

MACON COUNTY  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
PLAN



## INTRODUCTION

Planning for the future is an essential task for the orderly development of a community. The plan that follows is written with this objective in mind, to coordinate the growth of Macon County, Alabama. For convenience, the Economic Development Element is divided into three sections: 1) a summary of relevant information relating to existing needs and opportunities, 2) the establishment of goals, objectives, and tasks, and 3) a plan for implementation.

## LAND AREA

The total land area of Macon County is 611 square miles, which comprises 1.2% of total land area for the State of Alabama. In comparison to surrounding counties, Macon County ranks fifth out of six counties (Figure 1).

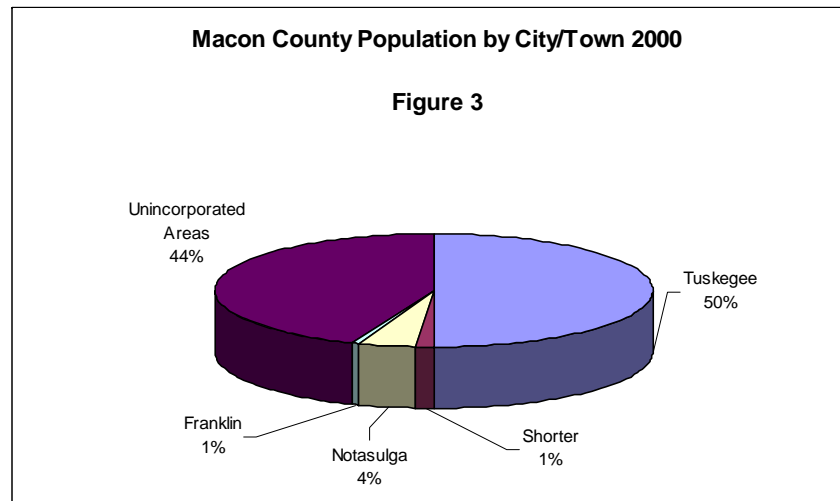
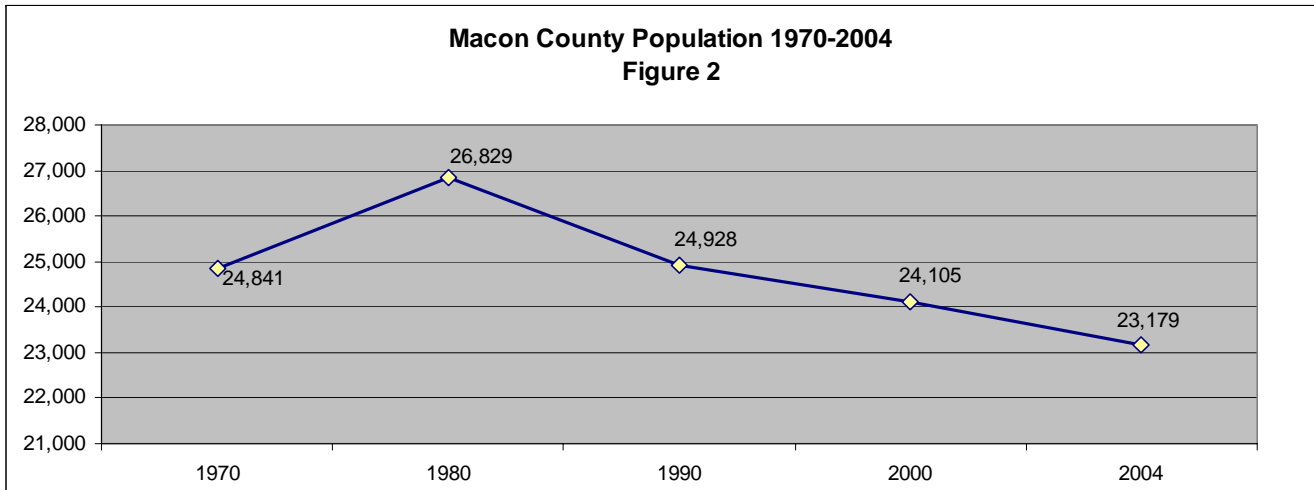
<b>County</b>	<b>Land Area in Square Miles</b>
Montgomery	790
Tallapoosa	718
Russell	641
Bullock	625
Elmore	621
Macon	611
Lee	609

Figure 1

## POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

According to the 2004 United States Census, Macon County's estimated population is 23,179 inhabitants. Figure 2 shows historical data from 1970 to the present. While the population in the county increased from 1970 to 1980, it declined from 1980 to 2004. The largest percentage drop was between 1980 and 1990, totaling 7.6 percent. In addition, population density (persons per square mile) has steadily declined from 44 in 1980, to 41 in 1990, and finally to 39 in 2000. Since Macon County has a greater number of births (315 in 2000) than deaths (296 in 2000), the cause for population decline is due to out-migration of people.

In addition, the population of Macon County is concentrated in the City of Tuskegee and in unincorporated areas of the county. Figure 3 shows that in 2000, 50 percent of the population lived in Tuskegee, while 44 percent inhabited in unincorporated areas, 4 percent resided in Notasulga, and one percent lived in Shorter and Franklin, respectively (Figure 3).



## **AGE, SEX, AND ETHNIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Macon County contains a wide variety of age groups (Figure 4). 2000 United States Census data indicates that the 15–24 year-old age group represents 30 percent of the population. The second largest group is the 40–49 year-old age group, which comprises 13 percent of the population. Additionally, 54.2 percent of the residents are female and 45.8 percent are male.

The racial makeup of Macon County is significantly unbalanced. In 2000, 85 percent of the population was African-American, 14 percent of the population was Caucasian, and one percent was designated as “other”. Within this last group are those who are a combination of two or more races, are Asian, or are Native American.

## **PER CAPITA AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Macon County ranks last in per capita income for all counties in the State of Alabama. During 2000, Macon County had a per capita income of \$15,624. In 2001, this figure rose to \$16,097, and in 2002, per capita income was \$16,728. Montgomery County is

ahead of the region with \$27,262 in 2000, \$28,473 in 2001, and \$29,813 in 2002. Per Capita income for the State of Alabama and the United States in 2002 was \$25,548 and \$30,906, respectively.

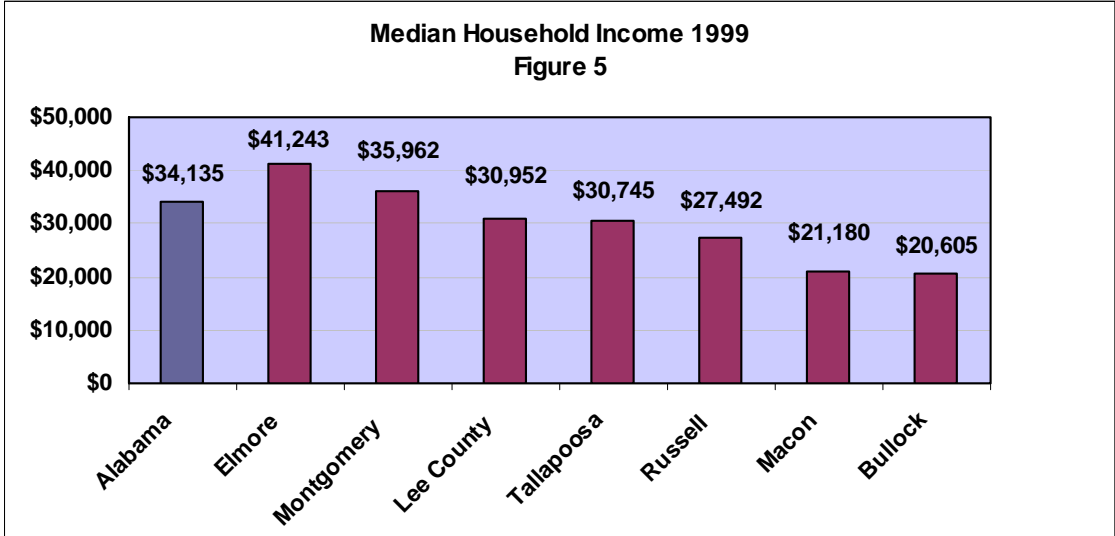
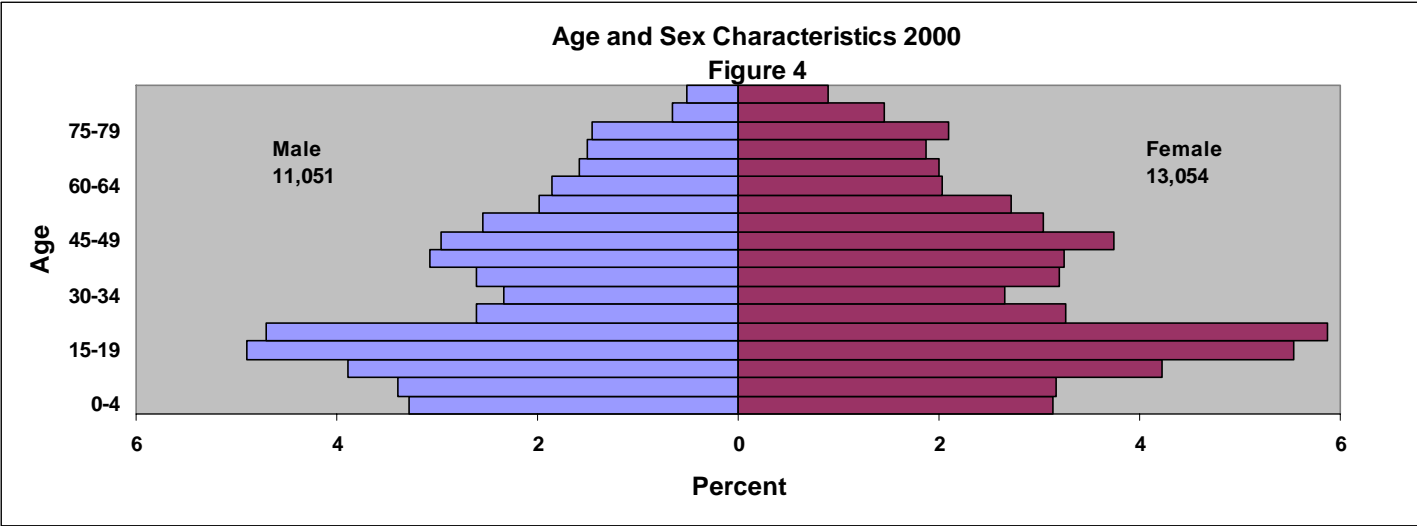
Median household income is also below average for Macon County. In 1999, the county had a median household income of \$21,180. In contrast, the median household income for the State of Alabama and the United States in 1999 was \$34,135 and \$41,994, respectively (Figure 5).

## **POVERTY**

Poverty is a great concern for the residents of Macon County. United States Census data for 1999 indicates that 32.8 percent of the county population is below the poverty level. Of these, 52 percent are between the ages of 18 to 64. For those in the 65 and over category, the rate drops to 11.1 percent.

## **LABOR FORCE AND UNEMPLOYMENT**

Labor force and unemployment are two indicators that illustrate how an



area is performing in terms of its local economy. Labor force is defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as the number of people who have jobs or who are available for work and are actively seeking jobs. While both labor force and unemployment are not exact figures, they give an idea of how saturated or unsaturated the labor market is.

The labor force in Macon County has declined in the past decade. United States Census data indicates that in 1990 those considered to be part of the labor force numbered 9,971. By 2000, this figure dropped to 9,293, a decrease of 6.8 percent. When labor force statistics are compared to neighboring counties, it is apparent that out-migration has greatly decreased the available labor pool in Macon County.

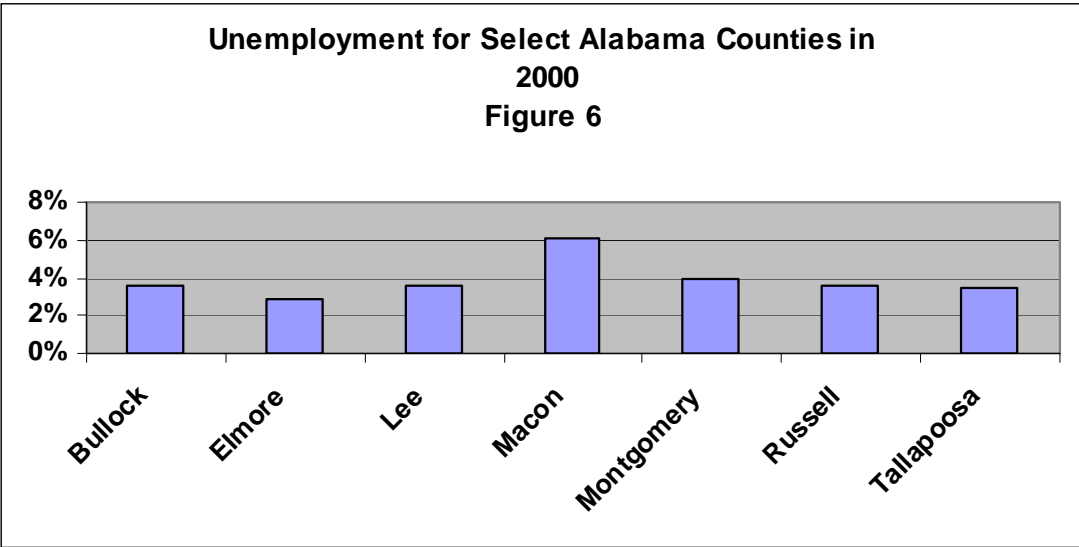
Another interesting figure to note is the percentage of the Macon County labor force which is employed. Census data from 2000 indicates that Macon County has approximately 87.5 percent of its labor force employed. When compared to Bullock, Elmore, Lee, Montgomery, Russell, and Tallapoosa counties, Macon County ranks last. The figures for the counties above are 91.2 percent, 93.1 percent, 93.7 percent, 90.8 percent, 91.8 percent, and 93.6 percent,

respectively. Additionally, the percentage of the Alabama labor force employed is 93.2 percent.

As mentioned, the unemployment rate is also an economic indicator. As jobs become scarce within an area, people are forced to move in order to find available employment. Census data indicates that the unemployment rate in Macon County was at 6.1 percent for 2000. While this might not seem high, all of the counties surrounding Macon County are below this number (Figure 6). In addition, the United States and Alabama unemployment rates are both shown at 3.7 percent, nearly half the rate in Macon County.

## EMPLOYMENT

As evidenced by the unemployment figures that were mentioned, there is a great need for employers within Macon County. According to County Business Patterns, published by the United States Census Bureau in 2000, Macon County had approximately 230 business establishments. Since the County Business Patterns are broken down by industry, they give one a representation of employment sectors operating within



**Largest Employers in Macon County**

**Figure 7**

Name	Product	Number of Employees
Tuskegee University	Higher Learning	850
V.A. Medical Center	Veterans Health Care	850
Macon County Greyhound Track	Pari-Mutual Wagering	800
Macon County Schools	Public School System	450
City of Tuskegee	Government	200
Halla Climate Systems - AL	Automotive Parts	150
Macon County Commission	Government	150
U S Postal Service	Postal Service	50
Martin Marietta Aggregates	Mining	50
Calhoun Foods	Grocery/Pharmacy	40

the county. By far the largest sector in Macon County is retail trade. This accounted for 64 of the total 230 business enterprises. Next is a category classified as other services (not including government) at 35 business establishments. Furthermore, health care and social assistance account for 23 of the business establishments within Macon County. According to the 2000 County Business Patterns, approximately 54.8 percent of the labor force is employed within these three sectors.

Along these same lines, the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama reports on the largest employers within a county. As of 2004, the largest employer was Tuskegee University at 850 employees. Next was Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (V.A. Hospital), also at 850 employees. The Macon County Greyhound Track in Shorter had a workforce of approximately 800 employees, while the Macon County School system employed around 450 people. Figure 7 shows this in detail.

## EDUCATION

Education is an important component that not only provides a competent workforce, but also attracts residential development into an area.

United States Census data provides a breakdown of educational attainment by county. The 2000 data for Macon County indicates that of the population, twenty-five years and older, 18.9 percent attended high school, but did not receive a diploma. However, 25 percent of the population received a high school diploma or its equivalent. 10.4 percent received bachelor's degrees, 6.3 percent hold master's degrees, and 2.1 percent obtained professional or doctoral degrees. For comparison, 28.6 percent of the United States population received a high school diploma, 15.5 percent received bachelor's degrees, 5.9 percent hold master's degrees and 3 percent obtained professional or doctoral degrees. So, despite the fact that Macon County is home to Tuskegee University, a major research institution, educational attainment in all but one category is slightly behind the national figures.

One important factor in educational attainment is the educational quality within the county or local school system. This ultimately determines how likely one is to continue his or her education. According to the Alabama State Department of Education, the Macon County school system is lacking in several key indicators. In the Macon County Report Card for 2003



– 2004, only four adequate yearly progress goals were met out of 41 total items. All of the goals are related to performance in three major areas: mathematics, reading, and attendance. For example, 56 percent of the teachers within the Macon County School system are considered “highly qualified,” as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act. This falls short of the state figure of 75 percent. Furthermore, ACT test scores exhibit similar results. In 2003, the ACT average score in Macon County was 17, giving the school system a D–rating. However, the average for the entire state was 20.4, or a C rating.

## TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

Transportation access is an important factor when attracting new industrial and commercial development. Macon County has many transportation assets, but limitations exist in several areas. A highway map of the county illustrates this point well.

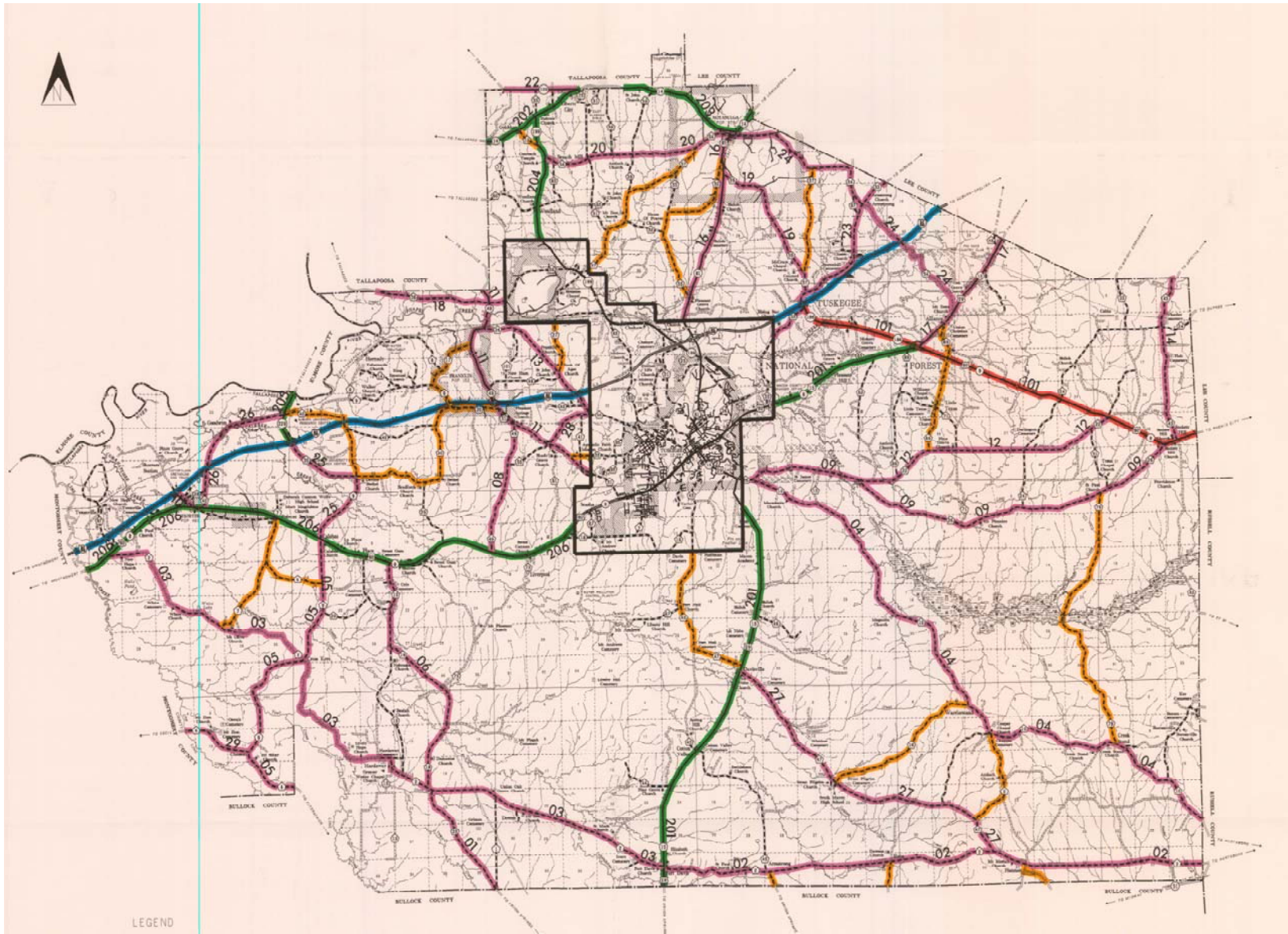
Interstate 85 runs through the northern half of the county. This thirty mile stretch of highway is the busiest route and carries traffic from Montgomery, Alabama, northward to Atlanta, Georgia. Five interstate exits are evenly distributed throughout the region and are close in proximity to the municipalities of Shorter,

Franklin, and Tuskegee. Highway 29 enters Macon County from the northeast and continues through Tuskegee, exiting the region to the south. This two-lane highway is the major north-south connector and connects Auburn, Alabama, to Tuskegee, Alabama. From Tuskegee, Highway 29 enters Bullock County to the south. Highway 80 is a two and four lane road which follows a similar path to Interstate 85. From Tuskegee, this route carries one westward to Montgomery, Alabama. Like Interstate 85, Highway 80 is a major east-west connector.

As mentioned, mobile limitations exist in several areas of the county. With the exception of Highway 29 and Highway 80, the southern and eastern portions of Macon County do not have a reliable road network. Many county roads exist, but are not capable of carrying large amounts of traffic.

In addition to the highway network, Macon County possesses a municipal airport. Located in the Tuskegee city limits, Moton Municipal Airfield contains a 5,000 foot runway capable of supporting small aircraft. Another asset for Macon County is its close proximity to Dannelly Field, the regional airport in Montgomery

# Macon County Transportation Routes



This facility is serviced by carriers such as Delta, Northwest, Continental, and U.S. Airways. Airport renovations are in process with an expected completion date of late 2006.

Macon County also has access to a segment of the CSX Railway Network. This railroad runs from the western edge of Macon County, northeastward to Lee County. Currently, there are no shortlines connecting to the Macon County segment, but opportunities exist for industrial development expansion.

#### **SEWER AND WATER SYSTEMS**

In addition to education and transportation, sewer and water systems are important for economic development. According to the Macon County Engineer, the City of Tuskegee forms the core of the county sewer system. Notasulga has limited sewer within its mercantile district, but the original lines were constructed

ninety years ago. All other areas of the county are served by septic tank or no method at all.

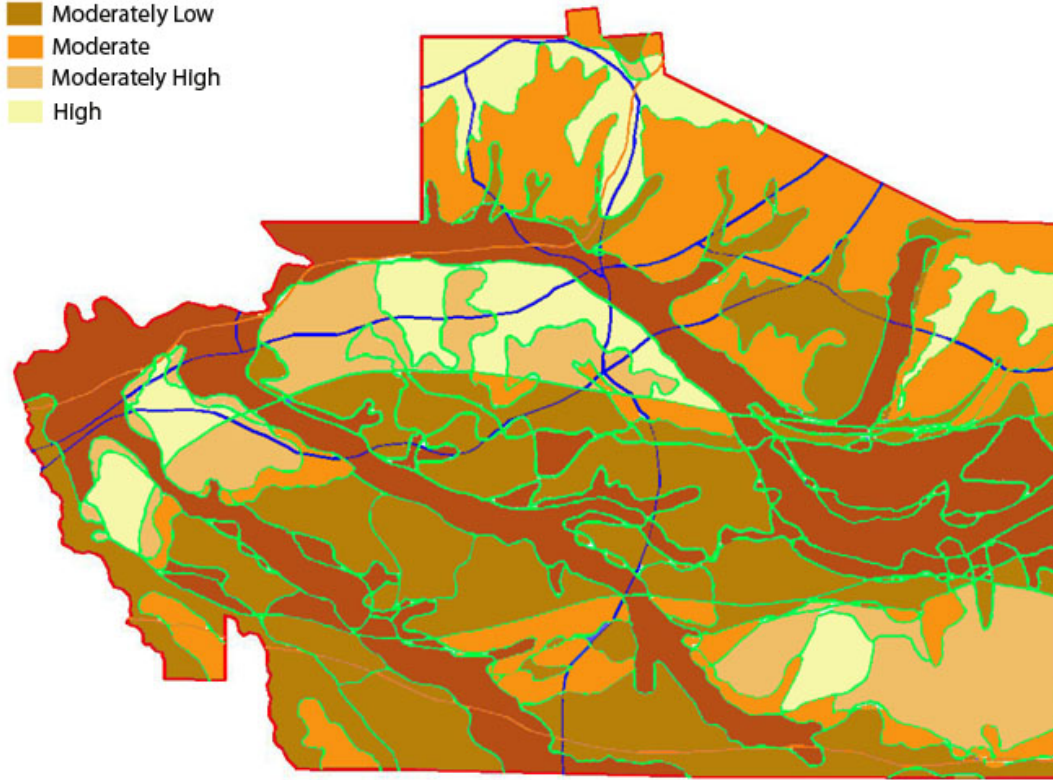
Water service within Macon County is provided by public and private suppliers. The largest of these is the Tuskegee Water Board which serves the central portions of Tuskegee. Additionally, the Macon County Water Authority serves residents near Hardaway, Fitzpatrick, Hurtsboro, and Union Springs. Franklin Water System supplies Franklin and Tuskegee and the Star-Mingdingall Water and Fire Protection Agency serves unincorporated districts.

#### **DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL**

As shown on the map (following page), the areas in Macon County with potential for development are located north of Interstate 85 near Notasulga, and along the Interstate 85 corridor. The darkest areas are the least suitable for development.

### Development Potential Map

- Low
- Moderately Low
- Moderate
- Moderately High
- High



## GOAL #1

- Encourage economic development, including the creation of higher paying jobs for a more diversified local economy

## OBJECTIVE

- Establish an economic development program that supports existing development and advances future growth through intergovernmental cooperation
- Ensure that the unique character of Macon County is not destroyed by desperate efforts to attract development

## TASK

- Strengthen the existing Macon County Economic Development Authority making it representative of all municipalities and unincorporated areas within Macon County
- Build upon the existing Tuskegee Chamber of Commerce to establish a countywide Chamber of Commerce which includes representation from both the public and private sectors
- Access the economic development needs of the county through the Macon County Economic Development Authority and target specific industries and businesses that are desired

## GOAL #2

- Develop a diverse and competitive regional economy through the use of information technology

## OBJECTIVE

- Increase marketability by maintaining current economic databases and mapping services (on-line geographic information systems)
- Promote and inform the business community of opportunities within Macon County through the use of a county webpage

## TASK

- Create a position entitled "Information Planner" within the county government system for collecting and maintaining data related to economic development
- Construct a webpage for Macon County that highlights key economic indicators and opportunities within the region
- Maintain a geographic information system for map production and analysis purposes



### GOAL #3

- Provide safe, efficient and effective infrastructure to serve the economic development needs of Macon County

### OBJECTIVE

- Increase transportation access to all areas of Macon County
- Explore funding alternatives for extending sanitary sewer services or upgrade underserved areas of Macon County
- Develop high technology infrastructure in Macon County

### TASK

- Submit grant proposals to the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) for Community Development Block Grant Program
- Seek funding grants from the United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Rural Development, for solid waste management and technical assistance
- Maximize opportunities for obtaining grant monies from these and other entities by using experienced, motivated administrators to write proposals

## IMPLEMENTATION

The most important part of the planning process is implementation. The goals and objectives that were introduced earlier will never become a reality without accountability and oversight. This section addresses these issues and prioritizes the tasks to address current and future needs.

The first item that should be addressed to implement the goals and objectives is to strengthen the existing Macon County Economic Development Authority. Up to this point, development has focused on the cities of Tuskegee and Shorter. Although these areas are pivotal to continued growth, a more holistic approach should be taken to plan for the entire county. In addition, private and public partners should work to establish a Macon County Chamber of Commerce. The idea is that development in any part of the county will benefit each municipality in some way. Once these programs are in place, Macon County can target specific industries and businesses that are desired.

Secondly, Macon County should create a website to market and attract new development. This objective will help to promote opportunities within the region. In addition, databases and mapping systems should be established and updated to provide accurate information

for potential users. The webpage and databases are maintained by an "Information Planner," who is hired strictly for this purpose.

Finally, Macon County should work to improve its existing infrastructure. Since sewer and water systems are limited to municipal areas, an experienced administrative official within the county can apply for funds from the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs and the Community Development Block Grant Program. Additionally, Macon should improve transportation access and road conditions throughout the county. As an economically distressed area, Macon County has many opportunities available to support infrastructure needs.