

■ Introduction

The characteristics and trends in a community can be important indicators of future housing needs and policies. Columbia County's Existing Land Use Map shows the current location of housing by type (single-family detached and multi-family residences).

The purpose of assessing Columbia County's housing stock is to:

1. Determine the County's future housing needs in conjunction with population projections and community goals and policies.
2. Discover and investigate any local housing problems such as substandard housing, over building, sewer availability etc.
3. Assess whether an adequate, affordable and varied supply of housing is being offered in Columbia County.
4. Develop a plan for managing housing development in the future.

■ Residential Growth in Columbia County

The first permanent residents in Columbia County came from the Virginias and Carolinas in the 1700s. Columbia County was a rural settlement based on cotton production and commerce centered around the Augusta Canal and new rail lines built to serve the southeast. Until about 30 years ago, Columbia County was primarily rural in character, with a few concentrated settlements, large land holdings and farms.

Because of its close proximity to Augusta, Columbia County has seen a transformation from a totally rural county to a bedroom community of Augusta, Georgia. Over the last 30 years the County has been urbanizing rapidly, with a large portion of that growth over the last 10 years. Census data for the period 1990-99 indicates that Columbia County captured 92% of all growth in the Richmond-Columbia-McDuffie area. To support this growth the County has become increasingly urbanized with population growth concentrated in the Martinez-Evans area and in the cities of Harlem and Grovetown. The predominate land use in Columbia County is residential.

In 1990 the County had an estimated 21,588 housing units; it is estimated that there are 32,541 housing units in Columbia County at the present time. During this 10-year span the County added 10,953 dwelling units, or 1/3 of the entire housing inventory. Housing types were majority single-family units built in traditional subdivisions in the Martinez-Evans area, and large lot and estate type developments in the more rural areas of the County.

Current growth trends are expected to continue into the future. Residential building permits issued in July 1998 in the metropolitan area had grown in value by \$4.48 million or 19%, compared to the same period a year ago. Sales of new homes were also strong. Local real estate professionals have attributed this growth to a robust economy and low mortgage rates. It is estimated that to accommodate a year 2020 population of 164,041 people, the County will require 55,788 housing units, or an additional 23,247 housing units. Although the primary housing type within Columbia County will continue to be a single family dwelling, it is expected that

future housing units will provide a diversity of types to accommodate Columbia County's projected smaller housing size and aging population.

■ Current Housing Stock

Well over 90% of the county's housing units are single-family units, either single-family houses or manufactured homes. Both categories showed dramatic increases during the 1990s. While the multi-family housing supply has grown numerically during the 1990s, the percentage has remained stable at about 4% of the total, while townhouses have increased from less than 2.0% to 2.6%. This increase in multi-family housing represents an increasing diversity in the demographics in Columbia County. Smaller household sizes and an increasing number of empty nesters that require alternative forms of housing are expected in the future.

Manufactured housing continues to increase in the County. In 1980 there were 2,205 manufactured homes, and in 1990 there were 2,796 manufactured homes representing 13% of the total housing inventory. By 2000, the County added an additional 2,061 units, bringing the total percentage of manufactured housing units to 14.9%. Reasons for high concentrations of manufactured housing include: second-home developments near Clark's Hill Lake, housing for military personnel near Fort Gordon, and lack of affordable housing.

Table H-1 shows the mix of housing types in 1990, growth during the 1990s and the housing supply estimated today in the unincorporated area.

Table H-1
Housing Stock by Type
Unincorporated Columbia County

	Total in 1990		Added 1990-2000		Total in 2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<i>Single-Family House</i>	17,005	78.8%	7,950	72.6%	24,955	76.7%
<i>Mobile Home</i>	2,796	13.0%	2,061	18.8%	4,857	14.9%
Total Single-Family	19,801	91.7%	10,011	91.4%	29,812	91.6%
Duplex	396	1.8%	44	0.4%	440	1.4%
Townhouse	404	1.9%	433	4.0%	837	2.6%
Multi-Family	857	4.0%	465	4.2%	1,322	4.1%
Other	130	0.6%	-	0.0%	130	0.4%
Total	21,588	100.0%	10,953	100.0%	32,541	100.0%

Sources: 1990 Census, STF1A database, U.S. Bureau of the Census.
Building permits, Columbia County, 1990-99.

■ Age of Columbia County's Housing Supply

In 1990 the Census Bureau reported a total of almost 22,000 housing units in the unincorporated area. The County's housing stock has continued to mushroom since then, adding almost 11,000 units during the 1990s. During this past decade, one-third of all housing units in the unincorporated area were built, indicating an impressively young housing stock. In the 1970s, 20% (6,500 units) of the current housing stock was constructed, while housing units built prior to 1970 represent only 12% of the supply. Table H-2 presents a view of the County's housing stock that reflects its age.

Table H-2
Age of Housing Stock
 Unincorporated Columbia County

Year Structure Built	Housing Units		Accumulated		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Before 1940	219	0.7%	219	0.7%	more than 60 years old
1940 to 1949	244	0.7%	463	1.4%	more than 50 years old
1950 to 1959	1,088	3.3%	1,551	4.8%	more than 40 years old
1960 to 1969	2,397	7.4%	3,948	12.1%	more than 30 years old
1970 to 1979	6,483	19.9%	10,431	32.1%	more than 20 years old
1980 to 1989	11,157	34.3%	21,588	66.3%	more than 10 years old
1990 to 2000	10,953	33.7%	10,953	33.7%	less than 10 years old
Total	32,541	100.0%			

Sources: 1990 Census, STF3A database, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce.
 Building permits, Columbia County, 1990-99.

So much of the county's housing supply has been constructed since 1980 that it comprises two-thirds of the entire inventory. Conversely, only one-third of all units are over 20 years old, with most of those built during the 1960s & 1970s. Comparison to statewide data on housing age underscores the fact that so much of Columbia County's housing supply is relatively new (see Appendix A).

A little over 2% of the housing stock was built before the 1950's and can be classified as "historic." The majority of these homes are located in the city of Harlem and rural areas of the County. The architecture of these houses can best be described as vernacular with examples of Federal, Greek revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Neo-Classical, Colonial Revival, Craftsman and Bungalow. There is also a high concentration of farm houses in the County.

A little over 54% of Columbia County's housing stock was built between 1970 and 1990. These homes are mainly brick ranch homes and traditional built either on large lot in the rural areas

of the County, or along major arterials and in traditional subdivisions. In some cases, older dwelling units along major arterials have converted to other uses.

■ Tenure and Vacancy in Columbia County's Housing Supply

Housing built during the last decade has been a mix of large luxurious homes on large lots and smaller moderately priced starter homes. Traditional subdivisions have been built in the Martinez-Evans area, and single large estate sites and small large lot subdivisions have been built in the more rural areas of the County.

The over-riding trend in the Columbia County housing market over the past decade has been the development of suburban subdivisions with curvilinear streets, cul-de-sacs and recreation amenities. Building styles represent traditional, modern, and European, among others. Affluent subdivisions of the 1990's such as Windmill Plantation and Eagle Trace are excellent examples, and expected to set the trend for future development in the County.

This great asset of new housing presents a statistical disadvantage, since the last reliable data collected on housing occupancies was the 1990 Census.

Owner-Occupied and Renter-Occupied Housing

Historically, the unincorporated areas of Columbia County were traditional communities with single-family homes on large lots. The housing stock, therefore, has primarily been owner occupied. As a rural agricultural community, there was never a significant demand for rental housing. In fact, the share of renter-occupied units increased a little over 1% from 19.5% in 1980 to only 20.7% in 1990. Overall, during the 1980s renter-occupied housing increased from 2,508 units to 4,519, while owner-occupied housing increased from 10,326 units to 17,322. Since the housing supply in 1990 included only 1,787 multi-family units (including duplex, townhouse, multifamily and other), the majority of the households renting in Columbia County (2,732) were living in single-family houses or in manufactured homes.

Comparison with State and County data indicates that Columbia County has consistently had a higher owner occupied rate and a lower renter occupied rate than either its neighboring counties or the State as a whole (as shown on Table H-3 for 1990). In 1990, Columbia County had a 21% rental share while the State had a 35% rental share. The unincorporated area itself, however, had a lower rental occupancy rate of 18%, reflecting higher rental occupancies in its two cities. Higher rental rates in Harlem and Grovetown reflect a higher number of rental units in the cities. Many of these rental units provide housing for soldiers stationed at Fort Gordon.

Since 1990, the rental market in the unincorporated area is estimated to have expanded somewhat with the construction of an additional 465 multi-family, and 477 duplexes and townhouse units and an increase of over 2000 manufactured homes. If the same proportion of single-family units are renter-occupied today as in 1990 (20.7%), and if all of today's multi-family units are renter-occupied, then rental occupancy will have risen to about 7,439 units, or almost 23%. This percentage is still substantially below the available 1990 percentages for neighboring counties and the State.

**Table H-3
Housing Tenure--1990**

Columbia, Richmond, McDuffie County, and the State

	Columbia County		Richmond County		McDuffie County		Georgia	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Owner Occupied	17,322	79.3%	38,762	56.4%	4,990	68.6%	1,536,759	64.9%
Renter Occupied	4,519	20.7%	29,913	43.6%	2,280	31.4%	829,856	35.1%
Total	21,841	100.0%	68,675	100.0%	7,270	100.0%	2,366,615	100.0%

Columbia County and its Cities

	Columbia County		Grovetown		Harlem		Uninc. Area	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Owner Occupied	17,322	79.3%	576	44.9%	410	70.4%	16,336	81.8%
Renter Occupied	4,519	20.7%	707	55.1%	172	29.6%	3,640	18.2%
Total	21,841	100.0%	1,283	100.0%	582	100.0%	19,976	100.0%

Source: 1990 Census, STF1A database, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Vacancy Rates

Of Columbia County's 21,588 housing units in 1990, 1,612 (or 7.5%) were vacant and 19,976 were occupied (or 92.5%). Since an overwhelming majority of housing in Columbia County is owner occupied for sale housing, vacancy rates are lower than surrounding counties or the State.

Comparison to State and County data also highlights the relatively unique characteristics of the County's vacancies in 1990. Table H-4 shows both the status of all vacant housing units in the Columbia, Richmond and McDuffie counties and the State, and the proportion of units specifically on the market for sale or rent. All three counties: Columbia County (49.2%), Richmond County (54.2%) and McDuffie County (33.9%) had lower percentages of vacant housing units ei-

ther for sale or rent or already sold or rented but not yet occupied than the State (64.1%). Of the units specifically available for rent or sale, the vast majority of units in Richmond and McDuffie counties and the State of Georgia were rental units, while Columbia County's units were predominately sales units (51.4%). Comparing unincorporated Columbia County to its cities, it is clear that rental vacancies are concentrated in the cities of Grovetown (92.8%) and Harlem (82.8%). This latter figure underscores unincorporated Columbia County's traditional makeup as a place of families and neighborhoods.

Vacancy data is not available for years past 1990. Since there is a larger proportion of rental-type units in Columbia County's housing supply today, it would be expected that the percentage of units available for rent will have increased over the decade while the percentage available for sale will have commensurately decreased. Observations of sales and rental activities in the county suggest a healthy market currently for both homes and apartments, which is expected to continue due to projected growth in the county and attraction to the surrounding area in general.

Table H-4
Vacancy Status--1990

Columbia, Richmond, McDuffie County, and the State

	<u>Columbia County</u>		<u>Richmond County</u>		<u>McDuffie County</u>		<u>Georgia</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All Vacant Units								
For Rent	396	20.8%	3297	38.3%	147	19.0%	115,115	42.4%
For Sale Only	418	22.0%	893	10.4%	71	9.2%	38,816	14.3%
Rented or Sold, but Vacant	122	6.4%	470	5.5%	44	5.7%	20,006	7.4%
Seasonal or Recreational Use	309	16.2%	120	1.4%	129	16.7%	33,637	12.4%
For Migrant Workers	5	0.3%	7	0.1%	3	0.4%	617	0.2%
Other Vacant	654	34.3%	3826	44.4%	379	49.0%	63,612	23.4%
Total--All Vacant Units	1,904	100.0%	8,613	100.0%	773	100.0%	271,803	100.0%
Vacant Units Available								
For Rent	396	48.6%	3,297	78.7%	147	67.4%	115,115	74.8%
For Sale Only	418	51.4%	893	21.3%	71	32.6%	38,816	25.2%
Total--Available Vacant Units	814	100.0%	4,190	100.0%	218	100.0%	153,931	100.0%

Columbia County and its Cities

	<u>Columbia County</u>		<u>Grovetown</u>		<u>Harlem</u>		<u>Uninc. Area</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All Vacant Units								
For Rent	396	20.8%	128	59.3%	24	31.6%	244	15.1%
For Sale Only	418	22.0%	10	4.6%	5	6.6%	403	25.0%
Rented or Sold, but Vacant	122	6.4%	4	1.9%	7	9.2%	111	6.9%
Seasonal or Recreational Use	309	16.2%	6	2.8%	1	1.3%	302	18.7%
For Migrant Workers	5	0.3%	3	1.4%	-	0.0%	2	0.1%
Other Vacant	654	34.3%	65	30.1%	39	51.3%	550	34.1%
Total--All Vacant Units	1,904	100.0%	216	100.0%	76	100.0%	1,612	100.0%
Vacant Units Available								
For Rent	396	48.6%	128	92.8%	24	82.8%	244	37.7%
For Sale Only	418	51.4%	10	7.2%	5	17.2%	403	62.3%
Total--Available Vacant Units	814	100.0%	138	100.0%	29	100.0%	647	100.0%

Source: STF1A database, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

■ Cost of Housing

The median purchase cost of a home in Columbia County rose from \$42,600 in 1980 to \$83,700 in 1990, representing a dramatic increase of almost 200%. Housing costs in Columbia County was about one-third to three-fourths greater than other housing values in the 4-county area. This \$41,000 increase of in value can be attributed to several factors:

- The development trend of expensive homes on large lots from 1980 to 1990;
- The inclusion of luxury amenity packages in many subdivisions;
- The high percentage of new housing stock in the county;
- The high quality of life and highly demanded primary school system;
- High incomes and educational attainment; and
- The proximity to I-20 and the Augusta metro area.

The cost of purchasing a home or renting a unit in Columbia County was consistently higher than the State average. The highest percentage of owner occupied housing was in the \$75,000 to \$100,000 value range (28.2%), as compared to Richmond County (15.9%), McDuffie County (11.8%) and the State of Georgia (20.2%). In addition, only 2.6% of housing in Columbia County was valued under \$30,000. The highest rental rates (17.8%) fell in the range of \$350 to \$400 per month. Again, the percentage of higher value levels was higher in Columbia County than either its surrounding counties, or the State of Georgia. In addition, higher values are clustered in the unincorporated area, suggesting that actual housing costs are higher than they appear. As stated previously, luxury homes, new housing stock and location had cause the median cost of both owning and renting in Columbia County to skyrocket.

Detailed tables of owner-occupied housing values and renter-occupied housing costs for 1990, comparing the county to the State, are included in Appendix A. Since more recent data is not available, more definitive conclusions must await the 2000 Census. However, experience with the local housing market suggests that housing costs in Columbia County have continued to increase at a greater pace than in the rest of the surrounding counties or in Georgia as a whole.

Although the latest available data for income trends is 1995, it is believed that these trends continue today. Compared to Georgia, the wealth of Columbia County's population is clear, with median household incomes over 40% higher than the State. Columbia's households were considerably more affluent than those in either of the other two counties at \$49,274, since median household incomes in Columbia County approach twice the medians in Richmond and McDuffie. In addition, the number of households in the highest quartile was 2 to 6 times greater than the surrounding area, and a considerably smaller portion of households was included in the lowest income percentile. Because of its excellent school system and quality of life, Columbia County is a strong attraction for executives and professionals in the August area. Housing size, types, amenities and costs reflect the affluence of the overall community.

■ Housing Conditions

The primary purpose of analyzing housing conditions is to determine the extent and location of substandard housing occurrences within a community. Established criteria to determine the quantity of substandard housing are the number of units lacking complete plumbing faculties,

using wood fuel for heating purposes or lacking public or septic tank sewage disposal. These criteria were last reported in the 1990 Census.

Only a fraction of the housing units in Columbia County qualified under these criteria as substandard in 1990. Of the total housing stock at that time, only 219 units lacked complete plumbing, or 1% of the total housing units in the County. Although the majority of substandard homes were located in the cities of Grovetown and Harlem, there were no significant concentrations of substandard housing in either city.

Since 1990, it is believed that the number of substandard housing units has been reduced, both due to attrition, and improvements. Even if all of the substandard housing units of 1990 remained today, they would constitute only .007% of all units in the County.

■ Housing Forecasts

As part of the Augusta metropolitan area, Columbia County will continue its rapid growth into the future. It is projected that the County will add approximately 60,000 persons by the year 2020. To accommodate this new growth, the County will add 23,000 new housing units. It is anticipated that although single family dwellings will continue to be the dominate housing type demanded, there will be an increase in housing alternatives, such as townhouses, apartments, and units in mixed-use buildings to accommodate smaller family sizes and an aging population.

Table H-4 projects housing growth in the unincorporated portion of the county by housing type, reflecting a continuation of trends set during the decade of the 1990's.

Table H-5
Housing Unit Forecasts by Type
Unincorporated Columbia County

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	Change 2000-2020	
						Number	Percent
Total Housing Units	32,541	38,707	44,631	50,383	55,788	23,247	71.4%
Single-Family Houses	29,812	35,145	40,239	44,482	48,378	18,566	62.3%
Duplex Units	440	465	489	516	543	103	23.4%
Townhouse Units	837	1,286	1,734	2,663	3,592	2,755	329.2%
Multi-Family Units	1,322	1,681	2,039	2,592	3,145	1,823	137.9%
Other	130	130	130	130	130	-	0.0%

■ Summary and Needs Assessment

Low-density single-family detached housing represents over 91% of the total housing stock in Columbia County. Of dwelling units classified as single family, 76.7% were traditional single-family homes, and 14.9% were manufactured homes. Most homes built more than 10 years ago are situated on relatively large (unsewered) lots in the rural areas and traditional homes within

subdivisions. Since 1990, new smaller lot subdivisions have emerged as public sewer was extended.

Representing 4.1% of the housing stock in 2000, multi-family housing has had numerical increases over the last 10 years, but has remained stable at about 4% of the total, while townhouses have increased from less than 2% to 2.6%. Multi-family and other “non-traditional” types of housing are expected to increase in the future to accommodate a more diverse population within the County.

The cost of buying a new home in Columbia County remains high. This high cost can be attributed to the higher median incomes in Columbia County and the development of high quality housing and amenity packages in newly developing subdivisions to meet the desires and needs of the many professionals and executives that are moving to the County.

Overall, housing conditions in the County are excellent, but a handful of substandard homes may still exist, mainly within the cities of Grovetown and Harlem. These homes will be identified as part of the 2000 Census and must be targeted for modernization assistance.

As part of this Growth Management Plan, the County created a vision of future growth focused on identified development nodes in strategic locations throughout the County to accommodate anticipated growth. Individual nodes are intended to act as community centers where inevitable growth is managed at a human scale and where new development integrates living, working, shopping and playing in close proximity to one another. It is anticipated that various levels of nodes, including neighborhood and town centers, will provide a variety of housing types to accommodate an increasingly diverse population within Columbia County. Currently, two-planned unit developments have been identified, Bartram Trail and the Greenbrier Town Center area, which will provide several hundred housing units. These two developments are proposed to provide a mixture of housing types and land uses within village settings. It is estimated that these new residential developments will provide ample housing for proposed growth well into the near future.