

3 Issues and Opportunities

3.1 Introduction

The list of issues and opportunities described below has been identified through discussions with elected officials, City staff and the public in meetings as described in the Community Participation Program.

3.2 Population

3.2.1 Issues

1. Moderate Population Growth

The City's population is projected to increase at an average annual rate of 1.8% to 5% between 2000 and 2025. The 2005 estimate of population for the City is 30,552. The projected population for 2025 is expected to range between 44,000 and 48,000.

2. Consistent Growth Throughout all Age Cohorts

Between 2000 and 2025 Kennesaw's Senior Population, 65 and over, is expected to increase slightly from 5.8% to 6.1% of the total population. This equates to 2,710 seniors in 2025. In 2000, children age 0-17 comprised 27.8% or 6,013 of the population and are expected to comprise a smaller portion in 2025 at 26.1% or 11,597 of the population. This equals a twenty-five year increase of 93%. Working adults age 18-64 comprised 66.5% or 14,413 of the population in 2000 and are expected to share a larger portion in 2025 at 67.8% or 30,125 of the population.

3. Hispanic Population

The Hispanic population is expected to increase its share of the population from 6.2% or 1,344 in 2000 to 7.6% or 3,377 in 2025. This equates to a modest average annual population increase of 82 residents.

3.2.2 Opportunities

1. Economic Impact

The increase in population may be advantageous to businesses and city government. If development efforts successfully keep a large sum of consumer dollars inside the city limits, then business owners would be able to reinvest in their business and employ additional people. The city would benefit through improved city sales tax receipts, thereby improving city revenue streams.

3.3 Housing

3.3.1 Issues

1. Demographic Changes Affect Housing Demand

- The market is dominated by single family homes.
- The largest age cohorts, representing nearly half of householders, are in their child-raising years – 25 to 44 years old – which will sustain demand for traditional single-family houses, but not necessarily new homes.
- Homeowners are solidly middle class with a median household income of \$66,839 according to the 2000 Census. All households earning more than \$60,000 annually have increased significantly since 1990. Households earning more than \$75,000 have grown more than 973% in the same 10 year period. Households earning less than \$20,000 have diminished.

2. Aging Neighborhoods

As neighborhoods mature, they may fall into disrepair, become attractive as rental properties that may not be well maintained or become a target for property crimes.

3. Limited Space for Greenfield Development

Approximately 95% of the property within the City limits is currently built out. As a result, new housing will be the result of infill or redevelopment.

4. Kennesaw State University Student Housing

As Kennesaw State University (KSU) continues to grow, additional student housing will be needed. However, land surrounding KSU is currently developed. Assisting KSU with their student housing situation is a key component to building a long-term relationship with KSU.

3.3.2 Opportunities

1. Encourage Traditional Neighborhood Developments (TND)

Where redevelopment or infill housing development opportunities exist, TND developments should be encouraged.

2. Encourage and Promote Preservation of Historic Homes

Incentives should be identified to encourage owners, business or residential, to improve or maintain the historic appearance of buildings located in one of Kennesaw's historic districts.

3. Monitor Market for Opportunity to Encourage High-End and Senior Housing

As household income rises, Kennesaw residents may desire upgrades in housing. As the baby boomer population ages, there will be a need for housing that has appeal to retirees, whether that is in the form of low-maintenance loft condominiums in downtown Kennesaw or detached single-story units in a senior-oriented residential community.

3.4 Economic Development

3.4.1 Issues

1. Relevant Job Growth to Population Growth

Based on generalized employment patterns in 2000, the number of jobs available is not aligned with the population growth. In 2000, 90% of the labor force, approximately 16,000 residents, worked outside of Kennesaw causing missed opportunities for local business, in particular, those in the retail and services industries.

2. Strategic Economic Development Plan

The City lacks a strategic economic development plan. The City has begun to experience new commercial and residential development; however, the City is in need of a formal economic development plan document that is updated regularly in order to measure and manage economic growth in the City.

3. A Balanced Economy

Kennesaw's disadvantages relative to creating a diversified economy include the number of jobs relative to the City's population, educational attainment and professional capabilities. Most jobs are in retail education, health, professional and management services.

4. Industrial Park Vacancies

There are many vacant office/warehouse units in the Cobb Parkway and Moonstation Industrial character areas. Filling these units play a significant role in developing the City's economic base.

3.4.2 Opportunities

1. Highly visible properties ripe for development and redevelopment

Redeveloping highly visible properties currently vacant or undeveloped in industrial areas and the redevelopment of under-performing commercial properties along Highway 41 should become top priorities.

2. Downtown Redevelopment

The Kennesaw Downtown Development Authority (KDDA) and others should continue to develop, refine and sell their vision for the downtown area and historic districts to residents, business owners, and prospective developers.

3. Business Recruitment

Since the City of Kennesaw is not dominated by any one industry, there are limited competitive pressures within the city limits. There are opportunities for Kennesaw to identify and pursue industries that are a proper fit for the City and its residents based on an evaluation of those that attract the majority of the labor force out of the City. Take action to fill the vacant office/warehouse units in the Cobb Parkway and Moonstation Industrial character areas. Coordinate these efforts with the proposed industrial business associations and the Cobb County Chamber of Commerce.

4. Educational Advantages for Economic Development

Kennesaw benefits from its proximity to Kennesaw State University and North Metro Technical College. Education levels among City residents are high, relative to that of other northwest Metropolitan Atlanta areas.

5. Intergovernmental Coordination

The City should continue to work with the State, the County, the Chamber of Commerce, and surrounding municipalities to develop ideas and strategies to encourage economic development and develop an effective Strategic Economic Development Plan.

6. Annexation

Adjacent property in unincorporated Cobb County or “Islands” may provide opportunities for the City to more clearly define its boundaries and capture more commercial tax revenue. Opportunities to annex undeveloped or existing commercial land use parcels into the City should be pursued in order to improve the funding of the City budget. A comprehensive annexation plan is needed to guide the achievement of these goals.

3.5 Natural and Cultural Resources

3.5.1 Issues

1. Financing Greenspace Acquisition, Development and Maintenance

Creative financing (e.g. impact fees) and funding programs must be developed to finance park and greenspace projects if Kennesaw's comparatively low property taxes are to remain in place.

2. Preservation of Historic and Cultural Resources

Adequate design guidelines are needed to protect the historic resources located in Kennesaw's historic districts, especially as opportunities for new infill development increase. It is important to govern blending of the new with the old. Funding is always an important factor for maintaining these resources. Additional sources of funding and revenue generation are needed, particularly for the Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History

3.5.2 Opportunities

1. Regionally-Connected Network of Open Space

Currently, eighteen neighborhood, local and regional parks are present throughout the City. Two additional parks, Smith-Gilbert Arboretum and Smith-Cantrell Park, are under development and are expected to become an integral part of the "Chain of Parks" that will be linked by sidewalks and trails. This system of linkages is planned as a segment of a larger Trail system connecting Lake Allatoona to Kennesaw Mountain to the Silver Comet Trail.

2. Water Quality Protection

Lake Allatoona, which is fed in part by Proctor and Butler creeks in Kennesaw, provides the City and many other north metro cities and counties with drinking water. Protecting the creeks from pollutants takes on an added importance that necessitates consistent enforcement of regulations that cover erosion and sedimentation controls and stormwater management.

3. State and Federal Historic Preservation Programs

The Main Street Program and Certified Local Government (CLG) Program are two federal programs that are administered at the state level. Designation as a Main Street City provides member cities with an opportunity to receive technical assistance that can further historic preservation efforts. The CLG Program also makes designated cities eligible to receive historic technical assistance, as well as matching grant funds for historic preservation-related activities. The City participates in both programs.

3.6 Facilities and Services Issues

3.6.1 Issues

1. Meeting the Service Demands of a Growing Population

Many public services are owned and managed by Cobb County such as the fire department, health services, water and sewer treatment and the public library. The City provides police, stormwater management, solid waste management and parks and recreation services to the residents. Based on the City's current population, an additional five to six police officers are needed as well as incentives to battle attrition.

2. Aging Stormwater Sewer System

Over the years the metal and concrete pipes used in the stormwater sewer system have deteriorated. A replacement schedule with identified funding sources is needed.

3. Parks and Recreation

In spite of the City's extensive park system, there is a need for adult softball and multi-use fields. To reach Phases II and III of Swift-Cantrell Park, the City will need to find funding estimated at \$16 million to build an aquatic center and performing arts center. The Smith-Gilbert Arboretum will have to become self supporting within five years of opening to the public.

3.6.2 Opportunities

1. Meeting the Service Demands of Growing Population

The Kennesaw Police Department patrol cars and 911 Dispatch Center are each equipped with state-of-the art communication equipment. The technology allows the force to be less centralized, more mobile, and more visible to the public. There is an opportunity for the police to position themselves strategically and leverage communication and GIS technologies to improve efficiency and response times

2. Meeting the Facility Space Requirements for a Growing Population

The new building being constructed for the Public Works Department will provide the additional work and storage space required by the department. The city may be able to maximize the use of this facility by expanding other departments.

The 911 Dispatch Center will be renovated to expand for a total of 2,800 square feet. Since this department also services 911 calls from Acworth, Acworth will likely benefit from an improved facility. The opportunity is that Kennesaw can use this department to strengthen its relationship with Acworth.

3. Re-evaluation of Impact Fees

The impact fee calculation formula and the application guidelines are under review by the City. Changes to the Impact Fee are desired to offset the cost of facility and amenity improvements.

3.7 Land Use

3.7.1 Issues

1. Suburban Sprawl

Most of the recent development in the City over the past 10-20 years has occurred in a typical suburban land use pattern. Retail shopping and employment opportunities are distinctly separated from residential areas and primarily located on Cherokee Street, Highway 41 or in one of three industrial parks.

2. Strip Commercial Development

The land uses along some highway corridors, in particular Highway 41 and sections of Cherokee Street, form stereotypical commercial strips that may detract from the City's character. Many of the strip malls are lacking visual appeal and consist of aging structures in need of revitalization.

3. Transitioning Uses

Cherokee Street has experienced conversions of single family homes into businesses. While sensitive adaptations have afforded continual protection of historic structures, adjacent established neighborhoods may be threatened by encroachment. Unincorporated "islands" embedded within the city limits also pose a potential land use conflict with adjacent "In-City" parcels.

4. Abundance of Zoning Districts

Over the years the city has created zoning districts to satisfy a particular need. Currently, thirty two districts are codified. Many of which list functions, uses, and requirements common to other similar zoning districts. Developers, residents and staff find this confusing.

5. Existing Land Use Ratios

Kennesaw has become a bedroom community over time with a disproportionate ratio of residential to non-residential land use. Additional work and planning is required to achieve a more balanced ratio that is beneficial to the City. This balance should represent 60% residential and 40% non-residential (public, commercial, industrial) land uses.

3.7.2 Opportunities

1. Redevelopment

Redevelopment of highway corridors provides an opportunity to create a more seamless transition of land uses between existing sprawling single-use commercial strips and low-density single family residential. As opportunities present themselves for redevelopment of underutilized and under-performing properties along commercial corridors, the City should recruit developers capable of providing commercial and mixed-use centers that produce tax revenue for the City and provide jobs that may reduce commuting patterns for residents who commute outside of Kennesaw for employment.

2. Identify Available Land for Industrial and Commercial Growth

Within the Character Area Map, commercial and industrial areas are defined. Using the Future Land Use Map an economic development plan should identify parcels within these character areas that are available and desirable for development. Redevelopment and revitalization projects present opportunities to improve the ratio of residential to non-residential land uses. Achieve a balance of 60% residential and 40% non-residential.

3. Encourage Traditional Neighborhood Development

Traditional neighborhoods developments can be viable in any context, but they should be encouraged in character areas likely to experience redevelopment such as the Historic CBD, the North Cherokee Residential and In-Town Living areas.

4. Corridor Overlay District

The City's familiarity and support for design guidelines to protect historic homes makes a similar approach feasible for corridors. In addition to architectural design, the overlay district could address interparcel access, utility placement, parking, landscaping, site lighting, sidewalks and signage.

5. Simplify Zoning Categories

The consolidation of zoning codes and development guidelines into the Unified Development Code presents an opportunity to further reduce the number of zoning codes. Commercial categories, in particular, may be consolidated in such a way to provide a single zoning application with like-commercial categories that is aligned with the Future Development Maps and is clear in its intent and application.

3.8 Transportation

3.8.1 Issues

1. Automobile Dependence

The dependence on the private automobile for all trips in the City contributes to the region's air and water pollution problems. Increased regional traffic and peak period congestion are reducing the level of service on many of the City's arterial roadways and the neighboring Interstate system.

2. Shift in Commercial Development Patterns

Past and current development trends have facilitated the shifting of businesses away from town centers and activity centers and towards strip retail developments along arterial road networks.

3. Inter-Parcel Connectivity

Many of the major arterial corridors are experiencing increased peak period vehicular congestion, unappealing commercial signage clutter, and a heightened level of sprawling development patterns with a general lack of inter-parcel access. Inter-parcel connections between individual development uses where compatible, should continue to be encouraged, if not strengthened, in new development scenarios.

4. Increase in the Need for Public Transportation

A growing resident and employment population has emphasized the need for transportation alternatives in order to have access to quality jobs, services, goods, health care, and recreation opportunities.

3.8.2 Opportunities

1. Transportation Alternatives and Improvements

The City should support opportunities and transportation alternatives that reduce the dependence on the private automobile, thereby reducing traffic congestion. Greater connectivity and operational effectiveness can be achieved by mixing travel modes with respect to pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and vehicular transportation options. The Cobb County Comprehensive Transportation Plan update will be completed in 2007. The City should review and consider any recommendations applicable to the City of Kennesaw. Implementation of the recommendations should be reflected in the 2007-2008 STWP update.

2. Promote Pedestrian Safety

Coordination with GDOT and the Cobb DOT to improve pedestrian visibility and signalization -- and thereby reduce vehicular speeds -- along the City's major arterials should be continued.

3. Development Patterns

Development patterns that blend uses incorporating housing, jobs, and recreation should be promoted for mixed-use opportunities in the future. These development patterns provide the activity nodes needed to make public transportation effective.

4. Context-Sensitive Design

Transportation facilities should be designed in a manner that compliments the character and aesthetics of the surrounding area, while also achieving positive results for connectivity and capacity.

5. Develop a Plan and Encourage Acceptance of Public Transportation

The City should continue to coordinate with CCT and GRTA with the intent of transit service options that adequately serve the residents of Kennesaw, including those with special and/or paratransit needs.

3.9 Intergovernmental Coordination

3.9.1 Issues

1. Communication with Cobb County

The City has identified a need to strengthen its relationship with Cobb DOT and the Board of Education, including communication and community involvement.

2. Communication with local municipalities

Because Cobb Parkway, Old Highway 41 and I-75 pass through portions of the City limits, the City experiences transportation and economic issues related to non-residents traveling through the City each day. Much of the pending growth located north and west of the City will eventually impact city resources and residents on a daily or weekly basis. Additional communication, cooperation and understanding are needed among Kennesaw's municipal neighbors.

3.9.2 Opportunities

1. Re-evaluation of Impact Fees

The City should continually evaluate its impact fees relative to its current need, projected needs, and compare to that of surrounding cities. The City's impact fees are being reviewed in 2007.

2. Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax

City officials need to continue to work closely with the County to help ensure that this important source of capital improvements funding is used effectively.

3. Regional Transportation Planning

City officials need to continue to be actively involved in the transportation planning activities with ARC, GRTA, and the Cobb County DOT. Transportation issues affect everyone and are the foundation for many home purchases, employment selections and economic development decisions.

4. Regional municipality communication

The City should coordinate with Cobb County and maintain regular communication with surrounding cities and counties to monitor transportation-affecting development activities that will impact city resources and residents. The Atlanta Regional Commission, the Department of Community Affairs, and Cobb County regularly host meetings and seminars that provide opportunities for Cities and Counties to discuss concerns and solutions to transportation, land use, economic and other important issues.

5. Cobb County School Board Inclusion

As the City continues to implement development and redevelopment projects, the City has the opportunity to include the Cobb County School Board in the planning process to insure that the needs of the school system and the City are understood and achieved uniformly.