to use attractive community design as a means to enhance environmental protection and support the extension of community facility infrastructure.

## Transportation, Facilities and Services

Partner with GDOT to continue to provide the most efficient transportation network across all modes.

- We will work with GDOT, the Railroads and other Stakeholders to insure appropriate transportation infrastructure is developed and installed in support of economic development initiatives.
- Identify, encourage and protect desirable land uses and development patterns along transportation corridors.
- Work with Railroads (NS & CSX) to develop inland port around newly installed switch.
- Provide a safe, efficient, and effective transportation system that reflects both existing and future needs while providing a variety of transportation options.
- We will guide development into appropriate areas close to existing transportation, as well as water & sewer infrastructure.
- Provide potable water service in a safe, clean, efficient, economical, and environmentally sound manner concurrent with new development.
- Provide sanitary sewer service in a safe, clean, efficient, economical, and environmentally sound manner, concurrent with urban development.
- Target infrastructure expansion to optimize commercial and industrial growth.

## LAND USE

The Land Use Chapter includes a review of existing land uses in all jurisdictions, a discussion of future development policies, and a Future Land Use Map. Previously, a “character area” methodology was required for land use planning that included generalized land use categories with implementation policies associated with each category. Character area-based land use planning has provided for more mixed use district categories as well as a simplified method of engaging with the public on land use decisions. However, the inclusion of mixed use within all business districts or “activity centers” may potentially diminish local governments’ ability to regulate specific land uses.

## Existing Land Use

It is important to have a firm understanding of what the current land use patterns are as they will have the most significant influence over future growth and development. The following highlights the existing land use within Elbert County.

Residential – Smaller, more dense, traditional single family residential

Commercial – Retail and Service

Public/Institutional – Schools, Churches, Government

Industrial – Manufacturing, Warehousing, Distribution

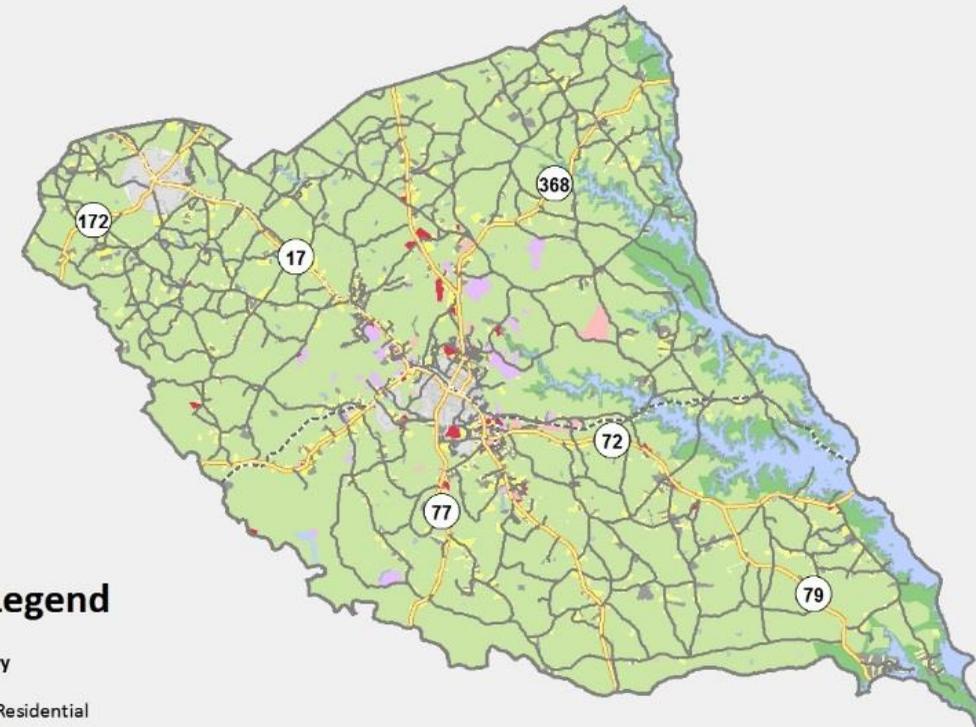
Transportation/Communication/Utilities – Roads, Railroads, Utilities

Parks/Recreation/Conservation – Parks, Recreation Centers, Wildlife Refuges

Agricultural – Farming, Pasture

## Elbert County, GA

### Existing Land Use



### Map Legend

#### Use Category

	Residential
	Commercial
	Public/Institutional
	Industrial
	Transportation/Communication/Utility
	Agriculture
	Park/Recreation/Conservation
	Undeveloped/Unused

0 1.75 3.5 7 Miles



For the 2016 Comprehensive Plan a traditional Future Land Use Map has been included to serve as the guiding legal document for regulation of land use. All land is classified as one of the following:

#### Rural Residential

Rural Residential land includes single family detached residential located on parcels of at least five acres per one unit of housing. Rural Residential may also include some low-intensity agricultural activities, such as pasture land. Several existing estate residential parcels have been rezoned for more intensive residential development. For example, a large parcel along the Alcovy River south of GA-316 has been zoned for a conservation subdivision.

#### Residential

Residential land includes housing and related activities. The existing housing stock is predominantly single-family detached residential. There is a small amount of manufactured housing. There is currently very little attached housing in the County.

#### Residential (Platted, Unfinished)

Residential (Platted, Unfinished) land includes housing subdivisions that have been approved and platted with some preliminary site work and incomplete construction of units or utilities. While work on these subdivisions was halted during the national recession, construction was observed during the existing land use survey.

#### Commercial

Commercial land includes retail sales, restaurants, office, services, and entertainment facilities. Commercial uses may be located as a single use in one building or grouped together in a shopping center or office building.

#### Public / Institutional

Public / Institutional land includes community facilities, certain state, federal, or local government uses and institutional land uses. Examples of institutional land uses include

colleges, churches, cemeteries, and hospitals. Government uses in this category include City halls or government building complexes, police and fire stations, libraries, prisons, post offices, schools, and military installations.

#### Industrial

Industrial land includes land dedicated to warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, mining or mineral extraction facilities or other similar uses.

#### Transportation / Communication / Utilities

Transportation / Communications / Utilities (TCU) land includes major transportation routes, power generation plants, railroad facilities, cell phone towers, airports, water/wastewater facilities and similar uses. However, it should be noted that much of the TCU acreage is accounted for in other categories, particularly roads and their right-of-ways, which are absorbed into the context of the more dominant land use (e.g. residential or commercial). TCU includes lands acquired as right-of-way for the future.

#### Parks / Recreation/Conservation

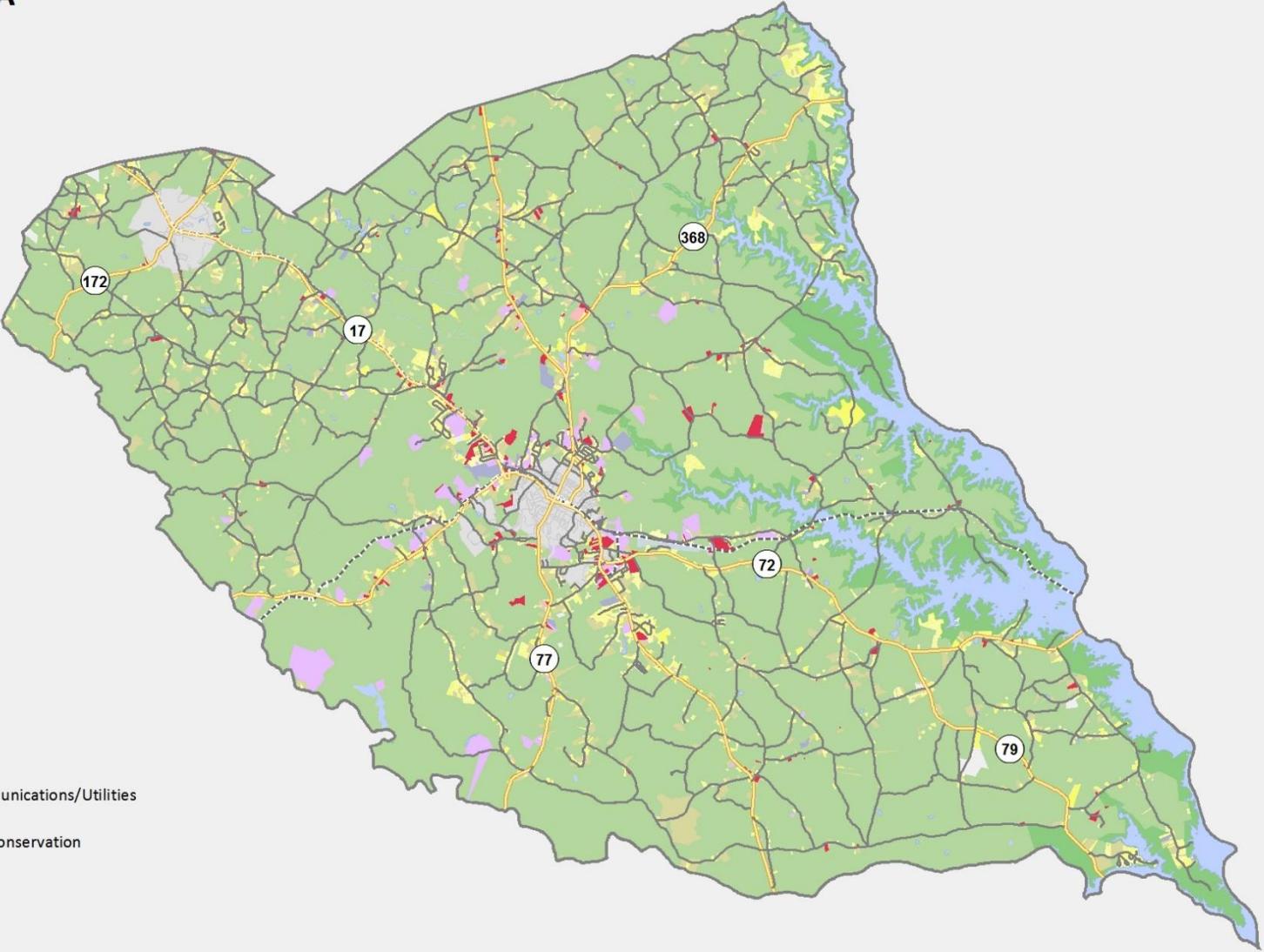
Parks / Recreation / Conservation land is dedicated to active or passive recreational uses and natural resource conservation. These areas may be either publicly or privately owned and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, golf courses, recreation centers, and similar uses. Conservation subdivisions may also include some land preserved as greenspace or recreational land through easements.

#### Agricultural

Agricultural land is comprised of land dedicated to farming (fields, lots, pastures, farmsteads, specialty farms, livestock production, etc.) or other similar rural uses such as pasture; land is not used for commercial purposes. Agricultural land may also include low density estate residential of one unit per five acres.

# Elbert County, GA

## Future Land Use



### Map Legend

- Future Land Use
- Rural Residential
  - Residential
  - Commercial
  - Mixed Use
  - Public / Institutional
  - Industrial
  - Transportation/Communications/Utilities
  - Parks / Recreation / Conservation
  - Agricultural



**COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM**

The Community Work Program chapter includes a listing of specific actions each jurisdiction plans to take in order to achieve the vision developed by the Plan. The Community Work program includes a Report of Accomplishments on previous planning projects and a Short Term Work Program (STWP) with a list of projects that can be accomplished over the next five years.

The STWP has been revised to exclude general policies and items that are open ended or longer term goals.

Description	Status
<b>Elbert County Report of Accomplishments 2012-2016</b>	
Study local economic characteristics and conditions to address the potential for economic diversification.	
Continue to support the Economic Development Authority.	
Continue cooperative relationship between local government, Athens Tech, and local businesses and industries to monitor labor force conditions and needs.	
Work with state agencies to identify opportunities for business and industrial recruitment.	
Provide incentives for passing the Georgia High School Graduation Test.	
Establish a Youth Advisory Committee to develop long-term strategies to address local issues that prevent students from reaching their full potential.	
Provide free books to 300 children through Read at Home Program	
Improve graduation rates through Parent Communication Coordination high school program and "On Track" program in elementary school	
Coordinate new development with existing and planned community facilities and the Comprehensive Plan	
Utilize zoning ordinance for agricultural preservation	

Description	Status
<b>Elbert County Report of Accomplishments 2012-2016</b>	
Allow tax incentives for agricultural preservation	
Work with Elbert Memorial Hospital to expand services.	
Continue participation in the Northeast Georgia Regional Solid Waste Management Authority.	
Continue public education program to promote recycling.	
Nominate Nickville Community to National Register.	
Nominate Fortsonia Community to National Register.	
Develop and adopt zoning ordinance.	
Establish Planning Commission	
Provide training opportunities for Planning Commission	
Utilize Future Land Use map to coordinate new development in appropriate areas serviced by necessary infrastructure.	

Description	Initiation Year	Completion Year	Cost Estimate	Responsible Party	Funding
<b>Elbert County STWP</b>					
Implement the Bobby Brown Park master plan	2016	Ongoing		County	
Seek funding for the implementation of the Bobby Brown master plan	2016	Ongoing		County	
Seek funding for brownfield site, including assessment, clean-up, and redevelopment	2016	Ongoing		County	
Adopt the updated 2016 pre-disaster mitigation plan	2016	2016		Board of Commissioners	
Implement measures outlined in the 2016 pre-disaster mitigation plan	2016	Ongoing		County	
Apply for funding for the 2021 update to the pre-disaster mitigation plan	2020	2021		Elbert County EMA	
Conduct the 2021 pre-disaster mitigation plan update	2021	2021		Elbert County EMA	FEMA Grant
Redevelop the former Elbert County Health Department building into a visual arts facility	2016	Ongoing		Elbert County	
Work in coordination with private developers to develop an inland port	2016	Ongoing		Elbert County	
Continued support for the 2015 Porter Drive CDBG Housing Project					
Pursue the funding for the additional phases of the Porter Drive Housing project					

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

### Demographic Overview

An analysis of Elbert County, Elberton, and Bowman’s demographic trends has been conducted to inform the overall planning process and provide a baseline for developing policy recommendations. The following demographic and market overview assesses current trends, market implications, and to the extent possible, makes projections for future growth opportunities. The goal is to present a snapshot of the relevant conditions within Elbert County and its Cities.

The data presented in this section were gathered from a variety of sources, including the 2010 U.S. Census, The 2009-2014 American Community Survey, input from the stakeholders committee, and ESRI Business Analyst.

### Population Change

- The population of Elbert County and all of its jurisdictions are becoming smaller.
- This trend can be seen in many places across both Georgia, and the U.S. as a whole.
- The annual rate of change is less than 0.5 percent in all jurisdictions.
- This is accompanied by a loss in the total number of households across all jurisdictions as well.
- However, average household size is not projected to change significantly during the same period.
- The net rise in the median age means that the County’s population is aging as a whole.

	2010	2015	2020	+/-
<b>Elbert County</b>				
Population	14,651	14,506	14,267	-384
Households	5,679	5674	5595	-84
Average Household Size	2.76	2.73	2.72	
Median Age	41.0	42.1	43.3	2.3
Median Household Income		\$33,550	\$37,684	12.3%
<b>Bowman</b>				
Population	862	862	855	-7
Households	360	363	360	0
Average Household Size	2.39	2.37	2.38	
Median Age	40.6	41.8	43.7	3.1
Median Household Income		\$35,948	\$40,267	12.0%
<b>Elberton</b>				
Population	4,653	4,537	4,430	-223
Households	2,024	1,990	1,946	-78
Average Household Size	2.25	2.24	2.24	
Median Age	40.3	38.9	39.5	-0.8
Median Household Income		\$28,489	\$31,510	10.6%

### Income

- The median household income across all jurisdictions is relatively high, and projected to grow at a rate that will keep pace with inflation.