

1. Community Goals

The purpose of the Community Goals Element is to lay out a road map for Cook County's and its Cities' future, to generate local buy-in to the plan, and to ensure that the plan is implemented. The Goals as listed below were developed in the 2010 Update through several community workshops. ~~These Goals were reviewed individually during the first workshop of this~~ During the 2015 comprehensive plan update, and again during the 2020 plan update, these goals ~~and were~~ deemed to still be applicable to Cook County and its cities. Therefore no changes were made.

Goal 1: Conserve and protect the functions and values of the natural resources of Cook County for future generations' appropriate use and enjoyment.

Goal 2: Protect, preserve, and promote the historic and cultural resources of Cook County through such measures as regulations, adaptive reuse, and tourism and education programs focused on historic preservation.

Goal 3: Improve the Cook County economy by developing and enhancing new and existing strengths that will draw new businesses, expand existing businesses, diversify the local economy, help Cook County compete in the regional economy, and ensure that overall community growth and development benefits all segments of the population.

Goal 4: Provide opportunities for homeownership and housing resources for all citizens of Cook County through public/private partnerships.

Goal 5: Ensure the highest quality living environment possible through a mixture of compatible land uses and character areas reflecting the needs and desires of the local residents and their vision of Cook County. The goal shall be implemented through strict enforcement of the zoning ordinances and building codes based on the objectives and policies that follow.

Goal 6: Ensure that needed community facilities such as water, sewer, solid waste, police, fire, and EMS are provided in an effective, environmentally sound, safe, and economic system, consistent with present demand and future growth.

Goal 7: Provide a safe and efficient transportation system which addresses the future needs of Cook County for movement of people and freight, and which considers the social, economic, energy, and environmental effects of the transportation system.

Goal 8: Establish effective coordination measures among all pertinent public and quasi-public entities to best maintain Cook County's quality of life and resources.

Issues and Opportunities

Natural Resources

Issues

- Water and groundwater conservation practices are not widespread in Cook County.
- Local water resources need to be protected from potential statewide re-distribution efforts.
- There are no existing tree planting campaigns or tree planting requirements in Cook County or the Cities of Cecil and Sparks.

Opportunities

- Cook County needs to protect its groundwater resources to serve residents and businesses into the future. To protect groundwater recharge areas, implement management strategies which could include the following protection opportunities: wellhead protection program (Adel has already implemented a plan); limit impermeable surfaces with maximum building footprints and maximum paving areas; require sewer service instead of septic systems, especially for non-residential.
- Protect and preserve Reed Bingham State Park.
- Continue with the implementation of the Wetlands Mitigation Bank.
- Develop tree and landscape standards for the preservation and/or replacement of trees and vegetation as part of land development, to protect the existing native tree canopy and to encourage the planting of new trees and the preservation of green space.
- Encourage protection and expansion of Open Space and Green Space and consider developing some standards for Open Space and Green Space provision.
- [The Little River is a valuable resource for recreation.](#)

Cultural Resources

Issues

- A comprehensive survey of historic buildings and sites has not been completed.
- Cook County has many historic buildings that are empty, in poor repair, or contaminated by lead paint and/or asbestos.
- Funding is not available to restore historic buildings where needed, and great resources are lost when those buildings fall into disrepair.

Opportunities

- Underutilized historic buildings and structures throughout Cook County should be adaptively used. One example is the old shooting range in Adel that could benefit from restoration.
- Cook County's cultural resources could be promoted and used to market the area, increasing economic and tourism opportunities in its communities, especially the Performing Arts Center, which is state-of-the-art, and the Cook County Historical Museum, which is housed in the old Post Office.
- Cook County has many historical churches that need to be inventoried and promoted as part of the cultural heritage of Cook County. Examples are the Presbyterian and Primitive Baptist churches on Route 41 south of Adel.
- Public/private partnerships are a great vehicle for promotion and coordination of historic preservation projects.

Economic Development

Issues

- Comprehensive marketing initiatives are needed to fill existing vacancies in commercial and industrial buildings.
- The area does not have enough local employment opportunities.
- The number of local businesses and industries needs to be increased in order to attract jobs and workforce.
- The local workforce needs to be increased in order to attract more businesses and industries.
- In order to provide a sustainable population base and workforce, initiative needs to be taken to provide quality education and job opportunities for the younger population to minimize the desire to leave the area.

Opportunities

- Cook County has six interchanges with I-75 that could be better utilized to bring businesses and development into the County by making the areas more attractive and incentivizing development.
- For the two main corridors that serve as entrances to the City of Adel, overlay zoning districts or similar measures could help to spur economic development.
- The County has a diverse industry base that could be used to attract more industry.
- The County is strong in agriculture, consisting mainly of produce, watermelons, cotton, corn, and peanuts. Additional niche products should be developed to ensure continued diversity.
- Cook County is centrally located along I-75 halfway between Orlando and Atlanta. This is a good location to draw businesses seeking a maximum area of influence.
- Two major rail lines, Georgia/Florida and Norfolk Southern, have routes through the County. Close proximity and easy access to both Brunswick and Savannah Ports are also good location factors for Cook County.
- Cook County has 3,000 acres of developable land available for business.
- The South Georgia Motorsports Park is located in Cook County, which is just one component of quality recreation opportunities within the County. These opportunities need to be coordinated countywide and marketed nationwide.

- The airport runway length of 5500 feet may contribute significantly to the ability to attract businesses that rely on general aviation activities for employees and their business. A contract is underway to expand the runway by an additional 500 feet.
- The rise in elderly population may enhance a community's economic base and provide a largely untapped knowledge and experience base for the labor market.
- Wiregrass is helping to fill the education gap with knowledge programs and the Quick Start Program. Broadband in general should be expanded in order to take advantage of the opportunities it provides.
- The new hospital opening in October 2019 will provide an additional estimated 50 jobs, and will spur retail and commercial development along the adjacent corridor.
- Opportunity Zones, New Markets Tax Credits, or similar programs could help to spur economic development.

Housing

Issues

- Location and lack of maintenance of mobile home parks specifically, and rental properties in general, often result in substandard housing. Mobile homes are the only option for many low-income residents to own their home and possibly the land it is placed on.
- Several areas within Cook County and its cities experience varying degrees of blight conditions that need to be addressed with a comprehensive enforcement and demolition program.
- [There is a lack of public housing in Adel.](#)
- [Paving and drainage is still needed in some mobile home parks and in other areas.](#)
- Sufficient housing for diverse population groups is lacking. Cook County and its cities need to adopt a comprehensive strategy to provide for additional diverse housing such as low-income housing and rentals, as well as quality low- to moderate-income housing.
- Cook County lacks a strategy to address the issues and needs of a homeless population.
- Projects for reinvestment and redevelopment of declining residential and commercial areas are lacking.

Opportunities

- Develop mechanisms to maintain the value of the existing and future housing stock, while also providing diverse, affordable, and quality housing.
- Strategies need to be adopted to encourage maintenance of existing mobile home parks.
- Older neighborhoods are perceived as providing quality character to the area and should be maintained and preserved in better shape.
- Find and provide mechanisms to maintain the quality and number of mid- to high-level income housing.
- Utilize the House of Grace, an all-male rehabilitation center and homeless shelter in Cook County, to address the needs of the homeless population.
- [A land bank could help to spur revitalization.](#)

- An Urban Redevelopment Plan could help to eliminate blight.
- There is outside interest in building about 50 new units for senior housing. Also, a developer is interested in building new affordable housing units in the \$100,000 to \$150,000 range.
- Paving and drainage has been completed in some mobile home parks, and more is underway. Grants, such as CDBGs, can help to pay for this.
- Construction of new public housing could provide much-needed quality housing options for some people.

Land Use

Issues

- Encroaching development poses a threat to existing farmland, not only by turning existing farmland into residential subdivisions, but also by endangering neighboring farmland through co-location of incompatible uses.
- Many buildings in Cook County and its cities are vacant. Infill development is needed for both residential and commercial/industrial buildings.
- Population numbers are stagnant. The county needs to find ways to increase population growth.

Opportunities

- Protect existing farmland from development by developing incentives to keep farmland agricultural, and make it productive for farmers to do so. Require sufficient buffers or transitional areas to protect existing farm operations from negative perceptions and complaints about incompatible farming uses next to newer residential subdivisions or the location of concentrated animal feeding operations next to sustainable family farms or comparable farming operations.
- No zoning or development should be approved that is not consistent with the comprehensive plan. A compatibility matrix should be established to provide an easy overview of what “Future Land Use Designations” and zoning categories are allowed.
- Cook County is located in proximity to large attractions and larger city areas, but still provides a quality of life geared towards a more rural lifestyle. This characteristic needs to be preserved and enhanced.

Community Facilities and Services

Issues

- Countywide fire protection capabilities and resources are limited and need to be expanded to provide adequate fire protection for the county's residents and structures.
- Recreation programs in Cook County are too fractured and need to be expanded with operation and coordination on a countywide level.
- ~~The Highway 41 industrial corridor requires additional sewer capacity to serve the industrial development area with adequate capacity.~~
- Expansion and modernization of the City of Adel's sewer system is necessary before additional development can be accommodated.
- The City of Cecil needs a fire truck and more recreation facilities, especially for children and seniors.
- Once the old hospital closes, identification of a reuse for the property will be necessary.

Opportunities

- Establish a joint Capital Improvement Program that all the communities will update on a regular schedule, in order to aid in planning future investments.
- Maintain adequate landfill capacity for Cook County and its residents.
- Maintain all schools in their current condition. All schools in Cook County ~~have been built in the last few years; are fairly new.~~
- Continue to utilize the new Boys & Girls Club and its Teen Center., ~~which has been in operation for the last three years. Coordinate with the school board and the County to provide a center for teens.~~
- Maintain the quality of the existing hospital system.
- The hospital system is undergoing replacement and improvement.
- A county-wide fire system could potentially increase efficiency. However, there is already a mutual aid agreement in place, and the City of Cecil is already served by the County Fire Department. The Town of Sparks intends to continue to maintain their own fire department.
- The County now has an expanded landfill, with a separate construction and demolition landfill.

- A new recreation complex is being built and will be an asset to the community.
- Sewer, water, and gas capacity have been expanded.
- The Board of Education is constructing a new stadium, tennis courts, track, and football field.
- The lake behind the high school could be a good site for a community gathering place.

Transportation

Issues

- ~~An additional interchange needs to be constructed on I-75 between exits 32 and 37 in order to provide access to the Highway 41 industrial corridor and industrial park without having to drive through residential neighborhoods.~~
- There is a need for students to be able to walk and bike to and from the high school.
- The City of Adel needs a continuous east-west truck route through the city. The truck route needs to be tied in to the Alabama Road project. Required right-of-way needs to be identified early and preserved for future construction.
- The transportation system (street network) in Cook County is aging and is in need of major improvements.
- Countywide transportation is lacking for kids not old enough to have a driver's license or who don't have a car to get to destinations such as the Boys & Girls Club facility. Continuous sidewalks are not available in most locations to encourage safe walking or bicycling.

Opportunities

- Develop and coordinate a plan with the railroad to relocate the switching yard into the industrial area to the south of Adel.
- Develop a right-of-way corridor plan for future road construction planning.
- Develop a bicycle and pedestrian master plan to address safety and improvements for sidewalks, trails, and bicycle paths.
- Many roads have been resurfaced in the last 10 years.
- Road improvements behind Walmart will be finished in 2020, and improvements from Exit 37 to Highway 76 will be finished in 2021.
- The passing of T-SPLOST will lead to many improvements, including resurfacing the main arterial roads.

Governmental Relations

Issues

- ~~Lowndes County residents~~ Residents of many surrounding counties are increasingly utilizing garbage collection stations in ~~south Cook County~~ due to decreasing landfill capacity and increasing garbage disposal fees in Lowndes County.

Opportunities

- Maintain the good existing working relationship between local governments and other agencies.

Broadband/Telecommunication

Issues

- Many residents and businesses lack adequate internet access due to lack of capacity, lack of availability, and lack of choices of service providers.
- More of the County lacks cell tower coverage than has it.
- Large areas of the County have no radio signal coverage for fire/police/EMS communications.

Opportunities

- Two 5G Verizon towers are being built.
- Some fiber optic cables are being installed in Adel.
- A 5-county project is underway, with help from DCA, GEMA, and FEMA, to improve radio signal coverage for fire/police/EMS communications.