

Columbia County, Georgia

....is the place to be



Development Services Division

A Personal Message from Richard Harmon

The Development Services Division of Columbia County is committed to provide our citizens, developers and contractors with courteous, efficient and timely services. We strive for "One Stop Service" for all civil and architectural plans focusing on a quality review with a quick response.

"We appreciate your business"



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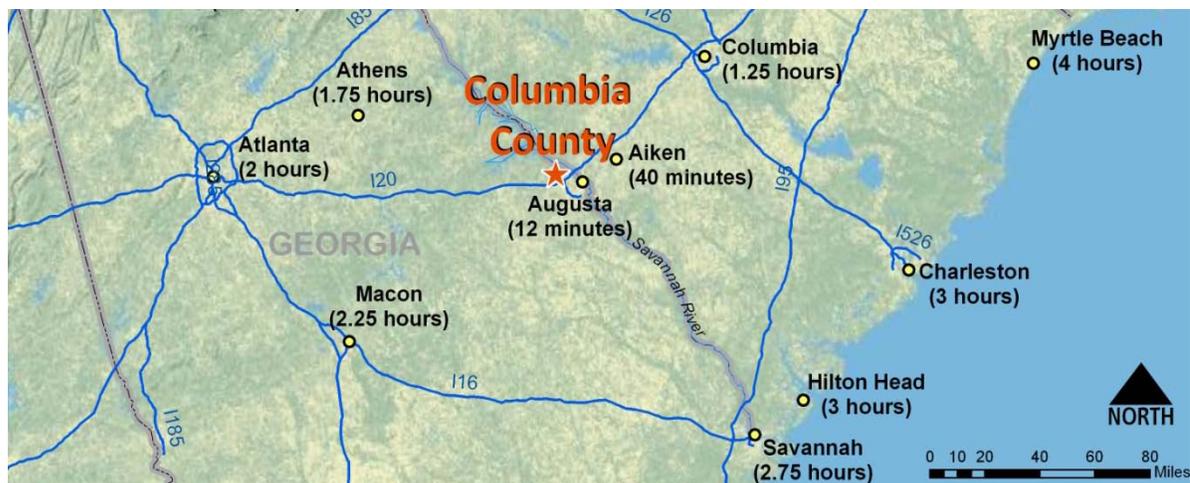
Introduction to Columbia County

The first permanent residents in Columbia County, Georgia came from the Virginias and Carolinas in the 1700s. In 1790, Columbia County was officially created from a part of Richmond County. It was named in honor of Christopher Columbus. Columbia County was a rural settlement based on cotton production and commerce centered on the Augusta Canal and new rail lines built to serve the southeast. During the 20th century, one of the most significant impacts on the County was the establishment in 1941 of the Camp Gordon military base (now Fort Gordon) in the southeastern portion of the County. 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 proximity to Augusta, Columbia County has seen a transformation from a rural county to a bedroom community of Augusta, Georgia. The predominant land use in Columbia County is residential. Over the last 30 years, the County has been urbanizing rapidly with a large portion of that growth over the last 20 years. 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.

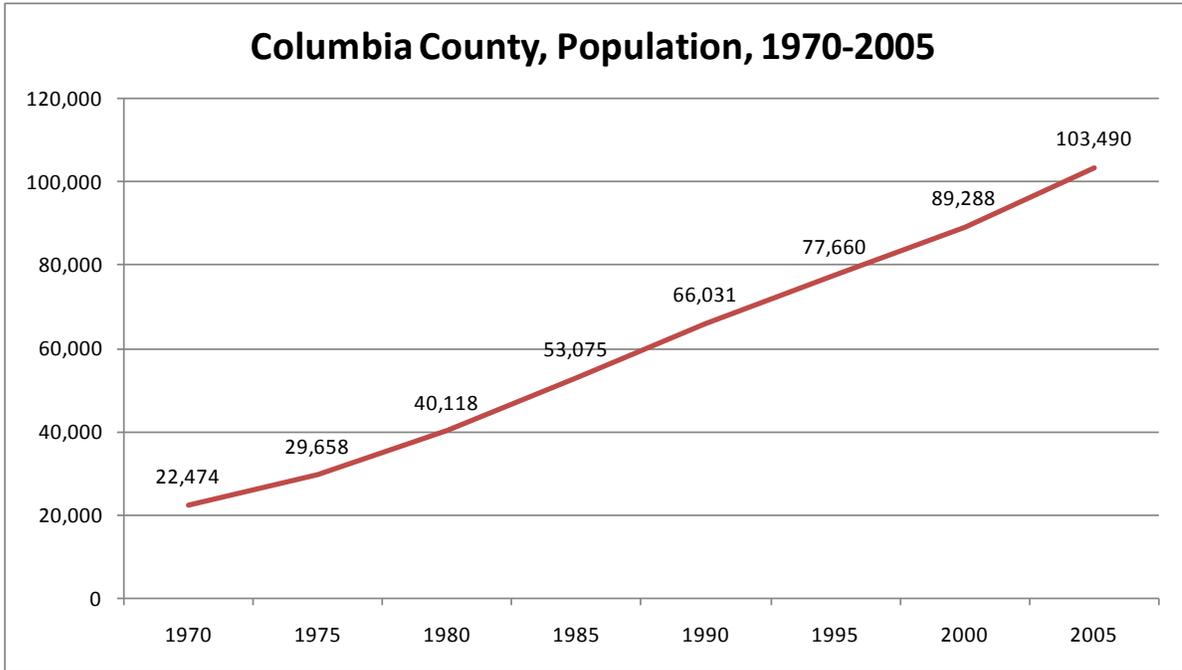
Columbia County is a growing community economically and as a part of the Augusta-Aiken MSA (Columbia, Richmond, and McDuffie Counties in Georgia, and Aiken and Edgefield Counties in South Carolina), Columbia County residents enjoy cultural and employment benefits of being part of a metropolitan area that is approaching an overall population of a half a million people. Although home to several large corporations and company headquarters, the majority of businesses located in Columbia County are retail and service-oriented, and their function is primarily to meet the immediate needs of its residential population.

Columbia County's location in the Augusta-Aiken MSA area presents many regional opportunities. Excellent transportation infrastructure helps to make the Augusta Region a center for economic activity in the upper Savannah region. The Augusta region is the largest population and employment center between Atlanta and Columbia, South Carolina, and serves as a hub for many services for the population in this area.



Population

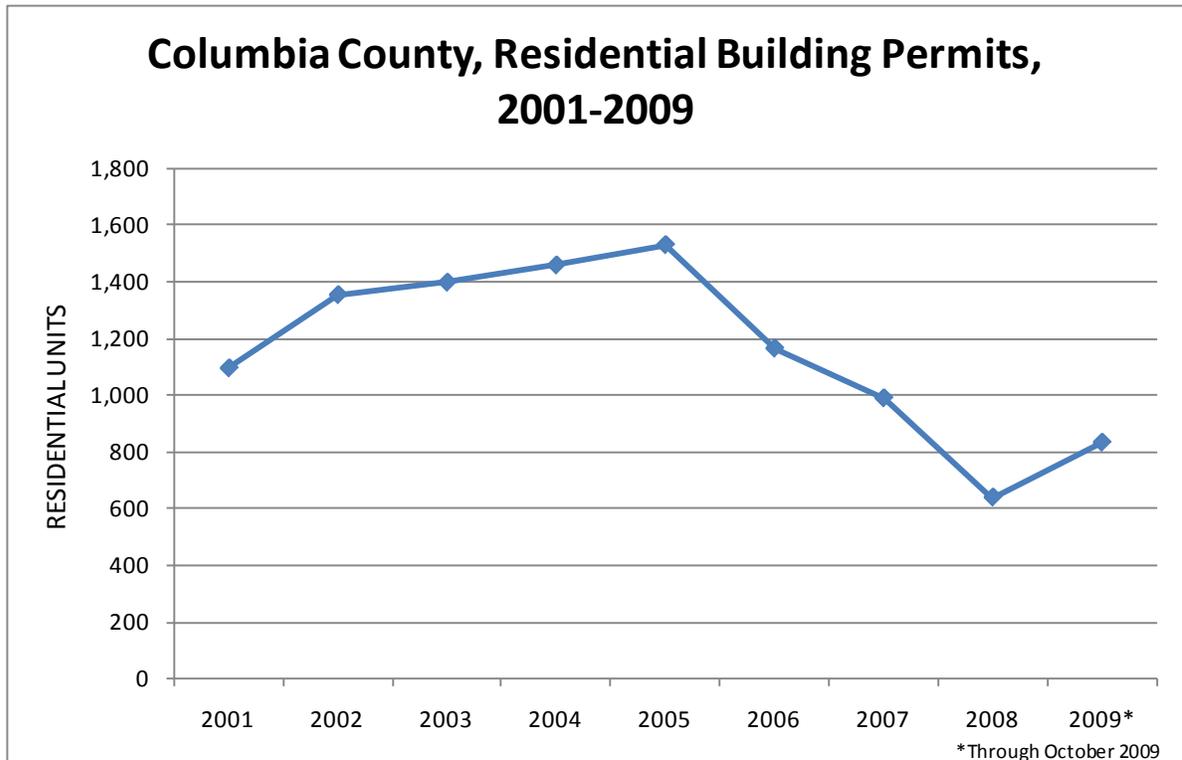
Columbia County is part of the Augusta, Georgia metropolitan statistical area (MSA). Augusta’s population of over 500,000 places it second only to Atlanta in MSA population within the state of Georgia. Columbia County is also the fastest growing county in the metro Augusta area. As of 2008, the county’s population is over 110,000 and continues to grow.



(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005)

Housing Growth

Significant residential building activity has provided a wide array of housing options in Columbia County. When the nation's housing bubble recently burst and many communities faced unprecedented vacancy rates and foreclosures, local housing growth continued in Columbia County. In 2009, housing growth is projected to increase about 50 percent over 2008.

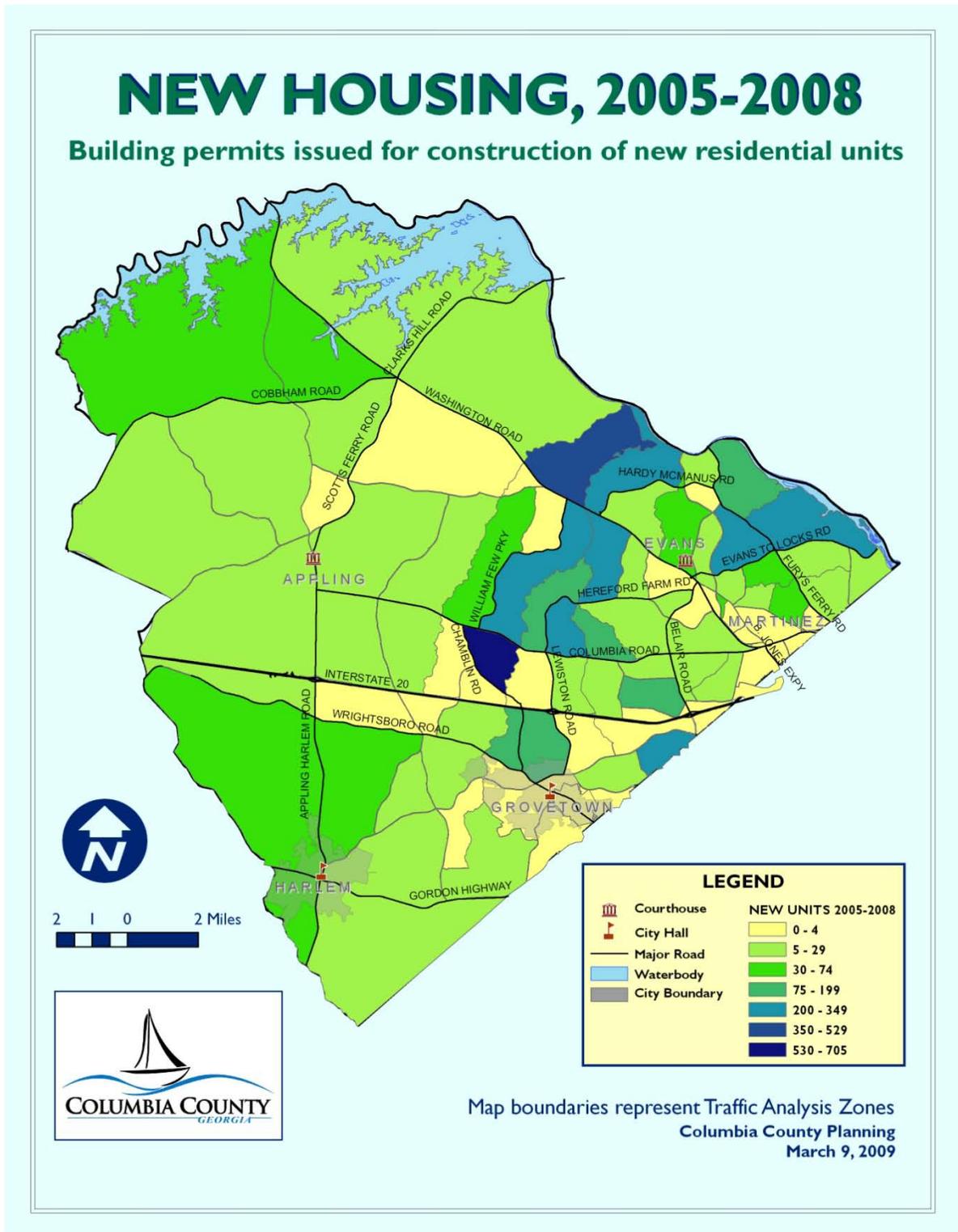


(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009; Columbia County building records, 2001-2008.)

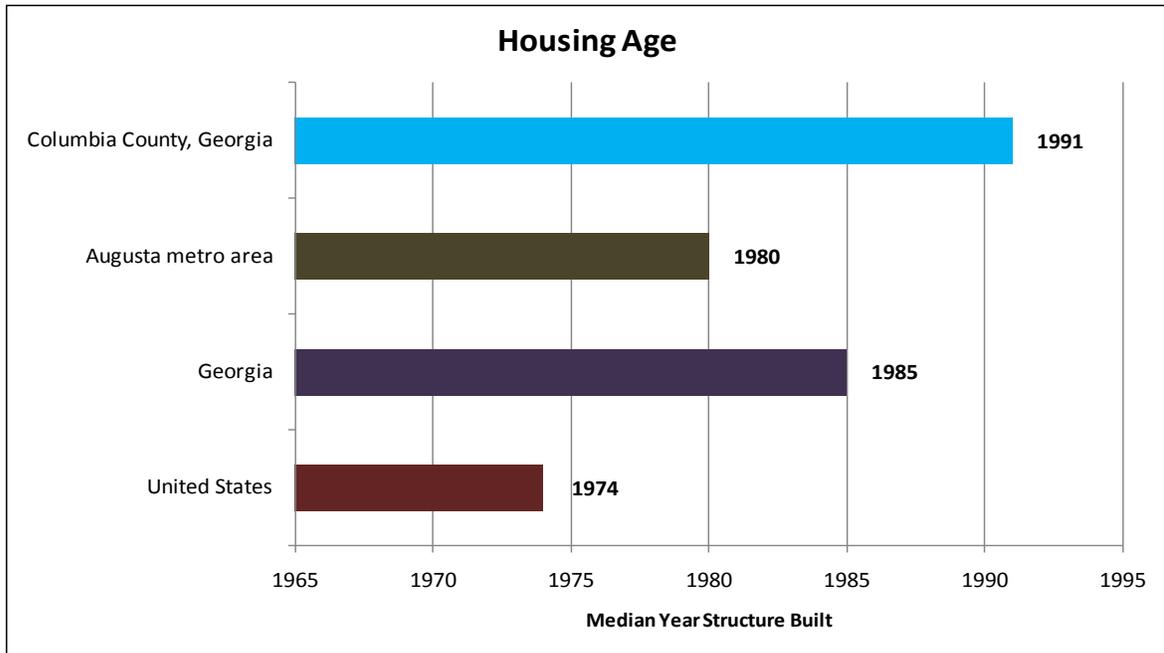
Despite the national housing slump, residential development is strong in the Augusta Metro Area. Columbia County has outpaced its larger neighbors in the region for new housing in 2009.

Augusta Metro Area, Residential Building Permits, 2009			
	single-family	multi-family	total
Columbia Co., GA - unincorporated	832	97	929
Augusta-Richmond Co., GA	357	93	450
Aiken Co. & City of Aiken, SC	360	0	360
source: U.S. Census Bureau, Jan.-Oct. 2009 Building Permit Estimates and Columbia County Building Permit records			

As buildable land becomes increasingly scarce in the eastern, urbanized part of the county, growth is moving outward in two directions- west on Columbia Road and north along Washington Road. The fastest growing neighborhoods are in the vicinity of Columbia and Chamblin Roads, as seen in building permit illustrations.



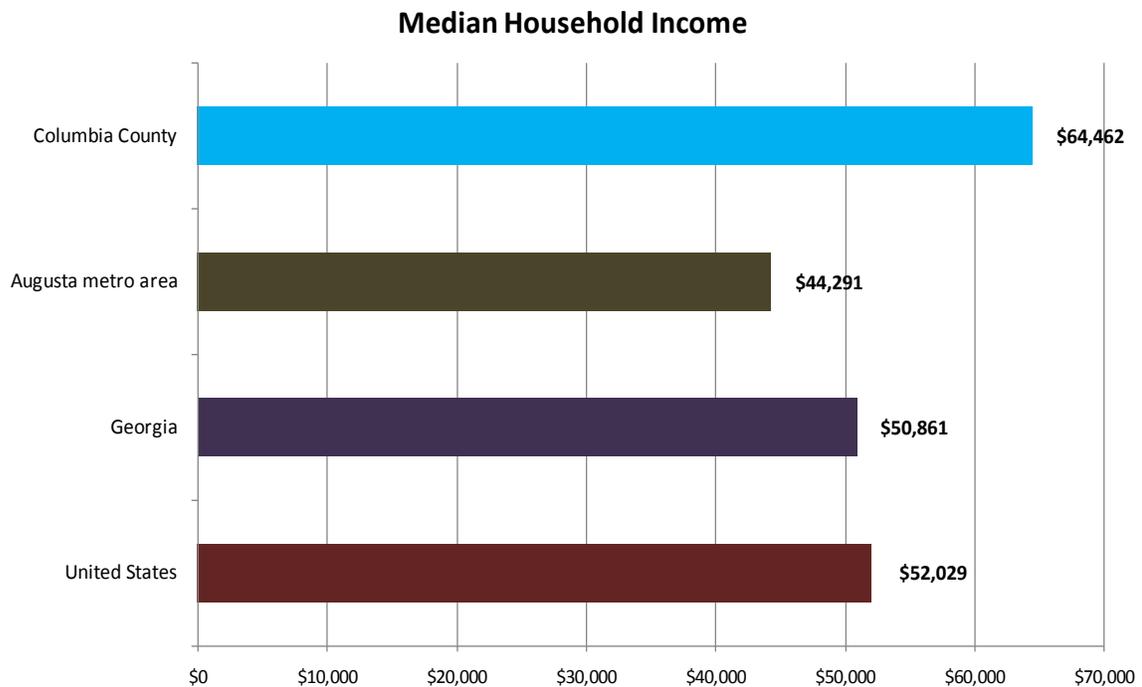
As a result of healthy building activity, the county’s housing stock is comparatively new. Over half of all housing in the county has been built since 1990.



(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey)

Buying Power

Columbia County households far exceed local, state and national income levels.



(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey)

Cumulatively, the county's residents wield significant disposable income- over \$2.6 billion after taxes. (Source: Sales & Marketing Management, 2009 Survey of Buying Power.) Retail sales for the county are projected to exceed \$2.3 billion in 2009.

Columbia County Retail Sales, 2009	
Total Retail Sales	\$2,331,131,951
Food & Beverage Stores	\$272,610,997
Food Serv.& Drinking Estab.	\$116,942,997
General Merch.	\$392,459,006
Furniture & Appliances	\$21,712,989
Motor Veh. & Parts Dealer	\$458,364,001

(Source: Sales & Marketing Management, 2009 Survey of Buying Power)

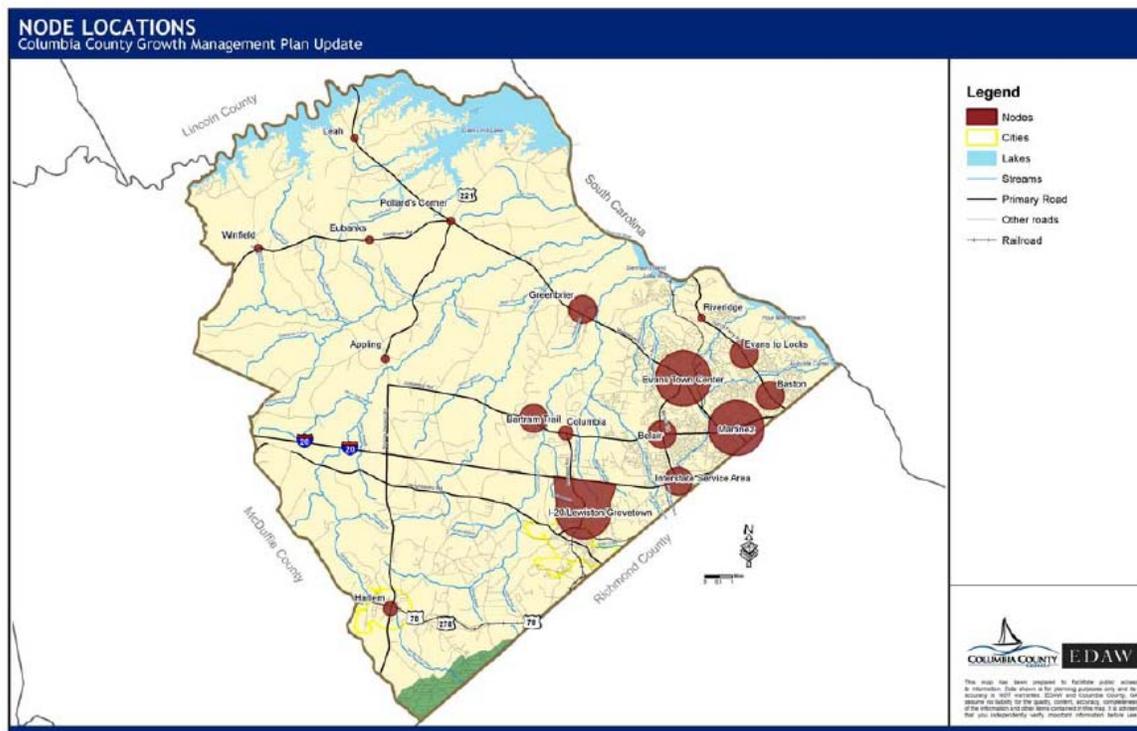
The \$300 million gap between income and sales largely accounts for shopping dollars spent by Columbia County residents in other counties. Retail development has yet to catch up to population growth. The Augusta metro area as a whole provides an even larger market, with retail sales expected to exceed seven billion dollars in 2009.

Augusta-Richmond County, GA-SC Metro Area Retails Sales, 2009	
Total Retail Sales	\$7,367,107,585
Food & Beverage Stores	\$845,952,991
Food Serv.& Drinking Estab.	\$699,339,002
General Merch.	\$972,816,988
Furniture & Appliances	\$120,859,969
Motor Veh. & Parts Dealer	\$1,264,531,948

The Augusta metro area also boasts an effective buying income of over 9.7 billion dollars.

Commercial Development

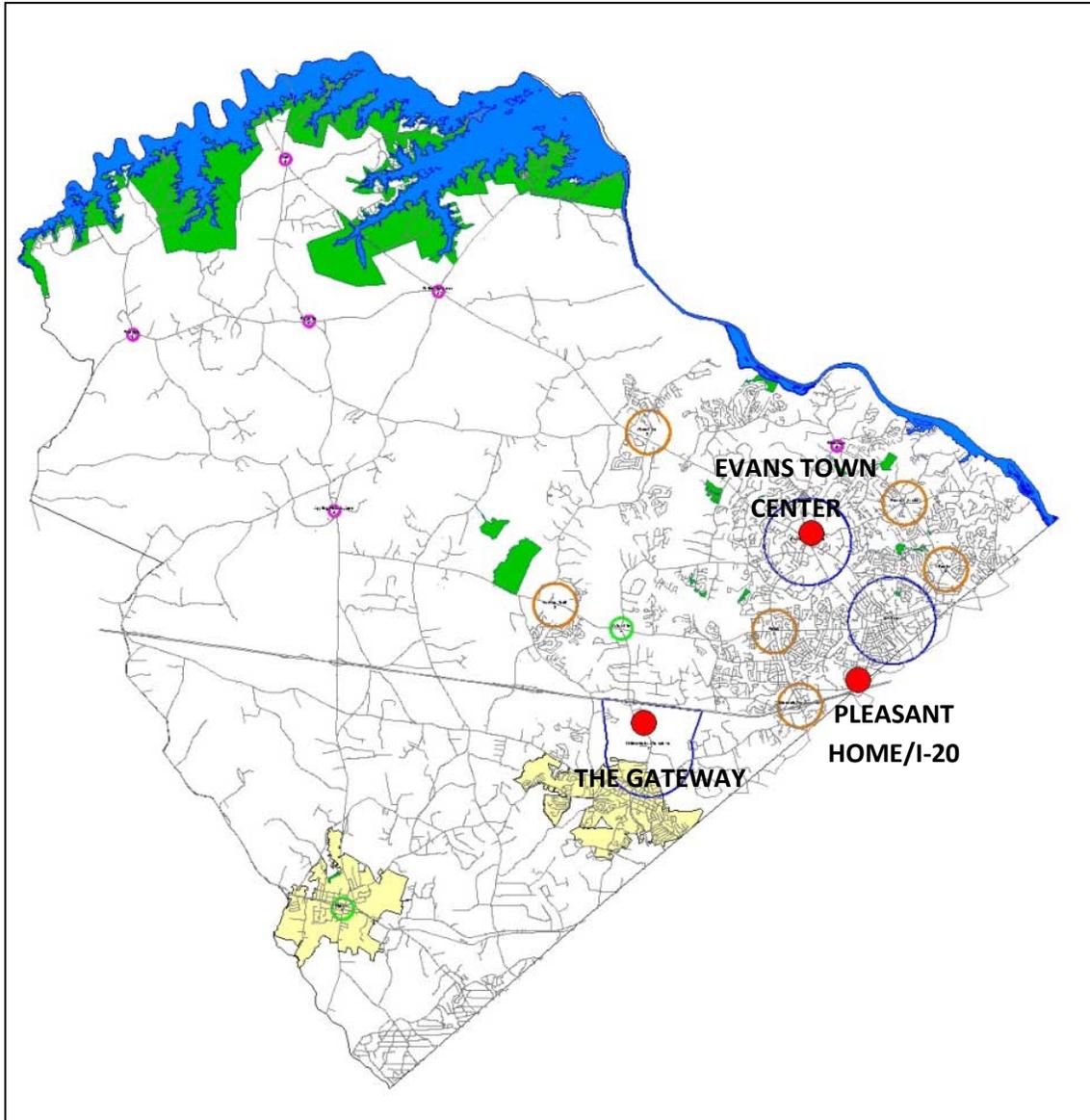
The County's growth management plan identifies appropriate locations for commercial development. Identified as nodes, they are located at major intersections throughout the County. The nodes are grouped into four tiers, indicating both their size and the intensity of uses appropriate for each type of node. Tier one nodes, the largest, are two miles in diameter and can accommodate a mixed big box retail and large shopping centers to serve the region. Tier two nodes are one mile in diameter and designated for supermarkets as well as shopping centers with an anchor tenant occupying no more than 70,000 square feet. Nodes in the tier three and four categories are in more rural locations and serve neighborhood shopping needs. The County's plan discourages commercial growth outside of the nodes in order to protect established neighborhoods, maximize use of existing infrastructure, and prevent urban sprawl.



(Source: Columbia County Growth Management Plan, 2005-2025.)

The County projects significant commercial development in an emerging area called The Gateway. Located off exit 190 of Interstate 20, over 1000 acres of undeveloped land is primed for growth due to its high visibility, easy access from the entire metro area and close proximity to residential growth. It is within the Tier One I-20/Grovetown Node and is suitable for the widest array of local and regional retail development. The first major tenant to open its doors was a Walmart Supercenter in 2009.

Another emerging area for retail is in the vicinity of Pleasant Home Road and Interstate 20. The Evans Town Center, centered on Washington Road and N Belair Road, is also quickly developing.



Employment

As a suburban community, over half of the County's labor force works in neighboring Richmond County. The health care industry provides the largest share of employment in the region and is led by the Medical College of Georgia, University Hospital, MCG Health and Trinity Hospital. Other leading employers in Richmond County include the Sitel Corporation, Shivers Trading & Operating Co., and Temple-Inland Forest Products.

In recent years, employers are increasingly moving into Columbia County, too. The largest employers are WCI Outdoor Products Inc., Norrell Staffing Services, Krueger Ringier Inc., and Ingersoll Rand Infrastructure, among others.

National Awards

Columbia County has received 6 Awards from CNN Money Magazine in the last 5 years:

- 2005 Evans - for being # 32 in the Best Places to Live Category
- 2007 Evans - for being #76 in the Best Places to Live Category
- 2008 Evans - for being #9 in the Best Places for Affordable Homes
- 2008 Martinez - for being # 25 in the Best Places for Affordable Homes
- 2008 Columbia County - for being # 19 in the Best for Job Growth (2000-2007)
- 2009 Martinez - for being # 63 in the Best Places to Live

The County also received an award from Family Circle Magazine:

- 2009 Evans - for being in the 10 Best Towns for Families in the USA



Rhodes Farm, Martinez

During the past decade, population growth has boosted construction and business development in Columbia County. As a result, companies like Lowe's and John Deere have moved in. The County is still small-business-friendly and continues to provide development assistance to local entrepreneurs, many of whom are military retirees attracted to the quality of life, natural resources, and Columbia County's strong medical community.



Columbia County Justice Center

Government is the leading employer in the region, followed by retail, administrative, waste services, and manufacturing. The area has two natural assets—wood and kaolin. The area is one of the world's largest suppliers of kaolin for ceramics and fillers. Forestry companies make wood products ranging from paper and pulpwood to fine furniture and flooring. Textile firms across the area manufacture apparel of all types. Medical supplies, services, and technology are also very important to the area. Medical companies turn out pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, and diagnostic equipment. Firms in emerging technologies, such as telecommunications and environmental remediation, are offered support through the Augusta Technical College - Augusta-Richmond County Small Business Incubator.



University Health Care System, Evans

Columbia County Information

For Columbia County, rapid population growth is the driver of employment growth. The County continues to attract such growth due to its low cost of living, high quality of life, superb schools, relatively easy market access for products, low labor costs, cooperative local government, accelerated permit process, available sites, warm climate, and low taxes. As the population grows, Columbia County is attracting more commercial enterprises that serve this large residential base.



Evans Town Park Center, Evans

One of the biggest draws in Columbia County is its primary school system and educated workforce. The Columbia County School System, the seventeenth largest system in the State, has established a pattern of consistent excellence and achievement making it one of the premier school systems in the state of Georgia. Columbia County students at the elementary and secondary school level consistently excel at a level greater than their peers at both the state and national level in the areas of academic achievement.



Stallings Island Middle School, Martinez

The County has recently built a \$13 million library and cultural arts center in Evans which is a 51,000 square foot community resource that offers meeting rooms, approximately 100 on-line computers, a full state-of-the-art performing arts theater, a picturesque outdoor amphitheater, and a beautiful children's garden.



Performing Arts Center, County Library, Evans



Outdoor Amphitheater, Evans

Other major attractions are the Savannah River and Lake Thurmond (Clarks Hill Lake) that provide recreation opportunities year round. With more than 1,200 miles of shoreline, Lake Thurmond is the largest man-made lake east of the Mississippi. The lake and the river provide opportunities for fishing, water skiing, boating and swimming.



Savannah River

Along with population growth, several economic indicators - educational attainment, mean income, and mean housing values - have shown increasing affluence in the County. Because of its location in the Augusta region, excellent transportation access, affordable land prices, natural beauty, executive housing, and amenities, Columbia County is an attractive community for executives and professionals.



Champions Retreat, Riverwood Plantation

Columbia County has long hot summers and winters are short and pleasantly cool with relatively brief cold waves occasionally occurring in one or two-day periods. The average temperature in the winter is 47 degrees Fahrenheit, and 79 degrees in the summer. The great weather allows families to participate in many outdoor sports including baseball, cycling, boating, and fishing.



Great weather for outdoor sports

The quality of life is attracting more retirees to the County. Criteria such as a mild climate, convenient location to many tourist areas, a low cost of living, quality healthcare, and affordable housing choices are important factors that help in making this decision.



Enjoying life at Rhodes Farm Subdivision, Martinez

The County is continually improving the services to the citizens and the development community. The Development Services Division has worked hard to develop a one-stop shop to provide services in relation to planning, engineering, building standards and code compliance. The County's streamlined plan review system is one of the best in the country and very user-friendly.

If you are considering any type of development in Columbia County - from opening a business in an existing building to buying land to build your own development - then please do not hesitate to contact our experienced and enthusiastic staff who will help you through this process. We offer free pre-development consultation meetings to answer any questions that you may have, and our system has already been very successful in saving local business owners and developers' time and money on their projects.

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(Revised Report date 01.04.10)