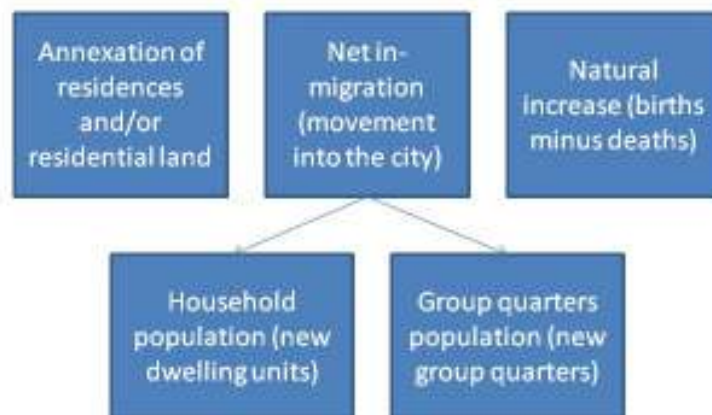


CHAPTER 2 POPULATION AND HOUSING

Few cities in Georgia (or the U.S. for that matter) have witnessed as substantial a population increase as Flowery Branch in the last several years. When this comprehensive plan was prepared in 2005, the city had an estimated population of approximately 2,300 persons according to the U.S. Census Bureau's annual estimates.¹ From January 2002 through the end of 2009, Flowery Branch issued a total of 1,816 permits for new housing unit starts. As of January 2011, Flowery Branch has an estimated population of 6,286 persons. That population estimate is substantially more than reflected in the most recent (2009) population estimate of 4,115 persons published by the U.S. Census Bureau.

When prepared in 2005, this Community Agenda anticipated a total population of 8,800 persons in the year 2010. Indeed, Flowery Branch witnessed a huge population increase in a short period of time, through substantial homebuilding. The population increase in the city in recent years is attributable to single-family, detached dwellings constructed within a large planned residential development known as Sterling on the Lake, completion of a 456-unit apartment complex known as Tree Park, and construction of new townhouses and other single-family residential subdivisions.

Even though the population increase has been substantial, it has not been as large as projected in the initial comprehensive plan, given the great recession of 2007-2009 which slowed homebuilding in Georgia after the third quarter of 2007 and then brought it almost to a complete halt by 2008. Population can increase within cities due to annexation, net in-migration, and/or natural increase (see figure).



Municipal Components of Population Change

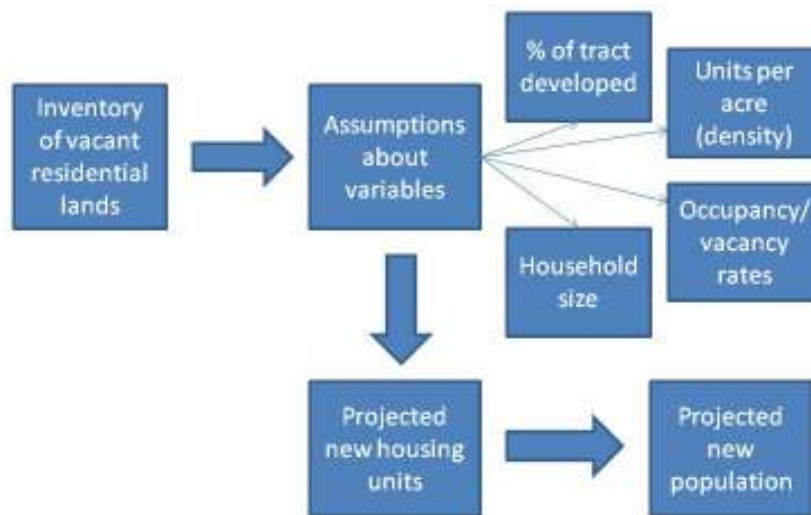
The prior plan did not assume any additional annexation but projected that some additional population would occur due to the construction of group quarters such as nursing and personal care homes. No such construction took place between 2005 and 2010 in the city, however.

¹ See Table 1 of the 2010 addendum to the community assessment.

The severe economic recession and residential construction slowdown necessitates that Flowerly Branch update the population and housing projections provided in the adopted Community Agenda.²

POPULATION, HOUSEHOLD, AND HOUSING UNIT PROJECTIONS

The method for projecting Flowerly Branch's population is described in detail in the 2010 addendum to the Community Assessment but is summarized here and illustrated in the figure below. Population increases in Flowerly Branch will occur predominantly as a function of households occupying additional housing units (net in-migration). This means that the capacity of vacant residential lands to produce new housing units is the most important factor, so capacity was estimated for each vacant parcel under the general assumption that vacant residential land will be built upon during the twenty-year planning horizon. The population increase in Flowerly Branch thus becomes a function of new housing units added. Variables in terms of population increase based on net in-migration include the percentage of developable land for each residential development tract, the number of homes per acre of land (i.e., allowable residential densities), housing occupancy/vacancy rates, and household size (population per dwelling unit).



Buildout Method of Projecting New Housing and Population

There is a projected capacity of 2,766 additional housing units in Flowerly Branch at buildout. Of that total, approximately one-half (1,324) will be constructed within the Sterling on the Lake master-planned development and an adjacent tract. As shown in Table 2.1, the housing unit, household, and population projections do not assume that new housing units will be constructed evenly throughout the planning horizon. Rather, the projections anticipate that housing construction will continue to be slowed by foreclosures, lending limitations, and a sluggish suburban residential housing market.

² Projections of population and housing were amended by the city in 2008, but that was before the full severity of the economic recession was known.

Table 2.1
Population, Household and Housing Unit Projections, 2010-2030
City of Flowery Branch

	2010	2015	5-yr. change	2020	5-yr. change	2025	5-yr. change	2030	5-yr. change
Buildout Share, Period (%)	--	10%	--	35%	--	30%	--	25%	--
Total Housing Units	2,625	2,902	+277	3,870	+968	4,700	+830	5,391	+691
-- Single-family	1,619	1,830	+211	2,561	+731	3,192	+631	3,717	+525
-- Multi-family	1,006	1,072	+66	1,309	+237	1,508	+199	1,674	+166
Total Households	2,405	2,667	+262	3,560	+893	4,326	+766	4,964	+638
-- In Single-family (93%)	1,505	1,702	+197	2,382	+680	2,969	+587	3,457	+488
-- In Multi-family (90%)	900	965	+65	1,178	+213	1,357	+179	1,507	+150
Total Population	6,286	6,976	+690	9,329	+2,353	11,347	+2,018	13,028	+1,681
-- In Single-family (2.67)	4,018	4,544	+526	6,360	+1,816	7,927	+1,567	9,230	+1,303
-- In Multi-family (2.52)	2,268	2,432	+164	2,969	+537	3,420	+451	3,798	+378

Note: These projections assume that, of the total new units constructed in a given five-year time period, 76% will be single-family detached and 24% will be multi-family units. Manufactured homes are counted as single-family.

Source: Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc., November 2010.

Flowery Branch's population is projected to more than double, from approximately 6,286 persons in the year 2010 to 13,028 persons in the year 2030.³ Between 2010 and 2015, 277 housing units and 690 persons will be added within the city limits of Flowery Branch, constituting 10 percent of the total residential buildout potential. Housing unit growth and population will increase substantially between 2015 and 2020, with an increase of 968 units and 2,353 persons, constituting 35 percent of the total residential buildout potential. From 2020 to 2025, 830 new housing units will be constructed, yielding 2,018 new residents and encompassing 30 percent of the total residential buildout potential. From 2025 to 2030, Flowery Branch's housing stock will increase by 691 housing units and 1,681 persons (25 percent of the buildout share).

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Educational Attainment

The educational attainment of Flowery Branch's citizenry as of 2000 was well below that of the state as a whole. This was initially considered a concern, because adults without a high school education, many adults without competitive educational levels might find it difficult to find employment. However, it was determined that those people with lower-than-average educational attainment in Flowery Branch were nearing retirement and would thus not make good use of any sponsored program to increase adult education. Furthermore, when the 2010 decennial census results are released, they are expected to show remarkable improvements in educational attainment of Flowery Branch's citizenry. For those reasons, this Community Agenda update does not call for any special programs to increase educational attainment of the citizenry.

³ These population projections are considered generally consistent with the 2040 projection of the city's population prepared by the Gainesville-Hall County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which is 13,477 persons in 2040.

Diversity of Housing Types

Flowery Branch's housing stock in the 1990s was relatively diverse, consisting mostly of smaller detached dwellings, some manufactured homes, and a relatively limited number of attached housing unit options such as duplexes, townhouses, and apartment homes. During the 2000s, significant additions were made to the city's housing stock, further diversifying it. The addition of new townhouses and apartments further increased housing choices in the city. Furthermore, the city's comparatively older housing stock of smaller, detached dwellings became much more diverse in terms of the addition of new, much larger, suburban tract homes.

Housing Unit Mix and Tenure Mix

The Community Agenda adopted in 2006 established two guideline policies with regard to the mix and tenure of housing in the city:

1. A desirable mix of housing types for Flowery Branch is as follows: Detached, single-family – 60%; Manufactured homes – 5%; Townhouses – 15%; and Apartments and Condominiums – 20%.
2. A desirable mix of owner-occupied to renter-occupied housing units is 2:1 (i.e., two-thirds owner-occupied and one-third renter occupied).

At issue is whether these guidance policies should be retained. On the one hand, the city has carefully considered its future land use plan and has implemented that plan with zoning categories; hence, attainment of these desirable housing mixes and tenures is virtually assured. On the other hand, the city's future land use plan calls for significant mixed-use development which is likely to raise issues concerning the proper mix of single-family to multi-family housing types and, by implication, the mix of homeowner-occupied and renter-occupied housing opportunities. These two guidance policies are retained, primarily to guide decisions about residential components of future mixed-use developments and development approvals for tracts annexed into the city in the future.

Age and Condition of Housing

Flowery Branch has a number of smaller, older homes in neighborhoods within and around Old Town which may not serve future market needs. In some cases, they are unlikely to be retained in the future and will be replaced by new units or the lots will transition to other land uses. To the extent older homes are concentrated within one area, housing maintenance programs and incentives need to be considered.

As a small town with few staff members, Flowery Branch would probably not be expected to initiate specific community development or housing maintenance programs beyond a simple continuation of existing code enforcement efforts. However, the city participates in a housing rehabilitation program in collaboration with Home Development Resources, Inc., a comprehensive housing counseling agency approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Housing Rehabilitation Program in Hall County is funded through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' Community Home Investment Program (CHIP) and is designed to help low and moderate income homeowners bring their homes up to current state and local housing codes and/or make them handicapped-accessible. In addition to the CHIP

program, a variety of private, federal, and state housing programs exist which can benefit the City's housing stock.

City officials need to continue to monitor housing conditions to ensure there is no increase in the levels of substandard housing conditions. Where existing housing units or residential neighborhoods have visible signs of disrepair or initial signs of neighborhood instability due to housing conditions, Flowery Branch should continue to enforce housing codes and property maintenance standards. For neighborhoods with intact, well-maintained homes fifty years and older, designation as historic could also be considered.

Housing Alternatives for Seniors

Stakeholders and visioning participants noted during 2005 that many of the older and smaller homes are occupied by seniors and are becoming less and less appropriate. Seniors need different housing than the units that exist now. New housing units built specifically for the elderly are needed. There are at least three distinct options for providing appropriate housing for seniors in Flowery Branch in the future, all of which are considered appropriate:

1. **Accessory apartments.** Accessory dwelling units are added onto the same lot (detached) as an existing home, or perhaps part of the home is changed to provide for an additional, separate dwelling unit (attached). In some cases, the addition of an accessory apartment to a smaller existing home will enable a senior household to “age in place,” retaining their current housing unit but also adding a new source of income. Accessory dwelling units do not currently exist in Flowery Branch, but they are now addressed in the city's zoning regulations.⁴ Opportunities to construct or convert accessory apartments are not sufficient on their own to meet projected housing needs of seniors.
2. **Life-cycle housing.** An important step toward developing successful housing options for the elderly is to offer “life cycle” housing. This term is used to describe areas with a wide range of housing types for residents so they can stay in the same area as they progress through different stages in life. Such development prospects may be considered appropriate in higher-density neighborhoods, institutional tracts, and/or mixed-use developments near medical services. They can also be incorporated into large-scale development master plans for planned unit developments.
3. **Institutionalized living opportunities.** The city currently lacks any institutionalized living opportunities (e.g., personal care homes, nursing homes, continuing care retirement communities, etc.). Additional dwelling units and care arrangements of this type are appropriate in institutional zoning districts and mixed-use zones and may also be considered compatible within large-scale development master plans for planned unit developments.

⁴ Attached accessory apartments are conditional uses in TND, R-2, R-3, and MHP zoning districts. Detached accessory apartments are permitted outright in TND zoning districts and are conditional uses in R-1, R-2, R-3, and MHP zoning districts per Articles 6 and 7 of the Flowery Branch Zoning Ordinance.

Housing Affordability

The existing housing stock provides significant affordable housing with manufactured homes and small detached dwellings. Affordable housing has not risen to a level of high concern in Flowery Branch, due mostly to the general affordability of its older housing stock. Furthermore, the city has added townhouses and rental apartments which increase the ability for different households of all income types to reside in the city. Therefore, this update of the Community Agenda does not call for specific programs, activities, or initiatives to promote more affordable housing. When large-scale master plans for planned unit developments and site plans for mixed-use developments are considered in the future, however, some thought should be given to maintaining a proper mix of homes for different economic segments of the population.