



**BOOK 2: BUILDING COMMUNITY**







# A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE CITY OF THOMASVILLE

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... AND HUNDREDS OF THOMASVILLE RESIDENTS

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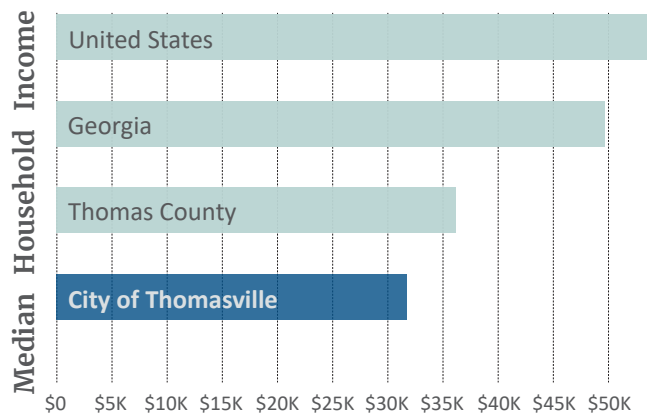
## CURRENT CONDITIONS

### Demographics

Thomasville has a population of 18,826, according to the U.S. Census as of July 1, 2016. It has relatively small population growth, at an average rate of 1.5% over the last five years compared with 6.4% for the whole state of Georgia.

The median age in Thomasville is 39.1 years, which is slightly higher than the state average of 36.4. The city has a higher rate of people over the age of 65, at approximately 15% compared to the state's 10%.

In terms of economic development, Thomasville is a lower-income community. The poverty rate in Thomasville is 28%, compared with the state average of 17% and 14.7% for the nation. Thomasville has twice the poverty rate of the country at large. It also has a lower median household income than Georgia and the United States at \$31,679 compared to just under \$50,000 for the state and \$55,755 for the country.

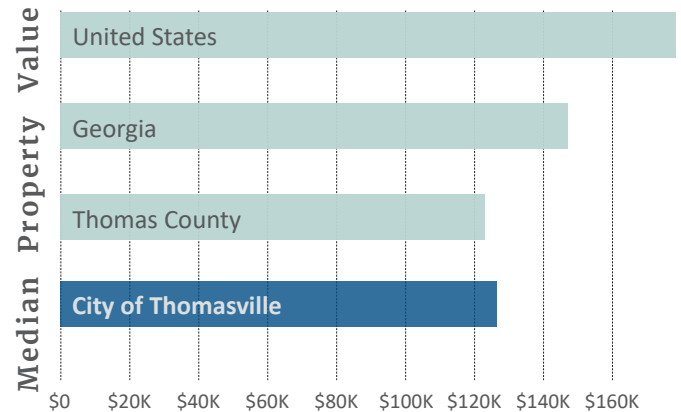


It is important to highlight that Thomasville is a minority-majority city in which African Americans make up more than 50% of the population. The city is 42% White and other smaller populations make up the remainder. There is a wide discrepancy in income between the largest populations: Whites have a higher average salary than the African American population, at \$42,253 and \$24,332, respectively.

Thomasville is a community with an aging population and higher-than-average poverty rates and income disparities primarily affecting people of color.

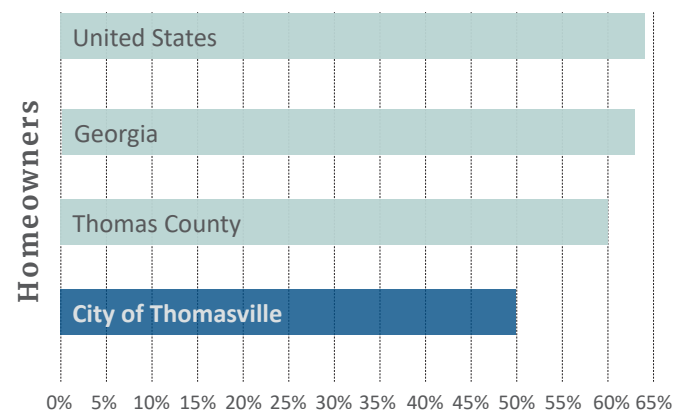
### Housing Data

Based on housing data, Thomasville's housing market is in decline. According to Data USA, a web-based data center, the median property value for Thomasville in 2015 was \$125,200 - a 4% decrease from the previous year.



The City had approximately 9,000 housing units in 2010; given the relatively low number of housing starts in the last eight years, this number hasn't change substantially. There are also many more renters in the city than the state and national averages. The ownership rate at the national level has stayed steady at about 65%; in Georgia, the ownership rate is slightly lower at about 62%. In Thomasville, the ownership rate is just under fifty percent at 49.7%.

**Research shows that generally, communities with higher homeownership rates are more stable and have higher rates of positive socioeconomic indicators such as lower crime, higher rates of civic participation, and higher educational achievement, among others;** it appears that Thomasville—where half the population rents—holds true to these indicators. This also indicates that there may be a lack of affordable housing options, and may explain why many single-family homes are being converted into apartments.



## Recent Housing Activity

### Single-Family

Based on recent housing data provided by the City of Thomasville, there is an uptick in residential activity. Over the last five years, there is a steady stabilization of single-family units constructed. Based on the “Single-Family Residential Activity” table, there are about 25 homes constructed each year in Thomasville. The lowest number came in 2012 with 13 and since then it has remained steady in the mid-twenties.

There is an increase in the valuation of this construction. In 2012 the average appraised value per square foot for all new single-family construction was \$66.35. In 2016 that average increased to \$95.88 ], illustrating a steady climb.

### Multi-Family

There has been no substantial apartment development activity in Thomasville over the last several years. In 2012, there were 84 units built. Market Station Apartments with 80 units was developed in 2018. The chart “Multi-Family Residential Activity” illustrates the activity in multi-family construction between 2012 and 2016. To date, there is no scheduled development of apartment units programmed in 2017.

<i>Single-Family Residential Activity</i>				
Year	# of Units	Average Appraised Value per Square Foot	Total Square Feet of Single Family Residential	Total Valuation
2012	13	\$66.35	44,741	\$2,968,500
2013	25	\$82.85	57,174	\$4,719,515
2014	24	\$91.37	47,004	\$4,294,925
2015	25	\$94.85	57,670	\$5,470,152
2016	24	\$95.88	50,338	\$4,826,577
2017*	11	\$90.00	16,830	\$1,514,670

\*Data through May 2017. Source: City of Thomasville, Planning Department & Gallinar Planning & Development

<i>Multi-Family Residential Activity</i>		
Year	# of Units	Total Valuation
2012	84	\$2,500,000
2013	0	\$0
2014	3	\$114,00
2015	20	\$3,373,000
2016	80	\$8,978,619



# COMMUNITY CONCERNS

## Lack of Housing Choices / Constraints to Affordable Housing

A healthy city offers its residents and future residents many housing choices. These include single-family homes, market-rate apartments, affordable housing for lower-income families, and varied housing styles. The residents of Thomasville recognize this and have identified creation of more variety of housing types as a high priority. According to various realtors working in Thomasville, there is a shortage of housing opportunities in the mid-income range of about \$130,000 to about \$170,000.

Currently, Thomasville has a large stock of single-family housing. A lot of the homes have great charm and character. However, as population changes occur and lifestyle and market preferences shift, Thomasville will have to adapt to provide multiple choices for multiple populations with varied incomes looking for a wide range of options.

## Increase in Homelessness

While there doesn't appear to be a visible high homeless population, community members felt that this is an issue that needs to be addressed. Furthermore, there is consensus that homelessness is on the rise in Thomasville and that strategies should be developed to help curtail this concern. These can include conducting a comprehensive study to gain a better understanding of the causes associated with homeless populations and developing a framework to help provide social services to these individuals and families.

## Improve Parking Standards for Downtown Housing

Downtown Thomasville represents an area where the city can increase housing choices. The city has a beautiful and distinguished city center that is an economically thriving area. Many residents expressed a desire to want to live downtown. However, there are many impediments to developing housing in this area; one area of concern for both the business owners and housing advocates is parking. Currently, the parking requirements for residential uses in downtown are too high and unless they are modified, housing development will be problematic. The city can encourage development in the downtown; this will largely depend on providing flexible parking standards.



This single-family detached housing is typical of most new housing in Thomasville. While charming, it is similar in style to many of the city's existing housing stock and offers no alternative housing choice to those seeking something other than a single-family home.



Wigs N Things Parking Lot Downtown

Shared parking agreements between private owners and potential housing developers and/or the city, is one way to provide more parking. This parking lot for Wigs N Things on the corner of Broad Street and Smith Avenue offers an optimal option for providing additional parking for residents wanting to live downtown.



Angled On-Street Parking on Broad Street

A previous downtown study illustrated that there is plenty of on-street parking; the city should engage in an educational campaign for both business owners and downtown residents in an effort for both users to coexist to ensure the continued success of downtown.

## High Concentrations of Dilapidated Housing

Thomasville has a large amount of dilapidated housing. This is a major concern that will need to be addressed in the immediate future in order to sustain the long-term vitality of the city. Boarded-up houses, abandoned properties, and vacant parcels affect the community in various ways. They offer no tax or utility revenues; they are unsightly, which may lower adjacent property values; and they provide an opportunity for infill redevelopment. There are many dilapidated buildings all over the city, and thus Thomasville residents understand the importance of this issue.



These boarded up and derelict houses are illustrative of many areas of Thomasville. More should be done to limit and stop the increase in these types of properties.

## Use Victoria Park Strategies as an Example

Victoria Park revitalization is a model development initiative with varied strategies of infill housing, rehabilitation of dilapidated housing, and inclusion of affordable housing. The Victoria Park initiative is a good strategy to address various housing issues. However, several residents and advocacy groups have expressed concern that it will be difficult for the project to stay true to its goal of providing mixed-income housing. These groups want to ensure that future developments using this model address these concerns and provide sufficient affordable housing as part of the overall neighborhood.



Victoria Park Neighborhood Open Space

## Maintain Historic Districts

One of Thomasville's great attributes is its historic homes and the districts utilized to protect them. More needs to be done to improve the existing districts' guidelines and policies while also creating new districts to further protect culturally and historically significant houses.

Victoria Park Is a model initiative with its varied strategies of infill housing, rehabilitation of dilapidated housing, and providing affordable housing.

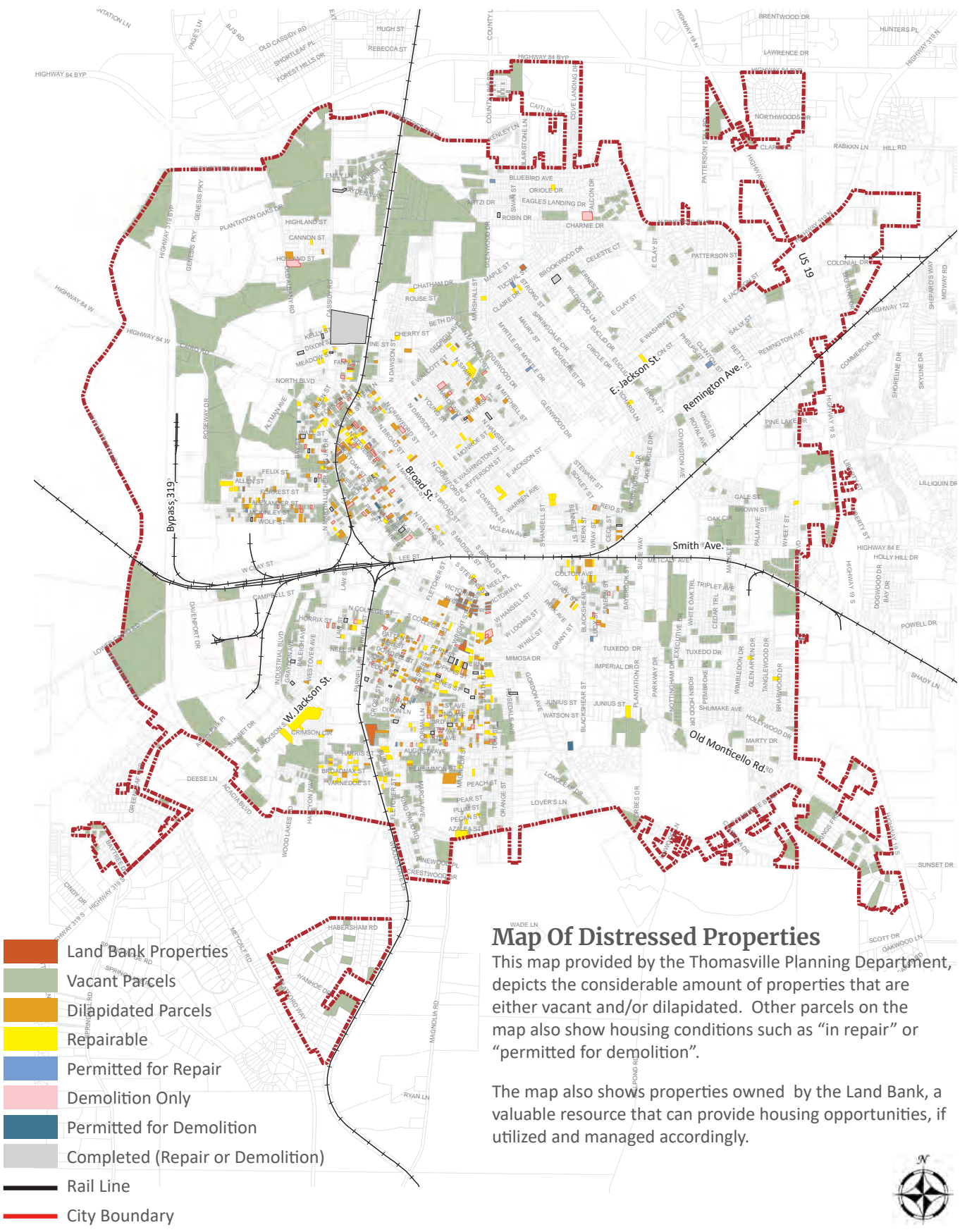


The Tockwotten Historic District is one of several historic districts in the city. With their historic and charming homes these districts serve as reminders of the city's gloried past but also offer examples for future development and redevelopment in other parts of Thomasville.



Victoria Park Home Under Construction  
Several houses have already gone up in Victoria Park with many more under construction. Housing construction sends a positive image to the residents that things are happening in their community.





### Map Of Distressed Properties

This map provided by the Thomasville Planning Department, depicts the considerable amount of properties that are either vacant and/or dilapidated. Other parcels on the map also show housing conditions such as “in repair” or “permitted for demolition”.

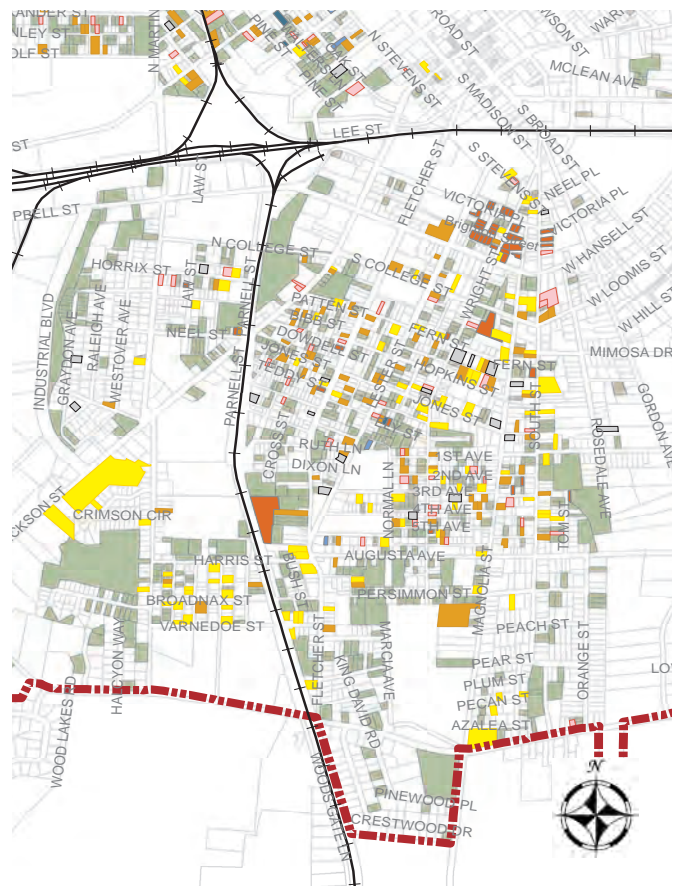
The map also shows properties owned by the Land Bank, a valuable resource that can provide housing opportunities, if utilized and managed accordingly.

## Map Of Distressed Properties-- A Closer Look

To better understand the immensity involved in the number of dilapidated units in the city, it important to take a closer look. The following two maps illustrate Northwest and Southern areas of the city where many distressed units exists. By zooming in on those areas, one is able to make better sense of the vast number of units that need attention.



NORTHWEST THOMASVILLE



SOUTH THOMASVILLE

- Land Bank Properties
- Vacant Parcels
- Dilapidated Parcels
- Repairable
- Permitted for Repair
- Demolition Only
- Permitted for Demolition
- Completed (Repair or Demolition)
- Rail Line
- City Boundary



# STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING COMMUNITY CONCERNS

The strategies presented in the following section serve to provide varied housing options for all Thomasville citizens while maintaining the community character and historic values of diverse neighborhoods through concentrated actions and multi-pronged approaches throughout Thomasville.

## Market Study & Data

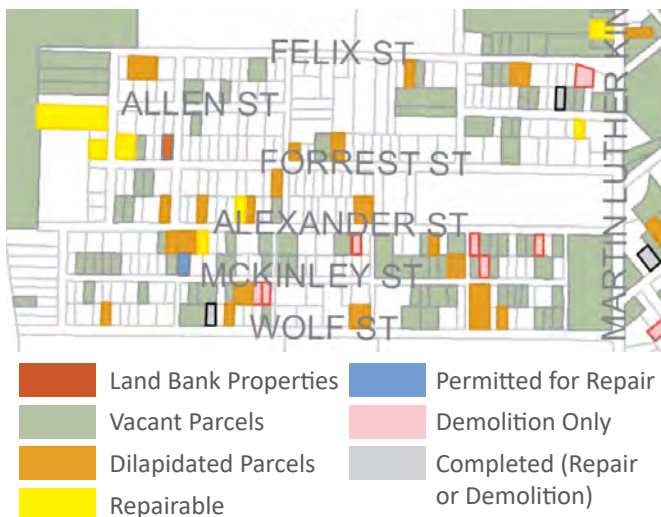
An initial step for the City of Thomasville to undertake, is to conduct a full fledged Housing Market Study. This study can provide the city and other stakeholders much needed baseline data on current housing trends, various housing markets, and regional housing demand, among other variables.

The study can also help the city planning department gather other data that is crucial for effective decision-making. One example is to gather data on the rehabilitation of existing structures and houses. This information can help city leaders allocate resources and policies in areas that needed most through a concentrated effort.

## Develop Infill Strategies for Housing and Mixed-Use Developments

One of Thomasville's most pressing issues--not only in housing but also in land use concerns--is the large amount of vacant parcels and dilapidated housing. These properties offer a great prospect for new housing opportunities through infill redevelopment.

- Utilizing the existing parcel database, the City should engage in a concerted effort to address the amount of underutilized parcels. These parcels include vacant and dilapidated homes. However, in an effort to make a significant dent, the City should identify a specific geographic area and begin a multi-pronged and years-long strategy.
- One example of this could be within the Neighborhood Centers and Crossroads areas due to the existing investments and activity currently underway.
- Dewey City is another more specific area that already has significant cultural resources such as the Jack Hadley Black History Museum, several churches, and Francis Weston Park. It also has a good stock of nice homes but also contains many vacant, boarded-up homes, and distressed properties.
- Develop an infill housing incentive strategy for other parts of Thomasville. This strategy can include providing land as equity, utility incentives, flexible zoning regulations, and expedited permit review.



The Dewey City Neighborhood has about half of its parcels categorized as some form of distressed properties; this makes it the perfect area for redevelopment and reinvestment.



Francis Weston Park - along with many other great community institutions - provides an incentive for redevelopment. Through infill projects adjacent to city parks and other amenities, the city can provide much needed housing opportunities identified by residents as a major concern.

## Create Housing & Neighborhood Development Collaborative

There is need for an umbrella organization to take the lead on all areas of housing and economic development. Currently, the identified organization is the Land Bank. However, some in the community view the Land Bank as too narrow-focused with its primary objective being the holding and management of city properties.

An independent Housing & Neighborhood Development Collaborative consisting of various organizations to include the land bank board, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood association presidents, city staff, private developers, historic preservation organizations, and other stakeholders can begin to address the various housing needs in Thomasville.

Based on initial conversations with groups that have been identified as current community leaders, the following options can form the initial collaborative:

- Utilize the **Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH)**, as the housing collaborative. A team is currently working through a grass-roots approach to provide technical assistance, training, networking, and other initiatives. The GICH may be the natural entity to carry this out as it already is comprised of some of the region's many important housing and neighborhood stakeholders working on housing issues on a daily basis: City of Thomasville, Habitat for Humanity, Community Outreach & Training Center, 1st Missionary Baptist Church, Thomasville Landmarks, Inc., William Family Foundation, Thomasville Housing Authority, the local NAACP, and other community leaders. If the community chooses this route, it is important that adequate resources are given to increase and sustain this entity.
- Another option is to create a wholly separate organization as **The Housing Collaborative** that can also serve as an umbrella Community Development Corporation (CDC) tasked with providing affordable housing opportunities, housing-related advocacy, strengthening other housing organizations through technical assistance, and lead on other community development concerns such as workforce redevelopment, health, and resiliency. Community Development Corporations have a long and varied history of providing affordable housing opportunities to low-income Americans; it serves as an incorporated nonprofit that seeks grants, land, funding, and utilizes other means to develop, build, and manage homes and in some instances entire neighborhoods.

## Address Homelessness Concerns

Since the closure of Southwest State Hospital in 2013, the city has seen an increase in homeless individuals with mental health issues. A concerted effort should be made to provide housing and social service amenities to this population.

The Community Outreach Training Center, Inc. is a valuable resource in the community that provides services to the “economically disadvantaged and homeless population” and connects them with “necessary resources, which lead to self-sufficiency and sustainability.” This organization lists the causes of homelessness in Southwest Georgia as the following: lack of affordable housing, unemployment/under employment, substance abuse, and domestic violence, among other reasons.

### Comprehensive Study

A comprehensive study should be conducted to gather more data and information as to the specific needs of Thomasville's homeless populations. This study can help inform a path forward with recommendations for a plan of action.

### Conduct “Point-in-Time Homeless Surveys” throughout the year

This entails identifying several random days throughout the year dedicated to conducting a census of homeless individuals identified throughout those days. Often, homeless counts are under-represented. These surveys can begin to provide a clearer picture of the homelessness issue or those in precarious situation such as those living with friends/family or substandard housing in and around Thomasville and Thomas County.

### Create One-Stop Shop for Social Services

By increasing funding and capacity to this population, a model program should be developed that encompasses several social services for the homeless. Ideally, this center should be located in an area that has accessible transportation options and adjacent to other resources such as clinics or employment centers.



**HELPING YOUR COMMUNITY MEET ITS HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION NEEDS**



## Downtown Housing: Provide Housing Choices

Thomasville has a great and beautiful downtown. In speaking with many residents, downtown and its main street is a source of pride for many. Many improvements have taken place over the last several years that have made downtown a bustling and economically viable area. A vitally important strategy is to continue the investments in downtown; more specifically by encouraging more residential development. The following is a set of actions that the city can engage in as part of a comprehensive housing strategy for downtown Thomasville:

### Develop Housing Above Existing Buildings

Currently there are 36 residential units in downtown--many of which are located in the Mitchell House--and as of September 2017, one project under construction. This level of activity for a city the size of Thomasville clearly illustrates an interest in downtown redevelopment. The City, through it's Main Street office, should proactively pursue downtown housing projects through advocacy, project management, and incentives.

### Utilize the Existing Building Code for Adaptive Reuse

The building located at 125 N. Broad Street could be an ideal location for an adaptive reuse project. By taking an existing and mostly empty office building and converting it into residential uses, downtown Thomasville can gain further residents in its urban core. However, there are many challenges when retrofitting an existing, older structure. Some of these include providing ADA units, fixing outdated elevators, and if required, providing fire suppression systems. Some of these concerns can be addressed by utilizing flexible building ordinances through the Existing Building Code.

### Create a Residential Parking Permit Program

One of the major issues in downtown is the perceived parking issue. While there are many strategies that can help mitigate this issue, one of the easiest is for the city to create a residential parking permit program. Tenants or residents living within a defined area of downtown can be given a parking permit that allows them to park in the city's on-street parking locations or public lots. The city could also cap it at a certain number so that other parking spaces are made available to visitors of the downtown or also limit the hours for on-street spaces in front of businesses.



Building at 125 N. Broad Street



During various times of the day and different days of the week, there seemed to be sufficient on-street parking available at various locations throughout downtown Thomasville. A sensible and logical approach can be taken by multiple interested parties, to identify a reasonable solution to the perceived parking problem in downtown. Additionally, wayfinding can help customers locate parking during busier times or in areas not otherwise considered public parking.

## Implement Housing Development Best Practices

The Planning Department should adopt several best practice policies that can help with the overall housing and community development strategy. Below is a list of policies and initiatives that should be implemented in the short-term.

- **Boarding Homes:** Regulate more closely the appropriate and to-code conversion of single-family units into boarding homes. Many older adults may find it difficult to maintain a large home and therefore, often homes suffer from “demolition from neglect” or are converted to boarding homes with little oversight.
- **Suburban Development:** As Thomasville grows outside in the periphery of the city, it is important to ensure that developers create “Complete Communities” with appropriate infrastructure and pedestrian amenities for residents; especially in the neighborhood centers near school campuses and along gateway corridors.
- **Beautify Existing Neighborhoods with Gateway Signs:** Thomasville has a great stock of interesting and historic neighborhoods. However, there are no markers or signs that proudly pronounce the entrance to these communities.
- **Increase Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU):** One affordable housing strategy could be increasing the availability of ADUs. ADUs can take the form of “granny-flats” in the backyard or small housing units on top of detached garages. Currently, the city allows ADUs, however, lessening some regulations might encourage their use.
- **Develop Assisted Living Housing Options:** Thomasville is an aging city with a higher than average aging population that could benefit from having nursing, meals, or housekeeping as needed. Programs can be developed to either house senior citizens in multi-family units or help subsidize the cost of home improvements to retrofit houses into larger “healthcare” units.
- **Develop a Housing-Grants Position:** pursue various funding sources for low-to-moderate income housing and other community development initiatives.

## Best Practices

### Neighborhood Gateways Initiative

One fairly inexpensive way to beautify neighborhoods is by implementing a Neighborhood Gateways Initiative. One of Thomasville’s greatest assets is its neighborhoods. By creating ornate and beautiful signage that welcomes residents and visitors into the community, these areas can be transformed through visual aesthetics that create pride and a sense of place.



The photo above illustrates one of many examples of where the Gateways initiative could be implemented. This is the intersection of Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive and Alexander Street in the Dewey City Neighborhood, the main entrance to this historic neighborhood.



The initiative can include new sidewalks and street trees that enhance pedestrian safety. It can include signature Gateway signage tailored for specific neighborhoods utilizing local materials and designs that illustrate the unique significance of the area and its importance to the greater city of Thomasville.



# Rethinking Public Housing

Public housing is not usually someone’s first choice as a place to live. Often times it can be designed in a way that is discouraging for residents. Simple copies of the same building arranged on a site can make a place less personal and its residents feel even more anonymous, contributing to the negative connotation that is usually associated with “the projects.”

What if we rethought public housing in how it was designed and the services it provided? What if public housing could help reestablish neighborhood centers and improve the quality of life for its residents and the neighborhood?

Drawing from the history of public housing in the United States and feedback from the community in Thomasville a range of ideas were explored to improve public housing sites. The goal is to build on past successes while learning from the lessons of previous examples. Experience has shown that the most successful public housing programs include a physical design strategy, a thorough implementation strategy, and an effective policy and services strategy.

A study of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Hope VI public housing model suggests that including residents in an open planning process can result in a higher rate of satisfaction for the residents and community. Holding public workshops to identify community concerns may reveal opportunities for the Thomasville Public Housing Authority to collaborate with other agencies and neighbors in improving the safety and quality of life in the area. The goal should be to determine what the public housing should look like and what ways public housing can tap into existing resources or bring value to the greater community.

Public housing was studied in Thomasville to illustrate a concept for how such a transformation could occur. Two options for redevelopment have been explored to show how a selected sample site can be revamped to better meet the community’s needs. It is important to note that while this example illustrates one particular location of public housing in Thomasville, it is intended to serve as a template for the other public housing sites in the City, as well as any potential future locations.

These examples--currently not being implemented--show how buildings could be renovated, or how the public housing could be redesigned in a way that does not displace citizens, but rather improves the quality of life for those who live in and around the community.



Faircloth Homes has a fairly large common space fronted by housing units, and large Live Oak trees providing shade.



Rear yards also create public spaces which reduces private space. At the same time utility poles and wires detract from the cohesiveness of the development.



Porches are too shallow to be effectively used by residents.

## Sample Site Existing Conditions

Faircloth Homes is a public housing block located between Stevens Street, Jerger Street, Webster Street, and Oak Street. The block faces residences, Good Shepherd Word of Deliverance Church, and the Scott Senior Center.

The site has sixteen housing buildings of three different sizes. This adds some variation to the buildings, however materials and details are the same for each structure which emphasizes monotony in the site. Similarity is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as it is balanced with some differences to make a place more interesting. Front and back porches are roughly four to five feet in depth.

These buildings are organized in such a way that building fronts face building fronts internally and around the perimeter, creating small public courts throughout the block. There is one civic building that currently functions as a police bicycle facility and the block contains a common space with large trees for shade.

Front yard courts serve as common space, as do the back yard spaces which virtually eliminates any outdoor privacy for tenants. Interestingly, when there is a lack of private space, there is a decrease in the maintenance of the area by residents. Establishing what is public and what is private helps identify what needs to be maintained and by whom.

Sidewalks are provided for each front door, however these abruptly end and are not connected to a sidewalk system. There are some trees on the site that provide shade; however, there is a lack of landscaping throughout the site. Site lighting currently consists of light poles and fixtures that one would normally see along major thoroughfares. While these cobra head lights may function well to achieve lighting requirements, they are designed for automotive traffic and detract from the neighborhood.

## Opportunities

Options were explored with utilizing lands associated with the Scott Senior Center that could be reused as public amenities. Public amenities include a public garden, café diner, pool and pavilions. Uses shown are the result of input from the community that identified a need for these amenities. This feedback was provided by both children and the elderly.

People in the senior center could make use of the pool during the day for exercise and help tend to the garden. After school is out, the pool and café diner provide a location where children feel that they can congregate. The pavilions and pool could be used by the community for events such as birthday parties or church barbecues.

- A** Existing structures consisting of 3 different types
- B** Existing Lanes
- C** Existing common space
- D** Civic Building



Faircloth Homes: Existing Conditions Aerial



## Strategic Upgrades

The strategic upgrades option is an intervention intended to help address the concerns of the community while keeping costs lower than a complete redevelopment of the site.

The upgrades preserve the vehicular circulation in the block and keeps the existing common space. Sidewalks are installed around and through the site, power lines are buried and pedestrian-scaled lighting is installed. Trees line the streets and are planted within the block to shade and define the spaces between buildings. The existing police facility is retrofitted, or could be expanded to be a community resource center.

Existing buildings on the corners of the block are removed and replaced with a variety of housing sizes and types, including multi-family and live/work housing. These buildings are aesthetically similar to structures nearby.

Existing housing would be updated and include 8 foot-deep porches. Some roofs are changed to have a gable end. Details would also be updated to have a variety of posts or columns at porches, different mouldings at roof eaves, and different bracket designs.



Strategic Upgrades Site Plan: The existing vehicle circulation is maintained along with the common space. New buildings replace the existing structures at the corners.

- A** New buildings that blend in aesthetically with the neighborhood
- B** Common space maintained
- C** Some porch roofs changed to gable roofs with differing details
- D** Vehicular circulation maintained
- E** Live/work units
- F** Community Garden
- G** Diner/Cafe
- H** Pavilions
- I** Community Pool



Faircloth Homes: Hybrid Option Aerial



### Site Redevelopment

The site redevelopment option is a redesign of the entire block. It builds on the strategic interventions of the hybrid so that the hybrid could eventually be implemented to this level.

The design changes the vehicular circulation of the site by placing a road with on-street parking down the middle of the block from Stevens Street to Oak Street. The common space is relocated to the corner of the site with a community resource center, playground, and pavilions that could be rented for parties.

Existing buildings have been removed and replaced with a variety of housing sizes and types including, single-family, duplexes, multi-family, row houses and live/work dwellings. This helps to create a neighborhood feel while also accommodating more dwelling units without construction that looks like downtown. Housing is designed to be aesthetically similar to neighboring homes and other historical structures in Thomasville.



Reconfiguration Option Site Plan: a new road and lanes are established on the site. New buildings replace the existing structures and are similar to neighboring homes.

- A** New common space with pavilions
- B** Community Resource Center
- C** New buildings that fit in with the neighborhood
- D** New road with parallel parking
- E** Live/work units
- F** Community Garden
- G** Diner/Cafe
- H** Pavilions
- I** Community Pool
- J** New Lanes



Faircloth Homes: Reconfiguration Option Aerial



## Implementation

While Hope VI succeeded in some areas, one aspect in particular that stood out for significant improvement was the implementation of development.

Establishing an effective communication network about the demolition and construction process can help create a smooth transition. A common problem during Hope VI was that not enough planning was done regarding where to temporarily house residents, and this process was ineffectively communicated. As a result, residents found themselves in poor living conditions, or simply forgotten during the shuffle.

Confusion led some residents to believe that moving into the new units was not possible. Seminars and an online presence that clearly outlines the process with a Frequently Asked Questions page could help in preventing this issue in the future. Examples of successful programs can be found in Tuscon, Arizona (South Park) and Seattle, Washington (High Point Garden).

Historically, there was an assumption that a change in environment was all that was necessary to affect personal change. The various iterations of public housing show that an effective policy and available services are integral in achieving success.

## Policy

Increasing the housing stock to accommodate affordable, and in some cases, market rate housing should be considered. One of the successes of the Hope VI program was the benefits seen from a mixed-income housing community; the most significant was an increase in safety and quality of life for the area. Providing market rate housing has been shown to encourage better contracting services and neighborhood amenities. The rule of thumb tends to be to provide the same number of public housing units with a 20% increase in units to accommodate affordable, or market rate dwellings.

Recognizing that these initiatives will require financial resources, the housing authority and city can tap into various sources, such as Choice Neighborhoods Planning & Implementation Grants to begin the planning stages and facilitate a long-term sustainable financial model.

## Services

Utilizing an open design process can identify what services are needed by the community within housing developments. Tailoring the available services to these needs can be a more effective use of limited funds. Depending on the demographics for each housing development, the needs may range from child care, to financial literacy, GED classes, healthcare for the elderly, or other job skills training. Having a community resource center available at each site will provide a location to conveniently access these services which could also be available to the general public for a small fee.

A more robust online presence will help improve communication between the Thomasville Housing Authority and its residents. Currently, it is difficult to navigate where to go for necessary resources — one is directed to the HUD website which is also not very user friendly. Providing easy-to-access information will enable residents to understand their rights and responsibilities, and help the Thomasville Housing Authority devote time to other initiatives. An example to consider would be the Atlanta Housing Authority website.

## GOALS & POLICIES

To provide varied housing options for all Thomasville citizens while maintaining the community character and historic values of our diverse neighborhoods through concentrated actions and multi-prong approaches throughout all of Thomasville.

### Infill Redevelopment

**Goal 6.1: Develop a comprehensive infill strategy to create new housing opportunities in blighted areas or underutilized parcels of land.**

Policy 6.1.1: Identify key areas of the city where large numbers of vacant, dilapidated, or underutilized land exists and start a multi-prong approach to revitalize these areas that includes incentives, allocating city resources, or having flexible zoning standards. The Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) team can begin process and outline likely tools for implementation. Neighborhood planner can work with local stakeholders to create vision and plan. New and flexible zoning will help facilitate implementation strategy.

Policy 6.1.2: Working with the neighborhood, develop a vision and illustrative plan for target areas.

Policy 6.1.3: Identify tools and strategy for each key area. This could include an infill policy that includes utility abatements, waiver of permitting fees, parking reductions, and flexible zoning standards such as allowing by right, setback standards, mixed-uses, and parking reductions.

### Downtown Housing

**Goal 6.2: Create housing opportunities within the already successful downtown to diversify the city's housing stock.**

Policy 6.2.1: Develop communication plan to educate stakeholders about the flexible building ordinances (IEBC) that can assist adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

Policy 6.2.2: Encourage upper floor residential development.

Policy 6.2.3: Perform an analysis of existing parking requirements in order to develop a residential parking program to help offset the parking requirements for new housing in the downtown and other targeted areas.

Policy 6.2.4: Develop a code that is both form-based and flexible. Since much of the downtown housing is already included in a local historic district, which requires both form and architectural standards.

Policy 6.2.5: Reward those developers who follow a more intense level of regulation by offsetting fees and streamlining the approval and permitting process.

Policy 6.2.6: Develop a downtown specific housing plan to identify opportunities and set a specific housing target for the next ten years.

### Housing Advocacy

**Goal 6.3: Develop a Robust Housing Advocacy Network.**

Policy 6.3.1: Develop and support an all-inclusive Housing and Neighborhood Development Collaborative comprised of various housing and economic development organizations. Can potentially be done through the GICH team already in place.

Policy 6.3.2: Create Neighborhood Associations. These can serve as catalysts to develop community pride and advocacy. Neighborhood Associations also provide residents an outlet for civic participation and thus increases social capital.

Policy 6.3.3: Housing Plan and Market Study. A necessary and critical next step is to develop a comprehensive housing plan and market study. These two components will further evaluate various housing policies as well as determine level of housing needs while providing site specific areas of where to develop various levels of housing.

Policy 6.3.4: Increase Historic Districts. One way to ensure that older areas of the city—those having historic and cultural significance—keep from deteriorating is to bring them into historic districts. However, the city must ensure that the district regulations are not too stringent that they have unintended consequences prohibiting renovations.

Policy 6.3.5: Maintain in good standing the city’s newly reestablished participation in the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) initiative to assist with technical assistance and funding to create community development activities centered around housing.

## Housing Development Best Practices

### Goal 6.4: Include an Array of Best Practices in the City’s Policies, Codes, and Initiatives.

Policy 6.4.1: Boarding Homes. Regulate the conversion of single family units into boarding homes; policy could include the development of such uses but with adequate welfare and safety concerns addressed through proper building codes.

Policy 6.4.2: Suburban Development. As part of the new Unified Development Code, review the existing subdivision ordinances to ensure that new communities offer adequate amenities such as sidewalks, street connectivity, usable open space, require that overhead utilities be placed underground, and that new lots 50’ in width or less be accessed by a rear alley or lane and provide the right of way with major utility service hookup.

Policy 6.4.3: Create Neighborhood Gateway Signs. Using materials and features that are simple, yet stately, in keeping with traditional urban neighborhoods, archways, signs, and landscaping can be developed throughout Thomasville that dignify the existence of the city’s great neighborhoods.

Policy 6.4.4: Increase Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU). Relax accessory dwelling units (ADU) standards to encourage more users of this housing type.

Policy 6.4.5: International Existing Building Code. Utilize the International Existing Building Code (IEBC) to enable flexible building standards to existing older homes into a variety of housing types as well as mixed-used structures. This can facilitate housing renovations without costly unnecessary code requirements. A good first step is to provide education about how and when to utilize the IEBC.

Policy 6.4.6: Develop Assisted Living. As part of a larger Continuing Care Retire Communities Program, the city in partnership with local non-profits, can encourage the creation of various types of senior housing or help subsidize the cost of home improvements.

Policy 6.4.7: Pursue various funding sources for public housing. Funds can include state funds, Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) grants, or Community Reinvestment Act resources to develop exemplary public housing development.

Policy 6.4.8: Address Homeless Concerns. City should review current practices and policies and determine whether these are working or how to best modify. If possible, increase advocacy and resources to this population through a focus initiative.

Policy 6.4.9: Landlord Training. Working with the city’s code enforcement staff, landlords should be educated on existing laws and how to fix existing rental properties concerns. Tenant can also be included in the educational initiative.

Policy 6.4.10: Encourage Energy Efficient Homes. One way to decrease housing costs, is by decreasing other housing-related specific items such as utilities by constructing sustainable and environmental-friendly homes. These can include the Earthcraft Certification, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system, or a local policy that encourages green building standards.





## CURRENT CONDITIONS

The City of Thomasville has been largely influenced by its location in the Red Hills Region of Southern Georgia and Northern Florida. The region, known for its rolling hills and red clay soils, has extremely fertile soil and is home to tall stands of long-leaf pines, live oaks, dogwood, azalea, and wisteria. Thomasville has a humid subtropical climate with hot, humid summers and generally mild to cool winters with an annual average temperature high of 78 degrees and low of 55 degrees. This section reviews some of the existing natural conditions and the cultural assets in Thomasville.

## Sustainable Development

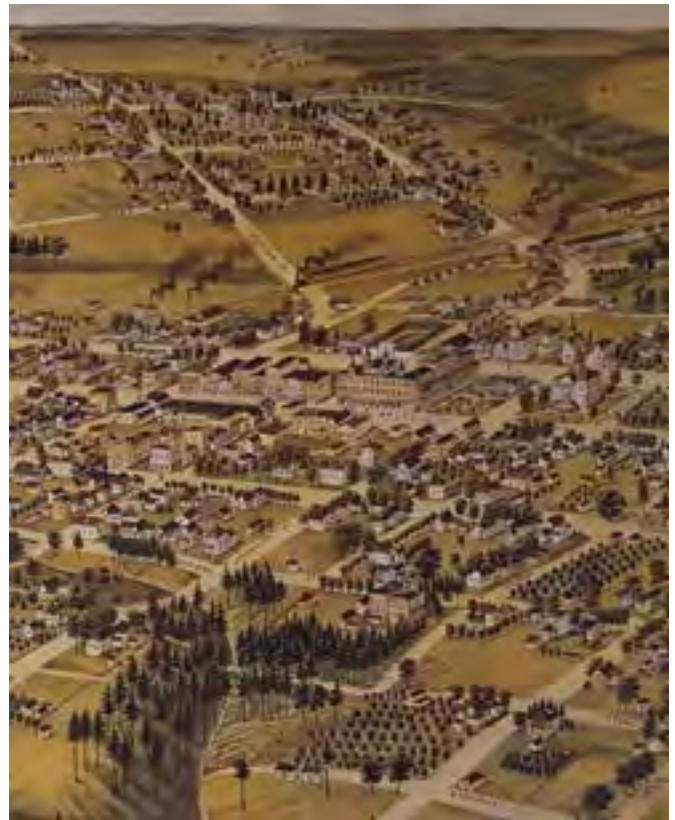
### Development Patterns

Thomasville initially developed as a largely rural, self-sufficient community. With the arrival of the railroad in 1861, the downtown developed around the rail terminal surrounded by tightly platted residential neighborhoods, forming a compact, mixed-use city that is a model of efficiency. Through tightly knit neighborhoods many needs — from general stores, to parks, to places of worship — were usually within walking distance. Smaller blocks with tree canopies made it more pleasant to walk and increased efficiency in delivering services. This early development pattern provides important lessons in sustainability, even if that word or concept did not yet exist in that time as we now know it.

The City of Thomasville has been able to maintain most of its historic development pattern with thanks to the plantations situated around the City. These plantations have historically surrounded the City and function as a greenbelt, largely limiting sprawl and preserving large areas of natural habitat. A significant portion of the native longleaf pine forests remaining in the United States are located in this region on privately owned plantations managed for bobwhite quail hunting.

### Climate Responsive Architecture

Before air conditioning, climate-responsive architecture increased the comfort within buildings. High ceilings allowed for hot air to rise above the heads of building occupants. Tall windows, usually aligned across shallow rooms, allowed for cross-ventilation. Porches provided needed shade and increased the congenial nature of Thomasville’s streetscapes. In the winter, brick or stone fireplaces radiated heat in both modest homes and mansions.



Historic map of Thomasville



The historic Lapham-Patterson House has porches and large overhangs responding to the local climate.



Climate responsive architecture highlights the local history of Thomasville and is inherently sustainable.

In recent decades, buildings have been built from more synthetic or industrialized materials. Air conditioning has caused buildings to have a diminished connection with the outside world, sometimes to the detriment of building occupants' comfort and enjoyment. In addition to air conditioning, the myriad of appliances and personal electronics requiring charging have increased dramatically. Despite efforts to reduce overall energy consumption per appliance, buildings are more energy-consumptive today than ever before.

## Natural Environment

### Climate

The warm temperatures and abundant rainfall sustain agricultural production and a lush landscape. The City of Thomasville has a humid subtropical climate with the coldest month being January and the hottest month being July.

The total average annual precipitation is 53.2 inches. Of this 24 inches, or 45%, generally falls in April through September. The growing season for most crops falls within this period.

### Air Quality

The City of Thomasville currently meets minimum air quality standards. To date, the City has not dealt directly with the same kind of air quality issues affecting other parts of the State, as significant air pollutants have not been a major issue in the area. However, compliance with any new standards may require vehicle emissions testing, more stringent industrial smokestack emissions permitting and additional air quality impact analysis tied to transportation planning.

### Green Space

There are a range of parks and park services within Thomasville. These highlight recreational activities and the natural beauty of the City. Some spaces have been dedicated to the cultivation of roses to promote and enhance the reputation of Thomasville as the City of Roses. Many of the park spaces tend to be large and include sports facilities. While this promotes a healthy lifestyle, many of these large parks are primarily accessible by vehicles which can discourage informal pickup games. The proposed trail to connect these parks would be a benefit to the community and could help locate smaller neighborhood parks.

While there are outdoor activities available in green spaces, many of the lush woodlands are privately owned. This reveals an opportunity within the City to increase access to wooded areas.

### Topography

Thomasville is located in an area with several hills and a topography that ranges from below 200 feet to above 275 feet. This range in topography can make for a varied and interesting pedestrian experience for the town and contribute to challenges for public infrastructure. Ensuring the proper vegetation is in place can help to mitigate erosion and help capture rainwater runoff from streets as it runs toward lower land.

It is possible to see how Thomasville historically developed along the higher ground and has avoided the lower areas. This is a natural choice for sound building practices, because it avoids chances of flooding and enables buildings to capture natural breezes that occur on higher ground.

### Water

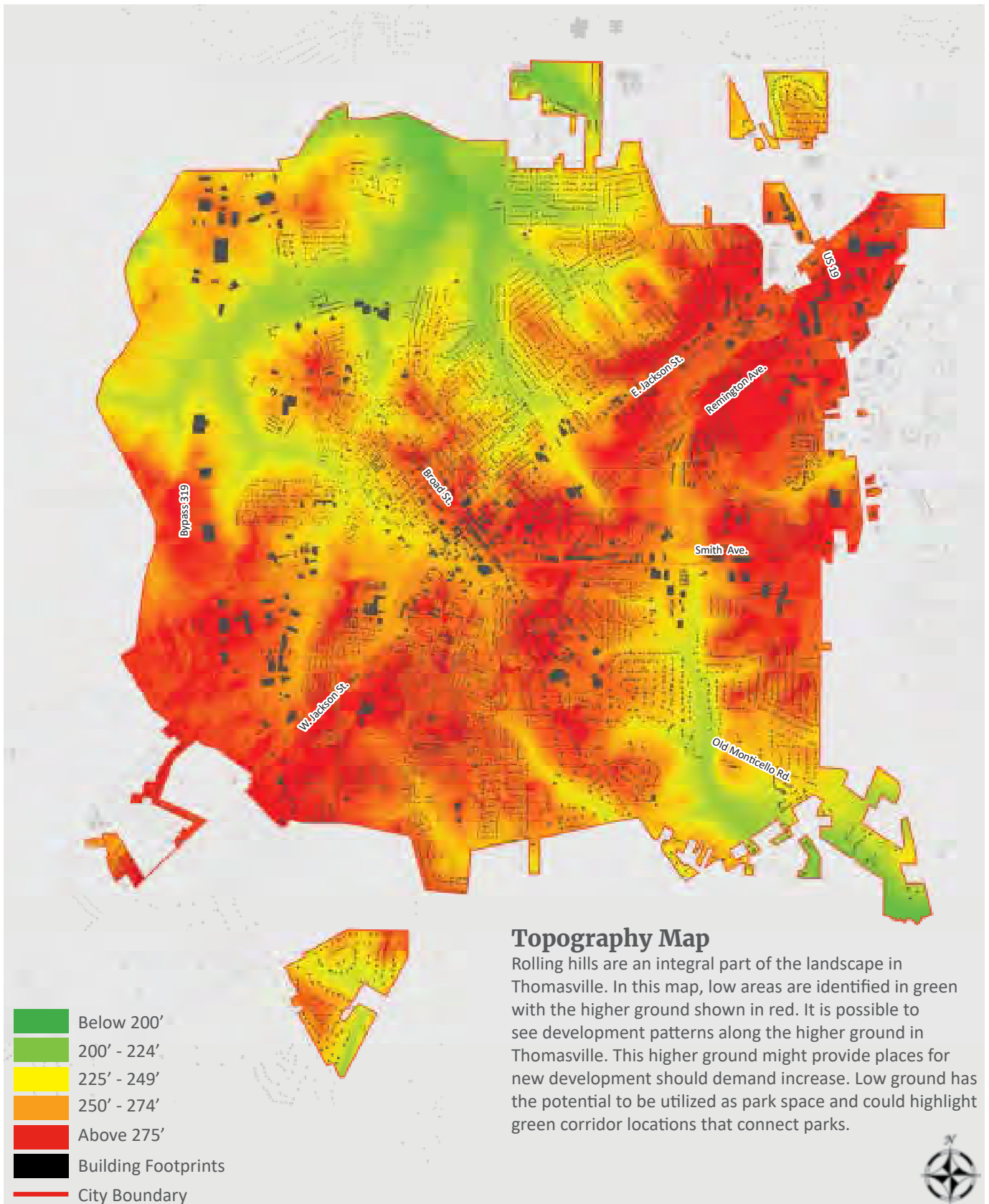
Small fingers of surface water lead into some areas of the City. According to FEMA, there are some locations that are susceptible to a 1 in 100 (or 1%) chance of a 100 year flood. Development in the City has naturally avoided these areas, which helps with public infrastructure and emergency preparedness. Flooding is not a regular occurrence in Thomasville and happens an average of two times a year with nearly no flash flooding. There is, however, no stormwater management funding in the City. As a result, there is little protection from erosion and suspended solids are the largest concern.

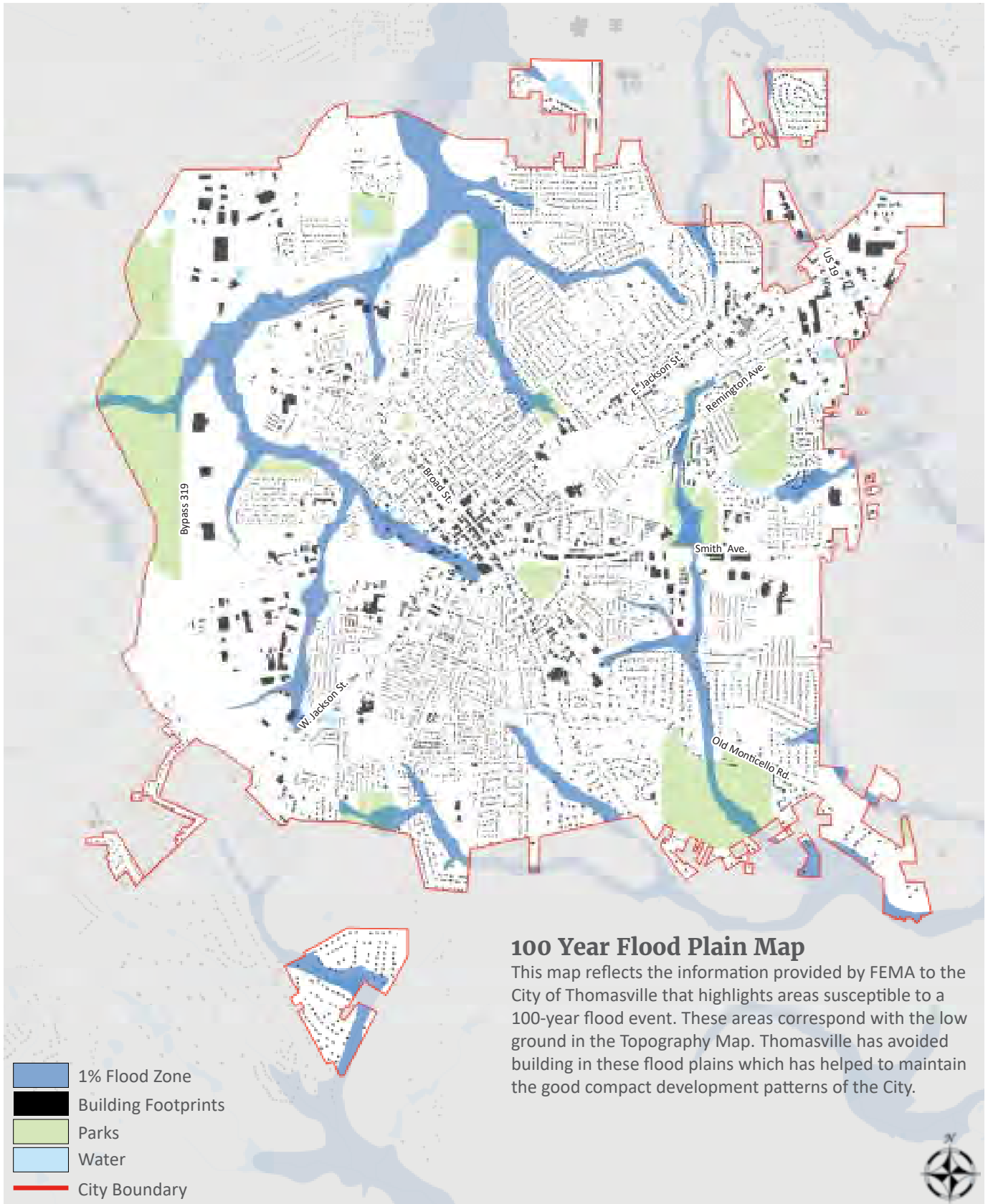
The drinking water in Thomasville is diversified and of a good quality, keeping with State regulations. Water is supplied to the City through a water main outer loop system.



Thomasville is Georgia's Official Rose City







# Cultural Institutions

## Cultural Sites

Thomasville has numerous cultural and historically significant sites in and around the City. Some of these organizations include:

- Pebble Hill Plantation,
- Historic Big Oak,
- Thomasville Rose Garden,
- Lapham-Patterson House,
- Birdsong Nature Center,
- Thomas County Courthouse,
- Anderson Prison Camp historical site (important to the American Civil War history), and
- All Saints' Episcopal Church.

## Historic Organizations

Thomasville residents are aware of the City's rich local history and the importance it has played in the history of our nation — from the winter home of wealthy northern tycoons, to a vacation spot for President Eisenhower, to a retreat for First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. Because of this, a variety of organizations have been founded to celebrate and protect the history of Thomasville. Some of these organizations include:

- Jack Hadley's Black History Museum,
- Main Street Advisory Board,
- Pebble Hill Plantation,
- Thomas County Historical Society & Museum of History,
- Thomasville Genealogical History & Fine Arts Library,
- Thomasville Landmarks, Inc., and
- Thomasville Preservation Commission.

## Arts

Thomasville has a robust offering of arts opportunities for a city its size. These range from dance companies and schools, to theater and drama groups, to art and art studios. From these, citizens in Thomasville are able to pursue enrichment opportunities which lead to further deepen the culture of Thomasville. These groups include:

- Thomasville Center for the Arts,
- Thomasville Entertainment Foundation,
- Thomasville On Stage Company,
- Thomasville Music and Drama Troupe,
- Dance Academy,
- South Georgia Ballet,
- South Georgia Ballet Conservatory,
- The F.I.R.M. Dance Company, and
- Rose City Ballet.

## Thomasville Center for the Arts

The Center for the Arts is a frequent partner with Thomasville to enhance the quality of life in the City. Regulars at local charrettes, the Center for the Arts is frequently bringing innovative ideas to the table to improve the walkability, sustainability, and sense of place in Thomasville. In addition, they publish THOM magazine, host the Plantation Wildlife Festival, host Due South, Host Flaunt, and are generally a mainstay in bringing the arts to Thomasville. They are the catalyst for much of the activity that takes place in the City. Physically, they anchor the school complex (providing charter like programs) to students and the Amphitheater (hosting several events each spring and fall.

## City Leadership

An important resource for any city is its population. The City leadership in Thomasville is very aware of this and is interested in encouraging and maintaining a vital and diverse leadership. Understanding the demographic trends, growth projections, and the importance of involving citizens from all neighborhoods, Thomasville is currently engaged in determining strategies to recruit, train, and highlight public leaders and leadership opportunities.



The Thomasville Center for the Arts



## COMMUNITY CONCERNS

While discussing environmental concerns, people in Thomasville frame the topic in terms of quality of life and local challenges. Through success in tackling local challenges, Thomasville will also be addressing environmental concerns that are global in scale.

### Historic Preservation

The historic buildings in Thomasville are more than just a reminder of the history of the city; they represent a significant amount of embodied energy, materials, time and labor that were a part of their creation. It would be more economical and more sustainable to preserve these historic assets than to replace them with buildings of a similar quality.

Adaptive re-use of these structures is an inherently sustainable enterprise for both the environment as well as for the character and life of the city. Beyond green benefits, historic buildings help inform today's developers and architects in creating street-friendly, climate-responsive structures of enduring quality. Cities have realized that historic districts with coherent architecture also attract tourists while generating positive economic impacts.

### Expand Network of Parks & Open Spaces

Many residents expressed the need to update existing parks and open spaces—such as improving the existing trails or activating parks with new facilities and programs.

In addition, thoughtfully considering the placement of development, including shopping destinations, fitness facilities, educational facilities, and restaurants within close proximity of parks and within neighborhood centers could create a potential symbiotic relationship between land uses and encourage more daily activity.

Additionally, many of the natural spaces like forested or wetland areas are privately owned in yards or plantations. This presents an opportunity for Thomasville to expand its network and look for partnerships to bring these types of natural areas into public use.

### Encourage Natural Biodiversity

The existing tree canopy, plantings, and wildlife offer a rich experience for residents and visitors to Thomasville. The community has communicated the importance of maintaining this signature element of the City. A recent inventory of street trees was performed by an arborist that recommends improving the diversity of plant species to improve the resilience of the natural environment against diseases. There are many ways that this could both engage the community, and improve neighborhoods in Thomasville.

### Reduce Landfill Waste

Residents expressed a strong desire to participate in a city-wide recycling program. There are two drop-off locations for recycling however residents desire at home pick-up service and recycling containers throughout the downtown.



Erosion in creek beds is a concern for water quality, and the experience of parks and natural settings in Thomasville.

## Address Water Management

### Erosion & Rainwater Management

The City currently does not have a rainwater management plan in place to address the erosion that occurs in creek beds during heavy rain events. However, the City can encourage state enforcement of the Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Regulations and cooperate with state enforcement officials.

A lot of creek beds are on private property, which makes their maintenance the responsibility of the owner to make repairs and upgrades. This can be a financial burden that results in no improvements to the entire property, resulting in the continued loss of sediment and erosion which gets deposited elsewhere in ponds and lakes. The City needs to ensure that floodplain and wetland protection ordinances continue to provide an adequate level of protection for those resources.

As the body of knowledge on environmental management grows, so does the understanding of best practices and goals as established by the State of Georgia. There has been an increased burden on the City to provide guidance for on-site rainwater management requirements for new development. Improving the ease at which developers and engineers can learn and submit proposals would increase the efficiency of the overall development process. There may also be an opportunity to integrate the response in a proactive plan and design that makes these creek beds a feature rather than background concern in Thomasville.

### Protect Groundwater

Although there is not a large concern for where Thomasville receives its water, the City should continue to work with the County to protect the groundwater from future contamination.

### Floodplain & Wetland Protection

The City needs to ensure that floodplain and wetland protection ordinances continue to provide an adequate level of protection for these important resources.

## Encourage Solar Energy Installations

The City is the provider of electricity within city limits. Although it may change the financial calculator for running the City, Thomasville should look toward renewable energy generation such as household solar panels. Thomasville's building code currently contains language making solar energy installations very difficult. While it is important to maintain historic aesthetics and maintain the local character, there may also be room to compromise or find other opportunities to encourage solar energy installations.

## Focus Infrastructure & Development

Thomasville provides utilities and services such as gas, electricity, and cable to its residents. Maintenance of this infrastructure can be a financial challenge on the operating budget of the City. Reductions in this expense can be achieved by encouraging development in areas where it already exists, thereby reducing the need for new infrastructure. There is an abundance of opportunity with the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods for new development. By concentrating areas of service, maintenance can also be concentrated rather than spread out — making the effort more efficient overall.

## Celebrate Local Culture

There is an abundance of small churches in Thomasville's residential neighborhoods. This unique asset of neighborhood churches should be considered building blocks and institutional anchors in future neighborhood planning efforts. Many neighborhood centers already contain small churches.

Continue to promote the cultural resources that are so well preserved in the city, including historic districts/neighborhoods and sites.

Thomasville has a range of opportunities for residents of all ages to express their creativity, and yet many residents observed that activities for young families are lacking. Increasing the visibility of these creative outlets and encouraging other similar activities for children can get more kids involved in the community. Many kids expressed desire to have more engaging local activities that give them a reason to get out of the digital world.

## Celebrate Local Art & History

Many residents discussed a desire to celebrate the local culture and history of Thomasville. Community members were enthusiastic about art and historic installations. Adding these features to the trails and parks throughout Thomasville would encourage locals to learn more about the local heritage. This could be done in coordination local artists and historic organizations.

## Encourage Diversity in Local Government Organizations

City officials in Thomasville expressed a desire to see a more diverse range of participants on local governmental boards and agencies. Agencies and boards made up of individuals with diverse backgrounds can help ensure that all voices are heard and that a maximum benefit is being shared throughout the community.



# STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING COMMUNITY CONCERNS

The residents and leaders of Thomasville have shown a holistic understanding of what sustainable means for the City that includes the economy, the environment, and social issues. It will be important to keep these in mind as the City move into the future.

## Built Environment

### Update the Master Plan for Downtown & Establish Neighborhood Center Plans

Review the plans for in and around Downtown Thomasville to ensure they are still focused on the downtown area’s current goals. This should include involvement of the City’s residents to confirm and identify how the City wants to grow. In addition, plans for each of the neighborhood centers should be created. An approved master plan helps to focus efforts on development that the community has agreed upon, creating places that are walkable and appealing to residents. Making lovable places creates buildings that will last, because they enhance the sense of place and community.

### Incentivise Density through City & Neighborhood Centers

Thomasville has developed neighborhood centers throughout its history. These have become less vibrant over time, however they pose a potential to create walkable destinations for residents once again. Incentivizing development at these centers will reduce the impact that a normal, single-use, greenfield building would have on the local environment. Concentrating some development will also make City service maintenance more efficient.

During a presentation to Thomasville, Charles Marohn of Strong Towns presented concepts such as investing in infrastructure within existing developed areas as a method to increase efficiency in public spending. Investing in downtowns and neighborhood centers rather than suburban sprawl strengthens a town and encourages a vibrant community with daily interactions.



Clay and Mitchell Street Intersection - Existing Condition



While the commercial properties in the neighborhood center at the intersection of Clay and Mitchell streets are being revitalized, drainage concerns for the for the creeks behind the properties can be addressed by strengthening the edges and cleaning the canal.



## Creation of a Sustainable Development Checklist for Developers

Local developers lean on Thomasville’s governing bodies to guide sustainable development practices, leading to more of an educational role rather than an evaluation role for the City during the creation of these projects. Creating a user-friendly checklist that outlines specific resources and practices for developers will allow the evaluating agencies to be more efficient with their interactions on proposed projects.

## Promote Sustainable Building Design

Buildings that respond to their local climate, implement technologies to enhance their inherent environmental friendly design, and are long lasting bring quality and value to the neighborhood and city. By incentivizing sustainable design approaches through a study of historic structures, organizations such as LEED, and the American Institute of Architects’ Committee on the Environment, Thomasville can encourage an urban experience that feels local and enhance the local natural resources of the City. Incentives could be financial or grant allowances if development adheres to certain criteria. This criteria could be for both existing and new development and defined using third party information such as: LEED, Earthcraft, Living Building, and Passive House.

## Greener Buildings

There are many reasons to incorporate sustainable construction practices into new construction, especially when many of these are no more costly than unsustainable designs, and others generally pay for themselves in a short time frame. Some low-tech, common sense ways to construct more sustainably include using locally produced construction materials, using renewable or very durable materials, and designing buildings to be climate-responsive. Thomasville’s historic and vernacular building traditions offer many pointers on how to accomplish these things.

Some typical climate-responsive design techniques include cross-ventilation, high ceilings, use of daylight, and acknowledging solar orientation. Of course, the location and siting of buildings is also crucial. A designer or building owner should strive to build mostly in walkable or in-town contexts. Unbuilt portions of the site can have roles in recharging groundwater and providing for habitat.

For those that can afford to build or retrofit using high-tech solutions, these may include on-site energy generation, integrated plumbing systems that recycle and differentiate water based upon intended use. The ability to increase the use of timers and sensors for lighting, air-conditioning, and other building systems, which can greatly reduce consumption and demand, already exists.

## Weatherization

“Weatherization” should be considered low hanging fruit in the process of making buildings greener. Without even upgrading building systems, large savings can be gained from easy and inexpensive improvements to insulation and by sealing cracks in windows and doors. Regular maintenance of air conditioning and heating systems, such as coil and duct cleaning and filter replacement, are important practices when trying to reduce citywide electricity loads. Installing shade devices such as awnings and shutters, planting deciduous trees in appropriate sites, using high-albedo (reflective) roof surfaces also contribute. The latter two practices also mitigate the urban heat island effect.

## Create an Urban Canopy Plan

Thomasville’s urban forest is an important community asset that provides numerous environmental benefits including: shade, reduction in the heat island effect, protection from rain, maintaining the local water cycle through rainwater capture, improved air quality, and an increased sense of beauty and place. An Urban canopy Plan provides a strategy to create a more sustainable urban forest and a truly green city. With appropriate care, Thomasville’s urban forest is expected to increase in value over time.

The Urban Canopy Plan should include the following components:

- An assessment that analyze the conditions and issues with existing canopy, and prioritize areas based on desired outcomes, such as maximizing ecological services, access to natural resources and protecting public health and safety.
- Set concrete goals on tree planting to quantify the urban canopy population growth, such as grow the street tree population by 15% in 10 years.
- The plan should delineate the responsibilities for the urban canopy management. The plan can also provide education on tree maintenance and provide tools, data, and other resources to guide future community forest management and reforestation efforts.
- Data generated by the Urban Canopy plan can be overlaid with available heat island information to create a long-term framework to address heat island effect through the expansion of tree canopy and prioritize sites with the highest impact.

Planning and funding for tree management must complement planting efforts to ensure the success of new plantings and that desired benefits area being achieved through strategic urban forest management.

## Ten Measures of Sustainable Design

The linked domains of sustainability are environmental, economic, and social. Sustainable design is a collaborative process that involves thinking ecologically—studying systems, relationships, and interactions—in order to design in ways that remove rather than contribute stress from systems. True sustainable design is beautiful, humane, socially appropriate, and restorative.

### 1. Sustainable Design Intent & Innovation

Sustainable design is rooted in a mind-set that understands humans as an integral part of nature and responsible for stewardship of natural systems. Sustainable design begins with a connection to personal values and embraces the ecological, economic, and social circumstances of a project. Architectural expression itself comes from this intent, responding to the specific region, watershed, community, neighborhood, and site.

### 2. Regional/Community Design & Connectivity

Sustainable design recognizes the unique cultural and natural character of place, promotes regional and community identity, contributes to public space and community interaction, and seeks to reduce auto travel and parking requirements.

### 3. Land Use & Site Ecology

Sustainable design reveals how natural systems can thrive in the presence of human development, relate to ecosystems at different scales, and creates, re-creates, or preserves open space, permeable groundscape, and/or on-site ecosystems.

### 4. Bioclimatic Design

Sustainable design conserves resources and optimizes human comfort through connections with the flows of the bioclimatic region, using place-based design to benefit from free energies—sun, wind, and water. In footprint, section, orientation, and massing, sustainable design responds to the site, sun path, breezes, and seasonal and daily cycles.

### 5. Light & Air

Sustainable design creates a comfortable and healthy interior environment while providing abundant daylight and fresh air. Daylight, lighting design, natural ventilation, improved indoor air quality, and views, enhance the vital human link to nature.

### 6. Water Cycle

Recognizing water as an essential resource, sustainable design conserves water supplies, manages site water and drainage, and capitalizes on renewable site sources using water-conserving strategies, fixtures, appliances, and equipment.

### 7. Energy Flows & Energy Future

Rooted in passive strategies, sustainable design contributes to energy conservation by reducing or eliminating the need for lighting and mechanical heating and cooling. Smaller and more efficient building systems reduce pollution and improve building performance and comfort.

### 8. Materials, Building Envelope & Construction

Sustainable design promotes recycling through the life of the building. Using a life cycle lens, selection of materials and products can conserve resources, reduce the impacts of harvest/manufacture/transport, improve building performance, and secure human health and comfort. High performance building envelopes improve comfort and reduce energy use and pollution.

### 9. Long Life, Loose Fit

Sustainable design seeks to optimize ecological, social, and economic value over time. Materials, systems, and design solutions enhance versatility, durability, and adaptive reuse potential. Sustainable design begins with right-sizing and foresees future adaptations.

### 10. Collective Wisdom & Feedback Loops

Sustainable design recognizes that the most intelligent design strategies evolve over time through shared knowledge within a large community. Lessons learned from the integrated design process and from the site and buildings themselves over time should contribute to building performance, occupant satisfaction, and the design of future projects.

### “Definition of Sustainable Design”

American Institute of Architects’  
Committee on the Environment

## Reduce Heat Island Effect

The heat island effect is where an area is significantly warmer than the surrounding areas due to human interventions such as large surfaces that reflect heat instead of absorbing it such as large parking areas or roof surfaces.

There are both building roof and non-roof strategies, described below, that can be used to mitigate the urban heat island effect.

### Roof Strategies

Create shade for roofs by using vegetated roofs, high albedo materials, trees to shade roofs, and pergolas, solar panels, and other devices to shade parking and/or flat sloped roofs.

### Non-Roof Strategies

Create shade for the ground by installing vegetative ground cover and trees in planting strips and swales. Instead of pavement, use high albedo materials for paved surfaces. Minimize surface parking lots and the size of expanses of asphalt by using pervious materials and planting trees and ground cover in parking lots.

## Natural Environment

### Connect Natural Areas through Corridors

Thomasville's natural areas present an opportunity to create a feature for residents and to showcase the City. Connecting these natural areas can provide paths for walking and biking as well as for wildlife to migrate throughout the City. Connecting these green spaces also helps plant life and creates a more complete natural ecosystem.

### Biodiversity

In response to the overwhelming community desire to retain the natural habitat and biodiversity that make Thomasville and the wider region distinct, efforts to protect and restore natural features as the City infills and grows will be central to realizing this vision. Natural areas serve multiple functions, acting as both infrastructure and open space.

### Protect Existing Habitats

Consider the network of natural and wild places, where they exist, as permanent and irreplaceable. Defend the interconnecting habitats with the same fervor with which the connected network of streets is defended. When developing land, consider that natural places are eons in the making. Such places offer multiple benefits to humans and the environment. The ecology of Thomasville will be healthier as a result of their protection; biodiversity is maintained or increased. Additionally, wild areas provide the benefits of water recharge and needed contrast to the realities of the built world and its stresses. Protecting existing habitats also includes the removal of invasive exotics that replace native plants and harm the local ecosystem.

Protect the old growth longleaf pine forest encompassed by the Greenwood Plantation. Greenwood is an iconic ecological and historic asset shared by Thomasville and Thomas County.



More direct access to the green spaces in Thomasville will highlight the rich natural resources of the City.



## Develop a Solar Energy Approach

A large number of sunny days makes Thomasville a good candidate to embrace solar energy technology as an alternative for energy use. The current code is very restrictive on what installations are allowable by right. While maintaining the historic character of the City is important, there may be areas outside of historic districts where solar panels are acceptable. There are also newer technologies that allow for solar cell installation on the roofs of existing structures even within historic districts that minimize, or eliminate their visibility to pedestrians on the street.

## Energy & Industry

The green economy does not resemble the previous generations' vision of industry. As city leaders seek to attract new business, they should be doing so with energy-saving and energy generating building and business models.

Many existing businesses and households want to retrofit their properties to be more efficient and more economical. While such innovation is occurring at the scale of the building, in addition, open spaces should be set aside for renewable energy generation such as solar farms.

## Establish a Water Management Plan

Thomasville's concerns over erosion show a need and opportunity to establish an approved and implemented water management plan. This will help to preserve the existing natural beauty for residents and visitors. Strategies to address this concern are outlined below:

- Look for opportunities to implement rainwater best management solutions (ex. bioswales along streets) where opportunities present themselves. For instance, when street improvements or infrastructure work is planned.
- Conduct watershed assessments to understand the issues and overall conditions affecting the creeks within and around the community.
- Implement stream management policy and related training to City employees and community members.
- Adopt stream protection and restoration policies as best practices.

Encourage rainwater management at the watershed level, to improve water quality and mitigate development impacts on streams.

## Cultural Environment

### Tourism

Tourism is partially dependent upon travelers seeking out what is unique to the region. Travelers often spend more time and money in a place that they perceive to be authentic, which has an identifiable character, and which offers them tastes, sounds, and sites that cannot be experienced elsewhere. The built environment contributes to some of this unique Thomasville character, but the natural environment is the complement.

Thomasville should work to build and further enhance the natural environment as a compliment to its unique historic character.

### Sustainability Task Force

A special Task Force can be created and charged with establishing economic, environmental and social goals for the next decade related to sustainability. These can then be followed up with specific steps in achieving these goals. There are some cities around the country, such as Santa Monica, California, that have achieved success with this model. Goal setting in this way helps focus efforts for the City and ensure opportunities for future generations.

### Santa Monica Office of Sustainability & the Environment

The Task Force on the Environment was established in 1991 by the Santa Monica City Council to advise City Council on environmental program and policy issues. The Task Force on the Environment was the driving force behind the development of Santa Monica's Sustainable City Plan in the early 1990s. Santa Monica has been a leader in setting goals for reducing resource consumption, like energy and water, and increasing the use of renewable energy.

## Urban Stormwater Transect

The urban stormwater management transect approach promotes traditional neighborhood design and at the same time develops an environmental friendly strategy to manage stormwater. A sample tool set for addressing stormwater runoff is introduced here. The tools are broken down into four categories: paving, channeling, storage and filtration. Each category has three options representing some typical urban and rural conditions. The tools can be used jointly at different scales.



### Paving

Paving, as a prominent feature in landscape, plays a large role in receiving, producing and directing stormwater runoff. Sturdy materials are often times less permeable. Paving in dense urban area require larger traffic load, thus less pervious.



T2-T4: Crushed stone/gravel/shell



T3-T4: Concrete Paver block



T3-T6: Concrete

### Channeling/Transport

Various techniques of channeling could be used to direct and control the flow of stormwater. Channeling tools should consider the amount of impervious surface and pedestrian movement. Some tools have the potential to create artful expressions with stormwater.



T1-T3: Vegetative/stone swale



T3-T4: French Drain



T3-T6: Planting strip trench

### Storage

Many kinds of tools could be applied to collect and store stormwater, storage tools are utilitarian for development process.



T2-T3: Retention basin



T4-T5: Landscape tree well



T4-T6: Pool & fountain

### Filtration

The goal of filtration tools is to mimic the natural system to reduce and remove the contaminants in stormwater. Filtration tools could also serve as an amenity when they are well integrated in design.



T1-T2: Filtration pond



T2-T3: Bioretention swale



T2-T6: Green roof

## GOALS & POLICIES

The City of Thomasville will continue to invest in its natural resources by encouraging climate sensitive design, improving cultural offerings to young families, and enhancing the natural settings in the City.

### Built Environment

#### Goal 7.1: Create walkable, livable places to increase efficiency, reduce the impact on Thomasville’s natural resources, and enhance economic competitiveness for Thomasville.

Policy 7.1.1: Utilize a public process to confirm and update the master plan vision set forth in the Comprehensive Plan for downtown Thomasville and its neighborhoods.

Policy 7.1.2: Implement incentives to concentrate development downtown and in neighborhood centers.

Policy 7.1.3: Require new development to include a connected street network.

Policy 7.1.4: Require new development to form public space by being close to the sidewalk and have an active ground floor.

#### Goal 7.2: Create a Thomasville Task Force charged with identifying economic, environmental, and social goals for the City.

Policy 7.2.1: Establish and appoint members to an environmental task force.

Policy 7.2.2: Determine and approve economic, environmental, and social goals for the City.

Policy 7.2.3: Determine and approve specific steps toward achieving the Task Force goals.

#### Goal 7.3: Encourage energy-independent and energy efficient development.

Policy 7.3.1: Encourage on-site, renewable energy.

Policy 7.3.2: Review requirements of solar energy installations and determine locations where more may be possible based on historic designations.

Policy 7.3.3: Identify possible technologies that are compatible with historic districts and structures.

Policy 7.3.4: Pursue complete streets, street connectivity, extensive bike and pedestrian trails, and carbon offsetting of unavoidable emissions. Reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) by making walkable, mixed use neighborhoods the basis of development and revitalization.

Policy 7.3.5: Pursue climate-responsive designs, increased building efficiency, and green building techniques including use of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) architectural criteria and LEED ND criteria for neighborhood designs.

Policy 7.3.6: Implement a city-wide recycling system. Explore best practices and most cost effective systems, considering a private company may be best suited to provide this service.

Policy 7.3.7: Increase the amount and diversity of markets for local products such as grocers, restaurants, schools, and farmers markets through the establishment of new programs such as: farm-to-table meals in schools, more frequent farmers markets, and Lean Urbanism approaches that allow for variances such as parking requirements and minimum sizes that make it difficult to start new businesses.



Policy 7.3.8: Map the area’s natural areas. Utilize the mapping as part of the development review process, and routinely update the City’s Geographic Information Systems (GIS) inventory of wetlands and their buffers, floodways and floodplains, aquifer recharge areas, woodlands, productive farmland and significant wildlife habitats.

Policy 7.3.9: Promote weatherization techniques such as adding weather strips on doorways, caulking, sealing and insulating doorways.

Policy 7.3.10: Promote durable materials and architectural designs with a long life.

Policy 7.3.11: Promote education programs, especially in schools, which stress the responsibility of each person to conserve energy resources.

Policy 7.3.12: Provide homeowner and builders guides for best practices to improve the energy efficiency of your home. Subjects could cover: energy efficient appliances, installing insulation in existing exterior walls, and HVAC system cleaning and maintenance.

Policy 7.3.13: Consider implementing periodic homeowner and contractor training on best practices.

Policy 7.3.14: Incentivize implementation of energy efficient measures in existing buildings.

#### **Goal 7.4: Mitigate urban heat islands.**

Policy 7.4.1: Encourage green roofs and high albedo surfaces (surfaces that reflect high amounts heat, reducing surface temperatures), both roof and non-roof.

Policy 7.4.2: Install vegetative ground cover and trees in planting strips and swales.

Policy 7.4.3: Minimize surface parking lots and the size of expanses of asphalt by using pervious materials and planting trees and ground cover in parking lots

### **Natural Environment**

#### **Goal 7.5: Protect, restore and expand native habitats to increase biodiversity throughout the city.**

Policy 7.5.1: Minimize the use of turf grass and encourage native landscaping.

Policy 7.5.2: Encourage the eradication of disruptive and invasive exotic flora and fauna.

Policy 7.5.3: Encourage the conservation, creation, or restoration of native habitat in urban areas such as public parks and publicly or privately owned lots.

Policy 7.5.4: Require that the majority of plants used on private lots, rights-of-way, and unbuilt portions of developments be native species, appropriate to the ecosystem viable for the particular site.

#### **Goal 7.6: Protect and enhance ecologically sensitive areas, plants and wildlife resources.**

Policy 7.6.1: Allow dense land uses and cluster developments that protect ecologically sensitive areas. Encourage “light imprint development” where development cannot be avoided adjacent to or within ecologically sensitive areas.

Policy 7.6.2: Use existing tools (PDR’s, conservation easements, zoning) or potential tools (land trusts, rural & critical lands programs) to encourage the protection of sensitive or undisturbed lands identified on the investment sector map.

Policy 7.6.2.1 Use these tools to encourage the retention of land that is in a natural, undisturbed condition. Plan new parks and open spaces to preserve ecologically sensitive areas.

Policy 7.6.2.2: Permanently establishment and maintenance of wildlife and nature preserves, particularly in areas that are home to threatened or endangered species of plants and animals.

Policy 7.6.3: During site development, preserve as many ponds, streams, marshes, tree stands, specimen trees and other significant natural areas as possible.

Policy 7.6.4: Locate structures as near street access as possible to reduce the overall paved driveway surface.

#### **Goal 7.7: Protect existing trees, diversify the tree canopy, and encourage best management principles for landscaping in Thomasville.**

Policy 7.7.1: Maintain and enhance municipal tree ordinances in order to prevent clear-cutting prior to development, to retain certain types and/or quantities of trees, and specify appropriate canopy levels of either existing or planted trees at the completion of the project.

Policy 7.7.2: Establish a tree planting and maintenance campaign throughout the city.

Policy 7.7.3: Encourage the use of native plant landscaping and street trees.

Policy 7.7.4: Diversify the street tree canopy with more species, replace dead trees and fill in the gaps in the streetscape.

Policy 7.7.5: Develop a program and incentives to protect the historic trees still remaining in the city and designate “tree save” areas.

Policy 7.7.6: Ensure that revised tree regulations, existing zoning, and subdivision regulations are consistent and complementary. In reviewing future development proposals, make sure that adequate landscape detail is required in the site plan.

**Goal 7.8: Develop a system of greenways along the City’s streams that serve to communities recreational and mobility goals, in addition to protecting water quality and property from degradation or damage due to flooding.**

Policy 7.8.1: Limit development of buildings in floodplains, wetlands and other natural and man made hazards.

Policy 7.8.2: Identify priority conservation zones, especially along waterways, and discourage development within these areas.

Policy 7.8.3: Create linear public open space that links parks, recreation facilities, schools and natural areas.

Policy 7.8.4: Update development regulations to provide for standards that address critical natural areas and that require usable open space.

**Goal 7.9: Encourage and promote public support for natural and cultural resource conservation and work toward coordinating resource management plans, as well as a parks and trails network that extends into the unincorporated county.**

Policy 7.9.1: Support the education of citizens, stakeholders, elected officials, and developers on the importance of resource conservation for Thomasville.

Policy 7.9.2: Coordinate citizen boards and authorities to plan for and advise on the protection of open space, corridors, and gateways.

**Water Management**

**Goal 7.10: Continue to develop policies that promote water reclamation, conservation, stormwater management, and access to a sustainable water supply.**

Policy 7.10.1: Incorporate recommendations from the Lower Flint Ochlockonee Regional Water Plan and continue to coordinate with regional water planning council to guide long-term use of water resources.

Policy 7.10.2: To support economy, protect public health and natural systems and to enhance the quality of life for citizens develop cost effective processes to re-use and reclaim water; use new technologies to expand capacity.

Policy 7.10.3: Develop policies that promote the development of surface water treatment, conveyance, and reclamation.

Policy 7.10.4: Develop standard best practices to be incorporated into public projects to pursue active and passive water harvesting techniques, including small-scale techniques, such as rain barrels or cisterns.

Policy 7.10.5: Maximize the use of native and drought resistant species in required landscaping policies.

Policy 7.10.6: Maximize the use of permeable surfaces where they can replace impermeable surfaces, such as conventional asphalt or concrete.

Policy 7.10.7: Locate development outside of flood plains and instead dedicate these spaces for suitable uses, such as recreational, agricultural, or open spaces.

Policy 7.10.8: Design necessary flood control facilities to blend with and enhance surrounding areas.

**Goal 7.11: Protect and enhance hydrological resources.**

Policy 7.11.1: Encourage practices to reduce erosion and sedimentation that may adversely affect local and regional watersheds.

Policy 7.11.2: Encourage changes in site planning and behavior to reduce both point-source and non-point source pollution.

Policy 7.11.3: Facilitate groundwater recharge through increased use of pervious surfaces, bioswales (natural low areas that are allowed to flood in storms), and other methods of sustainable design.

Policy 7.11.4: Promote water conservation in private and public development and buildings operation.

Policy 7.11.5: In buildings, encourage rainwater harvest and high efficiency water conservation fixtures and plumbing.

Policy 7.11.6: In site design, encourage native, drought-resistant landscaping that minimizes irrigation demand.

Policy 7.11.7: Enforce FEMA mitigation requirements on building in flood zones.

Policy 7.11.8: Maintain the quality of groundwater resources and improve as necessary to meet state and federal standards.

Policy 7.11.9: Establish a Developer Checklist that outlines goals and strategies for achieving stormwater runoff requirements and environmentally responsive design.

## Cultural Environment

### Goal 7.12: Increase the diversity of residents participating in local government.

Policy 7.12.1: Create more internship opportunities within various City of Thomasville departments.

Policy 7.12.2: Conduct outreach campaigns about City government through school, print and digital media, and special neighborhood events.

Policy 7.12.3: Conduct local neighborhood meetings that highlight opportunities for residents to participate in City government.

### Goal 7.13: Continue to strengthen and enhance cultural and arts opportunities.

Policy 7.13.1: Continue to promote local cultural institutions such as museums, historical societies, schools, artist groups, and arts programs.

Policy 7.13.2: Continue to collaborate with the Thomasville Center for the Arts to continue to enhance the quality of life for residents. Find ways to collaborate with other cultural establishments around the City.

Policy 7.13.3: Expand on public arts offerings through art installations, art festivals, free outdoor theatrical performances, or weekend art walks.

## Historic Preservation

### Goal 7.14: Continue to encourage and promote the preservation of Thomasville's historic resources, historic districts, and historic landmarks.

Policy 7.14.1: Continue to support ongoing preservation organizations and foundations, including Thomasville Landmarks, Inc., the Main Street Advisory Board, and the Thomasville Historic Preservation Commission through governmental actions and activity.

Policy 7.14.2: Identify, seek, and encourage the use of State and Federal preservation incentive programs.

Policy 7.14.3: Regularly update the contextual survey of the City's structures and residences over 50 years old.

Policy 7.14.4: Explore and capitalize on any parallel benefits (economic, marketing, administrative, etc.) of similar resources and markets, e.g., natural resource protection, active and passive recreation, retail, greenspace, parks, trails, pedestrian routes, rails, biking, equestrian, and scenic corridors, arts and antiques.

Policy 7.14.5: Continue to celebrate local history and historic resources through the development of programs and events similar to Main Street's award-winning Victorian Christmas event.

Policy 7.14.6: Identify and pursue funding and grants appropriate to all feasible economic opportunities available for capitalizing on historic preservation.

Policy 7.14.7: Support the preservation and educational efforts of local historical, cultural, and preservation groups.

Policy 7.14.8: Promote the adaptive reuse of historic resources.

Policy 7.14.9: Establish Thomasville's unique neighborhood churches as institutional anchors from which to build upon future planning efforts.



## Heritage Tourism

### Goal 7.15: Continue to capitalize on the economic benefits of historic preservation.

- Policy 7.15.1: Quantify the importance of historic preservation beyond quality of life and specifically in terms of heritage tourism.
- Policy 7.15.2: Educate residents, businesses, and public officials regarding the benefits of heritage tourism.
- Policy 7.15.3: Work with the Chamber of Commerce and the Main Street program to maximize and market the potential use of heritage resources for the film industry.

## County Coordination

### Goal 7.16: Continue to maintain progress with goals set forth in the Thomas County Comprehensive Plan

- Policy 7.16.1: Review the Thomas County Comprehensive Plan, measure progress and designate remaining tasks to appropriate agencies.
- Policy 7.16.2: Establish regular coordination meetings with County government for services and efforts to develop land use and transportation policies that protect the ecological, historical, and cultural resources and economic contributions of Thomas County’s quail hunting properties.
- Policy 7.16.3: Continue cooperation with the county to conserve, appropriately use, or protect unique vegetative communities located outside of the City.
- Policy 7.16.4: Collaborate with Thomas County to protect the county’s four designated scenic roads: New Hope Road, Twelve Mile Post Road, Mill Pond Road, and Glasgow Road. While these roads are located in the county, they are an essential component of the distinctive character and charm of Thomasville and are an important aspect of heritage tourism.
- Policy 7.16.5: Collaborate with Thomas County to develop land use and transportation policies that protect the ecological, historical, and cultural resources and economic contributions of Thomas County’s quail hunting properties.

### Goal 7.17: Manage and protect Thomasville’s and Thomas County’s water resources in accordance to the Lower Flint Ochlockonee Watershed Regional Water Plan in order to meet the current and future needs of the county’s residents, economy, and natural environment.

- Policy 7.17.1: Limit the type and degree of development in high recharge areas and soils with pollution susceptibility.
- Policy 7.17.2: Ensure adequate wastewater infrastructure in designated growth areas.
- Policy 7.17.3: Reuse “grey water” from both public and private treatment systems.
- Policy 7.17.4: Adopt regulations, as needed, that promote the conservation of water.
- Policy 7.17.5: Minimize any detrimental effects on wetlands from the extension of infrastructure.
- Policy 7.17.6: Protect those water-dependent habitats that are critical for the survival of fish and wildlife.

### Goal 7.18: Protect the quality and quantity of the city and county’s water resources.

- Policy 7.18.1: Ensure that the discharge of treated water from public and private sewage treatment systems does not pose a health risk or harm the environment.
- Policy 7.18.2: Ensure that development and industrial and agricultural activities do not pose a public health risk or harm the environment.
- Policy 7.18.3: Limit the intensity and types of development whose runoff or emissions might adversely harm surface or groundwater resources.
- Policy 7.18.4: Site any new waste and wastewater disposal facilities such that their risk to ground and surface water is minimized.
- Policy 7.18.5: Explore participation in Water First, Adopt-A-Watershed, the Georgia Source Water Assessment Plan (SWAP), and other similar programs.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

Thomasville possesses a broad array of public facilities, which include both attractive and high-functioning municipal buildings and successful public open spaces. These facilities vary in size and are supported, owned, and shared by all.

### Civic Buildings

From the proud civic buildings to ample sidewalks and street trees the past generations of Thomasville designed the City with quality public spaces. Libraries, post offices and government offices are anchors of the Thomasville Downtown, bringing in people who add liveliness and viability to the commercial main streets.

#### **Thomasville Municipal Building & Auditorium**

The Thomasville Municipal Building and Auditorium is located in the heart of Downtown Thomasville at the corner of Jackson and Crawford streets. It houses government offices, an historic 1,000 seat auditorium, a visitor center and meeting spaces.

#### **Thomas County Historical Courthouse**

Located at the center of a square between Broad and Madison streets, the Thomas County Historical Courthouse contains the Thomas County Supreme Court as well as the Thomas County Tax Assessor’s Office. An additional branch for the Thomas County Probate Court is located near the intersection of Madison and Monroe streets.

#### **Thomas County Public Library**

Serving Thomas County, the Thomas County Library is headquartered in Thomasville, across Madison Street from the Courthouse behind a parking lot. Thomas County Library offers a variety of free programs for adults, teenagers, and children, including local author visits, theatre performances, and classes for learning to use computers and the internet.

The Thomas County Library houses a collection of over 75,000 books, videos, and CDs for people of all ages. There is a Genealogy and Local History collection, which includes census records, family histories, access to the Heritage Quest database and many other unique resources. In addition to the main library, there are branches in the surrounding communities of Boston, Coolidge, Meigs, Ochlocknee, and Pavo.

#### **United States Post Office**

The U.S. Post Office in Thomasville is located near the intersection of Broad and Monroe streets. This location operates Monday through Saturday. The building was opened in 1962 and is of a brutalist style typical of the time. It doesn’t fit with the charming character of other Thomasville civic buildings.

#### **Thomasville Department of Labor**

Located near the intersection of Broad and Monroe streets, the Thomasville Department of Labor building provides services for residents and businesses including unemployment benefits, job search assistance, recruitment assistance, and job fairs.



## Thomasville Community Resource Center

The Thomasville Resource Center is located near the intersection of Varnedoe and Davis streets. It opened with funding from Jane Fonda and other organizations with the mission “to empower the youth and families of Thomas County and surrounding counties through alternative community-based programs built on a foundation of prevention, education, and preparation.”

## Education

Schools are an essential part of the City and the responsibility of educating children may be the most important task undertaken by government and community. For this reason communities are largely defined by the quality of their school system. A successful school system adds tremendous value to the community’s image and this translates into increased investment and higher property taxes.

### Thomasville City School System

Thomasville City Schools have been successful academically and rank high in the region with respect to achievement results. They offer a variety of extracurricular activities such as athletics, dance, visual and theatrical arts and music, and academic and career-oriented competitions. Embedded in the academic program is a menu of services that meet the needs of individual students – from instruction for gifted and talented and virtual education, to career-centered programs and services for special-needs students. At the heart of the system are teachers and support staff that truly care about helping students be successful. In addition, the City schools are frequent partners with the City on all sorts of projects, specifically planing and design charrettes which help to engage students and show how students can have an impact on their city.

The Thomasville City School System was chartered in 1900 as an Independent Public School System. Approximately 3,100 students are currently enrolled in five schools within the district. The district is comprised of three PreK-5<sup>th</sup> grade elementary schools, one 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school, and one 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade high school. The Scholars Academy for grades 6-12 operates as a school-within-a-school program and is housed on the middle school campus. These schools are:

- Harper Elementary School
- Jerger Elementary
- Scott Elementary School
- MacIntyre Park Middle School
- Scholars Academy
- Thomasville High School



MacIntyre Park Middle School



## Parks & Open Space

Ideally, each neighborhood would have at least some open space within walking distance of all its residents. This is true in many of Thomasville's neighborhoods, but there are some that are currently lacking access to public facilities. Paradise Park, Cherokee Lake Park, Balfour Park, Francis Weston Park, MacIntyre Park, Northside Park, Remington Park and Varnedoe Park are well integrated into neighborhoods and serve different users and uses successfully. They serve as models for future public spaces as well.

Thomasville has a range of active recreational parks and smaller neighborhood parks to provide access to numerous types of active and passive recreation for Thomasville residents. These parks may simply be a green space with an area to sit, or they may have some small active recreational equipment such as a small jungle gym. Neighborhood greens and pocket parks are very informal spaces that may or may not be maintained by the City. These greens are informal with some park furniture, trees, and perhaps a small area for children. Active recreational parks are larger parks, tend to be more formal, and typically have programmed recreation and more elaborate playground equipment for children. These tend to have a walking or biking draw of ten minutes before people will choose to drive. Neighborhood parks are smaller, tend to be informal and may contain community gardens, free play areas, and some equipment for active recreation.

## Active Recreational Parks

### Cherokee Lake Park & Thomasville Rose Garden

Cherokee Lake Park contains a one-mile paved and lighted walking path, including several exercise stations, that winds around the lake with several piers and sitting areas along the way. Fishing and small boats are allowed on the lake (small electric motors only). Several covered pavilions, grills, restrooms and a playground with modern equipment for the children can be found.

The park is adjacent to the Thomasville Rose Garden, which blooms from early spring to late fall. The large, main covered pavilion (Pavilion #1) and the Gazebo by the Rose Garden are both available for reservations for special events and is a popular location for small weddings.

This Park functions as a trailhead for the Thomasville Community Trail, which traverses the Park on its way to Paradise Park and Thomasville High School.



Cherokee Lake Park

**Paradise Park**

This historic, 13-acre park was known in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s as ‘Yankee Paradise’ Park when it provided the frontage to one of the town’s most glamorous Victorian hotels. Wintering northerners would enjoy the park on foot and on bicycles and would listen to famous bands play at the bandshell. The historic houses along the edges of Paradise Park can be found in the Self-Guided Tour of Historic Thomasville. The park is equipped with playground equipment, a lighted gazebo, grills, covered shelters, and picnic tables. This Park functions as a trailhead for the Thomasville Community Trail, which traverses the Park on its way to the Downtown Amphitheater and Cherokee Lake Park.

**MacIntyre Park**

MacIntyre Park is located in a residential area. This park is scenic in the spring with lots of blooms and old trees. It has playground equipment, picnic tables and a frisbee disc golf course. This Park functions as a trailhead for the Thomasville Community Trail, which traverses the Park on its way to Northside Park and Thomasville High School.

In 2016 the Park played host to a four day community design charrette. As part of the Park’s 2018 Vision Plan, numerous improvements were planned, with upgrades to the playground having already been implemented.

**Remington Park**

The City of Thomasville and the YMCA partner to provide and organize the athletic events for Thomasville/Thomas County children and adults at Remington Park. The fields and lights can be reserved through the YMCA. Picnic tables, grills, an exercise course, bike racks, playground areas, skateboarding, covered basketball areas, and restrooms are available. Two tennis courts and three pickleball courts were recently added to Remington Park. This Park functions as a trailhead and terminus for the Thomasville Community Trail as it makes its way outward from Thomasville High School.

**Francis Weston Park**

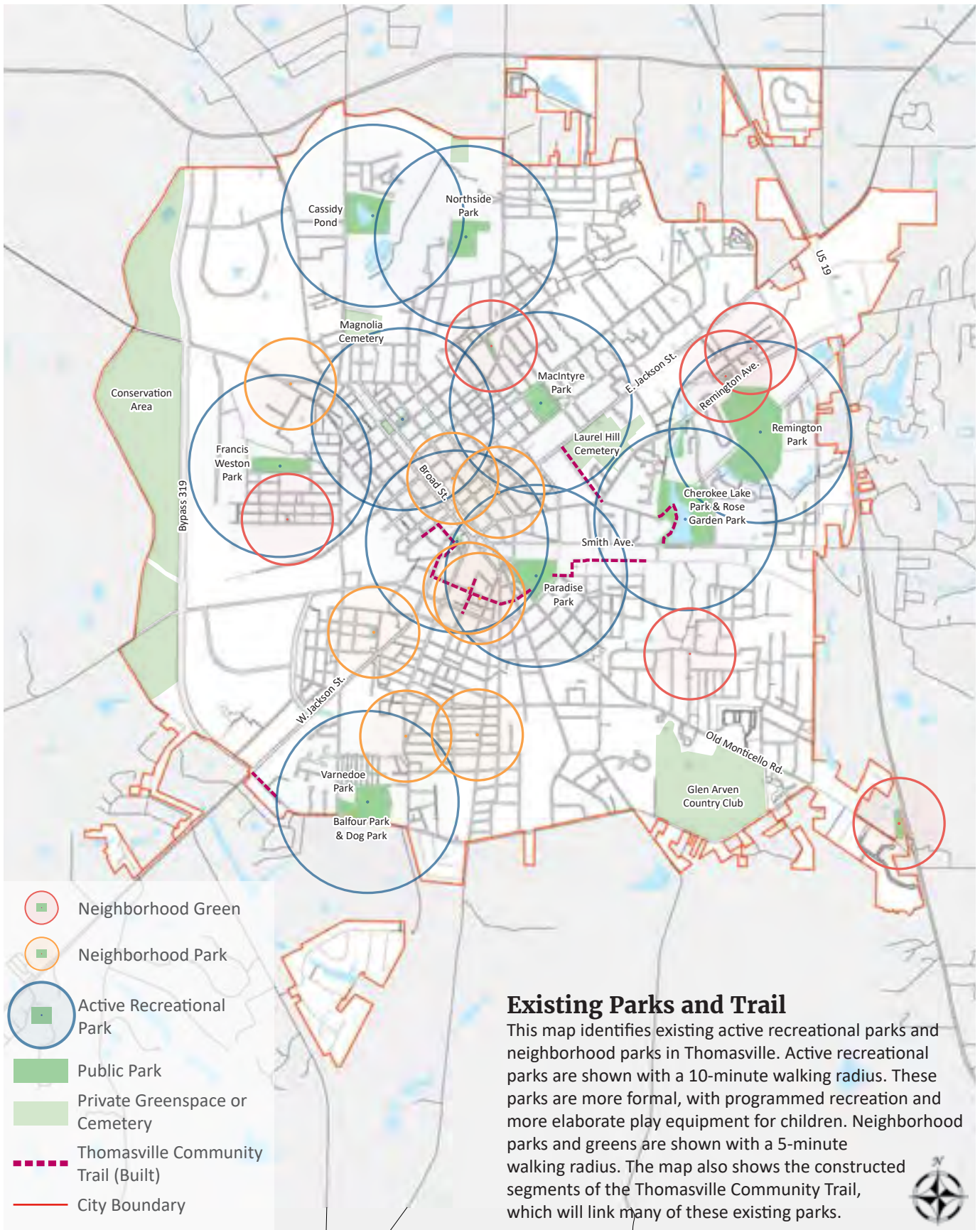
Francis Weston Park is located along the northern boundary of Dewey City. It has a baseball field, basketball court, playground area, sheltered picnic area, tables, grills, and restrooms. The track that is adjacent to the park is associated with the Douglass High School Alumni Association. The pavilion at this park is available for reservations. This Park will function as a trailhead and possible terminus for the Thomasville Community Trail, which will traverse the Park on its way to the Clay Street YMCA and Downtown Amphitheater.

In 2017 the community around Weston Park played host to a three day design charrette. As part of the 2018 Park Vision Plan, numerous improvements have been planned, with upgrades to the playground having already been implemented.



Paradise Park







**Varnedoe Park**

Varnedoe Park is a basketball park. The baseball and softball fields are operated by the Thomas University Nighthawks men’s baseball and women’s softball teams and are unavailable for public use when home games are scheduled. Lights and restrooms are available during games.

**Balfour Park & the City of Thomasville Dog Park**

Balfour Park located on South Pinetree Boulevard between US Highway 319 and Fletcher Street. The park is equipped with a covered shelter, picnic tables, grill, playground equipment, tennis courts, exercise stations and restrooms. Adjacent to the park is the Thomasville Dog Park, with separate pens for small, medium and large dogs, each with running water and an obstacle course. Dog waste disposal bags are supplied for convenience. This park will function as the southern trailhead for the Thomasville Community Trail, which will traverse the park on its way to Fletcherville and Thomas University.

**Cassidy Pond**

At Cassidy Pond, fishing is possible along the pier, and a sheltered picnic area is available. Boats and alcoholic beverages are not allowed. This Park has been considered for expansion towards Northside Park, creating a much larger facility with extensive nature trails, BMX course, disc golf, and archery range.

**Northside Park**

Northside Park is a 23 acre park with active recreation including baseball fields, a basketball court, tennis courts, and restrooms as well as 16 acres of undeveloped woodlands. This park is planned to be connected to the Thomasville Community Trail via Mitchell Street to MacIntyre Park. An alternate trail route would connect Northside Park to Cassidy Pond and then down Cassidy Road and Madison Street back toward the Downtown.

**Country Oaks Municipal Golf Course**

Country Oaks Golf Course is a municipal golf course owned and operated by the City of Thomasville. It is located 4 miles from Thomasville on Georgia Highway 122 and is open year-round. Country Oaks is located in a wooded setting accented by three lakes and surrounded by areas of wild azaleas, dogwoods, pines, oaks, and magnolias. The course is a par 72.

**Downtown Amphitheater & Thomasville Community Trailhead**

Located at “the Bottom” in Thomasville near the intersection of West Jackson Street and Stevens Street, this park is comprised of a terraced green space with Live Oak trees and an amphitheater. Community events including concerts, fireworks celebrations, and festivals are hosted here. This Park serves as the downtown trailhead for the Thomasville Community Trail.

Please note that visioning for the space began during a 2014 charrette, where it was determined that the abandoned lot in the middle of the block could be transformed into a first-class performance venue, and anchor for “the Bottom.”



Country Oaks Municipal Golf Course

## Neighborhood Parks

### The Big Oak & Gazebo (Elizabeth Ireland Poe Park)

At the corner of Monroe and Crawford Streets in the Downtown Historic District, this small park is home to Thomasville's oldest and most cherished natural landmark, The Big Oak. The Big Oak Park is a popular location for small events and weddings, and the gazebo is available for reservations. The Big Oak Park also has a unique amenity in a camera located across from the Big Oak so anyone can get their picture taken at this historic spot by calling a number and retrieving their picture online.

### Flipper Park

Flipper Park is a small historic mini-park / play lot located on Jerger Street between Broad Street and Crawford Street. It is split down the center with a creek and has basketball courts on one side and play equipment, benches, parking, and a picnic area on the other. Small improvements to this park could have a big impact on its perception. Flipper Park should be considered for a community workshop to discuss improvements. Some improvements suggested by the Park Programming Report include an improved park entrance, new shade trees, cleaning up the underbrush around the creek, and adding a walking trail and pedestrian bridge over the creek to connect the two sides of the park together.

### Additional Neighborhood Parks

Additional Neighborhood Parks include:

- Ethal Flowers Neel Park
- Victoria Park
- Victoria Place Pocket Park
- Wayside Park

## Park Maintenance

The maintenance and oversight for Thomasville's natural infrastructure is currently divided between three entities. The Department of Public Works' Urban Crew maintains the downtown planting and roses; the Recreation Crew maintains Remington Park and other active recreational facilities; another crew is responsible for the remaining not covered by the previous two organizations.

## Street Trees

In 2013, Thomasville Landmarks, Inc. contracted with a certified arborist to conduct a street tree inventory on certain streets within Thomasville. In all, 818 trees were identified. Most of these trees were larger which indicates that a majority are aging trees. Nearly half were Live Oak (42%), followed by Dogwood (35%), Crepe Myrtle (9%), and Magnolia (4%). Nearly all of the trees in Thomasville's right-of-way were growing underneath power lines.

## Private Greenspace

In addition to the public parks, Thomasville has the private Glen Arven Country Club, conservation land, and several cemeteries located throughout the City.



Downtown Amphitheater

## Fire Rescue Department

Thomasville Fire Rescue is an all-hazards preparedness fire and rescue service. Services include fire prevention, life safety, public education, fire investigation, hazard risk reduction, emergency medical response, rescuing trapped or endangered persons from any life-endangering threat, and protecting the community from the hazards associated with fires and uncontrolled releases of hazardous and toxic materials.

The fire protection services of Thomasville Fire Rescue, as rated by the insurance industry, are an ISO Class 2 Public Protection Classification (PPC). This top rating puts the City of Thomasville in a special group of communities in the country as a part of the top 2% of American communities for fire protection.

Key elements considered when evaluating a fire department include response capabilities (deployment analysis), which includes adequate staffing of fire service personnel on engine crews and ladder companies, fire station distribution (location and coverage), appropriate apparatus and equipment, training, water supplies, organizational structure, communications, community risk reduction, and building/fire prevention codes and their enforcement.

Thomasville Fire Rescue has a long-term commitment to excellence. An ISO Class 2 rating saves our residents significant money on their homeowners insurance and results in an even greater savings to our commercial businesses and industries. This is one more reason for families and business owners to locate to the City of Thomasville.

The Fire Marshall is often consulted to ensure Thomasville remains the amazing small town it is while also accommodating life safety. Thomasville’s interconnected grid, medium sized streets, on-street parking, and tight turning radii allow Thomasville to continue to build great places whose design can accommodate fire vehicles, but is not dictated by them. Considerations are balanced in regards to turning radii, street width, size of apparatus, etc., as streets are reconsidered.

### Fire Stations & Equipment Locations

#### *Thomasville Station 1*

100 South Crawford Street | Engine Company 1, Ladder Company: Tower 1, Rescue 1, Commander 1, Car 3 (Fire Marshal), Car 4 (Support Services), and Car 5 (Fire Chief)

#### *Thomasville Station 2:*

750 South Pinetree Boulevard | Engine Company 2, and Car 2 (Chief of Training)

#### *Thomasville Rescue Company 2:*

1202 Remington Avenue (located at Thomas County Fire Station 15) | Rescue 2

## Police Department

The City of Thomasville Police Department is located at 921 Smith Avenue. Their mission is to improve and maintain the quality of life within the community by working together to achieve a common goal, “A safe and secure city.”

The Thomasville Police Department is a CALEA certified organization. The City participates in crime mapping, bike registration, and neighborhood watch programs.

The city should monitor its police calls and incidences of crime in neighborhoods and commercial areas in order to identify and target areas of high crime activity for improvement.

The SRO/Community Relations team is responsible for many community and youth related programs.

- Junior Law Enforcement Academy Program
- D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education)
- G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Learning)
- P.R.I.D.E. (Parents Reducing Incidents of Driver Error)
- Bullying Program
- Halloween Safety Program/Tips for Treats
- Safe-t-Ville
- Driver’s Safety
- Stranger Danger



Fire Station



## Public Utilities

The City of Thomasville is a public power community, meaning that the City is the utility provider for all residents. This structure is an asset to the community for multiple reasons, including affordable energy costs, local customer service, and a focus on local goals. Perhaps most importantly, residents gain additional benefit from their utility payments when revenue generated from the service cycles back into community improvements, rather than heading off to a corporation headquartered elsewhere. Revenue generated by this City service in Thomasville helps fund improvements such as new Police and Fire Rescue equipment, improved roadways and sidewalks, and public park enhancements within the community.

### Community Network Services

#### Cable, Telephone, High-Speed Internet

CNS is the local provider for cable, telephone & high-speed internet. In 1995, the City of Thomasville began building a fiber optic network to serve local schools, libraries, businesses and hospitals with telecommunications and internet services. After seeing success in this limited offering, it was identified that the community at large would be able to benefit from access to high-speed internet. In 1998, the City of Thomasville began construction of a new high-speed, fiber-optic network and in 1999, CNS, or Community Network Services, was created.

In 1997, the Cities of Cairo, Camilla, Moultrie and Thomasville joined forces in order to better serve the citizens of each community. This multi-city partnership, titled the South Georgia Governmental Services Authority (SGGSA), enabled CNS to further expand its services to communities that were in need of high-speed internet, television and telecommunications services, and, in 2001, these services were provided to all SGGSA cities.

### Electricity

The Thomasville Utilities Department provides electrical service through the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia's (MEAG) statewide transmission and power generation system. Thomasville can reliably serve any size electric load while maintaining a lower cost of service than most of its competitors.

The Utilities Department provides security lighting services to property owners where the low voltage distribution lines of the city are close.

### Landfill

The City of Thomasville operates a joint City/County solid waste disposal facility for all of Thomas County and accepts additional waste from regional governments. The landfill is permitted by the Environmental Protection Division of the State of Georgia, under Federal Subtitle D requirements. The permit allows for disposal of Municipal Solid Waste, Non-Hazardous Industrial Waste, and Construction/Demolition Waste. No hazardous waste is permitted. An inert burial area is operated for materials that qualify as inert.

The landfill has been in operation since 1975 and has been continuously upgraded in order to meet environmental regulations. Adequate land exists for the continued operation of the landfill for more than 20 years.

### Natural Gas

The City of Thomasville Natural Gas Department is dedicated to serving the citizens of Thomasville by providing safe, efficient and clean-burning natural gas as an additional energy source.

The City of Thomasville owns and operates its own natural gas distribution system, which serves approximately 2,800 residential customers. As a result, natural gas service is readily available to new and existing utility customers. A wide variety of commercial customers, including hospitals, fast food restaurants, dry cleaners, retail stores, government and educational facilities, and large, industrial/manufacturing entities are also serviced.

### Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)

The City of Thomasville is successfully undergoing a compressed natural gas fleet conversion. During the first year alone, after converting only a portion of its sanitation fleet, the City saved approximately \$70,225 by fueling with CNG instead of gasoline or diesel.

With this type of success, the City began looking for ways to extend these benefits to the community. The answer was clear: Build Thomasville's first publicly available CNG fueling station — the Refuel CNG Station. When residents use the Refuel CNG Station their money remains in Thomasville, helping to fund other improvements.

The benefits of CNG go beyond the wallet. Choosing the more cost-effective and cleaner-burning CNG as an alternative fueling source is a more environmentally sensitive option because it greatly reduces vehicle emissions. It also allows the City to reduce dependence on foreign oils by using its own readily available supply of natural gas.

## Solid Waste

The City of Thomasville Solid Waste Department provides the following services:

- **Residential Services** - for residents of the City of Thomasville & residents of Thomas County (if desired);
- **Commercial Services** - for the City of Thomasville and Thomas County;
- **Roll-Off Containers** - for the City of Thomasville, Thomas County, & surrounding cities; and
- **Recycling** - The City of Thomasville Utilities Solid Waste Department has two self drop-off recycling centers for the convenience of residents.

## Wastewater

Current wastewater service within the corporate city limits is made available to new customers for a connection fee according to user type and location. If wastewater service is not available for new development, the developer is responsible for the extension of a public sewer system, and the City will inspect and maintain it after successful installation.

## Wastewater Treatment Plant

Thomasville’s Wastewater Treatment Plant is a 6.4 MGD Tertiary Treatment Facility that discharges cleaned effluent to the Oquina Creek, a tributary to the Ochlocknee River. The Plant staff must meet stringent NPDES requirement and are regulated by the Federal (EPA) and State Governments (EPD). Certified Wastewater Professionals take pride in ensuring that the greatest natural resource is protected both now and in the future. The plant gives tours of its facility to various groups and ages and is proud to show citizens the importance and means required to protect Georgia’s waterways.

## Water

One of Thomasville’s most abundant natural resources is its supply of artesian water, two hundred feet below ground. The City has used water from this source since 1884. The capacity of the City water system is 15 million gallons per day, and during the last decade, water usage has been about one and a half billion gallons per year, without affecting the water level.

## Mobile App

The City of Thomasville has launched a mobile app to make doing business easier and more convenient. The app contains convenient features such as:

- Viewing/paying utility bills;
- Payment history; and
- Account usage.



Thomasville Water Tower

# COMMUNITY CONCERNS

## Set A Sustainable Example

Public facilities should set an example of sustainability for the City's residents. Both public spaces and buildings can be models of energy efficiency and demonstrate how to minimize the City's environmental footprint. Sustainable design principles should be the norm in any new construction or remodelling project. Such energy-efficiency measures will help create public facilities that are less burdensome to maintain and operate over the lifespan of the building.

The City of Thomasville should continue to convert their vehicle fleet to CNG to save money and be less reliant on foreign oil.

## New Development Should Contribute To The Community

Residents expressed concern that landowners and developers help pay more proportionally for the traffic, new services, and additional infrastructure that new development inevitably leads to.

## Improve Existing Parks

Residents were encouraged by recent public processes to focus on individual parks and improve them. Residents would like to see the process continue until all of the existing parks are optimized. Residents expressed the desire for each park to have its own identity and offer different and new amenities. Some ideas for newer items included a trampoline park, outdoor pizza oven, splash pads, community gardens, and miniature golf. The cost to maintaining parks can be significant, so each park should be utilized to its upmost potential and benefit to the community.

## Consider Lost Creek & Its Use

There are several impressions of Lost Creek, how it is used, what its use will be, and who maintains it. These range from feelings that the area is forgotten by the City, to a sense that the groups in favor of promoting Lost Creek are unsure of what is wanted. A series of meetings, workshops, or other formats to exchange information and ideas will help to clearly identify the problem and any misunderstandings while potentially determining future uses.

## Carefully Expand Park System

Although a priority should remain on improving existing parks, residents expressed a desire to also increase access to parks so that the majority of residents in Thomasville lived within a five minute walk of a neighborhood park, or a ten minute walk of an active recreational park. Completing the Thomasville Community Trail will provide greater access to existing parks. Strategic locations should be considered for the acquisition of land to create small neighborhood parks in areas that do not already have access to parks, perhaps as part of new development applications. The decision to create a new park should be carefully considered and potentially born out via new development standards for civic space, a park impact fee, or even the beginnings of a land trust or critical lands program.

## Open School Yards to the Public

School yards offer an important green resource to their communities. School yards should be made accessible to the community after school hours and on weekends. This will instantly increase the amount of accessible active recreational park space to the community.



Working in the Rose Garden



## Implement & Expand Trail

The Thomasville Community Trail is a city-wide trail system currently in place in sections throughout the City. Existing portions, especially at Cherokee Lake Park, are well-used, and residents widely support its completion. The finished trail will provide much-needed connectivity throughout the community by adding bicycle and pedestrian access to downtown and community parks. Additional benefits will include improved community health through access to active recreation; and overall quality of life and livability. Both existing and potential new residents are increasingly looking for access to green spaces and trails when they choose where to live; this trail will be an attractive amenity for both of these groups.

## Continue to Pursue a Public Input Strategy for Parks

Public enthusiasm for a project increases when the public is involved and has a say in how spaces will be used. This also tends to lead planners and designers to program and design spaces that reflect the needs of the community which will help ensure that the parks and green spaces will be used as envisioned.

## Tree Planting & Biodiversity

Given that the tree population of Thomasville tends to be older and is made up primarily of Live Oaks, stakeholders raised concerns that there should be a strategy for replanting and diversifying the street trees in anticipation of future replacement. This strategy could also be used to guide tree planting in neighborhoods that currently do not have trees.

## Design Water Features that Address Erosion Concerns

Erosion around Thomasville was an environmental concern that was discussed several times. This was discussed in detail during the MacIntyre Park Design Charrette. This was the MacIntyre Park Design Charrette. Recommendations are captured at a local, District, and City-wide scale as part of the MacIntyre Park Vision Plan (2018) which includes utilizing water features in parks that help avoid erosion while also helping to enhance the natural infrastructure in Thomasville.

Though not specifically related, the most stunning comment made during this charrette was by a City Engineer who said, “a majority of the City’s stormwater infrastructure is old and will likely fail over the next 10 years. The only plan right now is to address as it happens.” Lessening the load and addressing erosion would obviously be a critical step for moving forward.

## Simplify Maintenance of Public Natural Infrastructure

Specializing can be a method to encourage efficiency in operations. However, as Thomasville grows, the importance of the programming, maintenance, and consistent vision will become more important. A “Parks Planner” or Department can help to establish this coordination and vision for the park system in Thomasville. Having a central authority, rather than a board, can enable decisions to be made more quickly and improve the response to community visions and future workshops.

## Encourage Community Health Through Gardens

Planting community gardens can have a multi-level affect on the community. They can encourage healthy eating by providing easy access to unprocessed foods. Community centers or online resources can be used in combination with these gardens to teach recipes and other techniques for using the plants in the gardens. Community Gardens help to teach children about different plants, how to care for them, and how they are used. They can also be gathering places where people of different ages and backgrounds can interact, which encourages emotional health. The City of Thomasville passed an ordinance in 2017 to allow Community Gardens on vacant lots throughout the City.

## Crime Prevention

The perceived safety of the City’s trails, parks, and natural areas can be improved, especially after dark. Natural surveillance can be heightened by having adjacent buildings face the space rather than turn their backs or sides to the space. Porches, doors, windows, and balconies can help to activate a space even after dark. Landscape maintenance can also contribute to a sense of safety. “Limbing up” trees and trimming understory plantings at the edges of parks and trail heads can help visibility and natural surveillance. Right-sized luminaires or lanterns are also an important part of crime prevention.

## Public Utilities

Residents are happy that the City is the provider of utilities. This allows local, sustainable resources to be utilized by the City which make it self-sufficient.

There is a feeling that the fiber optic/broadband network is Thomasville is no longer state of the art which can hurt the City when trying to attract small and freelance businesses.

# STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING COMMUNITY CONCERNS

## Civic Buildings & Community Spaces

Civic institutions such as schools, libraries, YMCAs and community buildings should play a crucial role in new development and revitalizing neighborhoods. When the City needs a new building, it should consider the possibility of locating in a neighborhood center, where the building could bring life to the community it serves.

Civic buildings which are sited memorably can be the centerpiece of a neighborhood. They can be landmarks which make the community intrinsically different and therefore memorable. For example, neighborhoods in Thomasville identify with the schools within them. Throughout the country the movement toward smaller, community-based schools is expanding. For Thomasville, small schools represent the maintenance of a tradition.

Though churches are not civic in the strict sense of the word, they also provide community gathering places. Thomasville has numerous churches spread throughout the City. These are assets to the community, neighborhoods, and neighborhood centers. They can play a critical role in revitalizing neighborhoods and their centers.

The City is currently pursuing several exciting civic space community initiatives:

### Victoria Park Neighborhood

A vibrant new neighborhood that blends seamlessly with Thomasville's downtown core, Victoria Park is a useful model for new infill development in Thomasville. The combination of parks, front porches, and a mix of residents creates a traditional community reminiscent of days past. Sidewalks and direct access to the Thomasville Community Trail provides every resident easy walking distance to local employers, schools, entertainment, and popular shops and restaurants.

### West Jackson Streetscape

After months of engaging with community members and actively listening to their ideas and concerns, a concept for the West Jackson Streetscape project emerged. The City's primary goal with this project has been to set a new precedent for soliciting public input regarding major projects. The conceptual plan, which will enhance this vibrant area of downtown Thomasville, was unveiled to a crowd of over sixty community members at an open meeting at Trinity Anglican Church.

Changes to traffic flow patterns, improved pedestrian and bicycle access, on-street parking, and overall improved aesthetics are planned for the West Jackson Street corridor, a move City officials believe will translate into an economic boost for businesses and property owners.

## Sign Ordinance and Manual

The City of Thomasville first began working towards improving the existing sign ordinance in 2014. The process has involved multiple revisions, public planning sessions, and numerous opportunities for public input.

The purpose of the new sign ordinance and manual is to establish standards for signage within the City that protect and promote health, safety, and welfare while allowing and encouraging creativity, effectiveness, and flexibility in design and use. The new signage standards will promote the economic viability of businesses in the community by providing a variety of available sign types that reinforce the City's aesthetic and historic character.

## Downtown Parking Study

The City of Thomasville Planning Department contracted with the Florida State University Department of Urban and Regional Planning (the "FSU Research Team") during Fall 2015 to develop a Downtown Parking Study (the "Study"). The Study consisted of three main tasks:

1. To identify and assess Downtown Thomasville's baseline parking conditions,
2. Analyze the utilization rate of the identified parking, and
3. Analyze and provide guidance on whether additional parking is needed to support two proposed event venues in Downtown Thomasville.

The report contains the final results of the FSU Research Team's work, and includes recommendations on potential parking strategies for the City of Thomasville to consider moving forward.

## Education

Where possible, school recreational fields should be made open to the public to double as weekend and after-hours community and recreational centers.

Schools should be located where they can most conveniently serve the areas where students live. Previous generations of school children in Thomasville typically walked to school, today, most do not. Thomasville has a tradition of small, well-sited schools. Although Thomasville has small neighborhood schools they do not always serve the students closest to them due to School Choice.

Thomasville should continue to do what they can to provide services to local children and to encourage walking and biking to school whenever possible. A great example of this is at Harper Elementary School, where students could walk to the Amphitheater for their graduation ceremony. Students from that school also walked downtown to participate in the charrette and offer input into the creation of this plan.

## Civic Building Placement

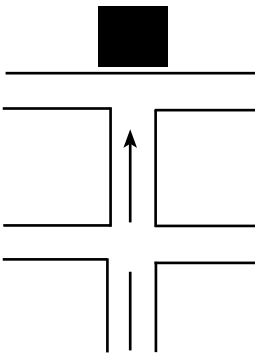
Civic buildings should be placed prominently and should have grander proportions and materials than their surrounding urban fabric. Approaches include locating public buildings at the ends of streets, across greens, or at the center of greens. Public buildings can be relatively small if placed strategically in the public view. Sites for civic purposes can be reserved even before there is a need for them to be constructed. The uses of these buildings may change over time as the needs of the community evolve.

Thomasville has a tradition of grand and properly sited civic buildings like the Former County Courthouse. However, some more recent civic buildings fail to enhance the public realm in the same manner. A prime example would be the new County library which despite a prominent location directly opposite the County Courthouse, is sited behind a large surface parking lot. Future civic buildings should strive to enhance the public realm and be properly sited to have the prominence in the community that they deserve.



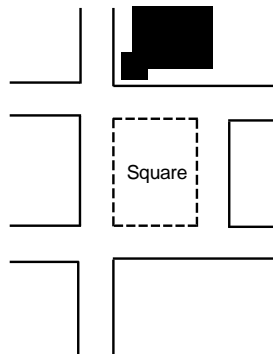
Even small civic buildings can have a dominant presence when properly sited.

### As a Terminated Vista



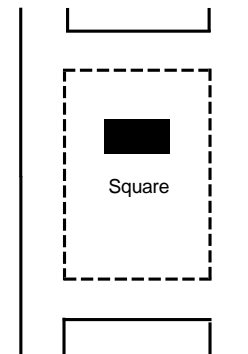
The Port Royal post office terminates the vista at a curve in the road. Many of Thomasville's neighborhood centers are located at gentle curves in the roadway. These make for good locations for civic or prominent buildings.

### Across a Green



The Thomasville Center of the Arts is a prominent building that is sited away from the street behind a green.

### At the Center of a Square



Thomasville's courthouse is a classic example of a prominent civic building at the center of a public square.



## Parks and Rec Facilities

Public parks, recreational spaces and open spaces are an essential component to the city's quality of life. The City should continue to actively pursue the updating and creation of parks and open spaces.

While parks and recreation impact fees can offset the costs of regional facilities, it may be more preferable for any new subdivision or new community to provide small community parks close to people's homes to increase accessibility. Every new neighborhood should include a plaza, green or square as its center. These general types can include playgrounds or community gardens. This is how Thomasville was originally designed, with parks interspersed throughout the neighborhoods.

Large, active recreational parks with ball fields should ideally be located within access of bicycling children and not clustered in distant mega-facilities. The Proposed Parks and Trails Plan suggests that every home could be located within walking distance to a green or square at the center of a neighborhood, while at the same time being an easy bicycle ride to a continuous park system with connecting nature trails. A day of picnicking, hiking or biking should not have to begin with a trip in an automobile.

## YMCA of Thomasville

The YMCA in Thomasville acts as the recreational arm of Thomasville's parks department. The Y is a diverse organization of men, women and children joined together by a shared commitment to nurturing the potential of kids, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility. They have three facilities, The Butler Mason Center, the Everett Milton Center, and the Weston Center where they run various recreational programs. The Weston Center houses the community public pool during summers and they run league sports out of Remington Park. The city is committed to continuing to utilize this positive partnership with the YMCA.

## Boys & Girls Club

Boys & Girls Club is a national organization of local chapters which provide after-school programs for millions of young people. In Thomasville, the Club works with hundreds of kids and teens each year to help them reach their full potential, providing an environment where many less privileged kids feel safe and secure. Club members pay a small fee and the club is supported by private philanthropy.

The Marguerite Neel Williams Boys & Girls Club operates a Youth Center on Fletcher Street and an adjoining Teen Center on South Madison Street. In the County, the Jackie Robinson Boys & Girls Club of Cairo-Grady County also works collaboratively with the Thomasville centers.



Bookshelf story time at the Amphitheater and Trailhead

## Creative District & Trailhead

In March 2014, Thomasville residents and community leaders gathered to develop a new Creative District in the downtown historic area known as “The Bottom.” One key to the Creative District’s location is to express Thomasville’s rich cultural heritage by recognizing and celebrating this black and Jewish neighborhood and its main street. By revitalizing this historic area, this district will embrace the geographic context of the land, leverage the energy of the New South trend, increase economic opportunity, and bring creative community resources together.

At the heart of the area is an open space which is the trailhead for a new multi-use trail system which connects historic districts, parks, and commerce centers. Additionally, it is a corridor between Broad Street and Victoria Place, a new urban redevelopment area (URA).

Cultural and artistic experiences have the power to transform cities. Visual arts, music, dance and theater, combined with unique public spaces, innovative business concepts, restaurants and fresh retail ideas can breathe new life into communities. This combination sparks tourism, inspires creative enterprise, and attracts a talented work force. Additionally, the Creative District and Trailhead project is designed to enhance the already vibrant Broad Street area by featuring programs and businesses which complement the existing business mix and enhance the visitor experience.

## Thomasville Community Trail

The Thomasville Community Trail, first envisioned in 2009, is a 15-mile walking and biking trail that will connect 17 of the City’s parks, 5 schools, and 3 YMCA’s. The trail will meander through many areas of the community, making access to Downtown, the city’s neighborhoods, and park areas convenient and accessible for both pedestrians and bicyclists. A trailhead is located in “The Bottom,” the community’s creative district, and includes an outdoor amphitheater that serves as a fully-functioning park, anchoring the trail to Downtown Thomasville. Portions of the trail have been implemented but more implementation is needed to complete the trail.

## Thomasville Community Trail Extension

An extension to the Thomasville Community Trail is proposed for within the northwest quadrant of the City. This greenway trail would connect Northside Park (formally Magnolia Park), and Francis Weston Park.

## Celebrating Public Art & History

As the available recreational opportunities expand, the opportunities for the City to celebrate its local creative class and history expand as well. Previous plans such as the Downtown Strategic Plan include provisions to incorporate local art and historical installations around the City. These could be incorporated as part of the trail and parks in the form of plaques, statues, murals, monuments, and other memorials. Placing art and historic installations helps to create a destination, makes movement to each public space interesting, and celebrates the local heritage of Thomasville.



Amphitheater and Trailhead



## Continued Park Improvements

The City of Thomasville is dedicated to improving the City's existing parks. The City plans to focus on one or two parks a year to work with the community and create plans for renewing. So far two park plans have been planned and adopted, MacIntyre Park and Francis Weston Park. A workshop for Paradise Park is slated for fall 2018. Once a plan and vision is established then the City can work towards funding and implementing the improvements. This work is primarily funded with SPLOST (special-purpose local-option sales tax ) dollars, though that is not the only source of funding.

### MacIntyre Park

Attention to MacIntyre Park first began in 2015 when a group of Thomasville City School fifth grade design lab students made a plan for improvements as part of a class project. They noted foot traffic hazards, stream bank deterioration and inadequate play equipment. In 2016, the City secured an award from the Citizens' Institute for Rural Design to host a 4-day effort to engage the public, current park users and national and local planning experts to construct a vision for this park. The charrette was held in 2016 and included more than 300 participants with an interest in charting the course for MacIntyre Park's future. The final master plan includes strengthening the waterways within the park, balancing active and passive uses, and design improvements of streets surrounding the park to improve walkability. Unnamed creeks have been named Sunbeam and Hero Creeks, as voted on by community.

### Francis Weston Park

In 2017 the community around Francis Weston Park played host to a three day design charrette. As part of the 2018 Park Vision Plan numerous improvements have been planned, including a new track, scoreboard, picnic facilities, and splash pad. Proposed upgrades to the playground have already been implemented.

## Cherokee Lake Park & Thomasville Rose Garden

In October 2017, the City of Thomasville partnered with Hands-on Thomas County Day volunteers to clean up around the lake. Cherokee Lake has been draining and is now at about 70% capacity. Plans are in the works to organize a park clean-up, including portions of the lake bed, in conjunction with Hands on Thomas County Day.

Cherokee Lake's dam is in need of refurbishment. The timing of the dam repair is ideal to address some other issues in the park, including repairing the boardwalk/walking trail, widening the path on the west side to connect to the Thomasville Community Trail that will cross from Smith Avenue at Susie Way, cleaning up the north end of the lake, and improving fish habitats.

The City of Thomasville has also engaged an arborist to provide advice about the tree population in the park; specifically, which trees are diseased and/or damaged and need to be removed. This information will be used to help determine where the trail can be improved so that the impact to healthy trees is minimized.

It would be nice to incorporate the Rose Garden into Cherokee Lake Park via a pedestrian trail. Currently, patrons must walk across the grass in order to visit the adjoining facility, some even get back in their cars and drive around to the separate entrance and parking.



Thomasville Rose Garden



### Paradise Park

Paradise Park is the largest of Thomasville’s parks. Its size allows it to fulfill the need for both passive and active recreation. Evidence of this is the current programming of the park. Paradise Park is many times larger than the typical Thomasville city block. Thus, it interrupts the city grid along several streets. For this reason, it is essential that the park be permeable to pedestrian traffic, not only for those who regard the park as a destination, but also for those who are crossing it to reach some other destination. The need for permeability relates both to the condition of the park’s edges and entrances and the design of its internal paths.

### Proposed New Parks

The City of Thomasville should strive for every home to be within a five to ten minute walk of a park. In order to accomplish this, some new parks would need to be added to the Thomasville Park system. The proposed park plan highlights areas where new parks should be added. They could be vacant lots that are cleaned up and given to the public as places to rest or have a neighborhood playground.

### Establish More Community Gardens

Community Gardens help to promote healthy lifestyles and a sense of community, while also educating children on the importance of nutrition and the natural processes that make good food possible. Residents expressed a strong desire to see more of these gardens throughout Thomasville — potentially as a solution to some of the vacant or blighted properties in the city. These can be formed through neighborhood groups, city efforts, public/private partnerships, schools, churches, senior centers, and other cultural or community organizations. These could even take the form of butterfly or pollinator gardens as a measure to encourage pollinator colonies for agriculture.

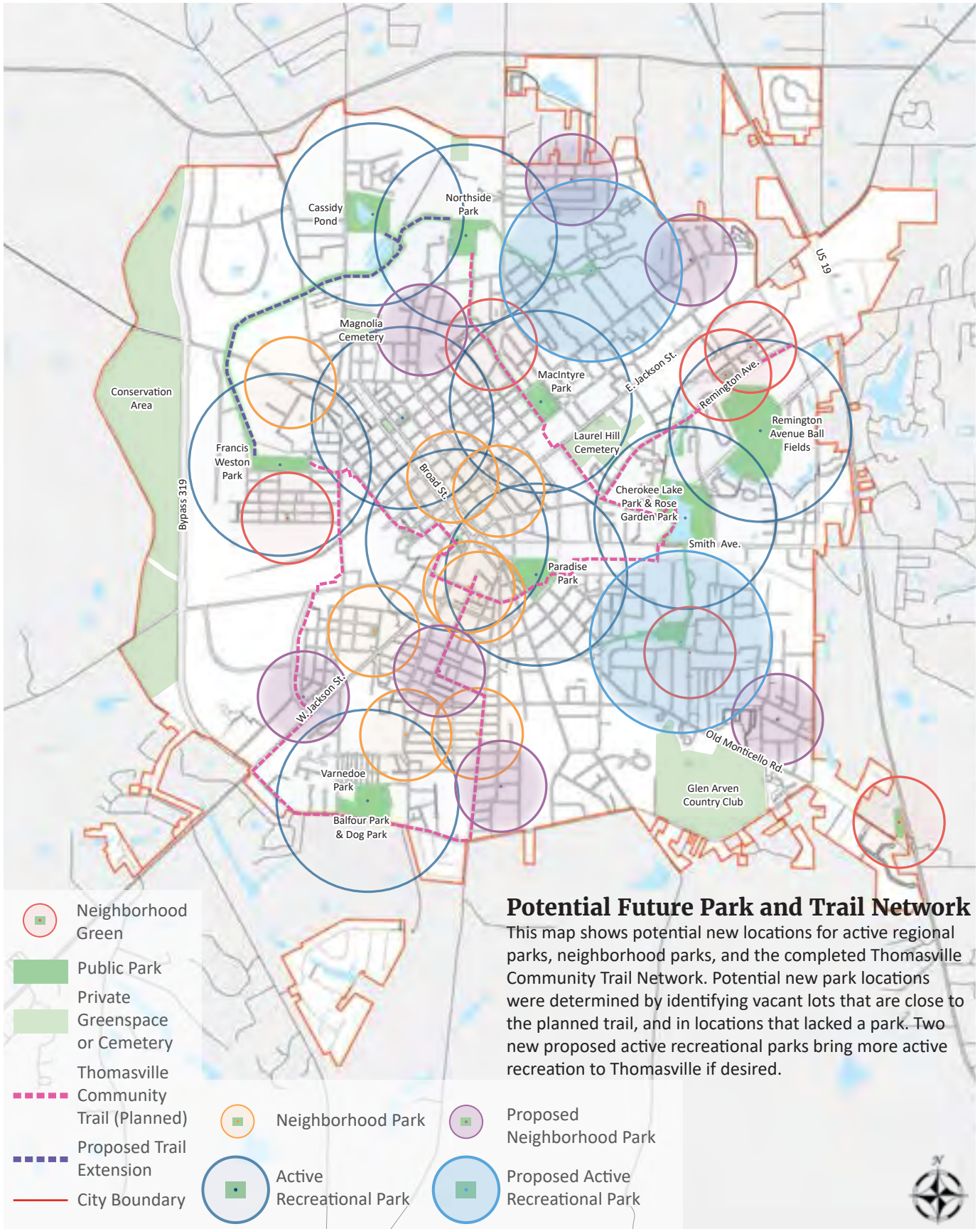
### Consider RV Parks

A different kind of park that the City should consider is RV parks. An RV park can provide a destination in Thomasville which is particularly attractive to overnight stays from FSU football fans. RV owners typically have discretionary income, often stay in an area for a week or more to sample all the attractions a city has. Thomasville wants to send the message that RV owners and their pets are welcome in Thomasville businesses.

Many communities use city or county parks for RV parking. The former City of Roses RV Park has closed, but has the facilities needed to accommodate RV pads. The city should consider the reuse of this asset as well as look for additional locations in town where RV’s may be able to be accommodated on a temporary basis such as through football season.



Creating community gardens





## Types of Civic Spaces

Public spaces and civic institutions should be integrated into new development and added throughout existing neighborhoods where they are missing. In keeping with Thomasville’s tradition of open space types, their design should follow well-tested local models. Four main categories are described below. Plazas and squares are the most urban types of space. They are bounded spaces enclosed by surrounding buildings and forming an outdoor room. Parks and greens are more open, bounded on at least one side by buildings with outdoor rooms framed by plantings. Community fields, gardens and multi-use play fields are the most open and unshaped types of public space.

A **park** is a natural preserve that serves environmental goals such as the preservation of habitat or filtration of water. It may also be available for active recreation. The shape of the park may follow the boundaries of natural features. Parks may contain trails, water bodies, woodlands and meadows.

A **green** is available for structured or unstructured recreation. A green may be spatially defined by landscaping rather than by buildings. Trees can be formally or naturalistically planted. A green contains lawns, trees, pavilions, memorials, benches and playground equipment.

A **square** is available for structured or unstructured recreation and civic purposes. A square is clearly defined by building frontages. A square can provide a public open space that provides a setting for civic buildings. They are located at the intersection of important thoroughfares and contain lawns, trees and pavilions that are formally disposed.

A **plaza** is designed for civic and commercial activities. A plaza is clearly defined by building frontages. Its surface is typically covered with pavers or compact earth. Trees are optional and plazas are located at the most central intersections.



Park



Green



Square



Plaza



## Lost Creek Forest Approach

Lost Creek is currently a wooded area that is part of land owned by the Thomasville Airport, which places it under the oversight of both Thomasville and Thomas County. This land is accessible through the Friends of Lost Creek Forest by appointment only, due to the layers of oversight for the land. These layers of oversight can cause confusion regarding who is responsible for the land and how it is integrated into Thomasville. The City, County, Airport, Friends of Lost Creek Forest, and other related agencies should coordinate efforts and establish an agreement for the future use of Lost Creek Forest.

## Follow Arborist Recommendations

The Tree Inventory by a certified arborist included a series of recommendations. The City should consider implementing these recommendations as measure to promote a healthy and diverse green network.

## Establish a Parks Coordination System

With several different agencies in charge of maintenance for different portions of the City's green infrastructure, it can be difficult to track spending, initiatives, and direct feedback from the community. Having a person or organization help to coordinate efforts on maintenance, programming, establishment of initiatives, and follow-through can help to guide and prioritize efforts for the City. This would also free the City Council to focus time and energy on larger-scale goals for Thomasville while maintaining a measure of control through a single point-of-contact.

## Utilities

### State of the Art Fiber Optic/Broadband

It is critical that Thomasville's fiber optic/broadband is maintained as a state of the art "SOA" system, so it will continue to be at a competitive advantage for not only retaining existing industry but attracting new industry as well as "freelance" workers. Flowers, our N.Y.S.E. based Company, hospitals, schools, professionals with multi offices, and "freelance" workers will continue to require SOA fiber. As "5G" becomes the norm (and security more and more a real risk) as well as broadband speed being critical, a long-term plan and required capital investment to insure SOA broadband is critical.

Thomasville was an early adopter of SOA broadband through CNS/utilities owned and maintained system, but it is quickly becoming not as SOA. In order to maintain a competitive advantage in this area, the City must commit to a plan to continually upgrade the system with the latest technology.

### Market SOA Broadband to Attract Small and Freelance Businesses

Chattanooga, Tennessee is a great model of the implementation of SOA broadband for industry recruiting and attracting "freelance" workers. In 5-10 years, it is believed 40% to 50% of the USA total work force will be "freelance." Today, over 25% of USA workforce is "freelance," and a SOA broadband is a great way to attract this growing sector of the workforce.



A meeting with different agencies and organizations will help to define the future plans for Lost Creek Forest.

## GOALS & POLICIES

The City of Thomasville will provide community services and facilities that meet the physical, educational, economic, and recreational needs of all segments of the community.

### Administrative Facilities

**Goal 8.1: Evaluate Thomasville administrative space to provide room for additional personnel and to spur additional private investment as the city’s population and employment grows.**

- Policy 8.1.1: Maintain and improve the exterior appearance and landscaping of all city and municipal facilities that are open to the public.
- Policy 8.1.2: Place public and civic buildings in downtown areas and neighborhood centers.
- Policy 8.1.3: Locate government facilities within easy bicycle and walking distance of many residents and workers.
- Policy 8.1.4: Consider using existing “gaps” left by abandoned buildings and vacant parcels to house administrative facilities.
- Policy 8.1.5: Create an illustrative master plan and coinciding document for the City Government campus that includes opportunities to incubate investment and improve upon the design of the built environment.

**Goal 8.2: Lessen environmental footprint and operational costs of public buildings.**

- Policy 8.2.1: Encourage any new public buildings to be built sustainably, preferably certified by USGBC under an appropriate LEED certification system.
- Policy 8.2.2: Encourage existing public buildings to incorporate sustainability measures and retrofits.

**Goal 8.3: Reinforce the City’s identity through architecture of public buildings.**

- Policy 8.3.1: Pursue climate-responsive architecture that is authentic to Thomasville’s traditions.
- Policy 8.3.2: Use locally sourced building materials wherever possible.

### Health, Education, and Welfare

**Goal 8.4: Enhance access to library services and reach a greater number of community residents by expanding the Thomas County Public Library System (TCPLS).**

- Policy 8.4.1: Expand the headquarters of the Thomas County Library System to increase space to meet the large service demand. Refer to the 2014 Creative District Illustrative Plan and the 2016 Downtown Master Plan for future expansion concepts.
- Policy 8.4.2: Increase the library capacity at satellite libraries to address service and space challenges.
- Policy 8.4.3: Ensure the library maintains at least minimum levels of services as determined by Georgia Public Library Standards. Increase the ratio of library books per capita to the recommended 2.5 books and media per capita. (TCPLS had 1.72 books and media per capita in 2003).
- Policy 8.4.4: Support and promote library activities and programs focused on adult literacy, computer skills for adults and seniors, as well as special services and children’s reading programs.

**Goal 8.5: Provide infrastructure, programs, and personnel to support improvement of the education process county-wide.**

Policy 8.5.1: Develop daytime learning facilities for industry training and adult education opportunities, possibly in conjunction with a community center.

Policy 8.5.2: Continue coordination efforts between the Board of Education and city and county entities to improve workforce development programs in order to aid local economic development and improve quality of life.

Policy 8.5.3: Support Souther Regional Technical College's efforts to expand physical facilities and programs offered.

Policy 8.5.4: Pursue and encourage joint and maximum utilization of recreation facilities with the Thomasville School Board and YMCA.

**Goal 8.6: Continue to support and expand community outreach programs.**

Policy 8.6.1: Evaluate and determine whether existing victim programs (e.g. child abuse, battered women, etc.) are adequately servicing the community, and plan to expand and modify services as needed.

Policy 8.6.2: Review poverty statistics to determine if additional family assistance programs are warranted, particularly in the form of costs to school students. (e.g. reduced school lunch program).

**Goal 8.7: Ensure that Thomas County and Thomasville are providing a first-rate education to all school children throughout the county.**

Policy 8.7.1: Determine whether the public school system is currently structured effectively as two independent public school systems. Research the possibility of consolidating into a joint city/county public school system or at a minimum combining certain school functions, such as transportation.

Policy 8.8.2: Determine whether transportation systems to and from schools are adequate, and conduct a study to determine whether pedestrian access and bicycle travel to schools and colleges should be enhanced.

**Goal 8.8: Coordinate the development or redevelopment of neighborhoods, recreational facilities and transportation improvements with the development of schools to meet the City's needs.**

Policy 8.8.1: Coordinate with Thomasville City Schools to phase development in a manner that maintains levels of service and provides safe environments for children to go to school.

Policy 8.8.2: Coordinate with Thomasville City Schools to ensure that new school sites, or expanded existing sites, can be adequately served by existing and planned infrastructure (including streets, sidewalks, water/wastewater, and public safety facilities).

Policy 8.8.3: Promote the renovation and expansion of existing schools within existing neighborhoods to encourage walkability, and to encourage healthier lifestyles for children.

Policy 8.8.4: Coordinate the Capital Improvements Program, development review and growth projections with the school district to improve the efficiency of capital planning and improvements.

Policy 8.8.5: Expand higher education opportunities for local residents by working with local institutions of higher learning.

**Recreation**

**Goal 8.9: Upgrade existing parks and recreation facilities.**

Policy 8.9.1: Consider the creation of a position for a parks planner, or director, to coordinate efforts for the visioning, implementation, and maintenance required to maintain an excellent park system. This position could be a joint position between the City and the County.

Policy 8.9.2: Prepare a long-range master plan for parks and recreation facilities.

Policy 8.9.3: Connect city parks via a bicycle/pedestrian route that provides a continuous network between parks such as through the Thomasville Community Trail.

Policy 8.9.4: Establish Level of Service standards for parks and recreation facilities.



**Goal 8.10: Improve the function, character, safety and accessibility of parks and other public open spaces.**

- Policy 8.10.1: Create new community parks and other public open spaces such as plazas, squares, and pocket parks so that most residents have access to such facilities within easy walking distance. This could be accomplished through multiple methods such as a PDR program (critical lands, or land trust), new development standards for civic space, park impact fees, etc.
- Policy 8.10.2: Improve the edges of parks and other public open spaces so that they have the appropriate degree of permeability and security.
- Policy 8.10.3: Encourage landowners adjacent to or facing parks and other public open spaces to heighten the sense of natural surveillance by developing buildings that have doors and windows facing the public open space.
- Policy 8.10.4: Where parking is necessary, encourage unobtrusive parking lots that do not significantly erode usable green space. Encourage on-street parking as a way to lessen the need for surface parking lots.
- Policy 8.10.5: Create illumination systems that deter crime while minimizing light pollution.
- Policy 8.10.6: Implement plans to enhance MacIntyre Park, Francis Weston Park, and Paradise Park.
- Policy 8.10.7: Work with the community to continue to improve all of the City’s parks.

**Goal 8.11: Lessen environmental footprint of parks and other public open spaces.**

- Policy 8.11.1: Design open space to offer multi-use, environmentally friendly recreation activities.
- Policy 8.11.2: Encourage the use of native trees and groundcover and maintain them to enhance transparency and natural surveillance at park edges.
- Policy 8.11.3: Encourage the integration of rain gardens, dry retention, and polishing marshes in public open spaces, where appropriate, in order to improve water quality and groundwater recharge.

**Goal 8.12: Public recreation facilities, schools and other civic buildings should be located prominently and accessible to all citizens.**

- Policy 8.12.1: Site new public buildings so that they have prominent locations in the city, especially as the terminated view at the end of streets, on axes across greens and parks, or in the center of greens and parks.
- Policy 8.12.2: Encourage the distribution and integration of public buildings within the neighborhood fabric of the city, particularly within the downtown and neighborhood centers.
- Policy 8.12.3: Encourage the location of public buildings within walkable, bikeable locations.
- Policy 8.12.4: New subdivisions and new communities should be required to provide designed open spaces.
- Policy 8.12.5: New public open space should be designed to be usable spaces, in the format of a park, green, square, plaza. Within these types, playgrounds, pocket park, dog parks, and community gardens may be provided.

**Goal 8.13: Plan for the multi-purpose use of facilities for cultural, educational and recreational programs.**

- Policy 8.13.1: Pursue the development of new uses within the city. Design each use in a way that reinforces the urban fabric of Thomasville’s neighborhoods.
- Policy 8.13.2: Explore the feasibility of a variety of potential use options for the former Roses site.
- Policy 8.13.3: Pursue the development of new hotels in Downtown Thomasville.
- Policy 8.13.4: Pursue the enhancement of Paradise Park, including possible elements such as a fishing pond, playground with splash park and other attractions.
- Policy 8.13.5: Pursue the development of additional outdoor events in Downtown Thomasville.

Policy 8.13.6: Consider the development of short term RV Parks in the City including the reopening of the site of the former City of Roses.

Policy 8.13.6.1: Identify underutilized strips of land, perhaps adjacent to existing city parks or the old Exchange Club fairgrounds, where 5 to 10 RVs could be placed with good spacing between parking pads.

Policy 8.13.6.2: 3. Identify local developers to revamp and create new temporary RV pad locations.

**Goal 8.14: Maintain and enhance Thomasville’s identity as a community which supports arts, cultural and social events.**

Policy 8.14.1: Continue to support the various arts festivals, street parties, and holiday gatherings in the city as a means of promoting reinvestment and closer community ties.

Policy 8.14.2: Pursue the development of one or more privately financed event spaces within the downtown.

**Public Safety**

**Goal 8.15: Support the Thomasville Police Department in order to effectively and efficiently protect and serve the current and future public safety needs of residents, government, and property.**

Policy 8.15.1: Identify and target areas of high crime activity that need improvement, utilizing crime mapping.

Policy 8.15.2: Continue to support programs administered by the Thomasville Police Department, including School Resource Officers, Crime Prevention, Community Relations, and Public Information.

Policy 8.15.3: Continue to support existing programs offered by the Police Department, including Student Driver Awareness, Parents Reducing Incidents of Driver Error (PRIDE), Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE), Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT), and Police Athletic and Community Events (PACE).

Policy 8.15.4: Continue to support the Police Department’s crime prevention, Crime Stoppers program, and Community Watch programs.

Policy 8.15.5: Investigate new locations for police substations to reduce response times and build relationships in neighborhoods. Consider sites that will help to activate the space or adjoining spaces.

Policy 8.15.6: Continue joint efforts and establish partnerships with other City departments and civic groups in order to ensure safe living and working environments and a high quality of life throughout the city.

**Goal 8.16: Utilize computer hardware and software to maximize efficiency, contain personnel costs, and improve communication between departments and with the public.**

Policy 8.16.1: Implement a GIS system combining resource information from all departments to assist in the decision making process.

**Goal 8.17: Maintain responsive fire and law enforcement services that efficiently enhance public safety.**

Policy 8.17.1: Include representatives of all emergency service providers in the development review process.

Policy 8.17.2: Require that all necessary fire fighting infrastructure capability and capacity be provided in new subdivisions and developments.

Policy 8.17.3: Continue to educate and work with fire safety officials concerning the benefits of good urban design when it comes to fire safety.

## Utilities

### **Goal 8.18: Encourage waste reduction measures.**

- Policy 8.18.1: Evaluate and institute as appropriate a residential curbside collection of recyclables in all areas of the city where it is economical.
- Policy 8.18.2: Place containers for drop-off recycling at additional locations in the city where curbside collection is not economical.
- Policy 8.18.3: Expand the diversity of items that can be collected for recycling.
- Policy 8.18.4: Re-energize campaigns to promote recycling and waste reduction.
- Policy 8.18.5: Adopt collection and disposal rates that encourage waste reduction and recycling.
- Policy 8.18.6: Implement a mulching program for yard waste with the products available to citizens.

### **Goal 8.19: Ensure the waste collection system is as efficient, economical, equitable, and safe as feasible.**

- Policy 8.19.1: Continue a residential curbside collection system.
- Policy 8.19.2: Monitor changes in waste collection and disposal technology that would reduce costs.

### **Goal 8.20: Ensure the Fiber Optic/Broadband System in Thomasville remains State of the Art.**

- Policy 8.20.1: Review existing CNS Fiber Optic/Broadband infrastructure and develop a plan to upgrade the system to ensure Thomasville state of the art.
- Policy 8.20.2: Market Thomasville's network as a means to attract small and freelance businesses.



## CURRENT CONDITIONS

Thomasville’s economy can be divided into several distinct eras. Thomasville initially developed as a largely rural, self-sufficient community before the arrival of the railroad in 1861. It was a pre-industrial agrarian economy, based on the labor of enslaved Africans, most of whom worked in the vast cotton fields throughout the County.

After the Civil War and with the arrival of the railroad, Northerners and other visitors came to Thomasville for their health, recreation, and social activities. Thomasville became known as the “Winter Resort of the South” in the late 1800’s as dozens of hotels, boarding houses, restaurants, and other elements of a tourist economy were built, and established Thomasville as a regional economic and cultural hub. By 1885, there were two large, luxury hotels – the Mitchell House and the Piney Woods – that catered to upscale industrialists. During this time, many of the large plantations surrounding Thomasville were purchased by wealthy visitors, turning them into retreats popular with America’s elite.

Thomasville’s “Resort Era” ended in the early 1900’s and the City began to attract industry. By 1920, more than forty factories, works, and mills were operating throughout Thomas County.

## Economic Drivers

Today, Thomasville has a more diverse economy anchored by several long-established industries. There are also strong ties between the City and surrounding County with common economic development organizations.

Food processing and boilers are the two dominant manufacturing industries in the area. Flowers Foods, one of the largest producers of fresh packaged bakery foods in the U.S., is headquartered in Thomasville. Founded in 1925, the John D. Archbold Memorial Hospital is another cornerstone of Thomasville’s economy. Thomasville is also home to Thomas University, a private, four-year university. The large quail hunting plantations surrounding the City attract thousands of visitors during hunting season and quail hunting remains an important mainstay of the local economy.

Tourism has always been an important part of the City’s economy. The City’s Victorian character and vibrant downtown attract a large number of visitors. While local residents do shop and dine downtown, much of the money spent comes from out of town, a large portion from Tallahassee.



Thomasville, the “Winter Resort of the South.”



Piney Woods Hotel



Pebble Hill Plantation

## Leading the Way

Thomasville’s successes result from the efforts of numerous organizations and City and County commitment. Thomasville was designated a Main Street City in 1981 and has since spent more than \$85.7 million in public-private improvements in the downtown district. The City of Thomasville Main Street program provides business support and promotes downtown economic development within the context of the historic Victorian character.

The City has a visitor center to further grow and support tourism. The Thomasville-Thomas County Chamber of Commerce provides local businesses with networking, education, promotion, advocacy, and community outreach assistance. The Thomasville and Thomas County Economic Development Authority provides resources and incentives to attract new business and industry while also supporting the expansion of existing businesses.

## Challenges & Opportunities

Thomasville still faces some challenges and has opportunities for economic growth and development. The City has an increasingly aging demographic as retirees are moving in and younger adults are leaving. While the downtown and many neighborhoods are vibrant and booming, not all portions of the City are seeing the same level of investment and economic benefit.

This economic development element of Thomasville’s Comprehensive Plan enhances the city’s attractiveness to residents, visitors and investors by encouraging policies to enhance its economic competitiveness.

Using the city’s historical architecture, festivals, emerging maker community, industrial and service businesses, as well as its green spaces within and adjacent to it, this economic development chapter proposes policy actions and goals to stimulate the city’s ability to be an economic engine for the wider area.

By reducing inefficiencies, highlighting opportunities and managing challenges, the city can better prepare itself for both high and low points in the natural economic cycle, while providing a competitive environment for investment and business operations.



Downtown Thomasville



Thomasville-Thomas County Chamber of Commerce



Flowers Baking Company



Vacant commercial properties in neighborhood centers

## Principles

Principles for economic development strategies include:

- Developing a broad-based, thriving economy that reflects a high quality of life and commitment to the whole community's success;
- Expanding existing and developing new opportunities for employment, consistent with each person's abilities; and
- Preserving, protecting and enhancing the community's character and resources for present and future generations.

## Goals

The goals for this portion of the Comprehensive Plan are designed to achieve real results in economic growth and employment opportunities. At a minimum, Thomasville should aim to:

- Increase business openings or migrations into the City by 10% each year over the prior year,
- Increase the number of employed persons by at least 5% every year, drawing from both unemployed persons and those out of the workforce,
- Increase satisfaction as measured by a consistent tool by at least 10% annually among citizens and businesses when doing business with the city, and
- Improve the City's competitiveness standing each year over the prior year using a custom-developed competitiveness measurement tool.

*Thomasville Blueprint 2028* focuses on the economic development goal of developing and serving a broad-based and thriving economy. The City recognizes that the remaining goals are supportive and integrative with the goal of making Thomasville not only a desirable place to live and work but also where a wide range of community and economic development strategies work together to advance the community's vision for prosperity.

## Approach

*Thomasville Blueprint 2018's* approach to economic development incorporates key findings from the planning team, city managers and public citizens. Each of these groups desire to craft a comprehensive plan that takes into account real challenges related to the impacts of technology, globalization, geographic location, regional urban trends, aging populations and natural disasters. These concerns have been incorporated into this chapter and underlie much of the strategic analysis contained within.

The City's Strategic Plan identified five areas of focus to be completed by 2018, and much progress has been made towards completing the actions identified under that plan. The Comprehensive Plan provides additional guidance to future Strategic Plans, particularly for directional policy changes that support a strong, more resilient and broader based local economy.

Recognizing that no one plan or person holds all of the answers to economic development, the Comprehensive Plan and the research behind the economic development recommendations are based on both in-person interviews with key stakeholders and those who have analyzed similar initiatives in other cities, as well as evaluation of local and regional data.

The results of these efforts provide a framework that promotes maximizing local competitiveness through well-established actions that create the right environment for business, while protecting the character and people in the local area.



## Situation Review

As a small town in close proximity to other mid-size towns and cities, attracting new jobs and enhancing existing institutions to meet current competitiveness challenges in a dynamic regional economy is a key objective of the city government's five-member council and mayor. The annual budget exercise serves as the main channel to realize the city's strategic planning objectives as well as financial planning and oversight. Thomasville has already shown that it is a prudent manager of its asset. It recognizes the challenges inherent in leveraging value-added investment and jobs in a competitive environment between towns, cities and regional centers.

The 2014-2018 Strategic Plan put forward by the city is well on its way to meeting implementation goals across all six major themes:

- Economic Development,
- Image and Brand Services,
- Environment,
- Organizational Culture,
- Community Relations, and
- Development.

Some 58% of the plan initiatives have been completed and another 38% are underway.

Thomasville has generally affordable housing, strong and adequate infrastructure, with competitive utility rates. It has capitalized on its technical and managerial capability in running multi-utilities in an effective and profitable way. Other components of a community's infrastructure, like the airport, greens/parks, and industrial parks, are adequate and in many instances newly upgraded. In fact, Thomasville's municipal outreach organizations, and Downtown Development Authority (DDA) are by themselves strong institutions capable of attracting a new cohort of professionals, expanding a nascent professional service industry.

In addition, the reputation and growth of the hospital sector - Archbold Medical's flagship location - are already a magnet for other cohorts, such as young and active retiree that are seeking the programs and services offered by such facilities. Such factors support the city's overall competitive advantage for new businesses and residents considering quality of life in their relocation decisions.

The City of Thomasville has a range of investment incentives that can be applied (together with Thomas County and State of Georgia incentives) to retain and attract new businesses to the city. The city's core incentives are competitive electrical rates to large industrial clients and targeted tax credits.

The City of Thomasville's Five-Year Strategic Plan for 2014-2018 began in the fall of 2013 when the City Council met in a retreat. This plan has served as the road map for the last several years of the City's operation. This road map includes the City's stated vision and mission as well as the set of guiding principles and service standards staff will follow as the plan continues to be implemented.

## Key Trends

Thomasville, like many small cities, wants to preserve and build on a solid cultural, tourism and varied industrial base. Preserving what works, however, is not sufficient to give the city a competitive advantage into the future.

To create an environment that can attract, retain and expand the businesses and employees that are needed for a dynamic and rewarding economy, the city is actively working on modernizing its economic base, and implementing programs that can help it to stand out from other small cities with which it competes.

Thomasville will need to deal with key issues like retaining and growing its population, attracting folks with new skills and continuing to build on its health care; all while cultivating a strong business and entrepreneurial class that offers employment opportunities across all age cohorts.

Here we discuss the following trends:

1. Demographics
2. Income and employment
3. Housing
4. Tourism

## Demographics

The City of Thomasville is home to a population of approximately 18,800, and growing at a slow but steady rate. Its youngest population groups are shrinking slightly, particularly the important family-aged one. The population aged 60+ is growing strongly, however, and may ultimately reshape some portion of the city’s social, retail, and housing landscape.

No large changes in either racial composition or educational attainment have been seen recently. The city is approximately 43% white and 54% black, while 23% of the population has graduated from college with a bachelor’s or higher degree.

Key demographic issues for the comprehensive plan include:

- **Retaining and expanding the number of families in the city** – The number of households in the city stands at roughly 7,600 — an increase after a few years of shrinking numbers of households. Household growth tends to indicate a positive view of economic conditions as roommates move into their own places and new families or households form.
- **Channeling the growth in the 60+ age group into economic opportunities** - Flat to slow growth is mixed blessing, with more pronounced growth in the 60+ age group.
- **Options for increasing the number of households in the city** – Attracting more and younger households favors growth, hence a good mix of labor age suggests a variety of broad programs that can work to stimulate investment and jobs.

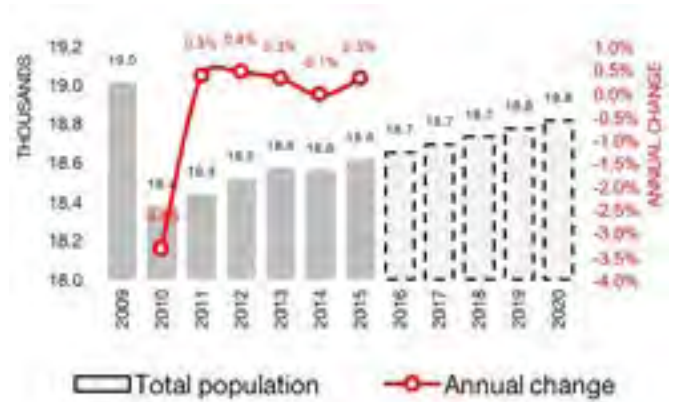


FIGURE 9.1: City of Thomasville’s population (2009-2020)

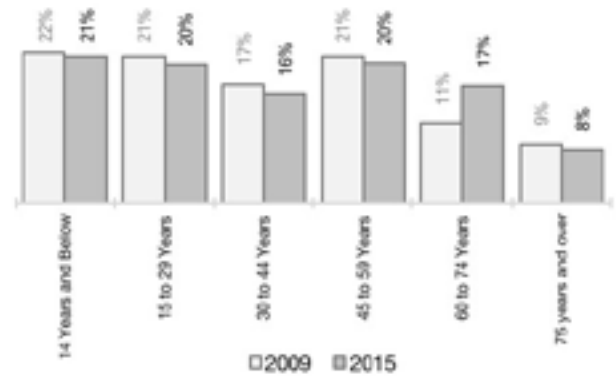


FIGURE 9.2: Population by age groups (2009 & 2015)

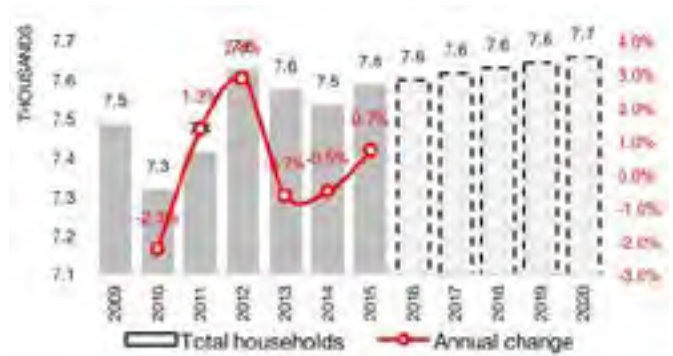


FIGURE 9.3: Households (2015)

## Income & Employment

Current figures for income and employment suggest that Thomasville has a stable employment base, with a relatively high concentration of low and high wage-earners, only slightly below the state averages, indicating an opportunity to target employment to expand the “middle income” portion of the wage cohort.

Average incomes are \$38,600 per household per year, with families averaging \$54,300 per year. 69% of all households earn \$49,999/year, while just 62% of families are in that income bracket. Incomes slightly lag national and state averages, indicating potential for higher wage and entrepreneur-driven job creation.

Similarly, the unemployment rate for the city is 7.0%, just a shade under the county’s level and a full percentage point over Georgia’s average.

Employment is concentrated in a small number of sectors, with the dominant one being public sector led education, health care and social services – employing more people than the next four industries combined.

While such concentration provides a core identity to Thomasville, and allows sector based “ecosystems” or economic clusters to be built, it also exposes vulnerabilities in the event of major job losses as a result of business cycles or changing regulatory and technology trends.

In recognition of these trends, the city’s economic development team has identified a pipeline of new business prospects and as such is marketing Thomasville’s destination appeal, including such structural advantages like lower cost of living, housing and low congestion levels.

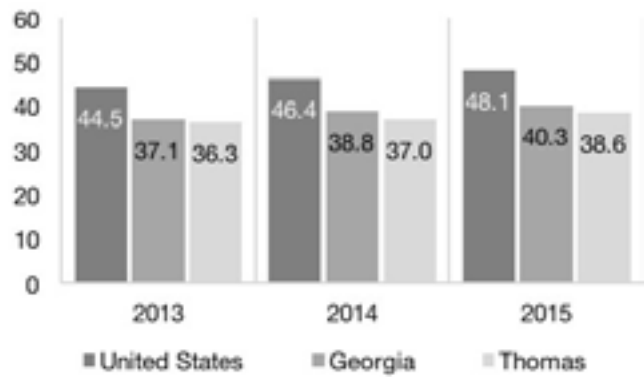


FIGURE 9.4: Comparative Income Review



FIGURE 9.5: Household incomes

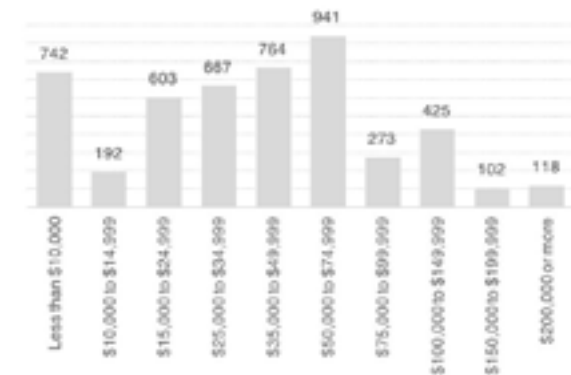


FIGURE 9.6: Family Incomes



Key income and employment issues for the Comprehensive Plan include:

- **Options for broadening employment opportunities based on existing assets** – high job sector concentration is a risk. The City needs to work on creating opportunities that require higher skill levels within existing and new employment clusters, like health care and utilities.
- **Linking employment and income more closely to broader trends in technology** – such as working from home and web-based entrepreneurship.
- **Increasing area median incomes to better compete with larger cities** – introduce “higher wage jobs” promotion across as many outreach programs as possible.

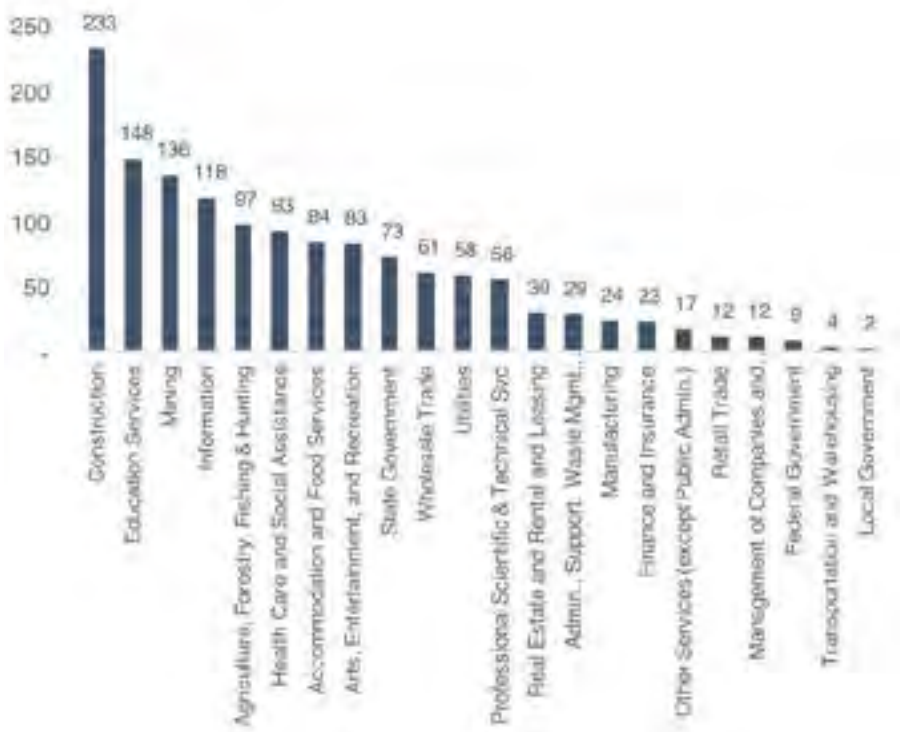


FIGURE 9.7: Average number of businesses by industry sector

## Housing

From a demand and supply perspective, the housing situation in Thomasville is largely in line with its population size and income levels. The key challenge appears to be a surplus of sub-standard housing (possibly as large as 1,400 units) that are potentially abandoned or in need of substantial renovation. Since only approximately 14% of the housing stock dates from 2000 to the present, it's likely that much of the surplus inventory was built well before 2000.

Three-quarters of the City's housing stock is in single-family homes, though just 50% of the total housing stock is owner-occupied (the remainder being rented housing).

Housing costs are reasonable and nearly 50% of households pay less than \$799/month (\$799/month would generally be affordable on \$29,000/year in income). As would be expected, housing affordability becomes a problem at income levels below \$20,000/year, where more than 50% of gross income goes to housing. Since the rule of thumb nationally is that one-third of income can go to housing costs, this amount is still below what many housing experts would note as severely stressed.



FIGURE 9.8: Housing supply and changes (2009-2020)

Home ownership rates in Thomasville are in line with expectations for small towns (the 2016 ESRI index for home ownership in small towns is estimated at 51%, as compared to the 63.5% national homeownership rate according to the US Census data), with some 53% owner occupied and rental occupancy representing 47% of the total market in 2015. These figures reflect a returning trend towards owner-occupancy after a multi-year period of decline in that category that was offset by rising rental usage.

The owner-occupied units in 2015 are 7% below their peak over the evaluation period (the high point being 60.3% in 2010), though a full 3% higher than the lowest point reached in 2014 of just 50.4%.

The housing stock was largely constructed before 2000, with the largest group of structures built between 1970 and 1999, and the second largest between 1940 and 1969. Only 14% of the housing stock dates from 2000 until the present. Of the built structures, 71% are single family homes.

Key housing issues for *Thomasville Blueprint 2028* include:

- **Expand affordable housing options in the city** – including for new entrants. These could be mixed-use developments;
- **Identify and dispose of vacant and under-used properties** – this is part of the City’s Strategic Plan and several agencies are working on this topic; and
- **Creating homeownership pathways for workforce and first time homebuyers** – in order to trigger new construction and replace aging housing units.



FIGURE 9.9: Housing supply and changes (2009-2020)

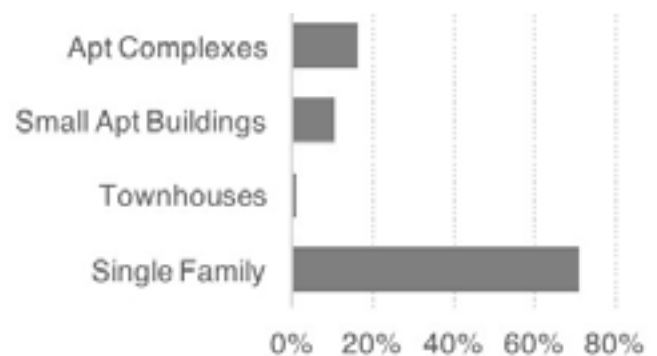
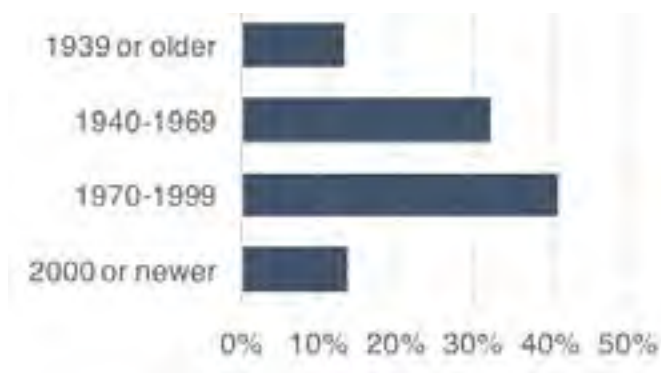


FIGURE 9.10: Housing supply: year built and housing type

## Tourism

Tourism is a key component of the City’s economy and appears set to potentially take on even greater importance through new investments in hospitality being discussed among both city and private sector interests. The City is continuing its efforts to find new tourism events and refine its current offerings to maintain and enhance existing visitor flow.

As statistics from the City’s Visitor Center show, there are seasonal trends in travel, with a peak in December and another in April (presumably coinciding with the Victorian Christmas and Quail events).

The vast majority (nearly 80%) of visitors to the City come from a day-trip’s drive away in Georgia and Florida, with a very strong flow from Tallahassee up to Thomasville.

The long tail of visitors representing the final 20% of visitors comes from the entire rest of the US outside of the area’s driving range.

A small group of international visitors does visit the City each year from a wide variety of locations across the globe – an impressive achievement, given the City’s lack of a large commercial airport and distance from an interstate.

These visitors appear to be most active early in the year, with a peak in March. Looking at international visitors in order of numbers who visited the Visitor’s Center; England, Canada and Germany were 80% of the total.

Other domestic and international visitors undoubtedly visited the City and did not stop into the Visitor Center, so those numbers are not captured here.

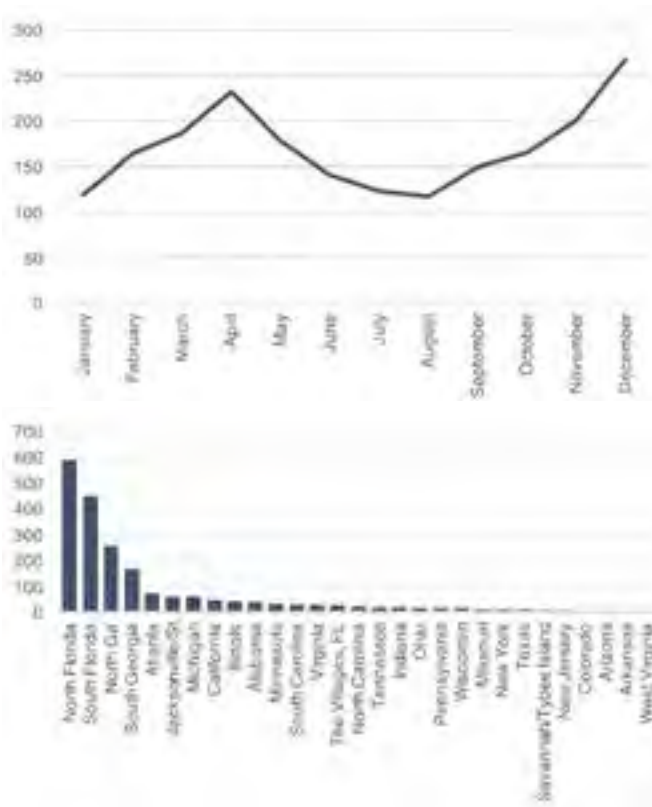


FIGURE 9.11: Domestic Visitors (2015)

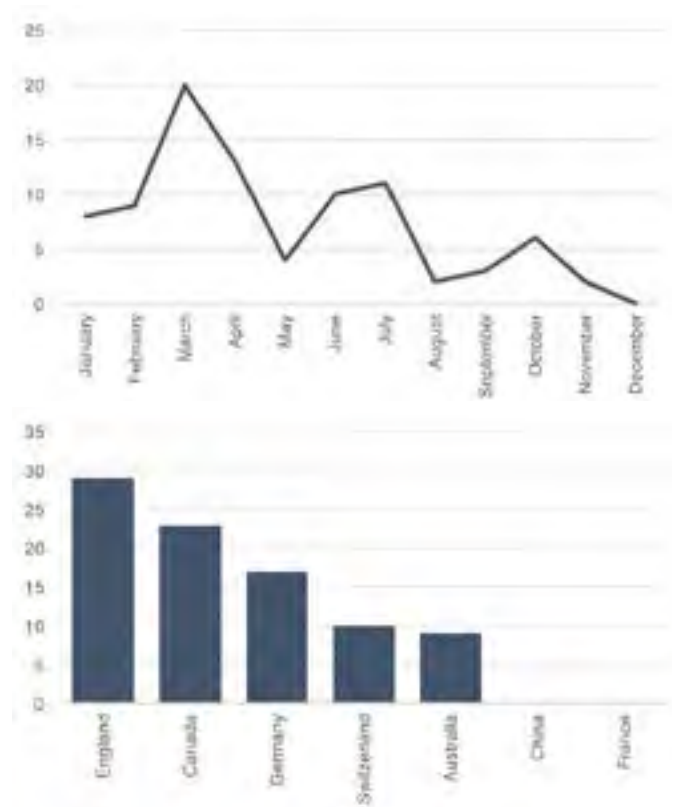


FIGURE 9.12: International Visitors (2015)



Expenditure data shows steadily increasing revenues from tourism activities in the City, up nearly \$20M since 2009 – an increase of 40% over that year’s \$50M.

The latest year of data available (2015) shows tourism revenues approaching \$70M and from both the data and informal conversations with hospitality businesses, this number is likely to have grown throughout 2016 and 2017 and can be assumed to generate more than \$70M per year currently.

## New Business Numbers

Thomasville currently has no single source of data for new business openings, hiring or investment, but there are anecdotal reports from the City’s Economic Development office about numbers. Those figures show growth of 337 jobs in 2017 from existing businesses, with another ten large scale projects at various stages of due diligence that could theoretically (if all of the projects ultimately moved forward and selected Thomasville for their base) generate 1,000 jobs. This is a healthy pipeline of medium scaled development that shows active business interest in the City from investors, many of whom are headquartered outside of the city and region.

## Thomasville’s Challenge & Opportunity

Thomasville stands ready to act to secure its economic future through reforms and investments needed to compete effectively against local and even national challengers. Its challenge is how to define the actions required to improve its chances of success through positive competitive differentiation that allow businesses, residents and visitors to actively choose Thomasville.

If executed properly, the City would find its economic conditions to be strong, offering a wide variety of jobs to people along the skills continuum, as well as resilient to temporary downturns in the national or regional economy because of its robust clusters and business linkages.

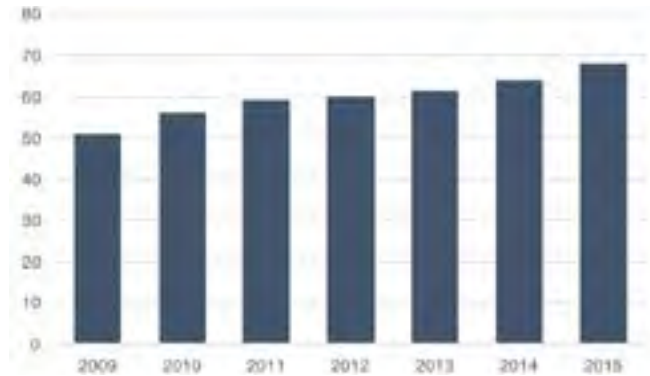


FIGURE 9.13: Visitor Expenditures (USD M - 2015)

Thomasville is already an emerging center for the maker community, and under current trends could become a leader in the Southeastern United States for handmade goods, and potentially even skilled trades, such as furniture or historical property restoration. The successes of the multiple tourism events, such as the Rose Festival, quail hunting season, Plantation Wildlife Arts Festival, the Bird Dog Bash, Due South, Victorian Christmas, and other events indicate that additional events or event extensions would likely keep people in the City for longer periods for more of these unique experiences. The City’s deep agricultural roots, high quality restaurants and reputation as a foodie location may extend the idea of a maker community into the locavore market, adding to its niche as the place for authentic quality experiences in Georgia.

# COMMUNITY CONCERNS

In addition to the workshops and charrette, input for the economic community concerns were gathered using the following additional activities:

- Holding focus groups and interactions with policy makers and the public over two one-week sessions at locations across the City,
- Conducting a short, targeted citizens survey that lasted six weeks and included 76 respondents, and
- Literature review of successful case studies for small city competitive advantage development planning.

The results of the Citizen Survey indicate that economic issues are not a high priority among the survey respondents relative to other issues such as the natural environment, the rural landscape, and a visually attractive community.

- Respondents indicated a moderate level of concern regarding the stability of the economy.
- There was a moderate level of agreement that key industrial sites should be identified and protected, but somewhat less agreement that public funds should be spent to develop those sites.

We conducted a survey outreach effort to gauge the economic pulse of residents and the results reinforce the recommendations made for *Thomasville Blueprint 2028*. The Resident Feedback chart shows the summary of key findings, with details in the topical areas.

## Economic Environment

Citizens of Thomasville are unsure that the City’s economic prospects will be as healthy as they are in 2017. The two employee skills gaps that employers most often mentioned were the lack of strong customer service skills and the relative dearth of skilled tradesmen.

## Income & Jobs

The most frequently cited cause for concern is limited job opportunities. The community worries about the economic base and distribution of businesses among services and manufacturing, particularly the idea that low-wage service jobs will not offset any potential manufacturing losses.

Even when jobs exist, residents note that the pay rates are not high. Many young people and families were open about considering whether to move for higher earnings.

	<i>Issue</i>	<i>Reported Finding</i>
Q1	How happy are you with Thomasville's economy right now?	Somewhat satisfied
Q2	How confident are you that Thomasville's economy will be much better than it is now in 10 years, with more employment options and higher average incomes?	Somewhat satisfied
Q3	What do you think will be the biggest drivers of health care economic growth in Thomasville over the coming decade?	Health care sector
Q4	What are the biggest weaknesses in Thomasville's economy currently?	A lack of skilled labor
Q5	What businesses should the city focus most on recruiting to Thomasville?	Small to medium sized regional companies
Q6	What are Thomasville's economically important strengths currently?	General quality of life

Figure 14: Resident Feedback from Targeted Citizen Survey (2017)

## Youth & Family Opportunities

Although the social and retail opportunities that are attractive to young people and families are traditionally not a core focus of economic development, the loss of population in these demographics moves this issue into one of the core focal areas for economic development planning.

Retail options that appeal to young people (younger than 21) are few in Thomasville. Young people drive to Tallahassee for entertainment, even for such simple concepts as a trampoline park. Restaurants close early all week long and few are open on Sundays and Mondays.

Alcohol cannot be served on the sidewalk in front of restaurants, so people would rather wait for a table inside than sit outside without their glass of wine or beer. This reduces activity on the street, as well as income to restaurant owners.

## City-Business Interactions

One common issue that arose from the investment and business community is that there are multiple friction points when dealing with the City to gain licenses and permits.

Investors and business owners noted the lack of a single point of contact to work with to solve problems with the City. Incentives were also a sore spot with large subsidies going to manufacturers, who may or may not bring residents to the City (even if the manufacturing facility is in Thomasville).

# STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING COMMUNITY CONCERNS

There is a substantial body of experience with economic development program design at the national, regional, city and local levels. The primary finding is that most development programs are designed with achieving economic competitiveness as a key governing thought. Many city managers and key actors within the City’s business ecosystem are broadly concerned with improving livability and equity for residents through policies that support human-capital development, sustainable growth, and productivity improvement across everything they do.

Based on economic data synthesis, stakeholder consultations, and public input, Thomasville should focus on a conceptual framework that includes three fundamental program priorities:

- **Building a Base**  
–of core competencies that provide the necessary inputs to ensure that investment is productive across the local economy. Priority actions include the creation of a competitiveness council, strengthening Thomasville’s educational options, and aligning vocational training to the needs of businesses and market demands.

- **Easing the Path**  
–for existing and new investors by reducing the costs and risks of investing and doing business in Thomasville through statutory changes, regulatory adjustments, and administrative processes. Priority actions include making incentives easy to access and streamlining business licensing, and increasing the focus on entrepreneurial activities that result in positive effects to the local economy.
- **Targeting Performance**  
–for the long-run success of high-performance investments on the margin, through activities that meet specific investment opportunities, or other social priorities that provide net gains to the economy. Priority actions include the promotion of investments in new or high value-added sectors.<sup>1</sup>

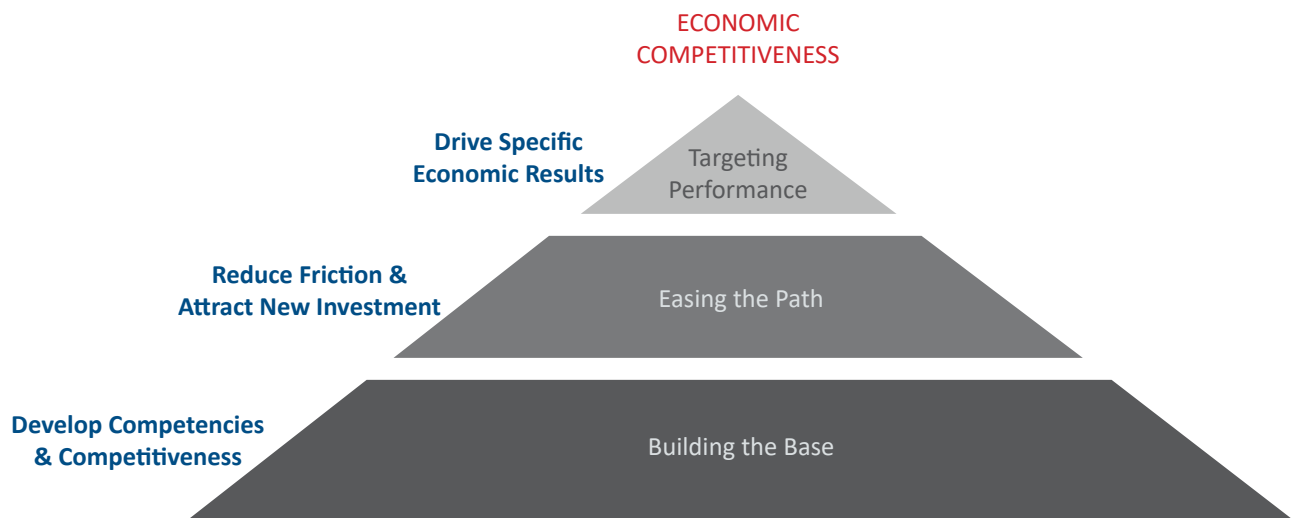


FIGURE 15: Conceptual model of the proposed Thomasville economic development program

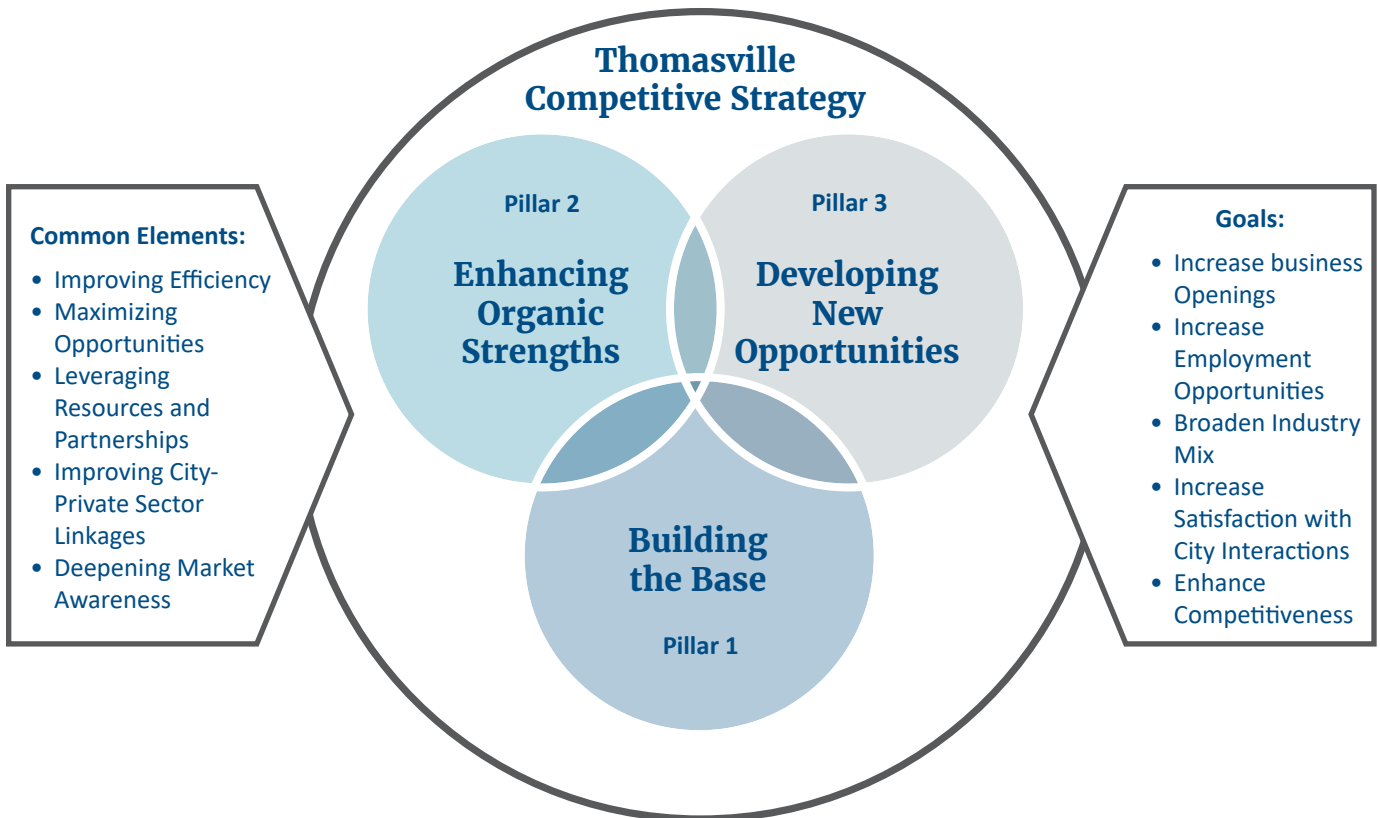
1 Thomasville , Quick Survey effort , 2017



Within each area, *Thomasville Blueprint 2028* recommends specific actions to implement within specific time frames. Some of these recommendations have been introduced before, or are under discussion in other programs, but might not have been organized into a single, investment-directed plan.

The three conceptual categories of strategies address both current and future opportunities, while providing policies and methods to address growth challenges using the City’s existing strengths in tourism, historic preservation, a relatively diversified industrial and service base, and established food processing clusters.

The strategies and policies described herein reflect effective mechanisms for enhancing Thomasville’s competitive advantages over time through focus on activities that can yield results across different timelines. These strategies can be taken as a group or individually depending on the current status of the City’s strategic plan, budgeting processes, and leadership preferences.



## Pillar 1: Building the Base

### Optimize The Foundation For Economic Growth

Thomasville enjoys a stable population, solid anchor employers, a well-managed city budget and a relatively robust downtown economy, but faces challenges in terms of increasing business diversity and effectively attracting or competing in opportunities that are attractive to young people and newer cohorts of residents.

Hence, the first economic competitiveness strategy pillar is to secure the foundation blocks for Thomasville's economic growth:

- Strategic clarity;
- Efficient organization; and
- Improving processes and technological usage.

These building blocks taken together will support the definition and implementation of the most efficient processes that can be deployed across departments and agencies in the city government responsible for economic development.

Many historic small and mid-sized cities face challenges in transforming from single or few economic poles, e.g., tourism and related services, to a dynamic multi-pole environment, rich in opportunities and attractive to a variety of economic engines. In some cases, many small cities benefit by reimagining their very identity, built form, function, and place in the world with the goal of eventually building economies that provide all residents with access to good jobs and a high quality of life.

This approach is supported by the latest research by leading figures in the field, such as the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, who recently produced a Small City Economic Dynamism Index that measures the economic trajectory of 400 regions centered around smaller cities. Studies of the Industrial Cities Initiative of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston's research on Springfield, IL and the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia all explored promising ways to help these cities improve their economic health and either slow or reverse population decline. This work, together with earlier efforts, represents an important shift in city research towards competitiveness factors that are appropriate at the city, versus national or regional level.

Smaller cities are uniquely placed to carve out their own vision of what their communities desire. Such cities often under-emphasize the need to build a robust strategic plan, invest in processes and delineate a clear pathway for

projects to be formulated, executed and monitored. Many of the strategies detailed in this report implicitly acknowledge the need to simultaneously address equity challenges while supporting economic expansion.

Thomasville's economy does not operate in a geographic or political vacuum. It is inextricably linked with the regional, statewide, and national economies across all of its economic endeavors, and faces the same tail and headwinds seen elsewhere. In fact, many small and mid-sized cities have concluded that they must think and act together with partners within their wider regions. City planners and elected leaders are getting out of their normal comfort zones, expanding their circle of stakeholders and building a new generation of partnerships, targeted to supporting key objectives in their respective comprehensive plans. Local economic competitiveness strategies and activities must recognize and take into account this reality by ensuring that the best data and insights are available for city decision makers.

This foundational pillar allows for clarity while looking at Thomasville's key organizational and programmatic strengths from a strategic objectives standpoint. Further, it allows for the injection of external perspectives to support this plan's evolution into a robust set of policy actions, that include a baseline of key metrics that will facilitate economic development decision-making as part of the overall Comprehensive Plan.

While existing programs are important to maintain for the sake of continuity, new programs and processes need to be part of a longer-term strategy with the associated organizational, managerial, and accountability frameworks. Such new efforts can be built step by step and gradually integrated into existing initiatives in Thomasville – with the immediate impact built around designing and focusing new programs to yield maximum benefit.

**Building the base** involves strengthening all aspects of long-term planning, investment appraisal and project screening and development, all refreshed on a regular basis, with wide input. Such planning can often benefit from strong input from additional stakeholders, like private-sector leaders, who can also coordinate or fund plans for economic competitiveness, improving housing options, or downtown infrastructure improvement. These stakeholders should work closely with City officials to ensure public input and accountability.

In addition, such groups should be so constituted so as to maximize access to creative financing mechanisms or sources of funding for revitalization efforts that might not be always available to local government efforts. Another promising area to explore is to directly approach state and regional development organizations and build a regional business

case for key local projects – this could lead to additional support in the form of program ideas, funding, stakeholders, partnerships and building a support base. Cities that exhibit a lean, yet agile, management structure benefit the most from the combined contributions from public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors working together.

## Pillar Focus Areas

The main focus areas for this pillar are activities common to all scales of investment planning efforts that are designed to strengthen the environment for attracting and retaining investment – and thus job creation. For this reason, the pillar is named, “**Building the Base**” as the successful implementation of the initiatives planned here leads to a strong and competitive base to attract and retain investment and a healthy mix of businesses.

From research and discussions with residents, it is clear that the government of the City of Thomasville must present a unified face to potential investors of being clear, consistent and easy to work with. After all, perhaps the most fundamental rule of economic development is not to turn away investors who already want to be in your community because of unclear policies or difficulty working with various City departments.

The first steps in building any sort of sustainable basis for investment is to:

- Follow a logical sequence of activities that produce an agreed upon strategy;
- Identify, protect and nurture existing strengths;
- Organize and clarify city administration as it relates to investment and permitting;
- Track and implement competitiveness-enhancing tactics as needed; and
- Let others know that the city is an attractive place to live, visit and do business.

## Details of the Focus Areas

Each of the focal areas points to initiatives that the City can undertake and review periodically to secure and enhance the overall regulatory environment for economic development.

The following pillar focus areas should be considered instrumental to achieving a broadening of the business base in the City, together with increasing both the number, variety and remuneration of employees in the City.

## Follow an Economic Competitiveness Development Strategy

The city’s Strategic Plan can be developed to enhance long-term economic development competitiveness. That strategy should help the city to compete for labor and capital such that Thomasville may leverage what it possesses in ways that answer the question “Why Thomasville?”

To this end, the City should work to update the current strategy to provide better guidance to long-range planning efforts. The strategy should not be a pro-forma exercise, but should take seriously the fact that Thomasville’s future depends on retaining families and young people even while these groups have specifically identified the local economy as a reason that they would consider leaving.

In addition to answering the question, “Why Thomasville?”, the strategy should discuss how the city intends to take advantage of its strengths and prioritize where resources can be directed.

## Manage Relevant Assets

To support the strategic planning effort, the city should identify key assets and strengths to be developed and protected.

This effort should include a plan to identify key physical and economic assets that offer the best opportunities for short-term and long-term growth and plan strategies to support them. Assets might include key firms or emerging clusters, parks, historic areas, seasonal events, sports and recreation, arts and cultural institutions.

It may be possible as part of this effort to work with selected data brokers for demographic or psychographic information to identify niche assets of human capital for additional economic development focus.

## Refresh City Organization & Processes as Needed

Citizens repeatedly mentioned that either they themselves or others they knew were frustrated in their dealings with the City and either did not invest or were unhappy with the process of investing in Thomasville. *Thomasville Blueprint 2028*, therefore, takes seriously the idea that improving economic development potential requires improving the competitiveness of working with the city to safely and efficiently bring new businesses to it.

To achieve the goals of the city’s economic development strategy and to reduce complaints about inefficiency from citizens and potential investors, the city should organize itself to most effectively deliver its services, while continuously striving to reduce the burden of compliance and forms.



This effort should focus on results that are led by global best practices for municipal organization and service delivery, such as:

**1. Verify That City Organization, Staffing and Resources Support Maximizing Economic Development Potential.**

This should be consistent with the vision for preserving and enhancing Thomasville’s existing character. The city government should have a simple and clear organizational structure that is reviewed regularly to ensure it is the best possible for attracting and retaining investment. All reporting relationships should be logical and consistent with best practices in the United States. Additionally, because private and non-profit sector resources exist and can be force-multipliers for the city, the city should consider how best to work with partners as part of its wider organization.

**2. Start Process Efficiency Improvements**

The City’s policies related to investment, business licensing and permitting should be reviewed regularly, using guidance from complaints and/or surveys. As part of this effort, special attention should be paid to codes governing key building types and specific districts in order to reduce bottlenecks, thereby making it easier for investment to flow into business projects.

**a. Conduct a Customer Experience Exercise**

Companies regularly assess themselves by stepping into their customer’s shoes to understand how they find the experience of interacting with it. Thomasville should mimic this approach for key economic development functions and incentive products by planning a customer journey exercise to identify areas of improvement and innovation.

**b. Complaints Tracking**

Another very useful exercise that both businesses and cities often undertake is tracking where the pain points are for their residents and others doing business within the city. This exercise not only lets the City understand where people feel frustrated, but could provide the foundation for its periodic process reviews.

**c. One Stop Shop**

Globally, a popular method of simplifying interactions with governments is the One Stop Shop idea, in which investors and citizens speak with one person in one place who handles the intra-government workings needed to achieve a specific goal, whether it be getting licenses or permits or working through tax issues. This approach tends to radically improve satisfaction and highlights the government friction points between various parts of government.

Because organizational change is always challenging, it may be best for the city to designate a term limited non-elected official (can be a public sector official or a private citizen) to be the steward of these activities. This role may be purely ceremonial (i.e. without decision-making authority), but should facilitate the transformation and publicly note progress and next steps to facilitate transparency and accountability.

**Set Up a Competitiveness Council**

To maintain and enhance its competitiveness against regional and even national competitors over the next decade, Thomasville should create a Competitiveness Council to identify, track and weigh information relevant to this end. For example, if the Competitiveness Council identifies an increase in Main Street vacancy together with a drop in new business registrations or weekly payrolls, it may decide to recommend targeted incentives to offset a predicted economic decline.

Evidence from other cities show that a competitiveness assessment is a key input for better governance and decision-making that supports general resident satisfaction as well as that of business partners. As an advisory body with a singular focus on improving the city’s economic competitiveness, this group would provide city leaders with regular data-driven assessments that can inform planning efforts across city government more generally.

The Competitiveness Council may track metrics around vacancy rates, new business creation, loan volume, visitor numbers, internal city processes, complaints, the results of the customer experience exercises – anything relevant to assessing its position in comparison to peers.

Since no existing tool for competitiveness tracking has universal application, the group would have to identify the targets that are most important to Thomasville. It would then construct a dashboard that can easily show progress or the lack thereof in those target regions. The city may consider putting the reporting dashboard online if it desires maximum transparency about the group’s targets, progress and plans.

Membership in the Competitiveness Council may be broad, with representatives from the city, businesses and residents who share a willingness to provide recommendations to both the City Council and administrative units in the city about activities to improve its competitiveness.

This effort would include three primary elements:

1. Define the details of the group’s operations, composition, reporting relationship and oversight;
2. Launch or, if needed, fund select membership and determine the composition of the competitiveness tool and dashboard; and

3. Develop initial data and survey-driven benchmarking, key performance indicators, and best practices, then regularly and incrementally improve the process of identifying, collecting and assessing data to better provide targeted advice to city leaders about where competitiveness can be improved.

### Targeted Economic Development Marketing

Bringing businesses to Thomasville from outside is a competitive effort in a world in which nearly every city in the world has someone trying to do just that. To best compete in this situation, the economic development function should be enlarged and given sufficient resources to perform both outbound marketing as well as respond to inbound contacts for the range of businesses it hopes to attract. Further, because different-sized businesses have different needs for City support, different business sources vary widely in how they may contact the City. A one-size-fits-all approach to both inbound and outbound marketing is likely to be insufficient to maximize the City’s economic development potential.

Instead, the economic development function of the City should be “right-sized”, that is, the staff size and scope of the organization should be appropriately modified for the revised strategic outcomes. In some cases, right-sizing requires adding new staff, but more often it involves organizational adjustments for existing staff to verify that roles and responsibilities match outcome requirements. Areas to strengthen include specialists focused on key business types (such as entrepreneurs, small and medium-sized companies, as well as national or international business or industrial companies). Within these focus areas, the economic development specialists can create customized online, social media and broader market activities to better position Thomasville to be recognized as a good partner for business.

In addition, the Economic Development function should be staffed to promote the recruitment, growth, and development of small to mid-sized firms (in addition to the currently serviced industrial clients) through programming/ partnerships with organizations such as local Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) and the National Center for Economic Gardening.

Once the economic development has been expanded to match a wider set of business marketing and support objectives, the city’s economic development entity should be regularly and publicly assessed against targets that can be selected by the city, but may include net new job creation, leads opened and closed, or new business registrations.

This activity should be considered a priority for the city due to its potential to make significant contributions to the local economy.

### Expected Outcomes

The results of the activities described in this pillar support the three outcomes most frequently cited by residents as their goals for the City of Thomasville.

Not every focus area in the Pillar supports each goal in the same way or to the same degree, but collectively they provide positive actions to improve Thomasville’s ability to attract and retain businesses, provide wider employment opportunities to residents — all while potentially creating an environment conducive to productivity enhancement.

### Expected Outcomes

	Building the Base Pillar Focus Areas:	Improve Business Friendliness	Increase Economic Diversification	Increase Productivity
1	Create An Economic Competitiveness Development Strategy	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
2	Launch An Asset Management Exercise	✓ ✓ ✓	✓	✓
3	Refresh City Organization and Structure as Needed	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓
4	Set Up a Competitiveness Council	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	
5	Targeted Economic Development Marketing		✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓

Key:  
 ✓ = Limited impact on outcomes, indirect, longer term contribution to narrow set of key metrics  
 ✓ ✓ = Moderate impact with broader contribution to key metrics  
 ✓ ✓ ✓ = Substantial direct impact, short-term, with measureable change in key metrics

Figure 16: Mapping Pillar One focus areas to desired outcomes

## Pillar 2: Enhancing Organic Strengths

### Developing Existing Assets to Maximize their Economic Contributions

The next strategic pillar, “Enhancing Organic Strengths”, focuses on improving the area’s existing strengths from an economic development perspective: utilizing its history, festivals, architecture, in-place businesses and city processes, people and natural resources to build sustainable economic assets. The centerpiece of this pillar is to deploy a cluster strategy as a way to enhance all current activities, policies, and investments. This pillar strategy can be viewed as cross-cutting in scope, and addresses Thomasville’s burgeoning small businesses as well as established anchors like Archbold Hospital and Flower Foods that have major impacts on the City’s economic life.

Generally, a cluster includes closely related and interconnected sectors, or specific industries operating within a specific location. In a cluster, firms often locate workers from a common pool, use the same supply chain and logistics, interface with the same consumers, and even use similar technologies, like Uber or Microsoft CityNEXT.

Clusters can also have sub-clusters, and these can form a mutually beneficial business ecosystem at a smaller scale, like food supply chains and food hubs. Cluster initiatives can be used to provide a workable framework for aligning disparate and outdated public policies, leadership and other initiatives and investments.

Tourism, which plays a central role in the City’s identity and brand, can also be supported and extended by utilizing a cluster approach. Segmenting tourism drivers and mapping them to activities that result in increased visitor attraction, repeat visits, and the creation of new experiences goes a long way towards consolidating Thomasville’s leading regional position as a day trip destination. Such segmentation can lead to new economic development targets: diversified sub-segments of the tourism economy (gastro-pubs), including attracting themed businesses (locally sourced or ethnic restaurants) or target entrepreneurship groups (such as disabled veteran-owned businesses).

Another key area of interest is harnessing the power of data availability to strengthen existing city and private asset performance by making collections of public data more easily available to a wide range of interested stakeholders. Such types of data made easily accessible can include

ongoing projects and statistics on just about every aspect of local government. Such an integrated, cross-cutting initiative can provide:

- Up to date information on how the city is spending money;
- The status of development permits;
- Geospatial data;
- Arts and culture program design information;
- Utilities data; and
- Current infrastructure spending related opportunities.

### Pillar Focus Areas

It is important to first identify and select Thomasville’s key competitive assets through a high-level cluster analysis (with input from business leaders), and ensure that target clusters create opportunities for all residents. Several clusters clearly exist (or are emerging) and have been supported: tourism, hospital/health care, and several emerging clusters, like manufacturing and utility services.

This business-focused strategy increases overall factor productivity by increasing the exposure of businesses to different growth options and business opportunities — which also increases employee skill development. As productivity increases and skills deepen, wages can naturally rise because the City’s labor force is able to work on more and varied business issues.

At the same time, cluster growth tends to enhance business level performance as partnerships and alliances deepen to go after new investment opportunities or targets.

The pillars focus areas include:

- Make and enhance industry clusters and linkages;
- Extend tourism successes;
- Bridge information gaps; and
- Export utility management skills regionally.



## Details of the focus areas

### Make and Enhance Industry Clusters and Linkages

Business and industry clusters are basically a series of defined relationships and linkages that are formed by like-minded decision makers in Thomasville, who all share a vision of improved business prospects for all. This high-level analysis is key to getting the best ideas and consensus to emerge, such that subsequent activities gain a level of buy-in at the management level and also garner financial support and analyze effective strategies to fill gaps. Such an effort would include the following steps:

#### 1. Select an Industry or Sector to Focus On

As an example, health care services (given the trending demand and demographics) would be a logical first choice, but other promising sectors are also acceptable choices.

#### 2. Hold a Workshop or Meeting to Pilot Ideas

Convene a group of participants, including leaders, to share the smartest ideas and practices for Thomasville's success through a facilitated session. This will bring out a list of prioritized ideas and actions to be followed through as pilots or full scale activities.

#### 3. Solicit Ideas By Creating a Multi-Way Dialogue

Create a special news issue or use regular communication channels such as a website, newsletter, webinar, podcast, and blog to socialize broad participation.

#### 4. Dedicate Time and Effort

Include monitoring and support time as part of the City outreach budget and incentivize staff to integrate ideas and actions into their core responsibilities.

Such an approach will provide Thomasville's efforts with a living laboratory for experimentation, reinvention, and continuous change. Coupled with the Competitiveness Council this provides solid cross-cutting inputs to all city economic development activities. While the group can certainly showcase site-specific projects, this work can also present a program dedicated to the macro forces that are shaping not only specific investments, but also larger regional trends that are likely to affect Thomasville down the line.

### Extend Tourism Successes

Tourism forms a core asset for Thomasville and can be expanded to not only include winning more loyal visitors, but also to play a role in supporting other focus areas in this and other pillars, including business successes in the maker's community. Key areas to consider include:

1. Attracting additional age or interest cohorts into the city;
2. Expanding the City's digital presence on social media platforms to broaden awareness of its offerings; and
3. Planning more events with a larger and deeper regional appeal to attract new visitors and reinforce Thomasville's offerings to recurring visitors.

Under this approach, Thomasville can plan to capitalize on strong tourism trends, including growth opportunities in international visitation and business travel like state and regional association meetings. As opportunities emerge, Thomasville may also find a niche as a corporate retreat destination.

Thomasville's 2016 second place ranking in America's Best Historic Small Towns by USA Today, and other recognitions bode well for further storytelling through a digital campaign to increase visibility, like travel and leisure stories or lists of "Best Small Towns In America" or "Best Towns to Retire In". This exposure can further emphasize Thomasville's community setting.

Millennial and older travelers alike are increasingly using digital stories and recommendations to drive choices. Any increase in regional and national digital visibility will result in more tourism interest, thereby jump-starting newer pieces of a tourism economy like shared spaces, a maker culture and even in supporting the city's green economy. Such campaigns are generally lower-cost and can be customized to work with existing ongoing programs and outreach.

Other more nuanced activities may exist around branding, such as hiring a horticulturist to develop a rose varietal that could be seeded across the city, sold to visitors and used as a distinct visual reinforcement to "The City of Roses."

### Bridge Information Gaps

Information is the new currency and sharing it creates value for a multitude of stakeholders. Thomasville is already creating a variety of data streams, with the potential of shared value beyond the stated data collection purposes. Thomasville could highlight opportunities that are often not known to residents or not currently collected in any structured manner, such as employment trends and opportunities from upcoming business expansions, re-locations, permit filings, as well as consolidation of disparate data from other government or research services.

Many cities are embarking on information sharing programs where data on things that the city is working on but doesn't share directly with citizens is now being made available to local residents. Examples include any sector or thematic area with a demand – supply mismatch, such as employment or housing. Even data-driven sections within newsletters can serve as a way to get hyper-local data and trends to be shared across sectors.

The city could host or facilitate websites that provide this information to local residents and businesses as a public good for no cost, simply to enhance information sharing, speed communication and better support supply and demand matching.

### Export Utility Management Skills Regionally

Thomasville has developed a core competence in managing the City's multiple utilities with a high level of performance. These include CNS – cable, telephone, and high-speed internet, compressed natural gas, electricity, solid waste, wastewater and water services. Having a multi-utility approach and understanding the end-to-end management and capital renewal aspects of utilities is very much in demand.

As America's infrastructure is notably under stress, skills related to managing with limited resources and controlling for commodity volatility and capital investment are in demand. Small towns in the region are facing issues related to the total cost of utility services, reliability, customer complaint management, and internal issues like customer relationship management and new technology adoption. Thomasville is in a position to offer other cities, communities or even utility cooperatives guidance and best practices in this area and is a service offering that should be evaluated in more detail.

## Expected Outcomes

	Enhancing Organic Strengths Pillar Focus Areas:	Improve Business Friendliness	Increase Economic Diversification	Increase Productivity
1	Make and Enhance Industry Clusters and Linkages	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓
2	Extend Tourism Successes	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓
3	Bridge Information Gaps	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓
4	Export Utility Management Skills Regionally	✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓

**Key:**

- ✓ = Limited impact on outcomes, indirect, longer term contribution to narrow set of key metrics
- ✓ ✓ = Moderate impact with broader contribution to key metrics
- ✓ ✓ ✓ = Substantial direct impact, short-term, with measureable change in key metrics

Figure 17: Mapping Pillar Two focus areas to desired outcomes

## Pillar 3: Developing New Opportunities

### Add New Economic Growth Engines

The final strategic pillar focuses on adding to the existing industrial and business base by taking advantage of untapped assets or emerging opportunities.

Typically, new economic endeavors offer high risk along with high return. Very few governments have shown a good track record in selecting “winners” — specifically choosing which industries to enter, how to enter them and how to stimulate investment in places where investors are uninterested.

For the City of Thomasville, then, the challenge and opportunity in this pillar is to selectively support the creation and growth of economic opportunities and the type of business environment that investors need that are not currently present in the city, or are not well established without making large bets with its accumulated capital.

The best method of achieving the goal of spurring new economic activity under this pillar is to begin with concepts for which demand is strong regionally and/or where the supply side is fragmented, or there are identifiable local resources that could be brought into commerce but are currently underutilized.

### Pillar Focus Areas

The core aspects of this portion of the economic development strategy are to either directly stimulate opportunities for the private sector to then develop (alone or in partnership with the city), or for the city to do as a matter of public good (which may be sold off later or managed under a public-private partnership (PPP)).

Typical activities in this strategy involve identifying industries with growth potential and some connection to the city’s skills, or asset factors that can be developed profitably. Other activities involve city-led efforts to market pre-feasibility studies for potential investment opportunities, as well as working to increase financial options for businesses in the city. Smart incentives are part of this process, as well, because the incentives can be directly tied to public policy goals for industrial development and entrepreneurship that are balanced with market realities.

The main focus areas for this pillar include:

- Promote new economic opportunities;
- Support new educational avenues;
- Create smart incentives; and
- Deepen local capital markets.

### Details of the Focus Areas

#### Promote New Economic Opportunities

The city can specifically target locations or businesses to develop (alone, as part of a PPP or as a purely private endeavor) that match particular policy goals. These opportunities include the improvement or elimination of neighborhood eyesores and brownfield sites; an event space; and anything that has the potential to generate positive, direct and indirect economic benefits beyond its cost, but may have challenges that the private sector is unable or unwilling to solve.

Typical examples here can be either small lots that have environmental contamination that the city could have remediated and then resell to bring it back into commerce. The City could focus on big bang projects to catalyze an area of town with little development. In many cases, these big bang projects do not work well, so the city should choose its focus carefully and sort among opportunities to identify those with the highest financial and economic returns. It should also eschew projects that are based on more wishful thinking than hard-headed business sense.

The city can and should take risks; however, it should temper its risk-taking with sufficient planning and research to mitigate as many risks as possible prior to launching.



### Support New Educational Avenues

The cost of a traditional college education continues to rise, along with a worrying rise in unbankruptable student loan debt. At the same time, the financial returns to such an investment have been declining for all but the most elite universities. Yet, skilled labor demands remain high for many types of industries, from construction trades to historical restorations, decorative arts, metal and wood working, and traditional vocational training in HVAC, automotive repair and the like.

Increasingly, the emergence of maker spaces and shared workspaces has driven a new class of entrepreneur to come from non-traditional backgrounds. These entrepreneurs are likely to work with their hands, but often with an eye towards creating custom work that overseas factories cannot match, and that offer much higher margins than normal for their industries. In facilities that support these entrepreneurs, the mixture of different skills help to seed new ideas that take root and become companies in the future. Thomasville has the opportunity to identify and nurture educational institutions that combine the best of non-college education, with the advantages of business-focused maker spaces.

As an example to illustrate the point, the City could define and support the creation of a Center of Excellence for the decorative and restorative arts in furniture and buildings. The center could specialize in training students in core and then advanced skills. Then, as an integrated part of the curriculum and also as a non-educational offering, the center could offer workspaces, tools and legal, accounting and business support services. Additionally, the center could secure partnerships with other training centers as well as customer markets in the region.

The results of this center would be an increase in skilled labor for high-demand industries, who in turn should earn much more than they did prior to their training. With the center acting as a shared workspace as much as an educational facility, it would bring actual businesses and customers to the site, offering a rich mixture of specialists in a single location and real-world experience for trainees.

Thomasville could take the lead in identifying sites for such types of education, potentially also beginning the process of negotiating with training suppliers to come to the City and even custom creating an incentive plan to reduce their start-up risk.

### Create Smart Incentives

Incentives theoretically attract businesses to an area that would otherwise not come to that place. In practice, though, incentives are often abused by businesses who are simply shopping for the largest public subsidy for their business. Cities compete by simply increasing the total amount of money that they can offer a company, often knowing that the business in question will leave as soon as the incentive period expires. Since almost no one ever calculates the true net addition to the local economy from the factory after considering the opportunity cost to the city of spending public money, many incentive programs underperform their promise.

This fact should drive Thomasville to recognize that since businesses are looking to maximize the total amount of public money spent to bring them to a location, so too should businesses recognize that they are in competition for those same investment dollars. The way to make this recognition explicit is to make incentives smarter, that is, to require additional conditions and closer monitoring of benefits and use of protections on when and how public money is spent to attract businesses to the city.

One basic approach would be that the net present value of any incentives provided would have to generate enough benefits to offset the fully loaded opportunity cost of the capital provided at a true rate of return equal to what the money could have generated had it been used for other purposes. Additional considerations may involve preferences for local business expansion, size of businesses to target, jobs created in the city, the creation of training programs for particular skills, etc. There really is no limit to what can be proposed as a condition for qualifying for an incentive other than what is practical without turning businesses away from wanting to locate in the city.

## Deepen Local Capital Markets

All businesses need capital to launch and grow, but it often pools in large urban centers, not in small towns. Thomasville should evaluate the local availability of both debt and equity for businesses to understand how it may be able to facilitate deepening these pools by adding to them from both government and private sources.

On the government side, there are federal programs, such as the Small Business Investment Company program, that provides equity capital support to local investors to make investments in local businesses. The benefits from having local equity capital available can be quite strong, as it more closely connects investors with their portfolio companies, who in turn are hiring from the local workforce and adding stability to the local economy.

The State of Georgia and Thomas County also have programs that provide limited grants or loans for economic activities that are favored by the government for reaching particular policy goals. Since these are freely available across the state and county, they do not add much to the city’s competitiveness, though if the city office were skilled in helping its residents to complete the forms properly, and in knowing what tends to be fundable or not, that knowledge will translate into economically competitive positioning.

Banks and credit unions too can be included in this activity, as the city can regularly request information from them on current lending facilities available in the city, as well as key terms for those loans. This information, together with sources of equity capital and government assistance provides a comprehensive local index of publicly available business capital. As an added benefit, if there are individuals in town who operate informal angel investment networks or provide growth capital in limited circumstances, then they too can be included in the listing.

## Expected Outcomes

	Developing New Opportunities Pillar Focus Areas:	Improve Business Friendliness	Increase Economic Diversification	Increase Productivity
1	Promote New Economic Opportunities	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓
2	Support New Educational Avenues	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓
3	Create Smart Incentives	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓
4	Deepen Local Capital Markets	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓

**Key:**  
 ✓ = Limited impact on outcomes, indirect, longer term contribution to narrow set of key metrics  
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Figure 18: Mapping Pillar Three focus areas to desired outcomes

## GOALS & POLICIES

Create an economic and investment environment that positively differentiates Thomasville from other small cities through ease of doing business, a wide variety of business and employment opportunities and attractive wages.

### Pillar One: Building the Base

#### Optimizing City Organization

**Goal 9.1: A City structured in line with its mission and that fits best practices for organizational functions, staffing levels and reporting relationships.**

Policy 9.1.1: Create an independent person or group to facilitate, publicize and maintain momentum for city optimization plans.

Policy 9.1.2: Review and rationalize City structure for operations annually.

Policy 9.1.3: Create partnership councils for targeted areas of City operations.

#### Improving City Process Efficiency

**Goal 9.2: A City that operates efficiently with the least friction for all parties involved.**

Policy 9.2.1: Create an internal complaints council to track process improvements.

Policy 9.2.2: Review and update policies in housing, investment and business licensing annually.

#### Enhancing City Competitiveness

**Goal 9.3: Apply policy tools to regularly improve the City's ability to attract and retain businesses, residents and tourists.**

Policy 9.3.1: Establish and manage a Competitiveness Council, including associated tools, data and reporting outputs.

Policy 9.3.2: Develop a regular process of translating competitiveness recommendations into policy.

#### Developing City-Private Sector Partnerships

**Goal 9.4: A City that leverages private sector resources to support public missions and management to the greatest extent possible.**

Policy 9.4.1: Maintain and publish a list of partnership opportunities and potential partners.

Policy 9.4.2: Create and regularly review guidelines and goals for public-private partnerships for service sharing.

Policy 9.4.3: Maintain and publish service level agreement terms for public-private partnerships.

#### Delivering Economic Development Marketing Effectiveness

**Goal 9.5: Vastly increase the number of businesses and others who identify Thomasville as an excellent location for investment.**

Policy 9.5.1: Expand the economic development function to meet broadened objectives and provide sufficient staff and other resources to execute its mission effectively.

Policy 9.5.2: Create targets and outreach plans for both business and potential residents.

Policy 9.5.3: Establish work groups for small business / entrepreneurs, industrial businesses and others (as needed) to bring together relevant stakeholders into the marketing functions.



## Pillar Two: Enhancing Organic Strengths

### Supporting New Educational Avenues

**Goal 9.6: Provide a wide range of educational opportunities to residents, particularly those that offer high income to educational cost ratios.**

Policy 9.6.1: Establish working groups to facilitate trade and specialty training options.

Policy 9.6.2: Provide opportunities for tourism and business events that link to trade and specialty training programs.

Policy 9.6.3: Maintain surveys of businesses that highlight skills gaps to be shared with schools and training organizations.

### Facilitating Employment Opportunities

**Goal 9.7: A City that supports an efficient labor market with open access to all applicants with the fewest hindrances between employer and employee.**

Policy 9.7.1: Regularly review requirements for city employment to eliminate unnecessary hurdles.

Policy 9.7.2: Create and maintain a local employment tool online where businesses and the city can post jobs and residents can apply (potentially as part of a structured program).

Policy 9.7.3: Facilitate internships among businesses and residents.

### Extending Tourism Successes

**Goal 9.8: Increasing the time and money spent by tourists in Thomasville by extending successful events to include new activities.**

Policy 9.8.1: Current tourism events should be regularly reviewed for extension and the inclusion of new local businesses.

Policy 9.8.2: Create a coordination plan for increased cultural programming.

Policy 9.8.3: Build additional linkages between the City's business base and its tourism economy, using (as an example) the emerging maker economy as a driver for additional visits and visitor spend.

### Broadening Utility Management Opportunities

**Goal 9.9: A City that maximizes its revenues with the lowest loss levels from utility operations.**

Policy 9.9.1: Evaluate opportunities to develop new municipal revenue streams from utility management functions that serve other communities.

### Enhancing Clusters and Linkages

**Goal 9.10: A City that contains more robust business clusters of firms at all stages of development, from research through to suppliers.**

Policy 9.10.1: Create and maintain City-facilitated cluster and linkage development strategies to expand existing clusters, build expertise and productivity in existing companies, and promote the use of local suppliers and services.

Policy 9.10.2: Promote and attract unique makers to the downtown to further build expertise in the handmade goods sector.

Policy 9.10.3: Support the development of regional and national interest groups to promote Thomasville's clusters and opportunities.

## Pillar Three: Developing New Opportunities

### Promoting New Economic Opportunities

**Goal 9.11: A City that generates new avenues for economic growth through targeted investment concept development and promotion.**

- Policy 9.11.1: Identify emerging opportunities for City development through makers & crafts people, locavores and green economy supporters.
- Policy 9.11.2: Create and publish feasibility studies on selected investment concepts to attract new investment into the area.
- Policy 9.11.3: Hold periodic roundtables, conferences and events to generate investment interest in Thomasville.
- Policy 9.11.4: Directly market to data centers and high tech clients who may find Thomasville’s location and cost basis as assets for their particular businesses.
- Policy 9.11.5: Host a regional workshop to promote joint activities.

### Creating Smart Incentives

**Goal 9.12: A City that provides targeted incentives for investment that reward public policy goals, such as growing the skilled employment base or hiring the long-term unemployed.**

- Policy 9.12.1: Develop and maintain a best practices manual for investment incentives.
- Policy 9.12.2: Award incentives competitively, promote their availability and publish results to maintain accountability on their effectiveness.

### Deepening Local Capital Markets

**Goal 9.13: A City that facilitates the wider availability of capital for business startups, growth and development.**

- Policy 9.13.1: Curate or support the development of local capital pools, particularly those for early stage equity investment.
- Policy 9.13.2: Create a Small Business Investment Company to leverage federal capital for local business growth.
- Policy 9.13.3: Develop a City-backstopped line of credit (or similar) facility for business expansion that fits public policy goals.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

### Factors Affecting Health

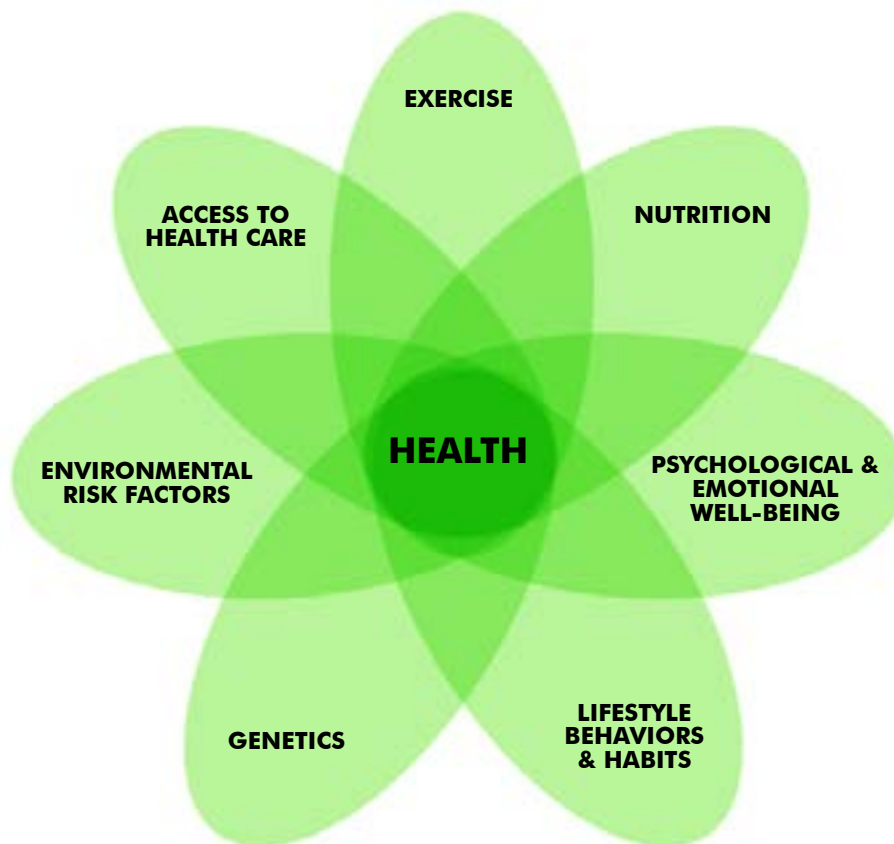
Health is affected by many overlapping factors, some internal, others external. A comprehensive plan may address some of these quite directly, especially those that help create a physical environment that encourages good health rather than one that thwarts it. However, certain factors such as genetics can only be addressed tangentially by this document, if at all.

Thomasville’s most common health challenges are the same challenges faced nationwide – diabetes, stress, depression, an aging population, childhood nutrition, and the spread of infectious, preventable, diseases.

According to the website *Livability* - an online ranking of communities based on various health factors - Thomas County ranks 72 for health outcomes, 64 for health factors, and 101 for healthy behaviors in GA, out of all counties in Georgia. Health Factors cited in the above, may include drug/alcohol abuse, number of insured residents, access to healthy food, obesity rates, and overall quality of life.

### What is the Health Element?

The Health Element is not meant to function as a Comprehensive Health Plan for the City of Thomasville. Up until recently, Comprehensive Plans did not contain elements pertaining to health. Yet, more and more people are beginning to recognize the relationship between health and the built environment, public policy, and the management of the city and its environment. This chapter seeks to describe these relationships and how they can be improved.





The average life expectancy for Thomasville is 73 years, which mirrors Georgia’s 74 years and is slightly lower than the national average of 76 years.

Thomasville has one doctor for every 1,147 residents and one dentist for every 2,400 people. This is below state and national averages.

The obesity rate in Thomasville is high: 34% of Thomasville residents are obese; compared with 31% for the state and 30% for the country. Diabetes is also higher in Thomasville compared to Georgia and the United States with 12.2% for the city, 11% for the state, and 9% for the nation. (Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census.)

According to the National Diabetes Surveillance System from the Centers for Disease Control, 28.4% of Thomasville residents are considered physically inactive. A person is considered physically inactive “if during the past month, other than a regular job, he or she did not participate in any physical activities or exercises such as running, calisthenics, golf, gardening, or walking for exercise.” This means that more than a quarter of the population is not getting any form of physical activity.

A high disparity exists in the number of people under 65 years who are disabled. According to the U.S. Census, in Thomasville, 14% of people fit this category. The percentage for Georgia and the U.S. is 8% for both.

The closure of Southwestern State Hospital in 2013 left a gap in mental health and social services in the city and region. Residents expressed the need to address the mental health issues affecting Thomasville.

*Given Thomasville’s size, some of the health data found for Thomasville is recorded at the county level.*



The Big Oak in the middle of town reminds residents of the city’s historical roots, but also serves as an indicator that Thomasville residents value their natural resources and overall health.

# COMMUNITY CONCERNS

## Higher Rates of Obesity

Thomasville, like many cities across the country, is experiencing high obesity rates. Obesity is caused by many factors: genetics, diet, and environment. The built environment (those items built by cities such as parks, neighborhoods, streets, public facilities, trails) can have a great affect on peoples ability or inability to get enough physical activity.

Many residents and various organizations expressed concern that residents are not getting enough exercise to combat obesity. This is an area of concern that should take priority if the city is going to have a physically active population.

## Create More Social Services

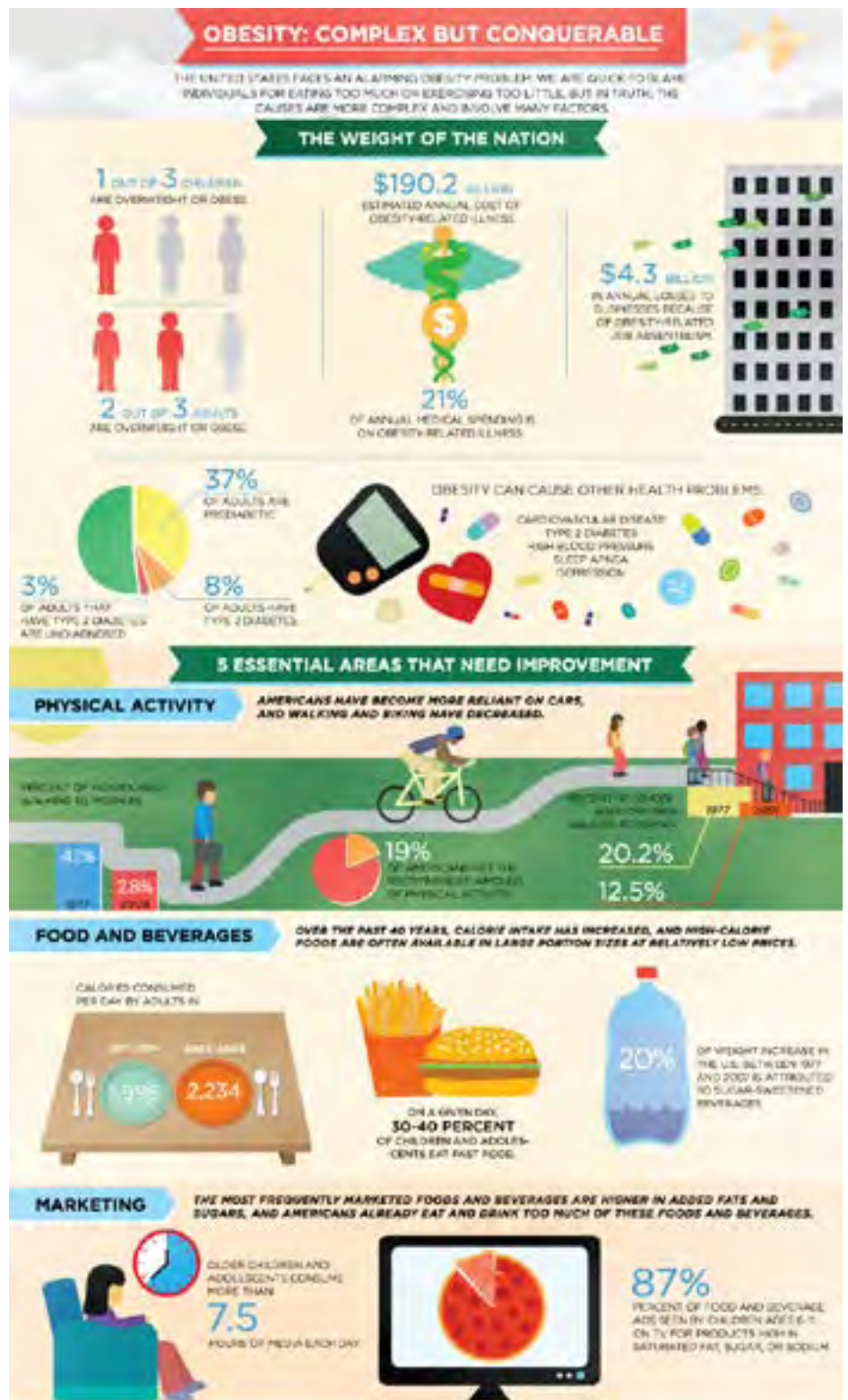
A prevailing concern further exacerbated by the closure of Southwestern Hospital in 2013 is the need for more social services for various populations. The YMCA was identified as one of few organizations providing services, but residents felt the need to increase capacity in this area.

It is important for the overall health of the city to ensure that its citizens have access to the various services necessary to maintain a high quality of life.

## Access to Healthy Foods

There is a significant problem concerning food deserts (lack of access to healthy food) exist, particularly within Thomasville's lower income neighborhoods where the streets lack basic infrastructure to ensure a safe walk to the closest grocery store. This has recently become a larger issue with the closing of the only grocery store on the south side of town. The City needs a comprehensive approach to securing reliable access to healthy food.

The infographic below and spanning onto the next page details the obesity epidemic from a national perspective but also offers insight pertinent to Thomasville.





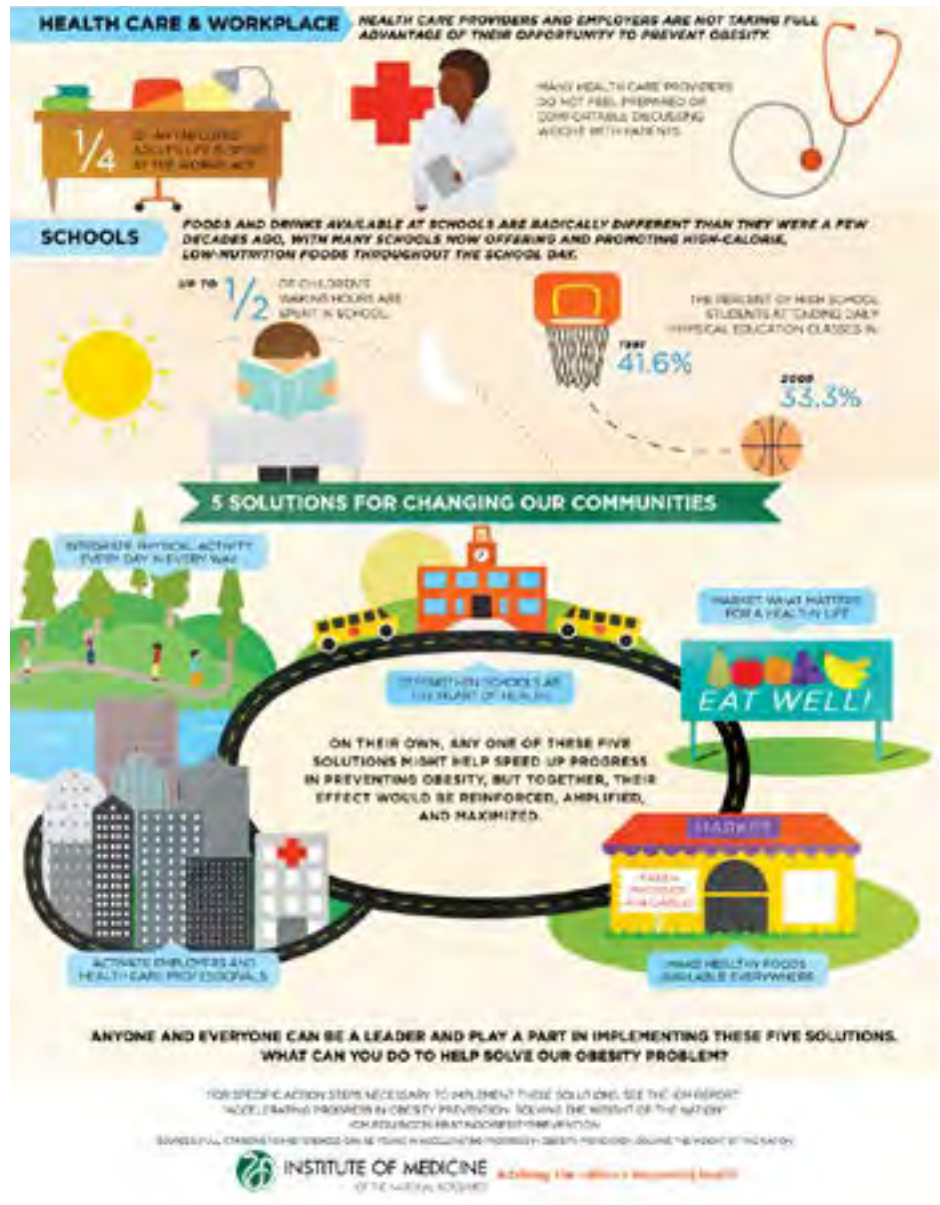
## Lack of Activities for Youth

On several occasions during the public process, many young people expressed concern that Thomasville does not have many activities for youth. They expressed frustration about having to travel to Tallahassee for entertainment and recreational activities, and a desire for more communal areas that increase their social capital with other youth. Suggestions ranged from coffee shops to restaurants and parks.

If Thomasville is to encourage its youth to stay in Thomasville as adults and future taxpayers it needs to do a better job of making its young people feel appreciated by providing multiple outlets for healthy mind and body activities and interactions.



During the charrette, these young women a local high school expressed a need for more youth-oriented activities in Thomasville.



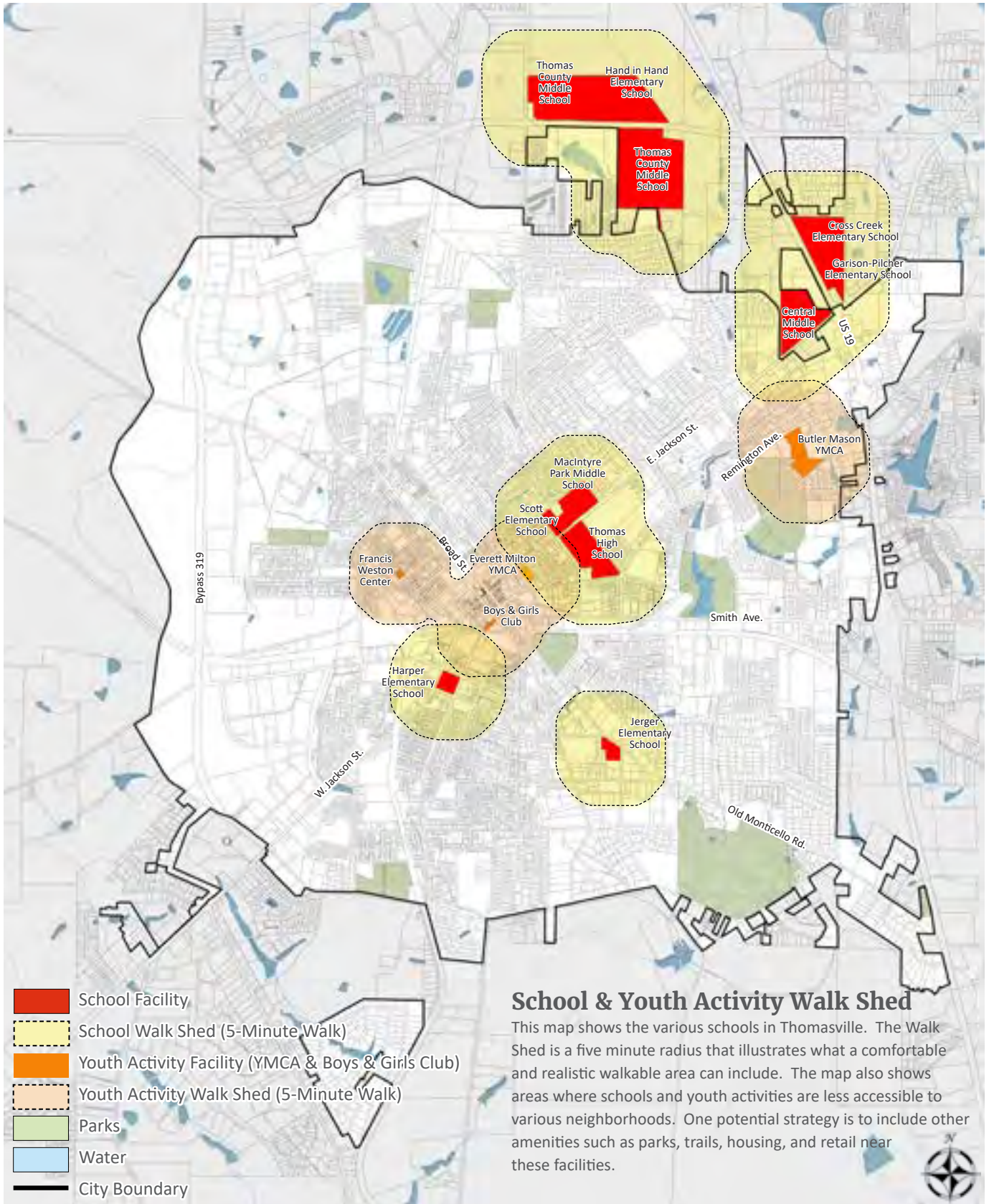
## Less Children Walk to School

One of the simplest and most cost-effective ways to get kids to exercise is by walking to school. Past generations remember walking to school because it was encouraged by parents and because the built environment encouraged it. There is concern in Thomasville that not as many children are walking to school as in the past. Residents expressed concerns that increased traffic at various intersections has made walking to school unsafe and that the culture of encouraging kids to walk to school is being lost.

**“We need a safety net for our most vulnerable people; human services are needed in order for human beings to thrive.”**

—Nolah Shotwell, Habitat for Humanity





## Vacant Lots for Local Foods

An evident issue in Thomasville is the large quantity of vacant and/or underutilized parcels of land and structures. Residents expressed concern about this on many fronts; from housing opportunities that can be created on these lots, to the impact these unsightly structures have on the community.

Residents also expressed the opportunities that exist for local food production through farmers markets and community gardens. A multi-prong approach for resolving various concerns could be to allow residents access to many of these underutilized lots for urban farming.

“Given the health benefits of regular physical activity, we have to wonder why two out of three Americans are continuing to risk their health and the quality of their lives by remaining sedentary.”

— U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

“Promoting Physical Activity: A Guide for Community Action”



There are hundreds of dilapidated homes and distressed lots throughout Thomasville. By converting these lots into urban farms, Thomasville can give residents recreational options for gardening while increasing social capital opportunities through community farmers markets.

During the public meetings, Thomasville residents were asked,  
“Do you agree: Where we live affects our physical and mental health?”

**96%**

Of respondents agreed with the statement.



# STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING COMMUNITY CONCERNS

## Increase Physical Activity through the Built Environment

The built environment has a major influence on residents' physical and mental wellbeing. If the built environment is designed well, meaning that residents have ample opportunities to walk, hike, jog, or other recreational opportunities, then people tend to be more active and are able to burn off calories making them less susceptible to weight gain. If the built environment offers very little opportunities to be active, then residents will be less inclined to exercise.

Already, Thomasville is pursuing an active living framework through the implementation of the Thomasville Community Trail, a citywide trail system. It is important that the system is fully funded and implemented. The trail system will have lasting effects on people's quality of life.

It is imperative that the city also build sidewalks in areas where they are lacking or are substandard. If safe and comfortable sidewalks are provided throughout neighborhoods, people will be more inclined to walk or bicycle.

In addition to recreation, if people have more opportunity to use walking and biking as a means of transportation, it will help to lead healthier lives. The development of Neighborhood Centers and Crossroads throughout the community, if developed, would provide needed services and increased density within walking distance of a large population. The City should encourage this "general theory of walkability," as coined by Jeff Speck author of *The Walkable City*, where walking and biking are seen as a means of transportation, not just recreation.

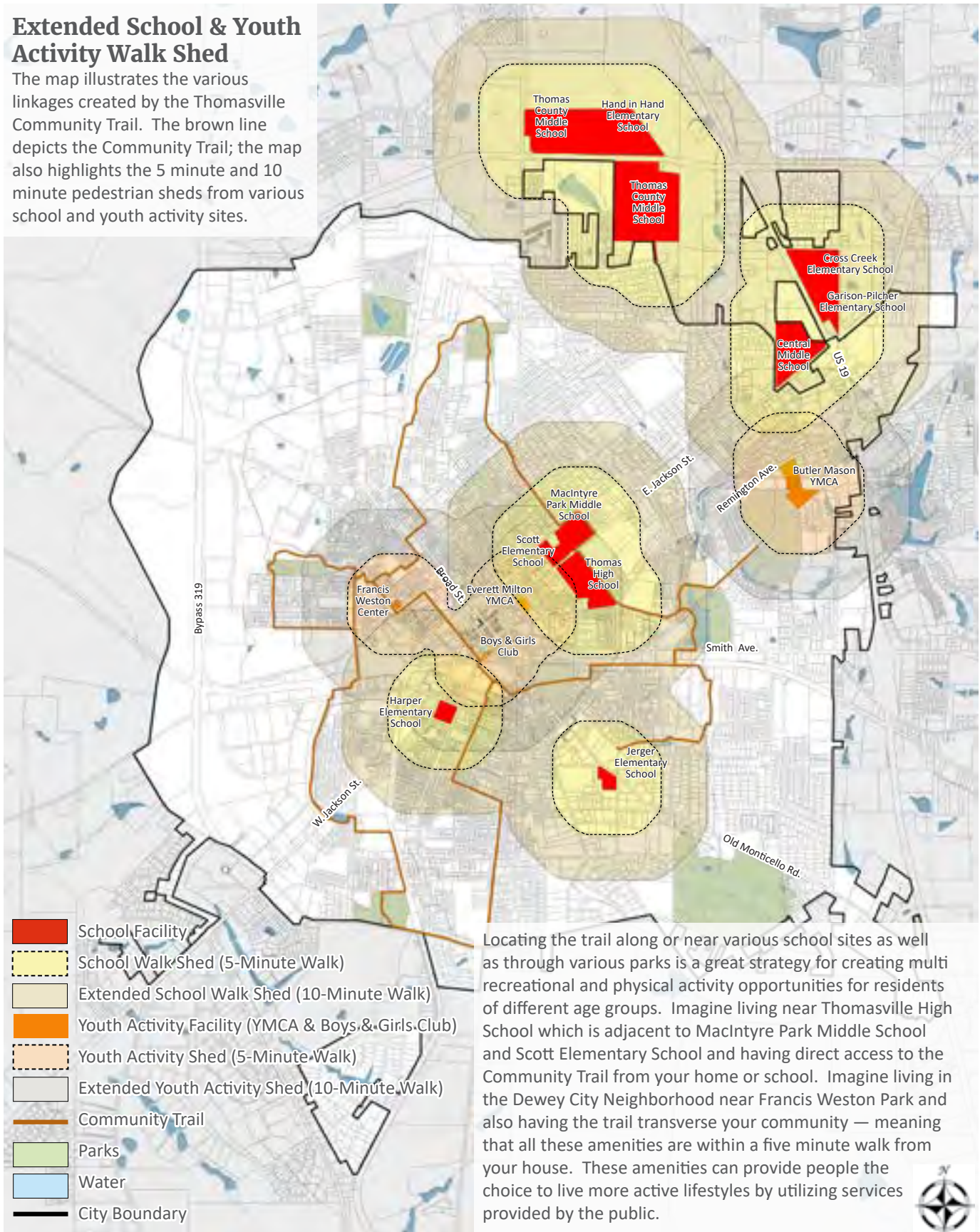


The top image illustrates an area where very little sidewalks exist. By creating wider sidewalks with street trees, the built environment becomes more encouraging for pedestrians, as shown.



### Extended School & Youth Activity Walk Shed

The map illustrates the various linkages created by the Thomasville Community Trail. The brown line depicts the Community Trail; the map also highlights the 5 minute and 10 minute pedestrian sheds from various school and youth activity sites.



## Develop a One-Stop Shop for Social & Health Services

The Southwestern Hospital site can serve as a potential location for developing a regional area for various social and health-related services, including a large regional athletic facility to include various sports activities. Another possible reuse of this site is a continuing care retirement facility, perhaps a mixed-use facility that includes health services for various at-risk populations.

Through a multi-phase approach, the city can begin to redevelop this large parcel of land with no current viable use. It would send a strong public message to repurpose an older community landmark into an exciting future amenity.

Services offered on-site could include both physical and mental health components, but could also include social services for various populations to include elderly services and programs for homeless populations.

The city should ensure that the area can be reached by public transportation in order to provide low-income residents with easy and accessible routes to these services.

## Provide Outlets for Youth Activities

Thomasville youth are hungry for things to do within their city; they voiced concerns that the city does not provide ample opportunities for positive interaction among young residents. Youth expressed a need for social outlets where they can get out of their houses and hang out with other young people. More coffee shops, better park amenities, more recreational activities such as a youth zone/arcade, and movie theatres were just some of the ideas outlined by various young people during public meetings.

The city should begin an earnest effort to increase youth participation in the city through varied activities. For example:

- Form a youth-led committee to inform decision-makers about their needs and provide input on policy recommendations that may affect their lives.
- Develop youth-specific events in downtown and in the city's large parks. These can include outside movie events, live music events, or arts festivals.
- Incentivize the creation of neighborhood retail that caters to children and young people. Ice cream shops, teen cafés, and family entertainment centers are things that can help improve the quality of life for this population.

## Continue “Live Better” Program

The Archbold Medical Center’s “Live Better” program is an initiative that should continue and, if at all possible, should be increased in scope.

“Live Better” is an effort to improve the health of Thomas County residents through health living advocacy, clinical outreach programs, education, and strategic partnerships. A major focus of this initiative is to combat obesity.

City leaders and health-related stakeholders should find ways to make this program accessible to large parts of the county and city by continuing on the success of this program. The program could be expanded to schools, religious institutions, workplaces, small businesses, youth organizations, and other community-oriented organizations.





## Develop a Comprehensive Healthy Eating Program

Food is another culprit that contributes to unhealthy lifestyles and increases people’s risk of various conditions like obesity and cardiovascular disease. Thomasville has plenty of usable land with rich soil. This land includes current vacant land but also parcels with dilapidated housing and underutilized properties.

A blue ribbon committee or citizen-led task force should be created to explore multiple strategies to increase the consumption of healthy foods. Some strategies could include the following:

- Increase access to grocery stores in areas that could be considered food deserts. Food deserts are low-income areas that lack full-service grocery stores or have little access to healthy food options. The City should consider a comprehensive approach that allows the City to offer incentives to transformative uses such as markets, grocery stores, and pharmacies.
- Create farmers markets throughout the city where local urban farmers and artisans could sell fruits and vegetables while creating a sense of community pride. Farmers markets also provide an avenue for neighbors to interact while increasing social wellbeing in their communities.

- Identify land where urban farms could be developed. These urban farms could be scattered throughout Thomasville and could be tended and maintained by local organizations including neighborhood groups, youth advocacy programs, or the private sector as a way to increase volunteer opportunities for their employees. The urban farms would also repurpose fallow and underutilized land while beautifying areas of the city that currently have large percentages of boarded-up structures.
- Continue to promote community gardens. There are opportunities to encourage gardens, orchards, and other edibles within the City’s parks and along the Thomasville Community Trail. Edibles grown in City parks could be sold or made available during farmer’s market events.
- In addition to access to fresh foods, people also need educational resources on how to prepare these foods. This could include cooking classes local food cookbooks, or even a coop kitchen, possibly in conjunction with the UGA Cooperative Extension Service.





# Farmers Markets: A How-To Guide

A robust farmers market offers many benefits to the community it serves: a marketplace for local farmers and makers; a cultural connection to local agriculture, ecology and food; a unique destination for residents and visitors; and the opportunity to co-market and highlight various organizations, products or activities at a special community event. The following considerations can set a community on the right path to the best possible outcomes when it comes to farmers markets:

## Management

The first step to starting a successful farmers market is finding the best host. There are many possible organizational structures; the best for Thomasville will depend on local capacity and resources. The Main Street program, the Marketing and Communications Department, or another non-profit or governmental agency are potential hosts, and many farmers markets incorporate as their own non-profit organization. In any case, it is important that a community-based farmers market has at its core a mission to benefit the people of Thomasville. The market host should dedicate sufficient time and resources to recruit vendors, implement a marketing plan, coordinate with local and state health department officials; connect with the community through various forms of outreach, and manage any special programs or events that take place at the market. Farmers Markets can quickly become self-sufficient based on vendor fees or commissions, grants, and/or special event sponsorships. Support from the City in terms of land, access to restrooms, special event permits, etc. will be vital to the success of any local Farmers Market.

## Location

Like any business, a Farmers Market needs a highly visible location. It should be thought of as a community asset and gathering place, and therefore it should be located adjacent to other important real estate or businesses that could benefit from its presence. Often Farmers Markets thrive in walkable destinations or community hubs. Other important considerations are accessibility, parking and/or wayfinding

signage, and restrooms. Farmers Markets are flexible programs and can locate outside, on pavement or in plazas, or under canopies or pavilions. Many well-established markets are moving toward more permanent structures that offer the benefits of electricity, and demonstration kitchens but this is not necessary — especially at the beginning while ideas are still being tested.

## Authenticity

Farmers Markets connect consumers with locally grown produce and other food products. There are many acceptable definitions for “locally grown”; what is most important is that the market set guidelines about what products can be sold and communicate clearly with vendors and customers about what these guidelines are. Many Farmers Markets allow makers and artisans to sell products at the market in addition to local growers and food producers.

## Special Programming

Farmers Markets have been on the rise across the country, which means that there are many toolkits and programs available to communities starting out. Some to look into include: Farmers Market Coalition’s free online resource library and ready-made kids activity guides; USDA’s Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) that enable WIC, SNAP, and low-income senior benefits to be used at farmers markets; and the USDA’s Farmers Market grant programs like the Local Food, Local Places (LFLP) grant.

## Support For Local Vendors

At the center of a successful Farmers Market is its growers, producers and artisans. In order to secure high quality goods and products, a local Farmers Market should connect with organizations that already support local growers and artists, like the County Extension Office, local arts organizations, and well-connected local businesses. A well-organized and promoted market with clear guidelines, vendor support, and an exciting calendar of events that connect with the community will build vibrancy in Thomasville throughout the market season.



## GOALS & POLICIES

Given the high percentage of residents who are physically inactive and the high rates of obesity, the City of Thomasville will work through and with its diverse populations to ensure that current health concerns are addressed while ensuring that future generations live in healthy and prosperous environments.

### Goal 10.1: Promote active lifestyles through improved built environments.

Policy 10.1.1: Increase pedestrian connectivity through sidewalk improvements. There are many sections of the city that lack proper sidewalk amenities. The city has initiated a city-wide sidewalk improvement strategy. This strategy should continue and if possible, increased funding should be applied to address larger sections of the city.

Policy 10.1.2: Continue the Thomasville Community Trail Program. This initiative should continue as these amenities provide physical activity opportunities to multiple populations that help improve physical and mental health while increasing social capital.

Policy 10.1.3: Make walking to school a priority. One simple way to increase physical activity is to provide opportunities for children to walk to school. There are many walkable schools in the city, however, there seems to be a decline in the number of children and families walking to school. A strategy can include advocacy for walkable schools and ensuring that routes to and from school are safe and adequate. In addition, the City School Board should consider more and smaller neighborhood schools instead of consolidation.

Policy 10.1.4: Within the downtown investment sector or new and retrofit investment sector identify high capacity streets that are too wide and unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists and propose street diets. People are more inclined to walk or bike on streets that are safe and well maintained.

### Goal 10.2: Provide a safety net for health and human services.

Policy 10.2.1: Redevelop Southwestern Hospital into a continuing care retirement community and one-stop shop for community services. A coalition of stakeholders should review the potential for redeveloping this site into a large-scale mixed-use housing and health facility to include health services for various at-risk populations. Public transportation or easily accessible routes should be a major factor when considering this initiative. Recognizing that Thomasville does not provide public transportation, if possible it should provide some form of transit services to this location.

Policy 10.2.2: Continue to promote and expand “Live Better” Initiative. Through partnerships with the local YMCA and the Archbold Hospital, the city should continue this initiative that promotes wellness. This could be coupled with the walk to school programs and the hike/bike trails project.

### Goal 10.3: Increase social capital for both adults and youth.

Policy 10.3.1: The City should develop a youth-led committee to provide input on how policies and programs affect the lives of young people. Through this committee changes can be implemented to positively improve the quality of life for Thomasville’s young men and women.

Policy 10.3.2: It is important that Thomasville leadership recognize that young people expressed frustration with the lack of youth-oriented amenities and activities. Every effort should be made to develop programs and activities that cater to the city’s youth. Small business that have positive activities for youth should also be encouraged.

Policy 10.3.3: Through various community partnerships, activities and advocacy work can be done to increase communal pride and social capital opportunities for residents. Thomasville residents expressed a desire to interact more with each other. By creating activities, events, or encouraging the development of clubs, the city can help improve the social wellbeing of residents.

#### **Goal 10.4: Develop a Comprehensive Local Food System.**

Policy 10.4.1: Develop a citywide program to repurpose vacant parcels and dilapidated structures into community and urban farm opportunities.

Policy 10.4.2: Look for opportunities to encourage gardens, orchards, and other edibles within the City's parks, along the Thomasville Community Trail, and rights-of-way. These locations can be mapped for use by urban foragers (such as fallingfruit.org, etc.)

Policy 10.4.3: Ensure that access to healthy food exist throughout all of Thomasville. The City should create a comprehensive approach to offer incentives to transformative uses such as markets, grocery stores, and pharmacies. The City should strive to eliminate all food deserts in the City.

Policy 10.4.4: Create neighborhood-based farmers markets; utilizing strategies in Policies 10.3.2, 10.3.3, 10.4.1, and 10.4.2. Farmers markets can address various concerns related to the overall health of Thomasville residents.





# Broadband Services 11

## BROADBAND SERVICES ELEMENT

Thomasville recognizes the importance of broadband availability and its role in enhanced community and economic development, educational attainment, and social engagement. As such, the City will explore the requirements for the Broadband Ready Community Designation and eligible locations for the Broadband Ready Site Designation.

The City will continue to explore ways to help expand high-speed internet service to the underserved and unserved areas. In addition to CNS, Thomasville residents can subscribe to broadband through private service providers, including AT&T and Mediacom. The City of Thomasville offers free Wi-Fi connections to the public in the Downtown area and at the municipal airport. The City is also looking to expand access to free Wi-Fi throughout the parks system, which is currently only available at the amphitheater and Weston Park.



Thomasville Francis Weston Park



Broadband Service Installation

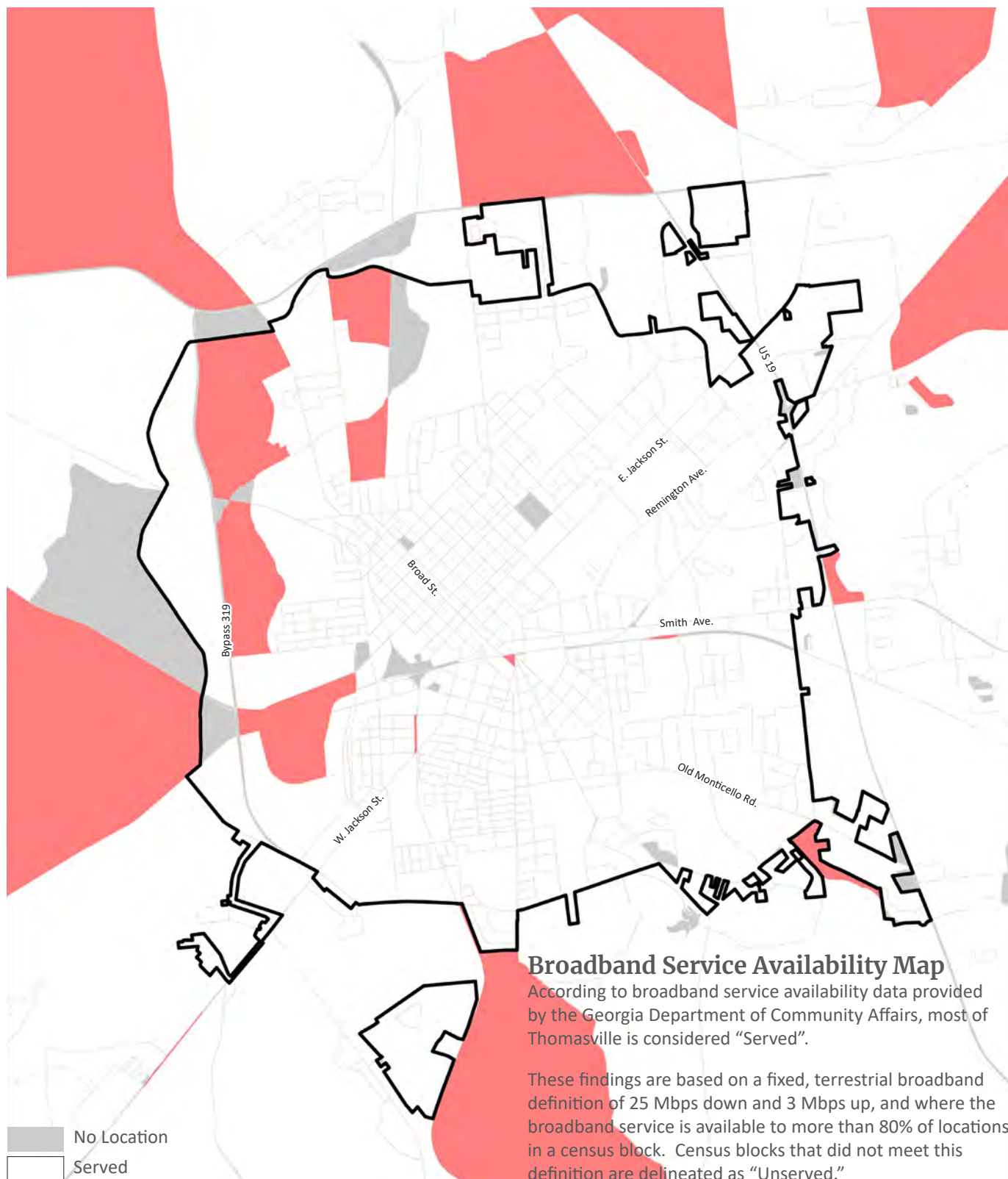


Thomasville Francis Weston Park



CNS Next

The Broadband Service Availability Map was created May 2023.



### Broadband Service Availability Map

According to broadband service availability data provided by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, most of Thomasville is considered "Served".

These findings are based on a fixed, terrestrial broadband definition of 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up, and where the broadband service is available to more than 80% of locations in a census block. Census blocks that did not meet this definition are delineated as "Unserved."

