
JUMPSTART



URBAN REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

ROCKDALE COUNTY, GA
NOVEMBER 2011

INTRODUCTION

Rockdale County has the potential of becoming a vibrant, appealing and dynamic economic center. It is situated in a strategic location in the Southeast, it offers a small-town atmosphere and it benefits from vast protected natural areas. The industrial vitality is tempered however by aging and obsolete structures, and its decline was accelerated by economic hardship.

Attrition in warehousing occupation and the closure of major car dealerships have deeply affected the western side of the county. Because most of the North part of the county is a watershed conservation area with low-density residential, and much of the South side is protected land part of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area and low-residential density, the interstate corridor is currently Rockdale's place of high-intensity business. The designated area covers only 1.96% of the county's territory, yet it includes half of the land zoned for industrial use. The county needs to be proactive, considering the development pressure coming from the core of Metro Atlanta, and the expansion of the regional transit system that could bring a multimodal station to Rockdale within 25 years.

The main intent of this Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) is to jump-start private investment. The County envisions its revitalization with a diversity of quality buildings and places that will offer flexible office, research and development, and warehousing space, supported by commercial and residential activities. The increase in the mix of land uses and types of structures is expected to help improve the quality of life for all Rockdale residents and businesses. The current lull in the real estate market and overall economy is an opportunity to reflect on our assets and the challenges we face, and to plan for a successful recovery.

Iris Drive



The URP is a first step in recognizing the need to promote the redevelopment of this area. It will provide a comprehensive vision to be carried by economic development tools, such as Opportunity Zones (OZ). By adopting the Urban Redevelopment Plan, Rockdale will be able to position itself as a competitive economic force in the region.

This plan is divided into two major components. The first part, the assessment, highlights existing strengths and opportunities and illustrates the need for redevelopment. The second part proposes a vision and identifies implementation strategies.

LEGAL BACKGROUND

The State of Georgia delegates the powers to local jurisdictions to plan, carry out the plan, and appropriate funds for the purpose of redeveloping areas in need, through the Urban Redevelopment Law (O.C.G.A. 36-61-8). It stipulates that such plan cannot be implemented until a resolution of finding of necessity is passed, which was done by the Rockdale County Board of Commissioners on October 11, 2011 (Appendix A).

The Urban Redevelopment Area (URA) defined by the county meets both prerequisites stated in the Law (O.C.G.A. 36-61-5):

- 1) One or more slum area exists within the County limits;
- 2) The rehabilitation, conservation, or redevelopment, or a combination thereof, of such area is necessary in the interest of the public health, safety, morals, or welfare of the residents of Rockdale County.

Most properties within the URA would not qualify as what is commonly conceived as slums. However the area is burdened by deteriorating structures, environmental hazards and declining activity, and fits the definition provided in the law (O.C.G.A. 36-61-2(18)):

... an area in which there is a predominance of buildings or improvements, whether residential or nonresidential, which by reason of dilapidation, deterioration, age, or obsolescence; inadequate provision for ventilation, light, air, sanitation, or open spaces; high density of population and overcrowding; existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes; or any combination of such factors is conducive to ill health, transmission of disease, infant mortality, juvenile delinquency, or crime and is detrimental to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare.

“Slum area” also means an area which by reason of the presence of a substantial number of slum, deteriorated, or deteriorating structures; predominance of defective or inadequate street layout; faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness; unsanitary or unsafe conditions; deterioration of site or other improvements; tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land; the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes; by having development impaired by airport or transportation noise or by other environmental hazards; or any combination of such factors substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of a municipality or county, retards the provisions of housing accommodations, or constitutes an economic or social liability and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare in its present condition and use.

When the Urban Redevelopment Law was first adopted in 1955, unsafe and unsanitary conditions prevailing in overcrowded neighborhoods were remedied by “urban renewal” projects. Some cities are still scared deeply with the drastic abatement measures taken in the subsequent decades, and this Urban Redevelopment Plan is not intended to be used as grounds for large-scale projects of such nature.

METHODOLOGY

Staff from the Division of Planning and Zoning spearheaded the preparation of the Urban Redevelopment Plan, in collaboration with the Conyers-Rockdale Economic Development Council. Many other divisions and departments provided input and data, including the Board of Assessors, Fire Rescue, Management Information Services, Code Enforcement, Stormwater, and Transportation. Staff conducted three extensive site visits during the fall of 2011 to survey and document conditions.

A public hearing was held on October 25, 2011, after legal advertisement in the Rockdale Citizen newspaper and on the county website (Appendix B). The URP received positive response from the residents in attendance, and members of the Water and Sewerage Authority expressed their support. During the last week of October, building inspectors handed out some 200 information flyers to property owners and managers. The URP was introduced to the Board of Commissioners at their work session on Tuesday, November 1, 2011. These meetings are always advertised and open to the public.

URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AREA BOUNDARY

The Urban Redevelopment Area (URA) boundary was drawn based on a number of factors, including current zoning, land use, and conditions of structures and site. It includes 459 parcels, covering approximately 1,638 acres (Figure 1).

The URA follows Interstate 20 on nearly three miles, between the DeKalb County limit to the West and the City of Conyers limit to the East. On the south side of I-20, the URA includes parcels fronting Iris Drive, and encompasses a larger area on the north side, up to the intersections of Plunkett and Lester roads, Farmer and Lester roads, and Sigman and Rockbridge roads.

Most of the land north of I-20 is currently used and designated for industrial activity, while the southern part is mainly zoned commercial. The only cross-over link is provided by the Sigman Road interchange (exit 78). The URA is also bisected longitudinally by the CSX railroad, still in activity. On some segments, up to 19 trains may travel daily.

Rockdale Industrial Blvd



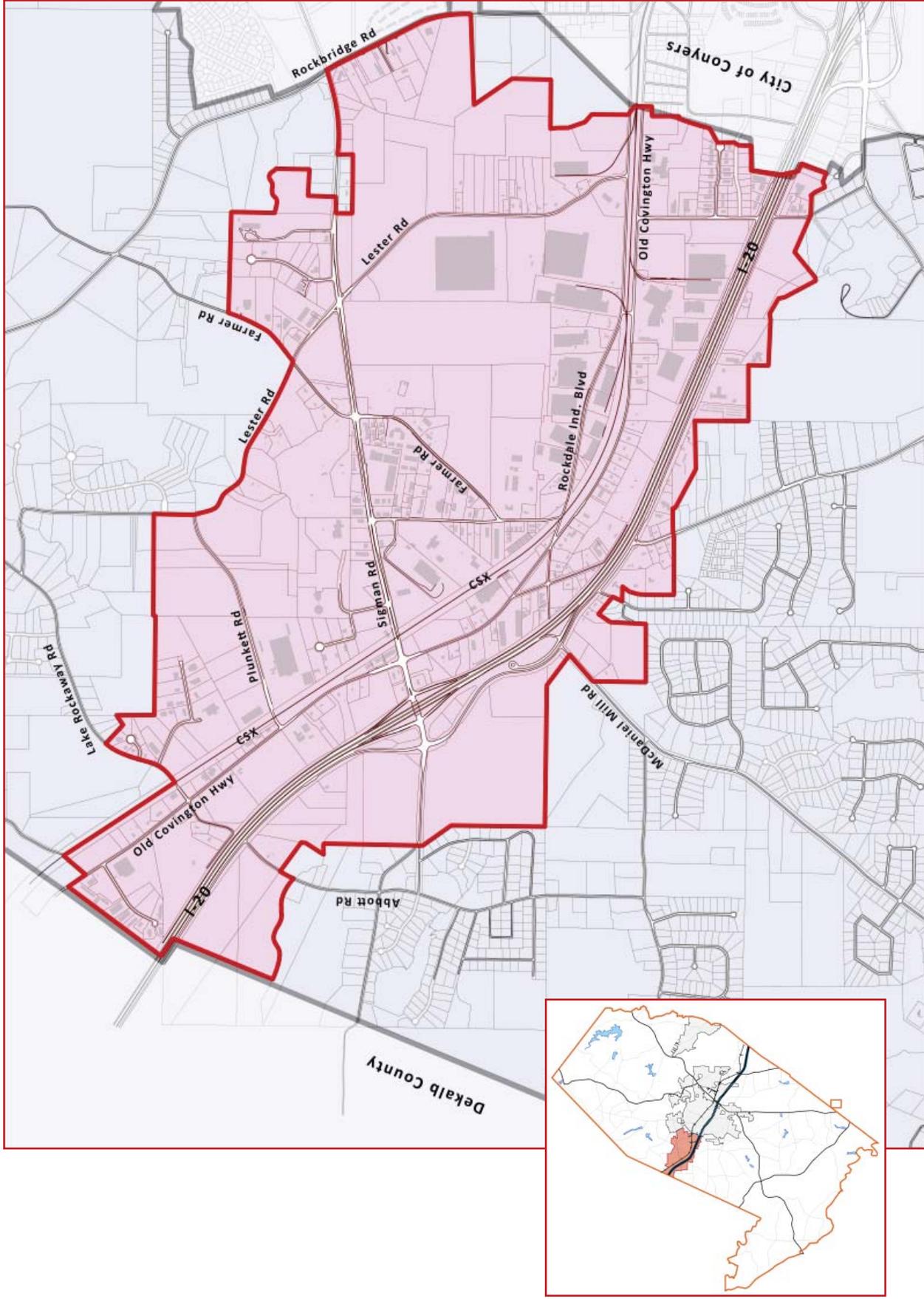


FIGURE 1: URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AREA

ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

HISTORY OVERVIEW

Growth in the Urban Redevelopment Area was not planned deliberately, until now. The railroad was essential to the development of Rockdale County and the City of Conyers beginning in the mid-1800s, like many other towns in Georgia. It was a driving force for the location of industries for many decades, although the majority of businesses are no longer dependent on railroad for the transportation of materials and products, because in part of the increase of road freight capacity. As the rural landscape was morphing into suburban subdivisions in other parts of the county, industrial activities emerged in the URA.

One can imagine that before the construction of I-20, Abbott Rd and Lake Rockaway Rd connected; Farmer Rd was a continuation of McDaniel Mill Rd; and Smyrna Rd reached Old Covington Hwy (Figure 2). The majority of the broken links were never rerouted and circulation within the band of land between Old Covington Highway and I-20 was compromised. The system in the 1960s was composed of a few major roads feeding from Old Covington Highway/Rockdale Industrial Boulevard, and from Iris Drive. The alignment of these roads avoided streams and wetlands. Sigman Rd was extended to the Northeast in the 1970s, and was the last major modification to the network. In the 1980s and 1990s, the only additions were short cul-de-sacs.

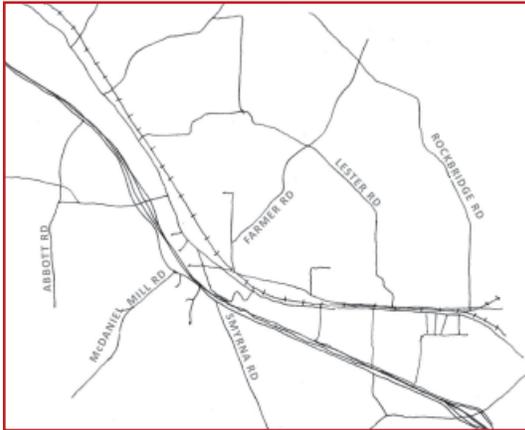
Manufactures began to line up against the railroad in the 1960s, and subsequently expanded and infilled the rest of the area. Lithonia Lighting was one of the first major companies to invest in the URA in 1956, and employs today some 875 people. Bio-Lab/Chemtura begun its operations in 1973 and still provides 340 jobs. Sealy purchased property on Rockdale Industrial in 1977, Great Southern Wood Preserving in 1985, and Frey-Moss structures was founded in 1992. C&D Battery was in operation from 1965 to 2007, when it was consolidated with another manufacture in Pennsylvania. Growth in the URA significantly diminished after the rapid expansion of the 1970s and 1980s. The conversion from residential to industrial activity pursued without the property lines changing or even upgrading the buildings in some cases.

Rockdale and DeKalb counties concerted efforts in 2003 to develop a joint vision for the development of the Stonecrest Mall area. The land use designation was changed to “special mixed activity center” on properties fronting Iris Drive between the county line and McDaniel Mill Road, but the master plan was never fully implemented. The infrastructure was built and the land is ready, but nothing was built in our county.

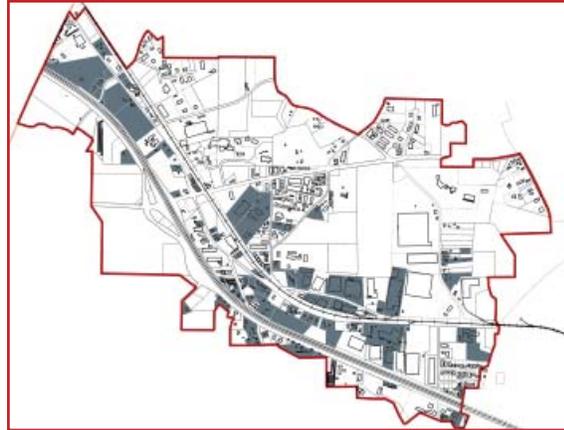
Another project within the URA was never executed. A residential subdivision of 34 single-family lots was planned on a parcel on Rockbridge Road. The preliminary plat had been approved in 2005, but the land remains untouched.

The Transit Planning Board (now Regional Transit Committee) prepared in 2008 the official long-range transit vision for the metropolitan area, named Concept 3. The Board identified the vicinity of the Sigman Road interchange as a potential location for a multimodal transit center, where commuter rail and regional suburban bus would connect (TPB, 2008). The precise location of the station remains to be determined.

FIGURE 2: GROWTH



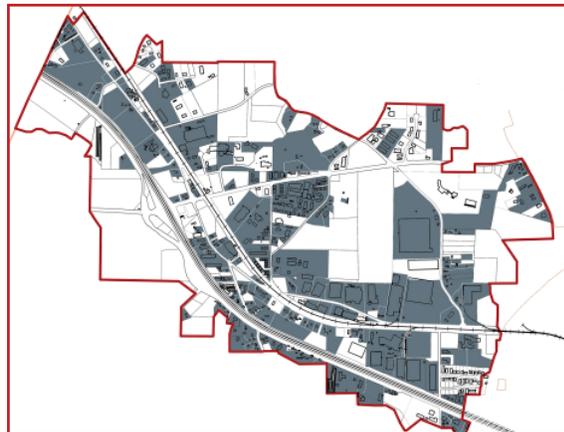
Roads in 1972



Parcels developed before 1960



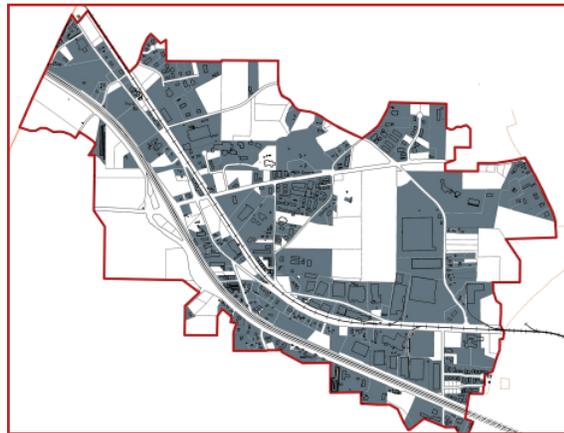
Roads in 1982



Parcels developed before 1989



Roads in 1999



Parcels developed before 2011

EVIDENCE OF NEED TO REDEVELOP

Road Network

With the important exception of Sigman Road, created in the 1970s as a bypass way for Conyers historic center, the road network hardly evolved since the 1960s. By the 1970s, the land division patterns were well established, and since 1990 most of the construction has been infill. The small cul-de-sac industrial subdivisions created in the 1980s feed off major thoroughfares.

The irregular road network reflects the development patterns observed in many cities in the Southeast: the influence of the topography, the railroad, and the interstate is clearly visible (Figure 3).

The combination of the interstate and the CSX rails creates a barrier to the flow of traffic between either sides and limits the development potential. At-grade crossings over the railroad are limited: there are six connections between the North part of the URA and Old Covington Highway. The short stacking distances can cause congestion and disruption of traffic.

Sigman Road is the only principal arterial road only connection across I-20 in the URA. RDOT is considering the construction of additional bridges, but there is no timeframe or funds associated with such project. The extension of Sigman Road to the southwest up to Turner Hill Road (project RO-235A) is anticipated for 2040. On its northern curve, the widening of Sigman Road is projected for 2020.

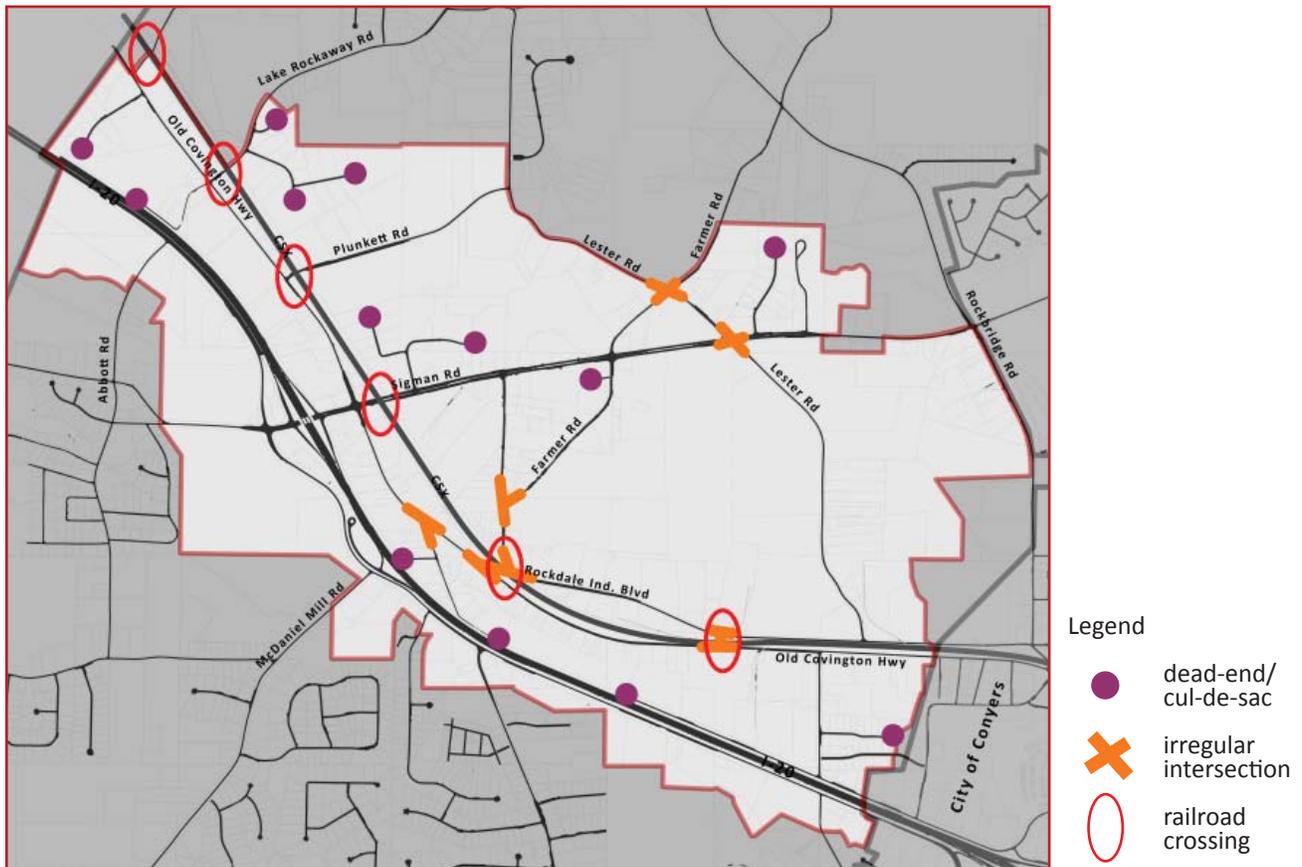


FIGURE 3: ROAD NETWORK

The layout, design and maintenance of the road network are all problematic. Most roads within the URA are below the following current standards of the Unified Development Ordinance:

- Interconnected streets, cul-de-sac discouraged (Sec. 302-10. Streets and driveways);
- Minimum separation of access points on any street, according to speed limit (Sec. 332-2. Access management);
- Deceleration lanes required at access point on arterial or collector roads (Sec. 332-3. Driveway design standards);
- Intersections to form an angle between 85 and 95 degrees (Sec. 332-5. Street intersections);
- Curbs and gutters on new or widened streets (Sec. 332-8. Curbs and gutters)

Old Covington Hwy



Curb cuts are especially numerous on Old Covington Highway, to service individually owned properties. In a few cases, the driveways do not allow for turn around, and large-sized trucks have to back out onto the highway. On Lester Road, a low and narrow concrete median separates the traveling lanes. It was likely installed to protect residences on the east side from the high volume of trucks serving the distribution centers across the road. However there are no other outlets to Rockdale Industrial Boulevard or Sigman Road, and this median could constitute a public safety hazard.

Pedestrian and bicycle facilities are insufficient, almost inexistent. Yet cyclists and “cow paths” were observed on site. In many instances, there is not enough clearance to even walk in the right-of-way.

Irregular intersections are common in the URA. They are dangerous because they limited sight distance, and they pose a special challenge to truck drivers who cannot maneuver their vehicle in tight radii. As a result, vehicles impede on the right-of-way and create erosion problems.

A visual survey conducted by the Rockdale County Department of Transportation rated Lake Capri Road and General Arts Road in the “poor condition” category, recommending rehabilitation. Old Covington Road and Abbott Road were labeled in “very poor condition” and would require reconstruction. As of September 2011, the resurfacing of General Arts Road and Abbott Road was contracted, and Old Covington Highway will be restriped.

Lot Layout

The many irregular intersections resulted in the creation of lots with sharp-angled property lines and shallow depth. The Unified Development Ordinance would not allow for the development of a large number of parcels because they could not meet the current design of lots standards (Sec. 302-9). It requires a minimum of 60 feet of road frontage, and prohibits flag lots. Additionally, the dimensional standards (Sec. 214-1) regulate the minimum lot size, setbacks, open space and maximum imperviousness and could hinder the development of many parcels. Properties in that situation may need a variance, combination with another parcel or rezoning prior to being developed or retrofitted. Some may qualify as legal nonconforming, each case needs to be evaluated individually.

Of the 329 parcels zoned M-1 (limited industrial), 156 are less than one acre in size and therefore substandard. In small subdivisions or complexes, they create a high concentration of buildings with limited access – a concern for emergency services. Additionally, nearly 25 lots are flag-shaped or have no direct access to a public road. (Figure 4)

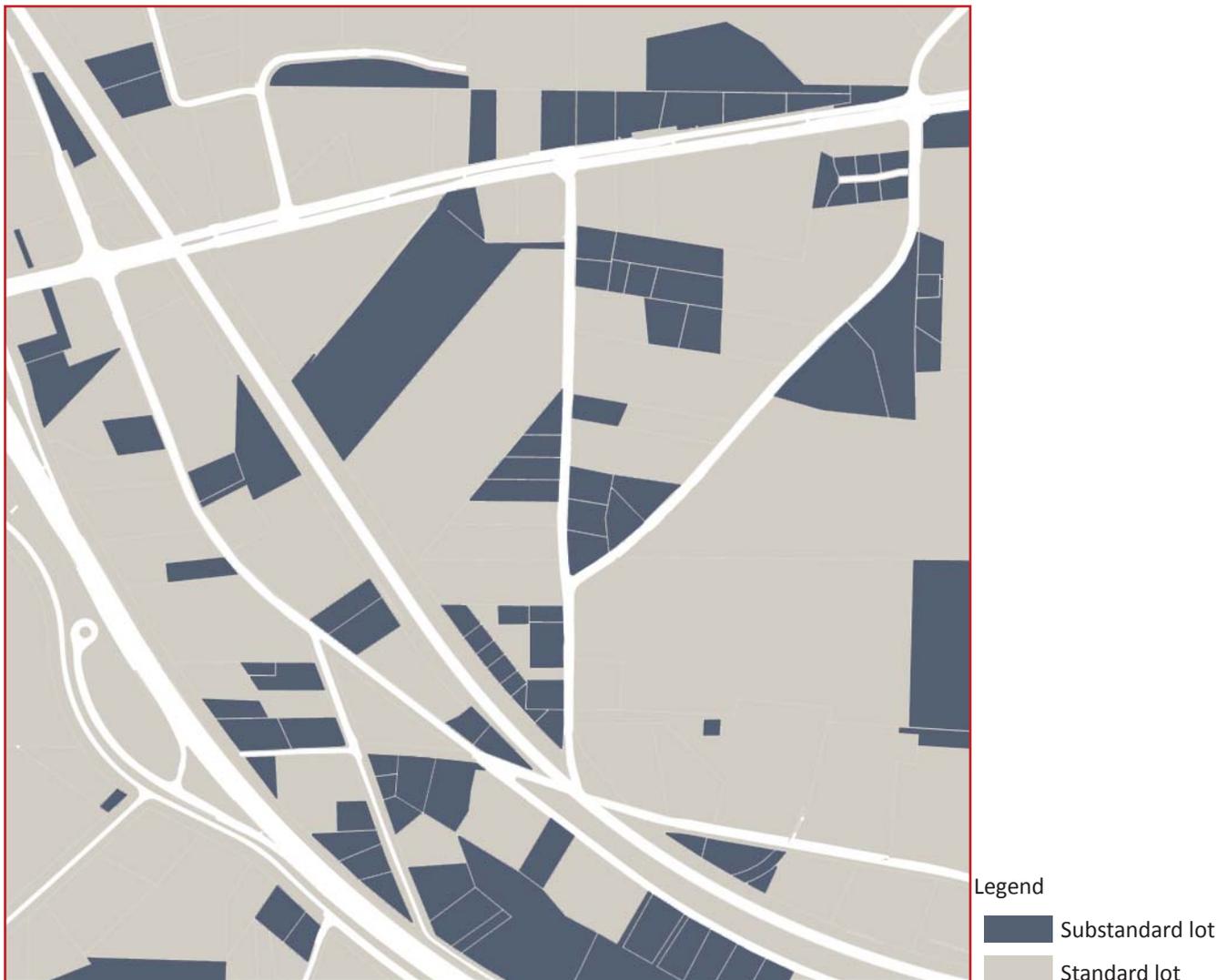


FIGURE 4: CONCENTRATION OF NONCONFORMING LOTS

Buildings and Structures

The stock of buildings is aging, with 70% of structures built before 1990, yet there are few historically significant sites or structures in the URA. The Victorian House and the office of Breedlove Land Planning are of the best examples of residential architecture in the sector. The Victorian House was used until recently as an event rental space and is now for sale. Both of these homes, respectively built in 1920 and 1930, are located near the unfortunate pinch point where Rockdale Industrial Boulevard, General Arts, Old Covington Highway and the railroad collide.

Some private residences are very well kept, while others are neglected. There are around a dozen of abandoned structures in the URA, and they are primarily found along Old Covington Highway.



Buildings and structures in poor condition

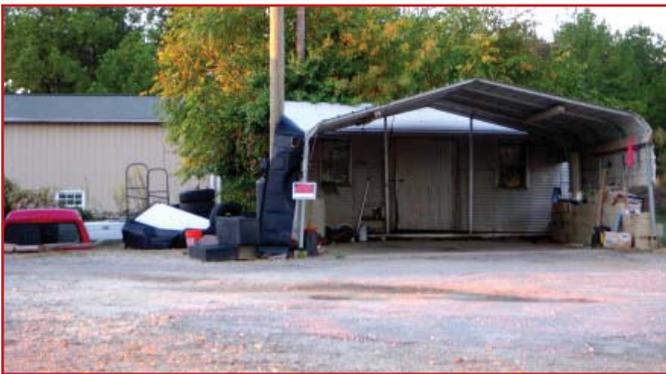


Dilapidated structures

Only a handful of industrial buildings in the URA are built with durable materials, such as brick. Most of these have a large footprint, and are owner-occupied. Almost all the others are pre-engineered and assembled on site. Those prefabricated metal warehouses have an average lifespan of 30 years if well maintained, according to our building inspectors. With a high turnaround in tenancy, owners are less likely to invest in their property. As a result, many structures are falling into disrepair and obsolescence. Yards encumbered with vehicles and accumulation of miscellaneous objects are unsightly, a fire hazard, and an obstruction to emergency response.



Preengineered buildings



Outdoor storage, neglected properties



Paved surfaces

Uses

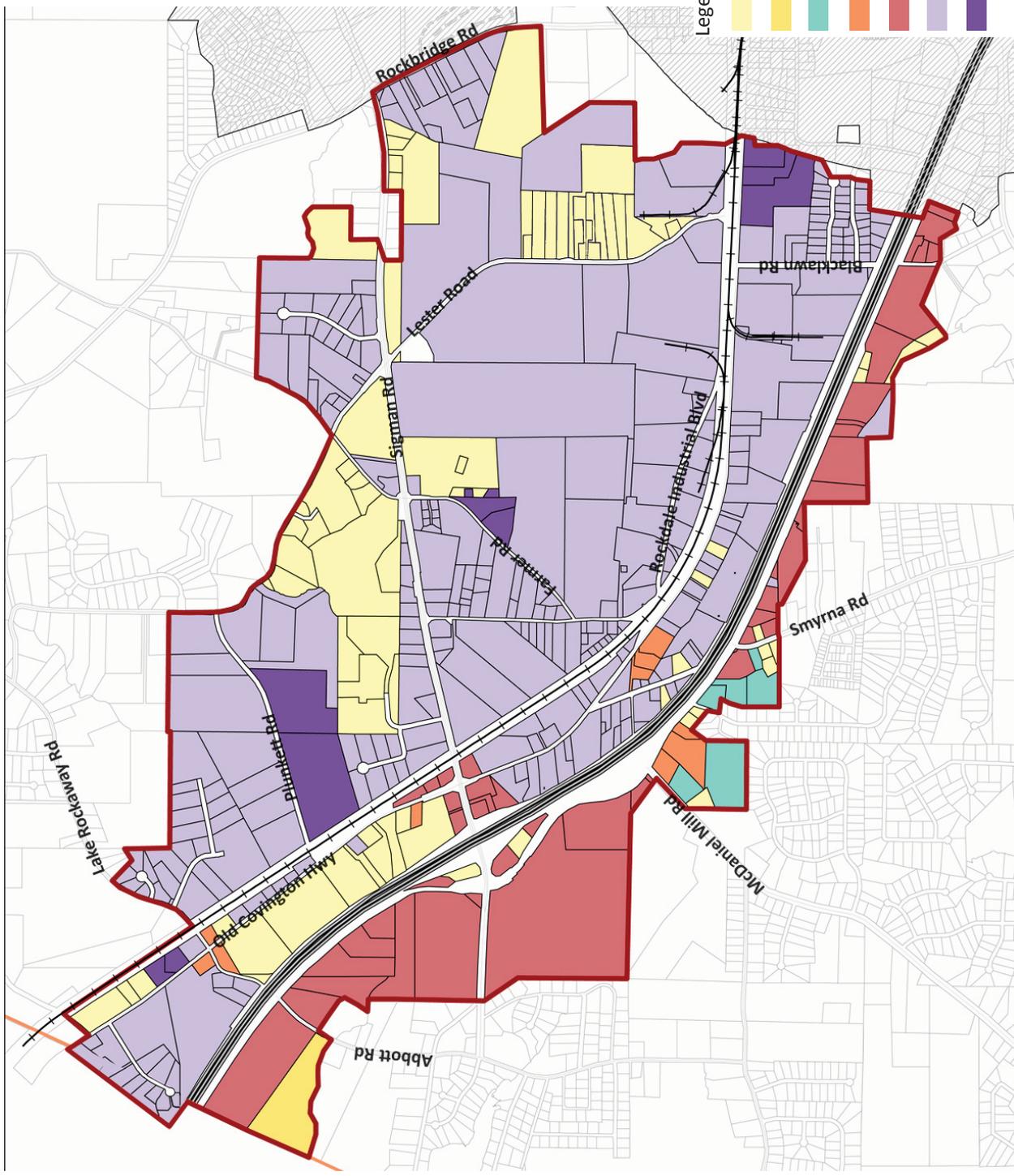
The zoning districts in the URA are segregated in general, yet a few clusters of residential remain inside the industrial area. The bulk of properties beyond the URA boundary to the North and South are almost exclusively zoned for residential uses. The commercial and light industrial character of the Iris Drive/I-20/Old Covington Highway corridor extends into DeKalb County and the City of Conyers.

There are discrepancies between existing land uses, designated future land uses, and zoning districts. As an example, a property zoned R-1 with a former single-family home is currently used for heavy industrial activities and is designated as commercial on the Future Land Use Map. Over 15 places of worship occupy warehousing space, while this use is not permitted in M-1 zoning district because typically the design of these buildings is unsuitable for public assembly.

By far, the predominant zoning district and future land use relate to light industrial activities. Most of the properties remaining in a residential zoning district are reallocated to industry on the future land use map. The volume of traffic and the trucking activity do not create the ideal environment for single-family homes. The County Jail Complex is still zoned R-1, but designated for public/institutional use. (Figures 5, 6 & 7)



Industrial use in a single-family structure



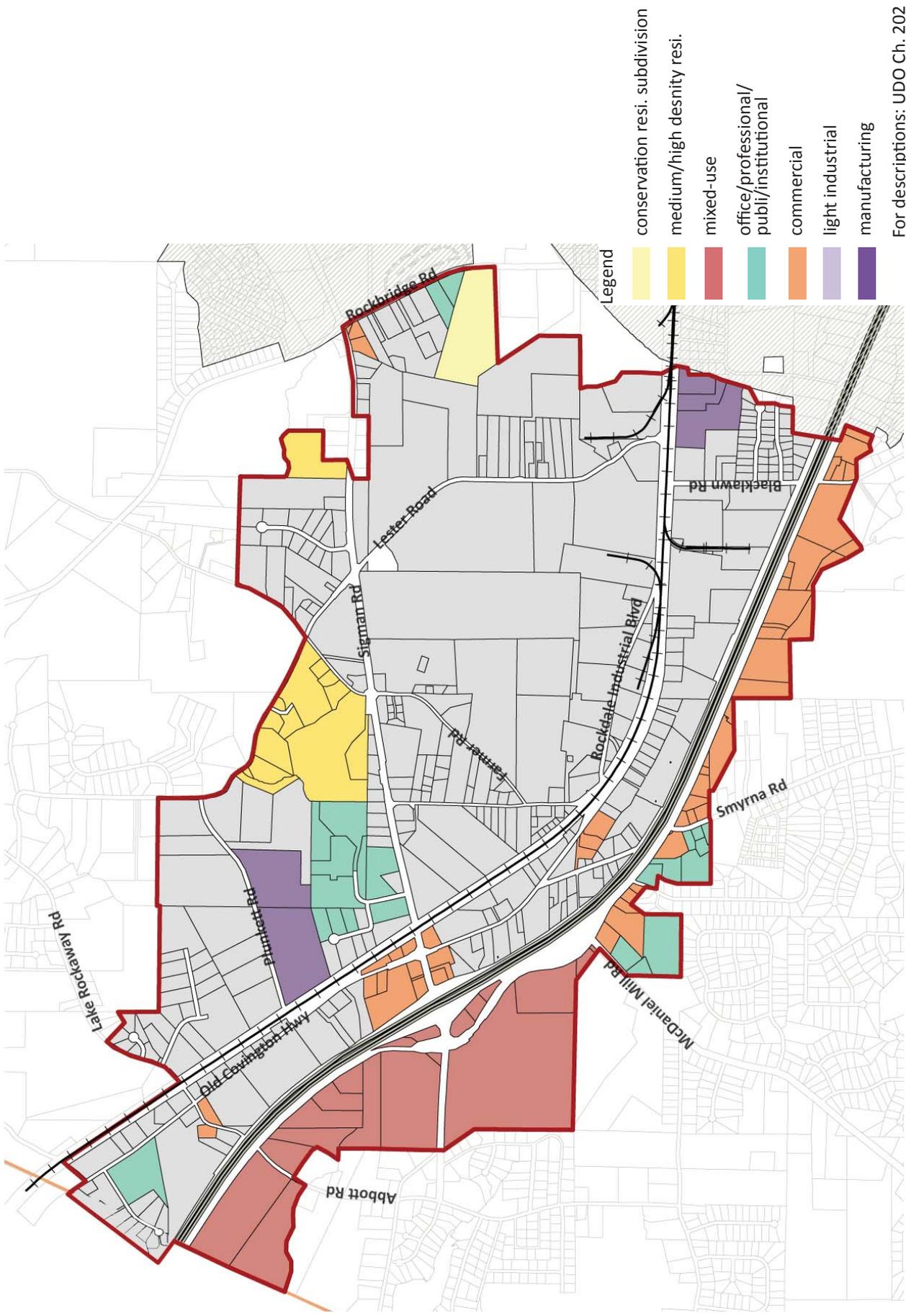
Legend

- R-1 (single-family residential)
- R-3 (residential multi-family)
- O-1 (office/institutional)
- C-1 (local commercial)
- C-2 (general commercial)
- M-1 (limited industrial)
- M-2 (general industrial)

For descriptions: UDO Ch. 206

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FIGURE 5: ZONING DISTRICTS



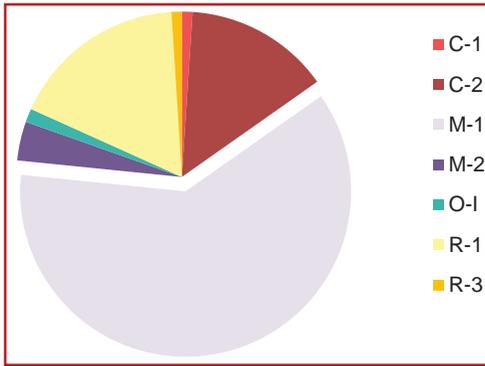
For descriptions: UDO Ch. 202

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ROCKDALE COUNTY, GA, 11.2011

FIGURE 6: FUTURE LAND USES

The special mixed-use activity land use designation includes 184 acres, south of I-20, currently zoned as C-2, general commercial. The majority of the land zoned for commercial on Iris Drive, east of McDaniel Mill Road, is vacant greenfield, although plans for development were under progress before the economy collapsed. West of McDaniel Mill Road, some businesses are still active, yet many buildings and sites stand empty or underutilized. Commercial uses are concentrated at major road intersections in the future land use map.

FIGURE 7: ZONING DISTRICTS IN URA



Zoning District	Acreege	% of URA
C-1	16.95a	1%
C-2	232.61a	14%
M-1	1,005.38a	61%
M-2	62.45a	4%
O-1	21.78a	1%
R-1	282.62a	17%
R-3	16.48a	1%

No hard data on current uses and property availability is collected regularly. Insight from site observations, real estate listings and business license records was extrapolated. A high turnaround in tenancy is suspected, and the vacancy rate appears to be the highest in multiple-tenant warehouses built in the 1980s. The row retention rate of tenants burdens property owners with perpetual marketing efforts and inconsistent revenues.

Since January 2011, the county has licensed 314 businesses in the URA, 98 of which are in the construction (NAICS code 23), manufacturing (NAICS code 33) and wholesale (NAICS code 42) sectors, representing 65% of the jobs in the area. Businesses in the repair and maintenance trade (NAICS code 811) are also abundant. The vast majority of the latter operate automotive repair and maintenance shops. These small businesses often employ one or two persons, and unfortunately do not stay in operation for long. Between 2007 and 2010, 79 positions in the 8111 sector were eliminated (BLS, 2011). Total employment in the county was reduced by 13.9% in that same period, and in automotive repair and maintenance businesses alone the drop was of 20.9%. This might be an indicator that demand for this type of business is in decline, and that efforts should be concentrated on diversifying the employment base.

BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE URA

NAICS code	No. of Business Licenses	No. of Reported Employees
23 Construction	63	722
33 Manufacturing	18	1436
42 Wholesale Trade	37	238
811 Repair and Maintenance	67	144
Total in URA	314	3687

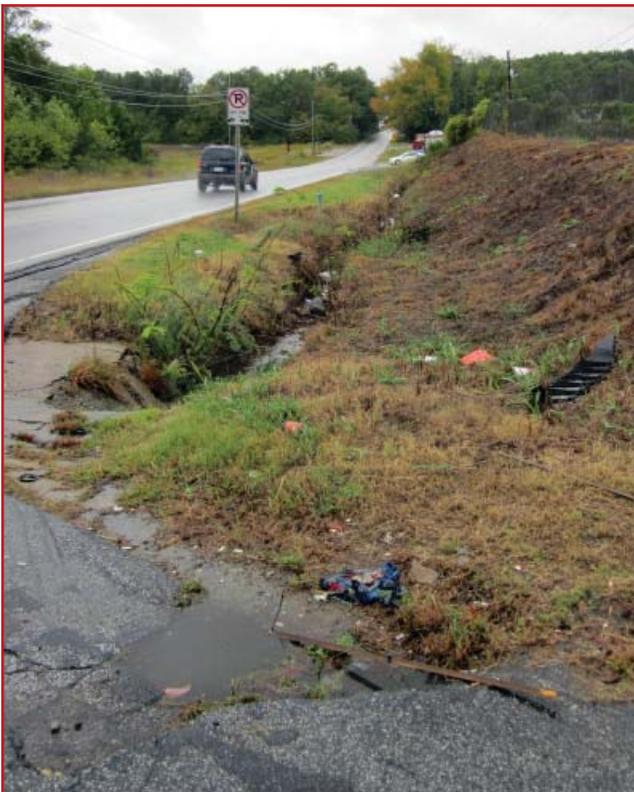


A small sample of properties on the market in the URA

Environmental Concerns

The combined alignment of the interstate/railroad/Old Covington Highway follows some the highest elevations in the county. The older and quasi-perpendicular roads to this corridor on the north side (Lake Capri Rd, Lake Rockaway Rd, Plunkett Rd, Farmer Rd, Lester Rd and Rockbridge Rd) run parallel to streams and depressions. These natural features collect and deliver stormwater to the Yellow River to the Northeast. On the south side, streams and depressions have a general southeastern direction and are tributaries of the South River. The head of Almand Creek appears to be within the URA, near the dead end of Smyrna Road, and channelled under I-20. The entirety of the URA is outside the 500-year floodplain according to Flood Insurance Rate Maps 13247C-0092C; -0091C; -0087C; -0083C of January 19, 2001.

Stormwater management is one of the main environmental issues in the URA. Industrial land in Rockdale County comes in every shape and size, but a common denominator is the extent of impervious surface. With large building footprints and the need for employee parking and truck circulation, this situation is typical of manufacturing and warehousing facilities. There appears to be an overabundance of paved surface – from aerial photographs, it is estimated that nearly half of the properties in the URA are developed with impervious materials over 50% of their area. Even the parking lots of active businesses seem too large for the need. Many have outdoor storage, i.e. materials, merchandise or vehicles are kept in the same unenclosed area for more than 24 hours (Sec. 106-1). They are unsightly, but also they can be a threat to the quantity and quality of stormwater. Small parts, particles and chemicals can get collected by rain and transported to surface waters. The current UDO limits imperviousness to 75% on non-residential sites (Sec. 214-1).



Faulty stormwater infrastructure

Vast expanses of land have been cleared, and loose soil from erosion constitutes a threat to stream habitat and water quality. Many properties have been found violating the stream buffer requirements, and in a few cases, the streams beds were rerouted with proper permitting.

A total of 23 facilities in the county are regulated by the EPA, and 13 of them are located inside the Urban Redevelopment Area (EPA, 2011). It does not indicate necessarily that these companies are polluters, but that there is a risk associate with their activities, current or previous. The Georgia Environmental Protection division monitors sites on the Hazardous Site Inventory list that are known or suspected to be contaminated by ethylene glycol, lead, chloroform and other toxic components. Four of those sites are within the study boundary (EPD, 2011).

Illegal dumping sites a located throughout the URA, and the problem seems to have amplified since the vacancy rates began increasing.



Land disturbance and erosion

OPPORTUNITIES & DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

The findings from the assessment illustrate the pressing need for redevelopment in the Urban Redevelopment Area. The road network is insufficient in terms of capacity, connectivity and completeness. The layout of the majority of the lots does not reflect the development standards of their intended use. Some properties neglected, dilapidated or contaminated.

Due to the fragmentation of ownership, piecemeal private investment is unlikely to spur responsible redevelopment without guidance and incentives. The ultimate goal of the URP is to stimulate the creation of an all-inclusive and high-quality neighborhood that will provide growth opportunities for workers and residents alike. Sustainability – environmental, economic and social – will be our core value and will influence all of our decisions.

Based on the challenges and opportunities identified in the URA, we recommend exploring four principles in the development of a collective vision: (Figure 8)

- Green and blue
- Appeal
- Connectivity
- Completeness

Green and blue

The northern part of the County protected for potable water, and the southern is part of the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area; it is evident that environmental quality is an important value to county residents and leaders already. While much of the land has been disturbed in the URA, a few natural enclaves remain and provided habitat to the urban wildlife.

Suggested objectives: Restore the stream network and preserve portions of undeveloped parcels; embed trails and recreation opportunities in the green infrastructure; become a regional model of stormwater management best practices.

Connectivity

Fluidity of traffic could be improved if the road system was expanded and brought up to standards. Density maximizes also the potential of public infrastructure, as shorter roads and pipes are necessary to provide for a same amount of activity.

Suggested objectives: Increase alternative transportation (walk/bike/transit) opportunities; use the multimodal station as a catalyst; increase connectivity in the road network; improve the design of roads; reduce the distance between uses.

Appeal

Aesthetics is a determinant factor in the civic pride, a recent study reveals (Knight Foundation, 2010). People grow stronger emotional attachment if their environment is visually pleasant. Opportunities for socializing contribute as well to the sense of belonging. Interestingly, the level of attachment also correlates positively with local GDP growth.

Suggested objectives: Promote the development of beautiful and timeless streetscapes; spark social interaction; attract responsible businesses; encourage the construction of quality buildings

Completeness

The inclusion of alternatives to the car is becoming a necessity as the one-person occupied vehicle model does not work anymore. Complete streets, designed for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists are becoming increasingly popular.

The golden days of complete segregation of uses are over. While it may be wise to keep dwellings away from heavy polluters, the stacking of uses in a same building offers potential. The integration of accessory uses to light industrial activities could include day care centers, fitness centers, restaurants, and grocery stores. Neighborhoods are the safest and the most dynamic when they harbor activity day and night. The introduction of dwellings in non-residential nodes bring “eyes on the street” off business hours and contribute to a safer environment.

Suggested objectives: Favor projects integrating several uses, promote walk-to-work and walk-to-school, design for seniors and children, attract businesses that share interest in public health



Streetscape

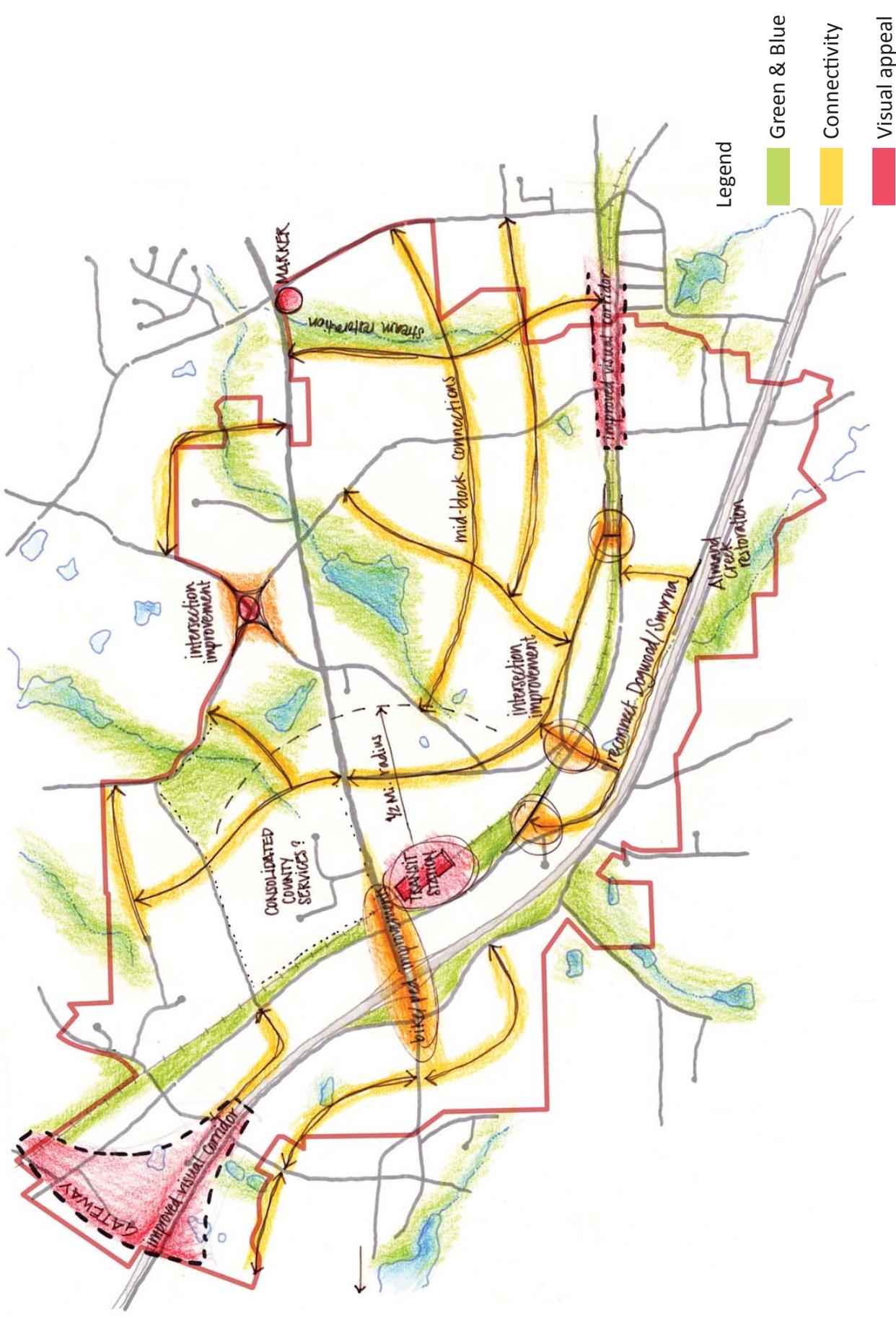


Mixed-use retail/office



High-density residential

Examples of sustainable development in the region



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 ROCKDALE COUNTY, GA, 11.2011

FIGURE 8: DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

Consistency with Other Plans

The four principles are consistent with the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) Plan 2040, the Rockdale County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and the Rockdale County/City of Conyers Comprehensive Transportation Plan. The URP shares the following goals and objectives:

Plan 2040 (2011)

Jurisdictions under the Atlanta Regional Commission are required to implement the performance standards of Plan 2040 at the local level. The standards are based on the following five objectives grouped under the overarching theme of sustainability:

- Increase mobility options for people and goods.
- Foster a healthy, educated, well trained, safe, and secure population.
- Promote places to live with easy access to jobs and services.
- Improve energy efficiency while preserving the region's environment.
- Identify innovative approaches to economic recovery and long-term prosperity.

CLUP (2003 and 2008)

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan is the single most important planning document used by the County. It is mandated by the Department of Community Affairs to maintain our Qualified Local Government status, which is a requirement to access a number of funding opportunities. The latest Comp. Plan dates back to 2003, was updated in 2008, and will be up for renewal in 2013. This URP is be a starting point for the new comprehensive plan and will be fully incorporated into it. Although the URP recommends increasing the mix of uses, it pursues most of the Comp Plan goals and objectives, in particular:

1. Economic Development

- Attract desirable businesses and industries to Rockdale County by creating a competitive incentive, tax and regulatory environment; by recruiting businesses in the fields of technology, clean industry, business and professional consulting; by expanding the industrial park westward as a technology park (Goal 1, 2003)
- Promote infill and redevelopment by targeting older and/or abandoned commercial and industrial areas (Goal 6, 2003)
- Improve the aesthetics of Rockdale County by beautifying the key gateways; by increasing landscaping on new and existing transportation infrastructure (Goal 6, 2003)
- Prepare for future growth (Obj. 1, 2008)
- Provide a range of job types to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce (Obj. 3, 2008)
- Work closely with the Economic Development Council to facilitate redevelopment projects (Obj. 6, 2008)

2. Natural Resources

- Implement watershed management strategies to restore impaired waterways (Goal 1, 2003)
- Create sustainable land development regulations that also protect the developer's interest (Goal 2, 2003)
- Design programs and regulation to protect and preserve open space and sensitive lands (Goal 3, 2003)
- Implement ordinances and policies that lead to cleaner air (Goal 4, 2003)
- Minimize the amount of land consumed in new development and promote low impact design (Obj. 5 and 10, 2003)

3. Transportation

- Increase the safety, efficiency and effectiveness of the transportation infrastructure (Goal 1, 2003)
- Support the creation of a balanced multi-modal transportation system by considering commuter bus and rail passenger service (Goal 5, 2003)

4. Housing

- Provide a variety of housing choices in size, cost and density by encouraging the construction of townhomes; by rezoning areas for mixed-use (Goal 1, 2003)
- Improve the aesthetics of medium and high density housing by developing architectural controls; by increasing quality standards as lot sizes decrease (Goal 3, 2003)
- Improve the sustainability of neighborhoods by encouraging residential above retail (Goal 4, 2003)
- Increase accessibility to employment and services from home by means other than car by increasing road connectivity (Obj. 3 and 4, 2008)

5. Land Use

- Strive for compact development patterns and implement walkable communities principles (Goals 1 and 4, 2003)
- Reduce impervious surfaces and other land disturbances that may degrade the environment (Goal 6, 2003)
- Establish land use transitions (Goal 7, 2003)

Rockdale County/City of Conyers Comprehensive Transportation Plan (2009)

The joint CTP provides a long-range approach to transportation needs, and to resource allocation. The recommendations in the URP are in line with the goals and objectives of the CTP, especially the following:

Goal 1: Enhance access to jobs, homes, and services within Rockdale County and throughout the Atlanta Region through a multi-modal transportation system:

- Ensure that funding is established for bicycle and pedestrian improvements identified in the Long Range Transportation Plan.
- Explore projects that improve access to and from I-20.
- Work with the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) in support of future Xpress Park and Ride lot expansion and explore the potential for future regional rail transit connections.

Goal 2: Improve mobility within Rockdale County through enhanced multi-modal connectivity:

- Enhance north-south and east-west connectivity in the County by improving existing connections and creating new connections including additional crossings over I-20.
- Connect residential and commercial activity center nodes through roadway, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit improvements along major transportation corridors.
- Explore the potential for future local transit connections within Rockdale County.

Goal 3: Maintain a safe, reliable and efficient transportation network which will sustain economic activity and promote economic development.

- Identify projects that improve and enhance access to employment and activity centers.
- Explore transportation solutions that accommodate growth in travel demand while enhancing quality of life.

WORKABLE PROGRAM

ACTION PLAN

The purpose of the workable program is “to eliminate and prevent the development or spread of slums, to encourage needed urban rehabilitation, to provide for the redevelopment of slum areas, or to undertake such of the aforesaid activities or such other feasible municipal or county activities as may be suitably employed to achieve the objectives of such workable program” (OCGA 36-61-6).

The Conyers-Rockdale Economic Development Council (CREDC), with the support of the Department of Planning and Development, is the party responsible for the promotion and the reporting of initiatives related to the Urban Redevelopment Plan.

Four priority actions have been identified for the successful implementation of the URP:

- **Conduct a needs assessment and develop a vision**
- **Review and update the processes and regulatory documents**
- **Prepare the infrastructure for development readiness**
- **Develop incentive packages**

STRATEGIES TOOLBOX

The list of strategies below is not exhaustive or prescriptive. It offers different options that can be implemented, adapted or simply rejected. It will be the task of the stakeholders to decide which strategies from the toolbox are the most likely helpful to the renovation of the URA. To unlock the economic situation in the short-term, but to create a sustainable market in the long-term, the contribution of all parties affected is necessary.

At the moment, the County does not anticipate land acquisition, demolition or removal of structures. Unless additional funds are provided by outside sources, there will be no construction of public infrastructure in the near future beyond the normal budget and work plan. The County will support private developers with in-kind services, whenever possible. Current residents will not be displaced.

The recommended strategies are assigned to a suggested responsible party who would act as an implementation coordinator. The initiatives are categorized in terms of realization timeframe: “S” indicates short-term action within the next two to three years, while “L” means a longer-range strategy. In general, less resources are invested in the pursuit of the short-term strategies.

Conduct a needs assessment and define a collective vision

Grand clean-up

- S Invitation to the URA community to clean up their property, as a kick-off event.
- S Positive enforcement of existing ordinances, including nuisance (UDO Ch.42)
Suggested responsible party: Dept. P&D (code enforcement)

Formal stakeholders group

- S Periodical gathering of a group of volunteer stakeholders representing the business community and residents to discuss the challenges, needs, opportunities and threats to the revitalization of the URA, and to develop a collective vision.
Suggested responsible party: CREDC

Market analysis and feasibility study

- S Market analysis and feasibility study, likely conducted by a consultant, to validate the needs assessment and the collective vision, and identify potential avenues for marketing.
Suggested responsible party: CREDC

Review and update administrative processes and regulatory documents

Audit of the existing Unified Development Ordinance and Future Land Use Map

- S Adaption of the UDO and FLUM to the unique situation in the URA, such as more flexibility in the table of permitted uses and increased mixed-use. Beginning after adoption of vision.
Suggested responsible party: Dept. P&D (zoning administration)

Development of special ordinances

- S New ordinances will likely be necessary to address specific issues, such as the retrofitting of industrial structures. Beginning after the audit.
Suggested responsible party: Dept. P&D (planning)

Administrative fee assessment

- S Review fees and processes associated with development projects to minimize hindrance to the developers.
Suggested responsible party: Dept. P&D (business relations)

Develop incentive packages

Regional, state and federal funding

- S Identify and facilitate the application for regional, state, federal and private funding sources for businesses, such as:
 - GA Dept. of Community Affairs – Opportunity Zone, Enterprise Zone
 - US Treasury – New Markets Tax Credit ProgramSuggested responsible party: Grants analyst

Tax break or reduction

- L Study the possibility of offering tax breaks on private property.
Suggested responsible party: Tax Commissioner

Preferred utility rates

- L Study the possibility of offering preferred rates for large development on water and sewerage.
Suggested responsible party: Water Resources

Review of regulatory documents

- L Review ordinances to provide incentives such as bonus density.
Suggested responsible party: Dept. P&D (planning)

Prepare the infrastructure for development readiness

Revision of street network (including bike/ped)

- L Review the alignment of existing roads and the potential for additional connections;
- L Upgrade deficient structures to current standards.
Suggested responsible party: RDOT

Siting study for the transit station

- L Explore different locations for a future multimodal station.
Suggested responsible party: Dept. P&D

Facilitation of parcel consolidation, land assembly

- L Actively encourage landowners of substandard parcels to consolidate with neighboring properties to ease redevelopment; study the possibility of purchasing land to assemble and resell through competitive RFPs.
Suggested responsible party: CREDC

Comprehensive stormwater management program

- S Initiate a comprehensive stormwater management program to improve the quality of surface waters; design a green infrastructure network.
Suggested responsible party: Dept. P&D (Stormwater)

Utility network expansion

- S Explore alternatives to provide water and sewerage throughout the URA.
Suggested responsible party: Water Resources

Financing options

- S Identify and apply for regional, state, federal and private sources of funding, such as:
 - Atlanta Regional Commission – Livable Centers Initiative, Lifelong Communities
 - GA Dept. of Community Affairs – Life Sciences Facilities Fund, Employment Incentive Program,
 - CDBG Revitalization Area Strategies
 - US Housing and Urban Development – Brownfield Economic Development Initiative, Neighborhood Stabilization Program
 - US Environmental Protection Agency – Environmental justice grants
 - US Department of Transportation – New Starts Program, Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing
 - Special Purpose Option Local Tax
 - Tax Allocation District
 - Community Improvement DistrictSuggested responsible party: Grant analyst

REFERENCES

SOURCES

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EPD, 2011. Hazardous Sites Inventory. GA Dept. of Environmental Protection. www.gaepd.org/Documents/hazsiteinv.html

EPA, 2011. Envirofacts Warehouse, Toxic Release Inventory. Environmental Protection Agency. www.epa.gov/enviro

Knight Foundation, 2010. Soul of the Community Report. www.soulofthecommunity.org

TPB, 2008. Concept 3 - Final Report. Transit Planning Board www.atlantaregional.com/transportation/transit/concept-3

GENERAL RESOURCES

Conyers-Rockdale Economic Development Council: www.credcga.org

GA Dept. of Community Affairs, Tax Credits: www.dca.ga.gov/economic/taxcredits

Rockdale County website: www.rockdalecounty.org

Rockdale County Unified Development Ordinance: www.municode.com

INSPIRATION

Cumberland Community Improvement District, Green Transit-Oriented Development Framework: www.cumberlandcid.org

Effingham, GA: Research Forest/Megasite: www.ced.uga.edu/pdfs/outreach/charrettes/effinghamfinal.pdf

Peachtree City Industrial Park: www.peachtree-city.org

Center for Neighborhood Technology, Harvey Industrial Districts Plan www.csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/HarveyIndustrialDistrictsPlanCNT2005.pdf

New Models Project for Commercial and Industrial Development: www.smartgrowthvermont.org/fileadmin/files/publications/NewModels.pdf

APPENDIX A: RESOLUTION OF NECESSITY

APPENDIX B: PUBLIC HEARING DOCUMENTATION

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