

The Liberty County Planning Commission (LCPC) has been working on a new comprehensive plan for Liberty County and its municipalities for the past 18 months. During this time we have facilitated 18 meetings throughout the county, covering the cities of Flemington, Walthourville, Midway, Riceboro, and Gum Branch as well as the Town of Allenhurst and the unincorporated county. In each of the 18 meetings, we received input from residents about how they would like to see their parts of Liberty County grow in the future.

During the next six months, we'll be meeting in three different areas of the City of Hinesville to discuss future growth and development: the west end, midtown and the east end. The west end generally includes the area west of Veterans Parkway/Pineland Avenue and Kelly Drive. The midtown area generally includes the area between Veterans Parkway and General Screven as well as the neighborhoods along South Main Street and West Oglethorpe toward Allenhurst. The east end includes the historic downtown area and the neighborhoods along Sandy Run, Fraser Drive and Forest Street plus Martin Woods.

The first of the six meetings will be at Savannah Tech at 6 P.M. Monday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, with a follow-up meeting to be announced in October. Meetings for the midtown and east end of Hinesville will be scheduled in November/December and January/February, respectively.

A number of factors influence the growth and development of a city. The availability of jobs, land and infrastructure play a significant role. Consider the following trends for Hinesville.

The local economy is likely to remain stable during the next 25 years. Population growth will continue at about 1.5 percent annually. The population of Hinesville will top 50,000 people by 2040.

During the foreseeable future, employment at Fort Stewart, traditionally a mainstay for Hinesville, will remain stable or decline slightly at best. A large percentage of the population derives their income from outside the community, either from federal payroll or pension. The large federal payroll/pension supports the local retail and service economy. Generally, aside from government jobs and service/retail jobs, residents must seek employment outside of the city. Most of Liberty County's industrial jobs are located on the eastern end of the county near Midway and Riceboro.

Liberty Transit is a public bus system started in 2010. It provides fixed-route services to residents of Hinesville, Fort Stewart and Flemington. It has provided more than 100,000 rides since 2010. The availability of public transit was a key factor in landing Armstrong State University, Liberty County's new college campus, and the Renaissance Senior Living Residential Development on Memorial Drive.

There has been steady modest growth in housing development since the 2009 recession ended. This growth, coupled with robust residential development prior to the recession has fueled commercial and non-residential development in recent years. Since January 2012, nearly 200,000 feet of commercial space has been developed in Hinesville in addition to 500 single-family dwellings that were built in the city during that period. Additionally, there have been 118 multi-family units permitted in the city since 2012.

As Hinesville's population grows, residential and commercial development will continue. One growth challenge for Hinesville is availability of developable land. Fort Stewart is effectively a permanent barrier to northward growth of the city. Flemington is a barrier to the east and Allenhurst and Walthourville are barriers to the southwest. Other significant challenges for future growth within the City of Hinesville are the prevalence of wetlands and floodplains, as well as the close proximity of the Long County boundary to the west. These factors combined will make infill development and redevelopment a vital part of the city's future development.

Through strategic investment in the water and sewer system as well as its partnership with Fort Stewart, the City of Hinesville has capacity to accommodate expected growth during the next decade. Additionally, there is significant water and sewer delivery capacity along the 15<sup>th</sup> Street corridor.

Transportation in Hinesville is heavily reliant upon the private automobile. This automobile reliance requires continuous planning for improvements to the city's major roads and intersections. Oglethorpe Highway (U.S. 84) is the city's major traffic artery, carrying more than 30,000 cars per day. Additionally, the road carries 1,000 trucks per day, 80 percent of which are only passing through.

The high volume of cars and trucks on Oglethorpe Highway, coupled with the current design and speed limits, creates safety concerns. Not only is there traffic congestion but too many conflicting turning movements. The elected officials of Hinesville, the other municipalities and Liberty County have a two-prong solution to traffic concerns on Oglethorpe Highway. The first is a bypass to take through trucks off of the urbanized portion of the road. The second solution is to install a landscaped center median on Oglethorpe Highway throughout the Hinesville urbanized area. The tree-lined landscaped median will make Oglethorpe Highway safer for those who travel it and it will help to create a sense of place.

Hinesville will commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its incorporation in 2016. What better way to send our county seat into its second century than with a good plan to inspire the generations of residents to come? Please come to the meeting on September 21<sup>st</sup> and check out our website [www.thelcpc.org](http://www.thelcpc.org) for the dates, times and location of subsequent meetings.