

## CHAPTER 3 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

Unemployment has not been a major issue in Hall County, with unemployment rates consistently well below that of the State of Georgia. Flowery Branch had a small labor force, just under 1,000 persons, in the year 2000, though the labor force will increase rather dramatically with the influx of new residents anticipated by 2010 and beyond. Nearly half of Flowery Branch's labor force in 2000 was employed in construction, extraction, and maintenance and production, transportation, and material moving (i.e., mostly blue collar) positions. That concentration in these occupations is approximately twice as large as that found in Georgia or the nation as a whole.

In terms of industry employment, Flowery Branch's residents are disproportionately employed in construction and manufacturing industries, though the proportion of residents employed in manufacturing declined during the 1990s, consistent with trends toward a more service-based economy. While manufacturing job opportunities abound in South Hall County, Oakwood, and Gainesville, a majority of Flowery Branch's resident work force found employment outside Hall County in 2000. Nearly one-half of the city's resident workers were employed in the Atlanta metropolitan statistical area outside the central city of Atlanta, and some 40 percent worked in Hall County. Less than 10 percent worked in the city itself in 2000.

Within the Flowery Branch zip code (30542) (including areas outside the city limits), there were 352 establishments employing 4,340 persons in 2002. Of the total establishments in 2002, 71 were construction firms, 40 were retail trade establishments, 32 were administrative support, waste management and remediation services, 30 were manufacturing firms, 30 were wholesale trade establishments, 24 were professional, scientific and technical services, and the remainder were various other types of establishments. Wrigley Manufacturing Company, with 720 employees, is believed to be the largest employer in the Flowery Branch area.

Flowery Branch can capitalize on numerous advantages from an economic development perspective. Because of Flowery Branch's location and amenities (including excellent highway access, small town atmosphere and proximity to Lake Lanier including Lake Lanier Islands), the City's economic base is poised to grow. The Atlanta Falcons Training Facility, which will attract thousands of visitors a year, is within the city limits and helps give the City an identity. The challenge facing the City is to balance the job growth, so that it does not disproportionately favor any one major industry, including blue collar (the traditional area of skills and job needs), professional (historically under-represented), government, health services, and low-paying retail sector jobs (the latter of which will dramatic increase in Flowery Branch). With efforts proposed in this Community Agenda, Flowery Branch will also capitalize on its tourism potential with regard to historic preservation and creating a destination downtown (Old Town). South Hall County will continue to receive a good share of industrial establishments, assuming that water and sewer capacity is sufficient, despite a decline nationally in manufacturing employment.

Economic development resources available include the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce, Silicon Lake Lanier, Gainesville-Hall County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and a local Economic Development Council. Education and training opportunities are close by, with Gainesville College and Lanier Tech (Oakwood), Brenau University (Gainesville), and a new university in Gwinnett County formally announced in 2005.

**EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS**

The community assessment did not provide an estimate of employment in Flowery Branch, though it found that there were approximately 4,300 employed in the Flowery Branch zip code. Division by industry is not possible given a lack of data for municipal employment. A general estimate of employment in Flowery Branch is 1,500 persons in 2005.

Future employment is estimated on the basis of vacant land areas expected to develop for non-residential uses. An estimated 340 acres of land will develop for retail and service uses, 169 acres for office-institutional uses, and 51 acres for light industrial and manufacturing uses, between 2005 and 2030 in Flowery Branch (see Table 3.1). In preparing the employment forecasts, it was assumed that commercial sites would develop at a 0.25 Floor-Area Ratio (FAR) and light industry at a 0.30 FAR. Commercial properties will be developed at approximately two-thirds retail and service establishments and one-third office space. It is assumed that retail and service will yield 1 employee per 650 gross square feet of building, office space will generate one employee for each 350 gross square feet, and industrial space will generate one employee per 600 gross square feet. The employment growth is assumed to be distributed evenly during the five-year increments from 2005 to 2030. The growth between 2005 and 2030 is added to the estimated 1,500 current employment to yield total employment estimates in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.1  
 Forecasted Employment by Land Use Type, 2005-2030  
 City of Flowery Branch**

Use of Land (Employment)	Employment Acreage, 2005-2030	Floor-Area Ratio (FAR)	Gross Square Footage of Building	Gross Square Feet per Employee <sup>1</sup>	Employment
Retail and service	341	0.25	3,713,490	650	5,713
Office and institutional	170	0.25	1,851,300	350	5,289
Light industrial	51	0.30	666,468	600	1,111
Total employment, 2005-2030	562	--	6,231,258	--	12,113

<sup>1</sup> Assumptions by Jerry Weitz & Associates based on Table 4.2, "Gross Building Space Occupied Per Employee," p. 43, in Arthur C. Nelson, *Planner's Estimating Guide: Projecting Land-Use and Facility Needs* (Chicago: Planners Press, 2004).

**Table 3.2  
 Employment Forecasts, 2005-2030  
 City of Flowery Branch**

	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Employment	1,570	3,992	6,664	9,086	11,508	13,933

Source: Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc. October 2005. Updated August 1, 2006, to account for Lafarge annexations (28 acres of additional retail and service employment at 250 persons by 2015 and quarry and manufacturing employment (70 employees total addition to current 2006 employment) as reported in Lafarge annexation impact analysis.

Employment by industry for Hall County is provided in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3  
 Employment Projections by Sector, 2005-2025  
 Hall County**

<b>Category</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>
Total	85,915	91,818	97,375	102,629	107,607
Farm	908	845	793	754	724
Agricultural Services, Other	814	812	823	845	878
Mining	179	184	189	194	199
Construction	5,473	5,585	5,668	5,745	5,834
Manufacturing	20,875	22,213	23,274	24,031	24,474
T.C.U.	3,331	3,717	4,039	4,303	4,508
Wholesale Trade	4,810	5,161	5,472	5,741	5,967
Retail Trade	12,662	13,659	14,632	15,583	16,531
F.I.R.E.	5,762	6,182	6,517	6,809	7,077
Services	21,984	23,683	25,627	27,848	30,360
Fed. Civilian Government	477	487	492	490	482
Fed. Military Government	475	481	485	488	488
State/Local Government	8,165	8,809	9,364	9,798	10,085

Source: Gainesville-Hall County Comprehensive Plan, Economic Development Element, June 2004.

### **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

***Programs to help seniors find paying jobs or volunteer opportunities.*** Significant access to information on employment opportunities for seniors is available through the AARP. Most residents have likely heard of the organization but some may be unaware of the benefits and access to information that the AARP offers. Flowery Branch should increase awareness of the organization and inform residents of what the organization offers. Another valuable resource available to seniors is Senior Corps. This is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, an independent federal agency created to connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and their nation. Senior Corps is designed to connect the 55 and older population with people and organizations that need them most. Senior Corps helps them become mentors, coaches or companions to people in need, or contribute their job skills and expertise to community projects and organizations. Senior Corps was created during John F. Kennedy's presidency, and today links more than 500,000 Americans to service opportunities. Their contributions of skills, knowledge, and experience are important to individuals, nonprofits, and faith-based and other community organizations throughout the United States.

***Diversification of area employment opportunities (beyond manufacturing).*** Flowery Branch should continue to expand employment opportunities in the city. Flowery Branch must work closely with the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce and other institutions and organizations that provide economic development resources. The Chamber has been successful in promoting the county and its cities to companies across the nation and world, and Hall County is currently home to approximately four dozen Fortune 500 companies. Flowery Branch and Hall County's continued expansion of sewer lines and infrastructure to provide land for new businesses is vital to success in the economic development arena.

**Promoting and capitalizing on Lake Lanier tourism potential.** Flowery Branch's close proximity to Lake Lanier offers the city a wealth of opportunities to capitalize on one of the premier attractions in North Georgia. Lake Lanier is a 38,000 acre lake that attracts roughly 10 million visitors annually. Flowery Branch does not currently see a large portion of Lake Lanier-generated tourism dollars, because destinations on the lake are outside of the city. During the visioning forums, participants envisioned concerts on the lake taking place during summer months at Flowery Branch Park on Lake Lanier. This Community Agenda envisions enhanced pedestrian, bicycle, auto, and boat access to Flowery Branch Park and Starboard Marina on Lake Lanier. Boosting community activities on the Flowery Branch side of the Lake could have "spin-off" benefits to Flowery Branch's merchants. A "concerts on the lake" program could be jointly sponsored by Flowery Branch and area economic development organizations.

**Promoting and capitalizing on being home to the Atlanta Falcons football team.** The Atlanta Falcons football training facility is located in Flowery Branch. Having the team train here is a significant benefit to the city and opportunities exist to extend those benefits. Existing partnerships and new partnerships between the city and Atlanta Falcons should be fostered to promote and benefit both parties. One such example suggested during the visioning forums was to operate an Atlanta Falcons store in Old Town. The catering of events towards the Falcons during training season inside the City also has the potential to bring many residents from around the Atlanta Metropolitan Area into Flowery Branch's Old Town who would not otherwise visit Flowery Branch's downtown.

**Promoting and capitalizing on the history and historic resources of the city.** Flowery Branch should work with the Georgia Office of Historic Preservation and property owners in the city to ensure that worthy historic places and buildings within the City are preserved and kept in quality condition to benefit tourism potential. Marketing efforts that publicize the historic aspects of Flowery Branch should be initiated to increase both community awareness and tourism.

**Establishment of an urban redevelopment agency for revitalization activities.** This Community Agenda envisions a revitalized Old Town, which will take some clearing of obsolete buildings and structures and redevelopment of at least two large city blocks (see Chapter 10, Redevelopment). Flowery Branch intends to establish an urban redevelopment agency, prepare a redevelopment plan, invest in new public improvements that will anchor redevelopment efforts, form partnerships with landowners for redevelopment, and aggressively market revitalization prospects as described in a redevelopment plan.

**Staffing in addition to Better Hometown Coordinator for economic development.** Flowery Branch was designated as a "Better Hometown Community" by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs in 1999. This program offers technical assistance in the revitalization of cities with populations of 1,000 to 5,000, and follows a four-point approach toward downtown revitalization, focusing on economic development, organization, promotion and design. Having adequate staff support is crucial for plans to be formed and implemented. It is imperative that Flowery Branch maintain the Better Hometown Program and keep the position staffed. Flowery Branch may be able to rely on that single position for economic development activities. However, as economic development and redevelopment programs take shape, the City should consider hiring an additional staff person or else formalizing cooperative arrangements with other existing economic development organizations.

***Tax credits, tax abatement, and other incentives for business development.*** The State of Georgia offers job tax credits to business or to its headquarters engaged in any of the following six categories: manufacturing, telecommunications, warehouse distribution, research and development, processing (data, information, software), and tourism. Hall County is classified as a Tier 3 county (with Tier 4 being the most developed, and Tier 1 the least developed). This classification allows for a tax credit of up to \$1,750 which can be used toward 50 percent of a business's tax liability. There are numerous other tax credit opportunities available including investment tax credits, child care tax credits, small business tax credits and research & development tax credits, among others.

***Use or under-utilization of area colleges and universities.*** Flowery Branch should partner with local colleges and universities for a number of purposes, especially in providing higher education and job training programs to citizens and providing research support and student projects that stimulate economic growth in south Hall County. Flowery Branch should work with area schools, colleges and universities to ensure the proper skills and training are being provided to its labor force to provide a good employment base for small businesses.

***Water and sewer master planning to provide for additional growth in city.*** In 2003, Hall County and Flowery Branch reached an agreement related to the expansion in the South Hall/Flowery Branch area. Five major corridors were chosen as areas most in need of sewer: I-985 south of Gainesville, Atlanta Highway, Spout Springs Road, Hog Mountain Road (between Friendship Road and Atlanta Highway), and McEver Road. However, the county has not funded or planned for the extension of sewer in these areas. Flowery Branch must continue to work with the county to address sewer needs and implementation strategies. This includes increasing coordination and cooperation with Oakwood and Hall County in each jurisdiction's sewer service delivery strategies. For more information on proposed water and sewer improvements, see Community Facilities in this Community Agenda.

***Rate charges and fees for water and sewer as they relate to economic development.*** Charging fees for sewer and water connections provides Flowery Branch with funding to maintain the current system and expand it as necessary for further development. During the visioning workshop, there were concerns raised by stakeholders with regard to the high water and sewer tap-on fees Flowery Branch charges. If fees are higher than in adjacent jurisdictions, the higher fee could be a disincentive to locating new residences and businesses in Flowery Branch, some stakeholders contend. Flowery Branch should carefully study its capital needs for water and sewer facility maintenance and expansion (see Community Facilities), and only charge tap-on fees that can be justified in terms of a capital improvement program and good estimates of the costs of maintenance.

***Attention to small businesses for their contribution to economic development.*** Supporting small business is another strategy for economic development. The Community Assessment revealed that approximately 10 percent of Flowery Branch's households in 2000 had some form of self-employment income. The majority of businesses are small, and these businesses contribute significantly to the local economy. The Georgia Entrepreneur and Small Business Network is a valuable resource Flowery Branch could utilize. It is a community-based program designed to create an entrepreneur culture and environment to encourage local business growth. The State of Georgia also provides numerous loan and tax incentives to promote the development and expansion of small businesses.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICIES**

1. Flowery Branch should work with the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce and other economic development agencies to attract new businesses and industries, preferably those with above-average wages.
2. Retain existing businesses and encourage new business relocations by maintaining a positive business climate.
3. Capitalize on the City's access to Interstate 985 (including a second proposed interchange) and its close proximity to Lake Lanier and the Atlanta region.
4. Diversify the city's economy to reduce its reliance upon any one employment sector or industry (e.g., manufacturing or retail).
5. Remove unnecessary regulatory and other impediments which may negatively affect the retention and expansion of existing businesses.
6. Conduct a review of the City's water and sewer tap-on fees in comparison with needs and fees charged in surrounding and nearby jurisdictions, then evaluate whether such fees have an impact on recruitment of businesses and residents.
7. Provide the necessary infrastructure (especially water, sewer, and pedestrian facilities) to support tourism, job growth within activity centers and neighborhood commercial areas, and industrial employment areas, and the revitalization of Old Town.
8. Protect resources, natural and cultural, that can increase tourism in the community.
9. Support activities that bring attention to and sustain the economic vitality of the City's historic districts.
10. When mixed-use or planned unit developments are proposed, consider the development's overall contribution to the economic base of the City in relation to local labor force employment needs.
11. Tap the resources and volunteer labor pool of senior residents in all economic development and redevelopment efforts.
12. Consider the viability of attracting seniors as an economic development strategy.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORK PROGRAM**

**Table 3.4  
 Economic Development Short-term Work Program, 2006-2010  
 City of Flowery Branch**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Year(s) To Be Implemented</b>	<b>Estimated Cost (\$)</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Possible Funding Sources</b>
Conduct a review of the City's water and sewer tap-on fees in comparison with needs and fees charged in surrounding and nearby jurisdictions, then evaluate whether such fees have an impact on recruitment of businesses and residents	2006	\$10,000	Director of Water and Sewer/ Sewer and Water Committee	Operating Budget
Assess needs of small and home-based businesses in the City	2006		Better Hometown Coordinator	
Contact community program coordinators at colleges, universities and technical institutes to determine how they can assist with the City's economic development and redevelopment efforts	2006		Better Hometown Coordinator	
Explore prospects with the Atlanta Falcons and interested business owner(s) to establish an Atlanta Falcons store in Old Town	2006-2007		Better Hometown Coordinator	
Establish an urban redevelopment agency, prepare an urban redevelopment plan for selected city blocks in Old Town in need of redevelopment (see also Redevelopment)	2006-2007	\$25,000	City Planner; Mayor and City Council	Operating Budget
Aggressively market opportunities for redevelopment	2006-2010		Better Hometown Coordinator; Greater Hall Chamber; Convention and Visitor's Bureau	
Work with Old Town merchants to identify and conduct promotional activities, and involve the business community in decision-making about matters that affect them	2006-2010		Better Hometown Coordinator	
Periodically review and implement the recommendations, as appropriate, of the study of economic development potential in the I-985 corridor (sponsored by Hall County)	2006-2010		Better Hometown Coordinator/ City Manager	
Initiate a "Concerts on the Lake" program at Flowery Branch Park on Lake Lanier	2007		Better Hometown Coordinator	
Consider additional staffing beyond the Better Hometown Coordinator to staff the City's redevelopment agency and promote redevelopment and economic development efforts	2008-2009		Mayor and City Council/ City Manager	Operating Budget