

City of Statesboro Strategic Plan (5-Year)

2018 - 2023

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1. Introduction

■ What is a Strategic Plan?

A strategic plan is a tool used by community leaders to identify goals and supporting strategies that address local needs in the near term. The Statesboro Strategic Plan is intended to guide how elected officials and staff allocate financial and personnel resources over the next 5 years to meet the City’s mission:



The provision of public services requires local investment in physical infrastructure and city personnel. This plan assesses the City’s financial ability to make these investments and provides recommendations to augment current funding sources.

The Strategic Plan is intended to be used in developing annual updates to the six-year Capital Improvements Program (CIP). The CIP is included in the annual budget document and lists projects that cost a minimum of \$5,000 and have a useful life of at least two years. The first year of a project is included in the CIP for the given fiscal year, and the other five years are included for planning purposes. In addition, this plan recommends additional potential revenue sources for the General Fund, which is the principal fund

of the City and accounts for its normal recurring activities (i.e. public safety, general government, engineering, community development, finance, and public works).

■ Planning Process

This plan was developed with input from the public as well as Statesboro officials and staff. A community survey received 569 responses (see Chapter 3 for summary findings), and four public meetings provided opportunities for residents to share their opinions about public service delivery. Interviews with city staff and officials provided detailed information about existing departmental projects and needs as well as available funding sources. A review of existing plans provided additional understanding of local goals and initiatives (see Chapter 2).

Input from these varied sources helped identify the most pressing needs with respect to providing public services and was used to craft a set of goals and strategies Analysis of the city’s budget and tax structure, as well as research of financing mechanisms, resulted in a set of funding alternatives that potentially provide additional sources of revenue to fund city services and capital projects. (See Chapter 5).

Date	Time	Location	Address
April 24, 2017	1:30 P.M.—3:30 P.M.	Pittman Park United Methodist Church	1102 Fair Road, Statesboro, GA 30458
April 24, 2017	5:30 P.M.—7:30 P.M.	Bulloch County Board of Education	150 Williams Road, Statesboro, GA 30458
April 27, 2017	11:00 A.M.—1:00 P.M.	GSU Campus Russell Union Ballroom	85 Georgia Ave, Statesboro, GA 30458
May 13, 2017	10:00 A.M.-1:00 P.M.	Joe Brannen Hall	58-A East Main Street, Statesboro, GA 30458

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Chapter 2. Existing Conditions

For strategic planning purposes, the existing conditions, or status quo, refers to the present circumstances that are significant for strategic purposes. In a broad sense, with respect to the City of Statesboro present conditions and outlook, this is described in terms of relative present economic/financial circumstances and the status of City plans and programs for progress and investment.

Economic Snapshot

An economic snapshot, as the term suggests, is a 'quick look' at the present economic picture. Just as a snapshot photo captures some detail about everything in the view frame but does not zoom in on any particular feature to the exclusion of others, this economic snapshot provides an overview of many key economic and financial factors, but does not portend to be a comprehensive analysis of any one of them.

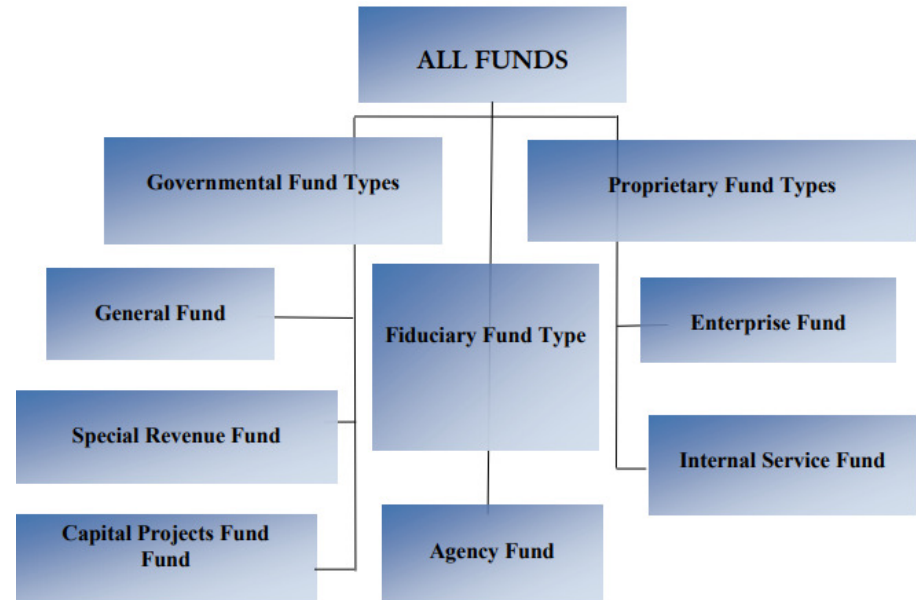
Included information specific to City of Statesboro public finances are summary overviews of revenue sources and the tax base structure; this includes a comparative analysis involving selected similar communities.

Revenue Sources & Tax Base Structure

There are a variety of sources that make up the full picture of City of Statesboro public finance revenues. Each source has associated limitations and opportunities. The following revenue sources snapshot provides summary analysis and description of the status of

primary revenue sources that contribute to public service delivery, with indication of associated impacts.

Specifically, discussion in this section will focus on revenue sources for the General Fund, as shown in Statesboro's fund structure below¹, and for the Capital Improvements Program (CIP).



The General Fund is used to account for all city activities not included in other specified funds. It is the primary fund for day-to-day operations, as listed in Chapter 1. The CIP includes infrastructure improvements and is largely financed by either of two methods, or a combination thereof: 1) "pay as you go" with existing operating funds (e.g. general obligation bonds, revenue bonds, capital outlay notes, Georgia Environmental Finance Authority

¹ The Capital Projects Fund represents financial resources available for the acquisition or construction of major capital facilities other than those financed by enterprise operations (i.e. the six Enterprise Funds: Water and Sewer Fund, Reclaimed Water Fund, Stormwater Fund, Natural Gas Fund, Solid Waste Collection Fund, and

the Solid Waste Disposal Fund). It is comprised of funds transferred from the General Fund, federal and state grants, and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) lease pool loans. The Capital Projects Fund represents approximately 4% of the CIP's FY2018 revenue sources.

[GEFA] loans, the Georgia Municipal Association [GMA] Equipment Lease Pool, or lease/purchase agreement) or 2) Special Purpose Local Option Sales Taxes (SPLOST).

Property Taxes

Property taxes are the revenue source most commonly associated with local government. The City anticipates a total of \$4.833 million to be collected in property taxes, which is the single largest source of tax revenue and equates to approximately 50% of all taxes anticipated (\$9.75 million) for the General Fund.

What is referred to as the Maintenance and Operations (M&O) tax base is comprised of the various types of capital assets (land, buildings, vehicles and equipment). A city's property taxes are levied on the value of this tax base each year. With few exceptions, the values against which a property tax is levied represents 40% of the actual market value of the assets. In many cases, the assessment on a particular property may be reduced by one or more exemptions the locality has adopted, such as for an owner-occupant of a residence (a homestead exemption); the types of exemptions and the amounts vary from locality to another.

Inflation has taken its toll on City tax revenues over the past decade. In summary:

- Prior to September 2017, the City had not raised the property tax millage rate since 2007². (Note: the recession began with the housing collapse in late 2007-early 2008.)
- When inflation is considered, the potential property tax revenue in 2017 is less than \$400,000 more than in 2007 (in 2017 dollars).
- For most years during the past decade, in order for the City to have produced the same potential tax revenue as in 2007 (\$4,438,734 in 2017 dollars), the required millage rate

would have exceeded 7 mills (compared to actual 6.358 mills during the decade).

- Inflation has eaten away at the City's property tax revenue, as the cost of materials, equipment and personal support services has risen. This suggests that salaries have also fallen behind.

Effect of Inflation on Property Tax Revenue

City of Statesboro

	M&O Tax Base			Effect of Inflation		
	Assessed Value*	Millage Rate	Potential Revenue	CPI Multiplier	Value in 2017 \$	Millage to = 2007 PV
2000	\$ 324,315,934	9.200	\$ 2,983,707	1.42	\$ 4,236,863	
2001	\$ 388,630,837	7.750	\$ 3,011,889	1.38	\$ 4,156,407	
2002	\$ 395,363,758	7.750	\$ 3,064,069	1.36	\$ 4,167,134	
2003	\$ 415,775,715	7.741	\$ 3,218,520	1.33	\$ 4,280,631	
2004	\$ 473,247,527	6.921	\$ 3,275,346	1.30	\$ 4,257,950	
2005	\$ 477,790,114	6.921	\$ 3,306,785	1.24	\$ 4,100,414	
2006	\$ 497,826,303	6.921	\$ 3,445,456	1.22	\$ 4,203,456	
2007	\$ 591,638,676	6.358	\$ 3,761,639	1.18	\$ 4,438,734	7.502
2008	\$ 617,691,073	6.358	\$ 3,927,280	1.13	\$ 4,437,826	7.187
2009	\$ 628,697,081	6.358	\$ 3,997,256	1.14	\$ 4,556,872	7.060
2010	\$ 613,263,797	6.358	\$ 3,899,131	1.13	\$ 4,406,018	7.238
2011	\$ 606,125,908	6.358	\$ 3,853,749	1.09	\$ 4,200,586	7.323
2012	\$ 590,029,278	6.358	\$ 3,751,406	1.07	\$ 4,014,004	7.523
2013	\$ 617,896,797	6.358	\$ 3,928,587	1.05	\$ 4,125,016	7.184
2014	\$ 646,382,000	6.358	\$ 4,109,697	1.04	\$ 4,274,085	6.867
2015	\$ 644,115,908	6.358	\$ 4,095,543	1.04	\$ 4,259,365	6.891
2016	\$ 653,201,157	6.358	\$ 4,153,052	1.02	\$ 4,236,113	6.795
2017	\$ 661,372,254	7.308	\$ 4,833,308	1.00	\$ 4,833,308	6.711

* 40% of fair market value.

Comparisons to other cities provide some perspective. The following three cities were selected for comparison to Statesboro: Dublin, Carrollton and Pooler.

consistent with the City's operating budget policies, which state a property tax increase should be used only for the purchase of additional capital improvements or to increase needed personnel.

² A 1-mil increase, from 6.358 to 7.308 mills, was approved on September 5, 2017 to provide the ability to increase police salaries for recruitment/retention purposes. There are currently several vacancies in the Police Department. This increase is

Millage Rate Comparison with Other Cities

	Population	Tax Base (2016)	2016 Millage	2017 Millage
Statesboro	31,419	\$653,201,157	6.358	7.308
Dublin	16,104	\$459,635,887	6.540	6.540
Carrollton	26,562	\$881,467,588	4.620	4.600
Pooler	23,744	\$1,194,554,989	3.909	3.909*

Dublin and Pooler are both accessible directly from I-16, but located well to the west and east from Statesboro, respectively. Dublin is the smallest of the four cities and has a property tax rate similar to Statesboro, which is applied against a smaller tax base.

Pooler is a bit closer in population to Statesboro than Dublin but, being within the economic activity zone of Savannah and Chatham County, has a considerably higher tax base value which keeps its millage rate much lower than in the other three cities.

Carrollton is somewhat similar to Statesboro in that it is an economic center to its surrounding counties, it is host to several State educational institutions (University of West Georgia and West Central Tech) and is located about 13 miles from I-20 via SR 166 (compared to Statesboro's 12 miles via US 301).

Carrollton is the closest of the examples to Statesboro in population, but has a lower millage rate against its tax base (which is a third larger than Statesboro).

Further comparison between Statesboro and Carrollton underscores the impact of not having a **Local Option Sales Tax (LOST)** at the municipal level. The LOST is an optional 1% sales tax activated by a local referendum and imposed on the purchase, sale, rental, storage, use, or consumption of tangible personal property and related services. State law creates 159 special districts in Georgia for the purpose of levying a LOST. The boundaries of the special districts are the same as the boundaries of the 159 counties in Georgia. Five counties (Cobb, Cherokee, DeKalb, Gwinnett, and Rockdale) do not have a LOST. Bulloch County is one of seven counties (the others are Chattooga, Colquitt, Habersham, Houston,

Mitchell, and Rabun) that have a constitutional LOST designated for educational purposes. LOST distributions go directly to the boards of education in each county and are not subject to renegotiation.

The following table shows the benefit of the LOST in Carrollton. Total LOST collections are nearly equal the amount of ad valorem tax revenue for the city. Removing LOST proceeds would therefore nearly double Carrollton's millage rate. This "effective millage rate" is approximately 20% higher than Statesboro's 2017 millage rate.

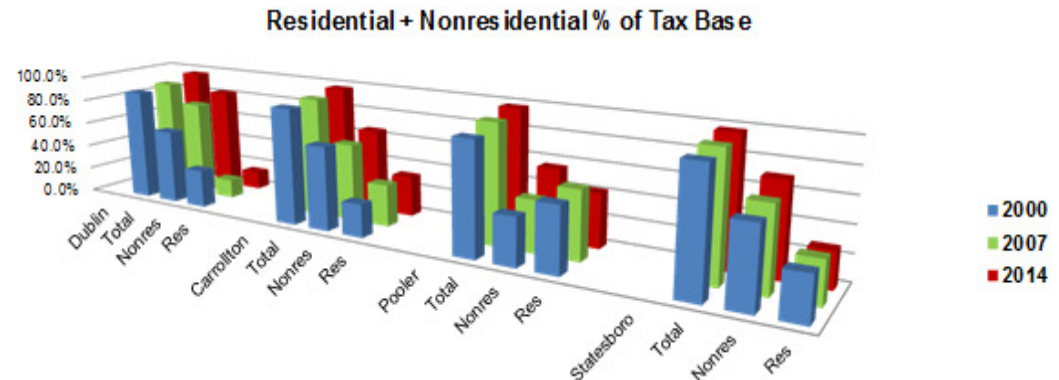
Effect of LOST on Millage Rate

2017 Estimated:	Statesboro	Carrollton*
Annual Ad Valorem Tax	\$4,833,308	\$4,350,000
Annual LOST	\$0	\$3,935,000
Annual Property Tax + LOST	\$4,833,308	\$8,285,000
Actual Millage Rate	7.308	4.620
Effective Millage Rate	7.308	8.761

*Based on City of Carrollton FY 2017-2018 Operating Budget

Tax Base Comparison with Other Cities

In 2016, residential and nonresidential properties accounted for 97% to 98% of the total M&O tax base in all of the four cities. The split between these use categories, however, varied considerably (primarily reflecting the differing economies of each city). The following chart provides an illustration of those differences.



As can be seen on the chart above, in every city except Carrollton, the residential property tax base makes up an ever decreasing share of the total tax base, with growth in the nonresidential sector making up the difference as each city's tax base has increased overall. In Carrollton, the residential tax base doubled between 2000 and 2016 (up 104%) and increased its proportion of the total tax base. Nonresidential uses maintained a steady proportion of the total tax base while actually growing by 65% in value.

In Statesboro, the proportion of potential tax revenue by land use has shifted notably. The M&O Tax Base table on this page summarizes the M&O tax base by general use category for 2000, 2007 (when the tax rate became "fixed") and 2016 (the latest year for which information is available from the Georgia Department of Revenue).

The Change in Residential Tax Base table and chart on the next page illustrate how the residential tax base has diminished over the years, decreasing from 33.2% of the total in 2000 to 27.4% in 2016. At the same time, the nonresidential tax base has increased from 59.0% to 70.1% over the same period.

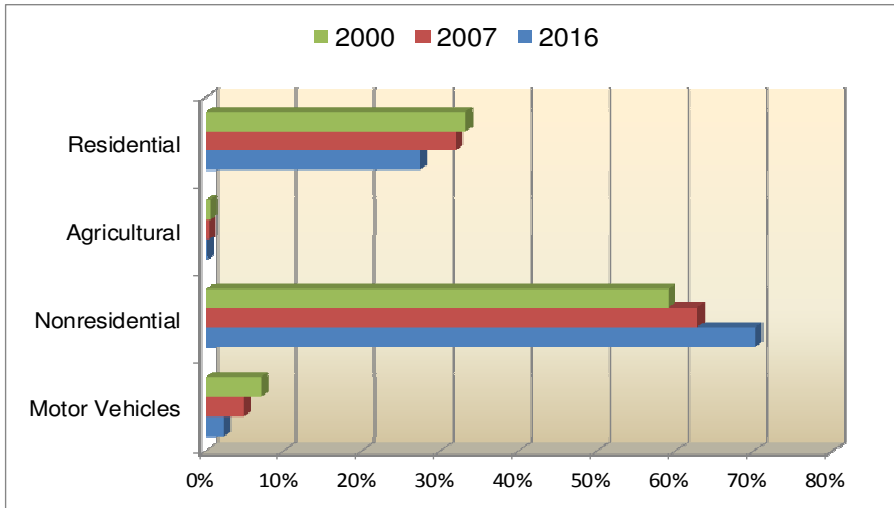
Nonetheless, the property tax returns have been eroding in value because of inflation. Put another way, a dollar in revenue in 2007 is worth only 84¢ today. The status quo of property taxes is a significant challenge for Statesboro.

Statesboro M&O Tax Base

Type of Property	M&O Tax Base		
	2000	2007	2016
Residential	\$ 133,676,762	\$ 192,623,437	\$ 173,257,587
Residential Transitiona	\$ 124,270	\$ 120,480	\$ -
Historical	\$ 213,320	\$ -	\$ -
Mobile Home	\$ 692,430	\$ 643,051	\$ 315,487
Less: Exemptions	\$ (5,733,874)	\$ (4,484,116)	\$ (7,034,831)
Residential Uses	\$ 128,972,908	\$ 188,902,852	\$ 166,538,243
Agricultural	\$ 1,244,400	\$ 879,840	\$ 790,186
Conservation Use	\$ 1,314,600	\$ 1,688,920	\$ 546,033
Agricultural Uses	\$ 2,559,000	\$ 2,568,760	\$ 1,336,219
Commercial	\$ 206,049,148	\$ 349,207,061	\$ 395,342,144
Industrial	\$ 9,359,213	\$ 5,998,633	\$ 16,756,554
Utility	\$ 13,981,230	\$ 15,879,960	\$ 14,782,713
Heavy Equipment	\$ 3,448	\$ -	\$ 11,031
Nonresidential Uses	\$ 229,393,039	\$ 371,085,654	\$ 426,892,442
Motor Vehicles	\$ 27,705,890	\$ 29,081,410	\$ 14,082,510
Total M&O Digest	\$ 388,630,837	\$ 591,638,676	\$ 608,849,414

Change in Statesboro Residential Tax Base

	Percent of M&O Tax Base			
	Residential	Agricultural	Nonresidential	Motor Vehicles
2000	33.2%	0.7%	59.0%	7.1%
2007	31.9%	0.4%	62.7%	4.9%
2016	27.4%	0.2%	70.1%	2.3%



SPLOST

The 1% Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) is an important funding source for capital projects. Additionally, SPLOST alleviates some of the burden on the General Fund, keeping more General Fund revenues available to address the many city services that SPLOST cannot fund in accordance with state law.

The current City/County 2013 SPLOST is being used by Statesboro to fund the following project types: street and drainage projects, public safety facilities and equipment, facility improvements, water

and wastewater projects, natural gas projects, solid waste handling equipment, economic development, and joint city/county solid waste disposal.

The current SPLOST is scheduled to expire by November 2019, requiring a public referendum in November 2018 to approve a continuation of the 1% tax. In the event that a TSPLOST is also up for consideration (discussed in Chapter 5), any transportation projects can be reduced or moved out of the SPLOST project listing for the next authorization, increasing the focus on other project categories.

Fifty-two percent (52%) of funding for the City's full 2018-2023 CIP is protected to come from SPLOST proceeds, based on the 2013 SPLOST (\$8,809,800) and possible 2019 SPLOST proceeds (\$10,417,830). SPLOST is primarily identified as a funding source for transportation improvements (street maintenance, intersection improvements, sidewalks, streetscape improvements), fire and police apparatus/equipment, and sewer upgrades.

For FY 2018, the City's budget anticipates SPLOST proceeds of \$4.6 million, while the County has budgeted \$4.9 million. An analysis of the State's point of sale reports should be examined to consider an equitable distribution between the City, the County and other eligible cities in the county.

Previous Plans & Studies

The following section highlights previous plans that have been undertaken to address a variety of community needs, ranging from transportation infrastructure to parks. The plans' recommendations should continue to inform the annual budgeting process, although changing local conditions or priorities, or the age of the plans, may warrant updates. In addition, funding constraints have limited the City's ability to fully implement these plans. This section describes the intent of each plan and, where available, provides the estimated costs associated with recommended projects.

Capital Improvements Program (FY2018-FY2023)

As described in the City’s annual budget (and the previous section), the “City adopts a Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for six years. The first year’s project is included in the FY 2018 Budget. The other five years are included for planning purposes. Their priorities can be changed in future updates of this program. The CIP is updated on an annual basis, so that the benefits of long-range planning can be obtained while having the flexibility to adjust to unforeseen circumstances or opportunities.”

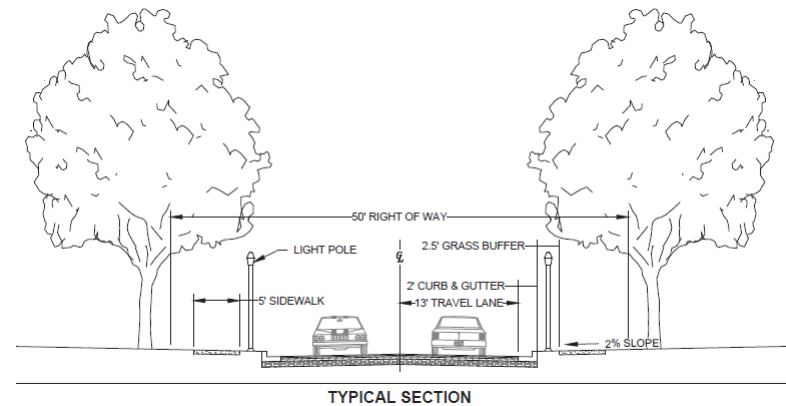
The CIP includes capital projects (defined as having a service life of at least two years and a minimum cost of \$5,000) for the following departments: Engineering, Fire, Police, Public Works (Fleet Management, Parks & Trees, and Solid Waste), Solid Waste, Water and Wastewater, and Natural Gas.

Funding sources in the FY2018-FY2023 CIP are listed as: Operating Income (27% of total funds over the six years), Aid to Construction (ATC) Fees for Wastewater Treatment Plant (5%), 2013 SPLOST Proceeds (24%), Possible 2019 SPLOST Proceeds (28%), General Fund Capital Improvements Program (2%), Contributed Capital: GDOT/GSU (7%), Private Capital (1%), and GMA Lease Pool (7%).

SPLOST proceeds combined (assuming approval of a continuation of SPLOST beginning in 2019) total over half of the six-year CIP, with a focus on funding transportation and sewer infrastructure and police/fire equipment needs.

The CIP includes South Main Street (Blue Mile) infrastructure improvements (\$350,000 for water/sewer, \$450,000 from DOT, \$150,000 local match and \$1million from the ABC Award), and the **West Main Streetscape** (\$760,000); a typical section is shown at right. Park and recreation projects are limited to Edgewood Park Improvements (\$35,000), Marvin Avenue Park Renovations (\$35,000) and McTell Trail Addition (\$50,000), with funding for the parks coming from the General Fund.

Concept for West Main Streetscape



Comprehensive Plan (2014 update)

The City of Statesboro Comprehensive Master Plan is a 2014 update to the 2009 plan that addresses long-term growth and development needs. The plan includes community goals and a five-year implementation program that address the following topics: Economic Development, Infrastructure and Community Facilities, Land Use, Population Growth, Housing, Public Safety, Intergovernmental Coordination, Fiscal Stewardship and Government Administration., and Quality of Life.

Recommended projects include infrastructure projects (transportation, water/sewer, natural gas, stormwater management) estimated at a cost of \$17 million, to be funded by SPLOST. Another \$8.2 million in economic development and infrastructure (including fiber optics) projects are recommended, with the City identified as the funding source.

Goals from 2014 Comprehensive Plan Update



Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2010 update)

The Statesboro-Bulloch County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan updates the 2000 plan. Project recommendations include \$17.7 million in improvement projects for Fletcher, Grady Mill, Luetta Moore, Memorial, and Mill Creek Parks, as well as \$6.5

million to complete the S&S Greenway. SPLOST is identified as the primary funding source.

The Statesboro Parks Division is responsible for maintenance of the Eastside Cemetery, McTell Trail, Rev. Julius Abraham Trail, Triangle Park, Renaissance Park, Edgewood Park, City owned green-spaces, City facility grounds, and trees and other plantings in traffic islands. Cemetery lot sales are handled by the City Engineer's Office. The Parks Division operating budget is within the General Fund. Capital projects are in the CIP and potentially the SPLOST Fund, however parks and recreation is not listed in the project categories to receive 2013 SPLOST allocations. As mentioned on the previous page, the current CIP identifies \$120,000 in improvements for Edgewood Park, Marvin Avenue Park and McTell Trail. Another \$25,000 is listed for cemetery improvements.

Long Range Transportation Plan (2009 update)

The Statesboro/Bulloch County 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) identifies existing and future transportation challenges for the multi-modal transportation system (roadways, bridges, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, freight, rail, and airports), followed by a list of prioritized projects for implementation.

Recommended projects in Statesboro include bridge improvements (estimated cost of \$400,000), intersection improvements (\$5 million total), railroad crossing improvements (\$466,000), and bike/pedestrian facility improvements (\$15.5 million). 'Bike/ped' recommendations include sidewalks, bike lanes/shoulders/sharrows, and multi-use trails (including the S&S Greenway, at \$2.8 million).

The LRTP indicates funding for most transportation projects in the County has historically come in part through GDOT, with SPLOST referenda increasingly being used to fund projects, including matching federal and/or state transportation funds.

Each year, GDOT develops its State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), a listing of all projects and project phases anticipated to be funded with federal and state funds within the current three-year period. The FY 2015-2018 STIP includes one specific project in Statesboro: \$265,000 in federal funds for a railroad crossing warning device at Zetterower Avenue.

The Blue Mile America's Best Communities Application (2015)

In April 2017, the Averitt Center was awarded \$1,000,000 in the America's Best Communities competition, which will be used to implement recommended streetscape improvements along the Blue Mile corridor. The Blue Mile Foundation, Inc. will manage the funds for implementation of Blue Mile initiatives.

Chapter 3. Community Priorities

Public input into the strategic planning process was derived from several opportunities for direct public involvement as well as via an extensive web-based public opinion questionnaire and through a related youth outreach/involvement effort. Strategic planning public meetings were held on April 24, April 27, and May 13 in different locations around Statesboro. At each meeting, participants were informed about current/ongoing City improvement initiatives and the purpose of strategic planning. Each participant was encouraged to complete an opinion questionnaire, and participant responses were compiled along with all other questionnaire responses. In all, 569 respondents completed questionnaires, and all results have been tabulated together. Additionally, the results from the recent YOUTH Say it Loud Statesboro effort (April 26, 2017), facilitated by the UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government, have been factored into public input.

These recent community involvement and input efforts are complementary to the many public involvement efforts from recent years associated with City of Statesboro planning initiatives (see also Chapter 2). There is value in all prior community planning efforts, and their results and recommendations should be repeatedly reviewed in the ongoing process of identifying and addressing community priorities.

■ Survey Summary

General Statesboro Community

The 569 respondents who participated in the Strategic Plan Opinion Questionnaire were not chosen based on a random sample of Statesboro residents, but rather were those who responded to the process either through attending a public meeting, finding the questionnaire as a result of local news advertisement, or otherwise

became aware of the questionnaire (e.g. through City website, email distribution, etc.). They represent a broad range in terms of age, location of residence and family status. Age ranges by percentages of respondents are as follows (in descending order of magnitude):

Aged 35-44: 23%

Aged 45-54: 23%

Aged 25-34: 21%

Aged 55-64: 19%

Aged 65-69: 5%

Aged 18-24: 4%

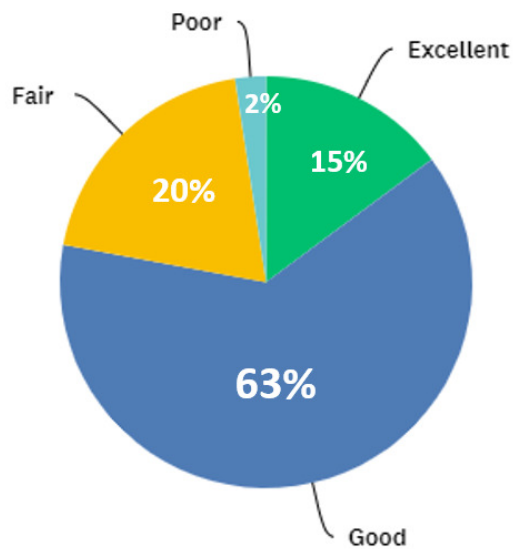
Aged 70-99: 3%

Aged 01-18: 2%

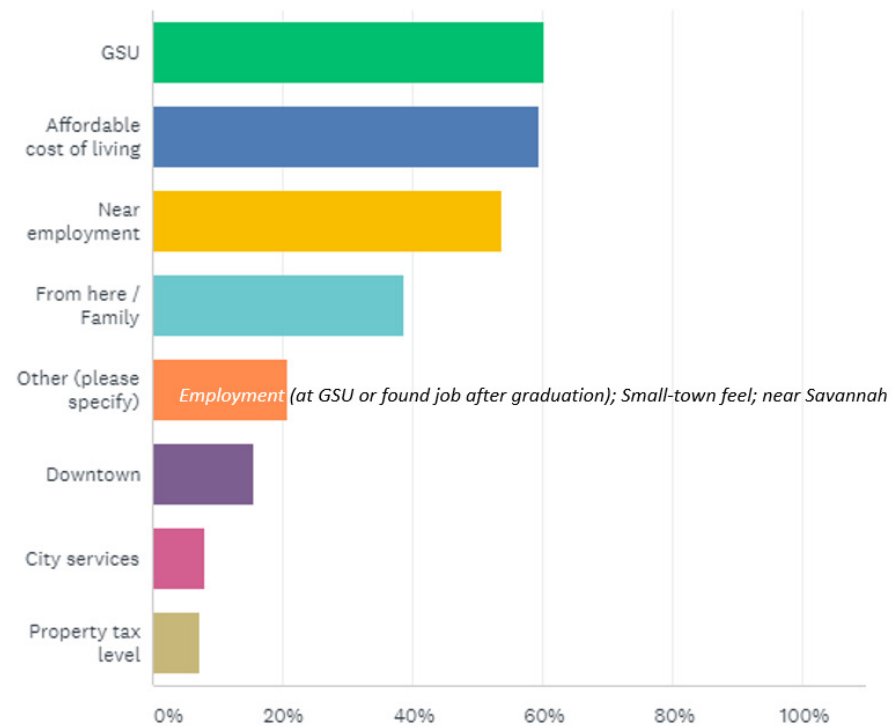
Though not a representation that is consistent with the overall age categories in the population, the results do have a relatively even balance of opinion from the entire (traditionally-considered) working age population, age range 25-64, which crosses multiple generations. Additionally, 37% of respondents indicated they live in households with children living in the home. Geographically, 55% indicate they are year-round city residents, 39% indicate they live in unincorporated Bulloch County, 4% live elsewhere and 2% attend Georgia Southern University.

In broad consideration, responses suggest that respondents feel good about the **general quality of life in Statesboro**, are attracted by the **community's small town feel**, and strongly value the **higher education assets in the community**. On the flip side, respondents express **public safety concerns** to a significant degree, and **desires for community development and growth that is well planned and contributing to better balance, diversity and more options** (e.g. for employment, retail, cultural offerings). Additional details about overall community summary findings are described in the following charts and tables.

General quality of life is....



I choose to live or work here because...



The one thing I like best* ...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small town feel 	<p>16%</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GSU/College sports • The community/people • Cultural activities and opportunities/community events • Stores/restaurants • Little traffic • Location • Safe/low crime • Size 	<p>5%-9%</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to get around • Not too small but not too big • Cost of living • Rate of growth • Downtown area • Great place to raise a family • Farmers Market • It's home • Public services (Police, Fire, Public Works, Parks and Rec, etc.) • Weather • The environment • Partnership between community and GSU • Quiet • Diversity • My job • Clean • Mill Creek Park 	<p>1%-4%</p>

*Open-ended responses

The greatest asset is* ...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GSU/Higher levels of education 	48%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The people 	15%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The community 	5%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small town feel with amenities • Public Works /Police/Fire/Parks and Rec/City Council • Location • Mill Creek Park • The Averitt Center • Diverse activities/community events • Shopping/Restaurants • Parks/greenspace/trails • Downtown • Growth/growth potential • Diversity • Farmers Market • Splash in the Boro • Safe • Size • Weather • Quality of Life • Cost of living 	1%-4%

*Open-ended responses

I am most concerned about* ...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime/drugs 	<p>20%</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blight, overgrown grass and empty businesses • Insufficient diversity/inclusiveness • Need for retail and entertainment options, shops and restaurants (not only chains) • No quality grocery store • Poorly managed growth • The appearance of a disconnect between City priorities and residents' priorities • Walkability and pedestrian safety (lack of sidewalks, bike paths, trails, etc.) 	<p>5%-7%</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic • Need for higher wages • Not enough public parks and/or greenspace • Downtown needs to be more family friendly/vibrant • Poverty • Lack of communication between community and GSU • Road/traffic infrastructure maintenance • Lack of sustainability initiatives and incentives (no recycling) • Lack of quality jobs • Quick turnover on businesses • Code enforcement/zoning violations • Driving safety (people speeding, running red lights, etc.) • No public transportation • Public schools • Alcohol sales restrictions • Poor money management • Lack of affordable housing • Crowded • Lack of funding for improvements • Cost of living rising 	<p>1%-4%</p>

* Open-ended responses

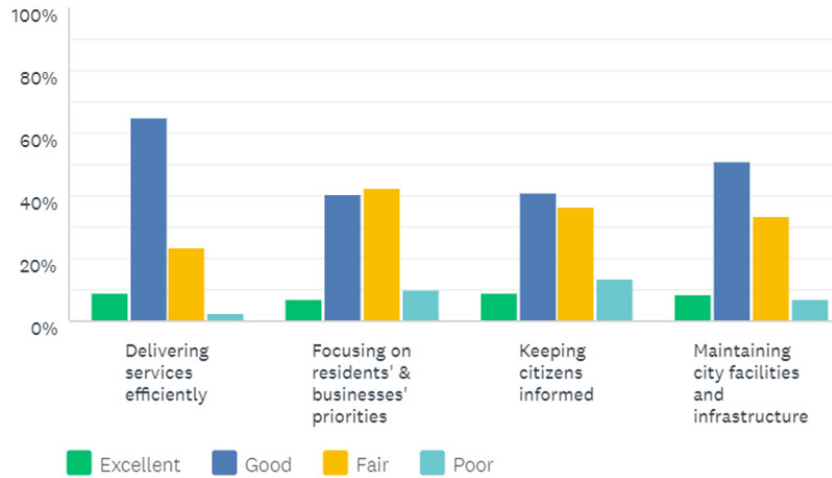
The greatest challenge is* ...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime/drugs 	11%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth rate/growth management (small town feel while still growing) 	10%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding a balance between college life and family friendly (vibrant community for all) 	9%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of diverse shopping (grocery, restaurants, business) • Lack of diversity and culture/not progressive • Keeping/attracting businesses • Traffic • Lack of quality jobs • Need for responsive and visionary leadership 	5%-7%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revitalization of downtown • Lack of investment/infrastructure • Poverty • Improving blighted areas • Affordable housing for all • Increase in wages • Funding for infrastructure and projects • Retaining police officers • Pedestrian safety • How to get GSU students to stay after graduation • Lack of sustainability practices • Lack of parks, greenspace and trails • Revitalizing Blue Mile project • Communication between GSU and community • Public transportation • Proximity to larger metro areas • Cost of living • Poor healthcare • Outdated alcohol restrictions • Public schools 	1%-4%

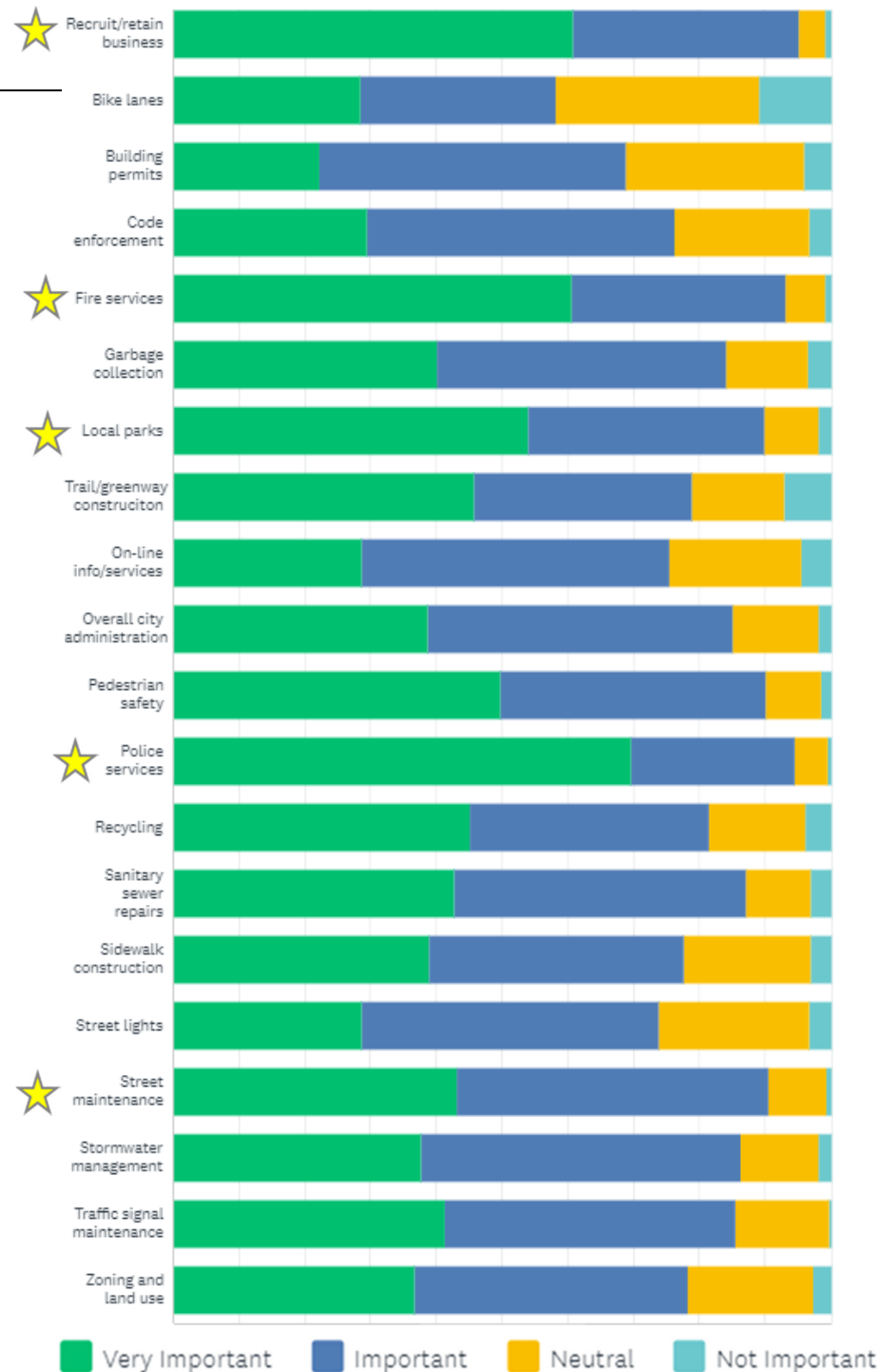
* Open-ended responses

City of Statesboro Services and Priorities

Beyond general community opinion, the questionnaire posed questions focused specifically on City of Statesboro services and priorities. In broad overview, respondents indicated that the **City is doing a "good" job delivering services efficiently**. The response is more "good" to "fair" to the questions of **how well the City is addressing the priorities of residents and businesses, how well citizens are being kept informed, and how well infrastructure and facilities are being maintained**. In none of these areas did a high percentage of respondents indicate that the City was doing either an "excellent" job or a "poor" job.

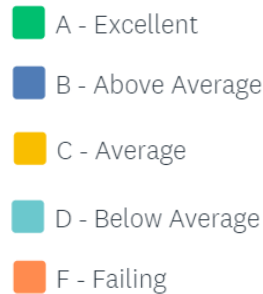


Opinions about specific City services were explored through a pairing of questions that explored the relative importance of most City services, then the grade (A through F) that respondents would assign to each of the same City services. **The top five most important services (or functions, in some cases) are Police, Fire, Business Recruitment/Retention, Local Parks and Street Maintenance.**



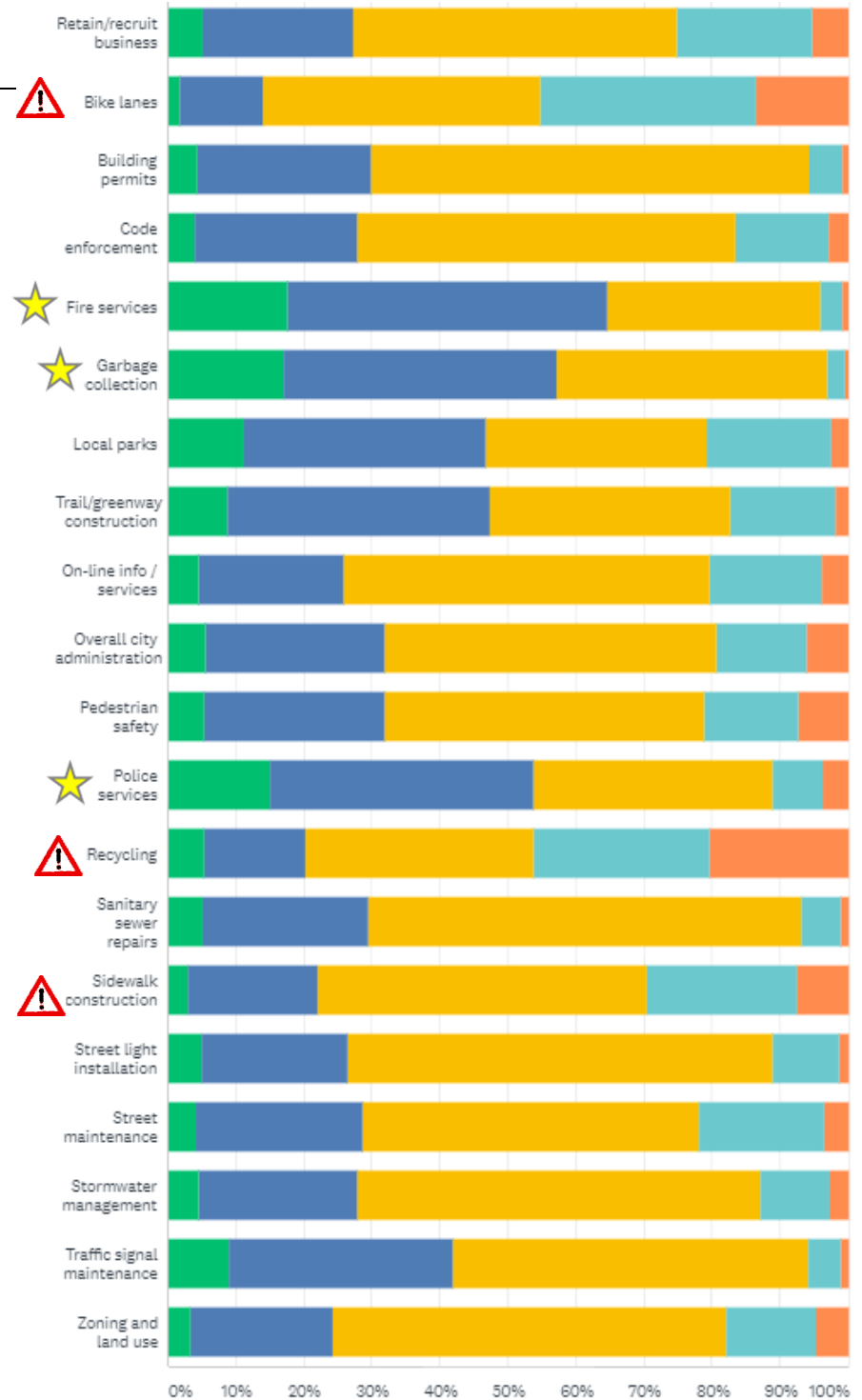
Several additional services follow close behind, including Pedestrian Safety, Garbage Collection (and Recycling), Traffic Signal Maintenance, Sanitary Sewer, Stormwater Management, and Overall City Administration. That said, there were no listed services/functions that were considered to be “not important” or “neutral” by a majority of respondents; all fall in the “very important” to “important” range by the majority.

When it comes to the grades assigned to different City services by respondents, there is a strong correlation between some of the most important services and those that respondents feel strongly about. A majority indicated grades of **“above average” or “excellent” for Police and Fire services**, which were also generally considered to be the two most important. In the case of other services/functions however, such as Business Recruitment/Retention and Recycling, respondents indicated relatively low levels of satisfaction for services considered to be among the most important. Overall, indication is an “average” grade for most services/functions included in the question.



= Lowest Level Satisfaction

= Highest Level Satisfaction



Transitioning from opinions about specific City services/functions, respondents were asked to indicate their opinions about what the City of Statesboro does well using open-ended responses. A wide variety of functions, initiatives and attributes were provided, with the following being the top three answers:

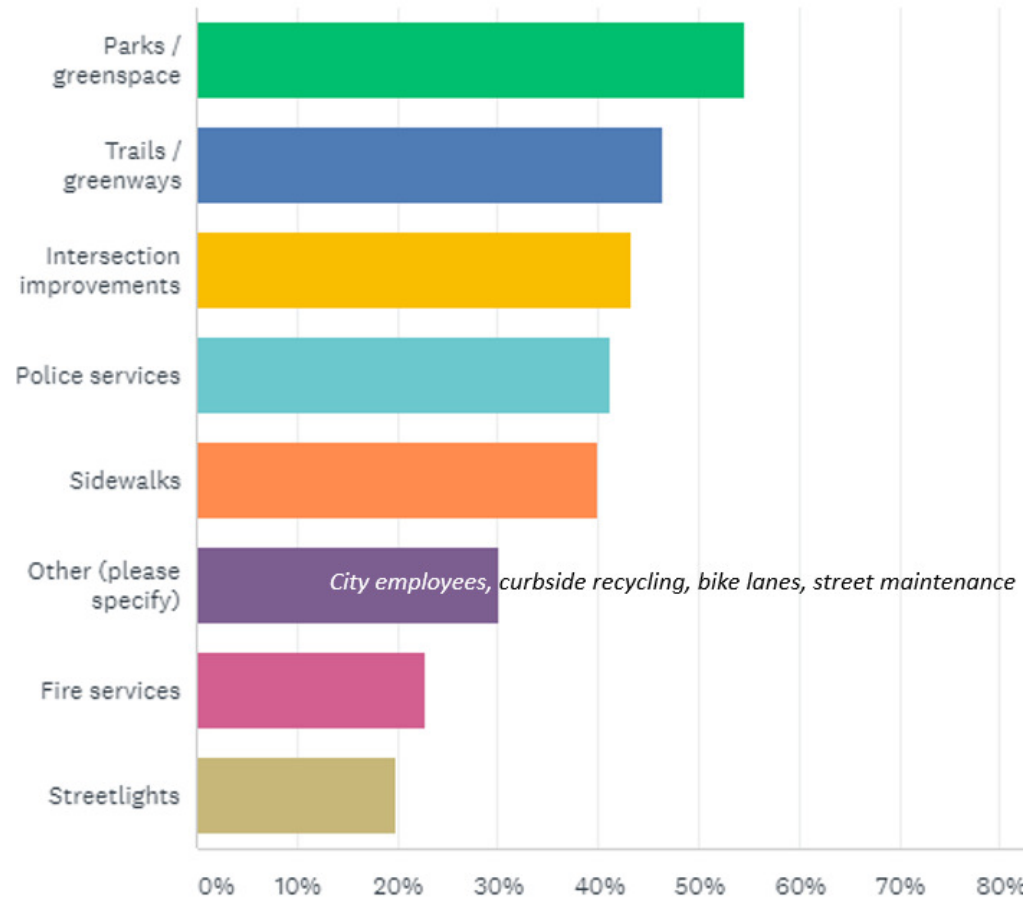
- **Maintains Community Appearance** (trash pick-up, yard waste clean-up, landscaping)
- **Provides Community Festivals, Events and Art** (for all ages)
- **Provides Police, Fire and Other Essential City Services**

Future Investment in City Services

To gauge opinions about the connection between public finance and City services/functions, a pair of questions sought opinions on where additional public funds should be invested and whether respondents would be willing to pay more for additional/improved City services. To the former, **priority for additional investment ranged from Parks/Greenspace/Trails at the highest level** (approximately 50% of respondents); **Intersection Improvements, Police Services and Sidewalks followed close behind** in the mid-range (approximately 40% of respondents); with a variety of Other Services, Fire and Streetlights in lowest range (between 20% and 30%).

Though the majority did not overwhelmingly agree on increased spending for a specific service/function, **a strong majority of respondents did express willingness to pay more** (by means of increased fees, property taxes or other) **for additional/improved City services**. Nearly 60% responded "Yes" to this question, and fewer than 15% responded "No" (with over 25% responding "Not Sure"). Overall, respondents express the opinion that there is a need for additional public investment, and a willingness to pay more, as individuals/families/households, to make additional public investment possible.

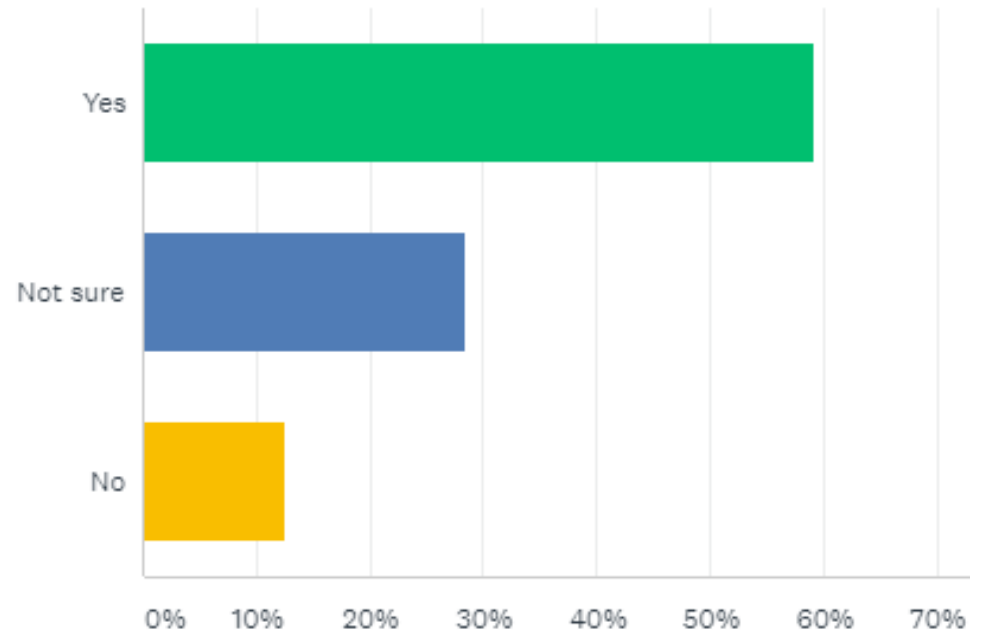
Where should additional money be spent?



Communications

A final finding from responses is particularly significant to a City “service” that is important to the way the City of Statesboro is perceived and understood in the community: Communications. In response to the question “How do you hear about (get news about) the City of Statesboro,” the most prominent information sources are indicated to be the Statesboro Herald (approximately 75%) and the City’s website (approximately 65%). There are several other significant sources, as indicated below, but the importance of the Statesboro Herald and City website should not be overlooked.

Would you be willing to pay more* for additional / improved services?



* Increase in user fees or charges, property tax or other revenue source

Chapter 4. SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is one method of evaluating key factors and developing a better understanding of relative issues, contributing to formulation of effective strategies. The obvious objectives are to maximize **strengths**, minimize **weaknesses**, take advantage of **opportunities** and limit **threats**.

Several key themes arise from analysis of the local economy, public finance, respondent information and other sources. These themes and the associated issues (and opportunities) are not unique to Statesboro, but understanding their applicability is helpful. The following are not presented in a particular order, and are not exclusive of any other potential theme or factor, but are useful to organize thoughts that lead to strategies.

- Resources (Human, Education, Community, etc.)
- Public Safety
- Quality of Life
- Public Finance Stability
- Economic Success
- Communications
- Collaboration/Partnership

Identification and breakdown of these themes contributes to classification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that are worthy of consideration. The following table presents the primary identified factors for this high-level SWOT analysis.

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
<p>Experienced City staff</p> <p>Established Plans and Planning Processes</p> <p>Community Trust (in Public Safety personnel)</p> <p>Success Track Record (e.g. downtown revitalized)</p> <p>City Communications Infrastructure</p> <p>Existing Infrastructure, Parks</p>	<p>Finance Options Limitations (LOST, etc.)</p> <p>Stagnant Property Tax Revenues</p> <p>Expiring SPLOST</p> <p>Limited Supporting Entities (e.g. non-profits)</p> <p>Aged Facilities and Infrastructure (expensive maintenance requirements)</p>
<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Threats</u>
<p>Higher Education Institutions (partnerships)</p> <p>College Graduates (potential to retain)</p> <p>Positive Employment Trends</p> <p>Low Cost of Living</p> <p>Growing Arts/Cultural Opportunities (+ diversity)</p> <p>Grant Successes (Blue Mile)</p> <p>TSPLOST Opportunity</p>	<p>Loss of Trained City Staff to Other Communities</p> <p>Outside Influences on Public Safety</p> <p>Transience in Population (Student)</p> <p>Negative Perceptions of Local Gov't</p> <p>Some Neighborhood Property Conditions</p> <p>High Percentage of Rental vs. Owner-occupied Housing</p>

Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

The following elaborates on the SWOT analysis chart:

Strengths:

Experienced City Staff – Many staff members have served Statesboro and provided leadership for many years; institutional knowledge and consistency is a great asset.

Established Plans and Planning Processes – As referenced in this document, plans have been prepared recently for to address specific needs and opportunities, and funding for implementation is lining up in some cases.

Community Trust – Survey results and anecdotal input suggests a strong level of community trust in public safety officials serving Statesboro. This is a critical strength; the community and police partnership in particular is paramount to address public safety issues.

Success Track Record – There are many stories to tell of successful implementation of projects and initiatives, and visible results include revitalization in downtown Statesboro, attractive parks, greenways and a growing business community.

City Communications Infrastructure – As shown through survey results, residents use and benefit from City communications tools like the City website; also through local media outlets. Having effective communications tools in place makes it easier to expand and enhance communications.

Existing Infrastructure and Parks – The availability of public owned land, in particular, is a strength that supports the City's ability to provide enhanced services and amenities to residents.

Weaknesses:

Finance Options Limitations – As described in Chapter 2, the impact of the inability of Statesboro to use Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) revenues to support its general fund is significant.

Stagnant Property Tax Revenues – As described in Chapter 2, property tax revenues have been eroding over the past decade or more.

Expiring SPLOST – SPLOST is a critical revenue source for Statesboro to fund infrastructure projects. Without SPLOST funding, projects would not be accomplished and the City General Fund would bear a much heavier burden. The fast approaching expiration date of the current SPLOST is a challenge that can be overcome by SPLOST reauthorization.

Limited Supporting Entities – Statesboro has a relatively (or very) small number of non-profit entities that can work alongside the local government to address issues like vacant housing, property deterioration and parks/greenspace maintenance. Those existing organizations need to expand, and new ones need to be fostered.

Aged Facilities and Infrastructure – Though the needs for investment in public facilities and infrastructure are understood to some degree, there are certainly unknown needs and liabilities, as is typical of most older cities in the South. Frequent assessment and action is required to address issues and maintain effective services through public facilities and infrastructure.

Opportunities:

Higher Education Institutions – Having Georgia Southern University, Ogeechee Technical College and East Georgia State College facilities in Statesboro provides opportunities for Statesboro residents to conveniently access higher education, and also brings thousands of students to Statesboro each year from different parts of Georgia and beyond. This is an educational and economic development resource in every sense, with potential for greater benefit to the community.

College Graduates – There are thousands of graduates from Statesboro each year; increasing the percentage who remain in Statesboro to start careers is a key opportunity for the City to pursue.

Positive Employment Trends – After many years of struggle on the jobs front, trends are positive in Statesboro and many communities around the region, promising benefits of business growth and expansion on the local economy and City budget.

Low Cost of Living – In the increasingly mobile and connected society, where individuals and families have a wide range of choices about where to live and work, the cost of living in a community can make the difference. Statesboro’s relatively low cost of living, combined with other community and environmental assets, can help to fuel growth of population and economy.

Growing Arts/Cultural Opportunities – A solid trend of arts and culture development is in place in Statesboro, linked to historic preservation and enhancement of the community’s sense of place. This is a highly attractive factor to the generation that is starting careers and families, and can be a key to community growth and development in coming decades.

Grant Successes – With the recent success of the Blue Mile project in a highly competitive environment for grant funds, Statesboro has proved the ability to play on the big stage of community development. There is opportunity to build on the momentum of this win, and others.

TSPLOST Opportunity – Though a regional TSPLOST failed in the past, the new authorization by the State Legislature to conduct a local (county level) TSPLOST referendum presents a much needed opportunity for Statesboro to add a funding source for transportation projects. Additionally, it is very advantageous that TSPLOST-funded transportation projects can be implemented quickly, relative to federally funded projects, due to streamlined processes for environmental and engineering approvals.

Threats:

Loss of Trained City Staff to Other Communities – Staff training is expensive, and trained staff members are of great value to a community, whether public safety or management and opera-

tions personnel. As Statesboro is in a growing region and proximate to larger communities that may offer higher salaries to trained personnel, there is a consistent threat that trained staff will choose to relocate for higher pay rather than remain in Statesboro.

Outside Influences on Public Safety – Two key factors involving outside influences seem to have a significant impact on public safety in Statesboro, both involving transience: the large student population associated primarily with GSU, and traffic/transience associated with the I-16 corridor. As GSU and I-16 both also offer incredible benefits to Statesboro, the requirement is to address the public safety threats while embracing the associated benefits.

Transience in Population – Beyond public safety factors, the high level of turnover in the local population due to student transience has an impact on the community, and in particular on neighborhoods where high numbers of students rent housing. This is one factor that impacts the level of owner-occupied housing, for example.

Negative Perceptions of Local Government – Survey results indicate a relatively high level of concern about local government and its effectiveness in Statesboro. Addressing issues in a strategic and responsive manner would be expected to alleviate concerns, as would improved communications that ensure citizens are informed about successes and the value that local government leadership and services provide.

Neighborhood Property Conditions – As common to most municipalities in Georgia, some neighborhoods suffer more from property maintenance neglect, code violations and vacancy. Instances of property neglect, in neighborhoods as well as commercial districts, threaten to worsened conditions across an entire neighborhood or district if not quickly and effectively addressed.

High Rate of Rental vs. Owner-Occupied Housing – In 2015 the housing vacancy rate in Statesboro was 13.7%. Of the Occupied housing units, 21% were owner-occupied and 79% were renter-occupied. Comparatively, the rates in 2011 were 27.2% owner-

occupied and 72.8% renter-occupied. Related to neighborhood conditions, it is frequently (but not always) the case that higher levels of rental housing in a neighborhood can be associated with declining property values and maintenance levels. Conversely, it is generally accepted that higher levels of owner-occupancy will result in growing property values and improved maintenance. These generalities would seem to apply to Statesboro, thus a long term trend of decreasing levels of owner-occupancy in neighborhoods is a threat to stability.

To interpret for use in strategic planning, by addressing the internal factors through building upon identified Strengths (and other City strengths related or yet to be identified), and by taking actions to address Weaknesses, the City of Statesboro can positively impact the external factors, Opportunities and Threats. For example, by building on the community's trust relative to SPLOST (two decades of continuous SPLOST, voter approved) and addressing the upcoming SPLOST expiration through proactive steps towards reauthorization, the City can see a near-term future where SPLOST is approved again and, infrastructure needs (Threat) are met, and there is potential for additional infrastructure funding through TSPLOST (Opportunity). Conversely, if the weakness in the outlook for the City's General Fund (due to limitations on revenue sources and stagnant property tax revenues) remains, the likelihood of underfunding City services and losing experienced personnel (Threat) for economic reasons remains serious.

Potential Tools to Address Identified Weaknesses, Threats

There are a number of tools (or means, methods) readily available to the City of Statesboro to address identified Weaknesses and Threats. Examples are described below.

Tools to Address Weaknesses:

Finance Options Limitations (LOST) – Address by maximizing use of other potentially available finance options, including T-SPLOST, MOST, Impact Fees, etc. Also, CIDs and Public-Private

Partnership approached can be used to finance unique areas and/or projects, taking burden off of local government General Fund.

Stagnant Property Tax Revenues – Address through milage adjustment in the short term; for medium and longer term, bolster and increase the tax base through expansion of commercial/industrial development and revitalization of residential neighborhoods. Additionally, emphasize tax collections to ensure a consistently high rate of collections.

Expiring SPLOST – Use staff expertise and public information outlets to promote SPLOST reauthorization, with advanced planning and a public information campaign. Ensure that projects proposed for funding are strongly supportive of public interests (as expressed in survey responses). And use public information and promotional communications to illustrate the history of successful and responsible use of SPLOST funds to date. In other words, broadcast the story of good stewardship leading to critical accomplishments and creating value for taxpayers.

Limited Supporting Entities (non-profits, etc.) – Collaborate with existing non-profits and agencies to support and expand their contributions. And leverage existing partnerships with higher education institutions in the community to help foster new supporting entities in the subject areas where needed (e.g. housing, community revitalization, job training/re-training, etc.).

Aged Facilities and Infrastructure – Use available technical expertise (internal and external) to conduct a comprehensive City-owned facilities condition assessment, and build a straightforward, engineering-based decision support system to guide plans and budgeting for facilities and infrastructure maintenance, including repairs, upgrades and replacement. And take advantage of opportunities, particularly those involving land use planning and economic development, to accomplish infrastructure fixes.

Tools to Address Threats:

Loss of Trained City Staff to Other Jurisdictions – Use options for pay incentives as well as intangible factors to promote retention. For example, maximize opportunities for community support partnerships that express/reinforce community appreciation for City staff. Additionally, maximize potential benefits to City staff from participation in relevant larger organizations such as Georgia Municipal Association.

Outside Influences on Public Safety – Use established partnerships with Georgia Southern University police/safety officials to expand Community Policing in all areas where students reside. Also expand partnerships with the Georgia State Patrol, GBI and similar agencies to address public safety issues related to I-16.

Transience in Population (students) – Use partnerships with higher education institutions and other community institutions (e.g. churches) to promote options for graduating students to stay in Statesboro. Work to expand local industry, housing options and cultural/recreational offerings to make Statesboro more attractive to graduating students.

Negative Perceptions of Local Government – Use local media partners (Statesboro Herald, etc.) to expand coverage of City activities and initiatives to ‘tell the whole story’ and tout successes and accomplishments that bring value to residents. Also, to provide robust two-way communication, more fully engage City staff in receiving and responding to public comments about concerns (potentially adding technology tools to facilitate public comment).

Neighborhood Property Conditions and High Rate of Rental vs. Owner Occupied Housing – Linked to neighborhood revitalization, use existing staff and partnerships to establish programs to promote and facilitate home ownership. Engage with local lending institutions to promote local loan options for first time homebuyers. Strictly enforce housing/property maintenance codes to eliminate negative factors in neighborhoods that discourage investment. Leverage the partnership with University police/safety officials to address concerns associated with students who are

renters in the community. And coordinate efforts of property maintenance, code enforcement and policing to address multi-family residential properties that have declined.

The following chapter transitions from an understanding of key themes, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to identification of appropriate high-level strategies and opportunities for implementation.

Chapter 5. Implementation

■ Key Strategies

Strategies are intended to guide City of Statesboro implementation actions in a manner that will lead to desired results. Strategies should be responsive to the issues and themes that are drawn out from public input, and should also be consistent with the overall mission, vision and goals of the City. The following six key strategies can be methodically implemented to achieve desired results such as improved services, community enhancement, balance, sustainability, and consistently advancing quality of life.

- **CAPITALIZE** on great assets (people, education, downtown, neighborhoods)
- **EXPAND** financial capacity to provide high quality services and execute high priority projects
- **IMPLEMENT** high priority projects with quality of life benefits (paths, parks, etc.)
- **IMPROVE** communications to community members (share information, report accomplishments, involve citizens)
- **RETAIN and ATTRACT** value-generating businesses (provide jobs, build wealth and serve community needs)
- **ORGANIZE** public-private partnerships for community enhancement (public safety/code enforcement, education/training, historic preservation/revitalization, parks/greenspace)

Capitalize on Great Assets

Public opinion and reality show that Statesboro (the City and community) has a wide variety of great assets to build upon. Its people, education institutions, neighborhoods, historic downtown are key assets to develop and leverage.

People

The community overall is significantly defined by the people who comprise it, and great benefits can come from all efforts to respect and promote all members of the community. Of specific importance is the talented City staff that is critical to maintaining and enhancing the level of service the City provides to residents. Adequately funding and promoting City staff retention and professional development is critical to Statesboro's success.

Education

Statesboro has a strong base of University, Technical College and State College higher education assets, institutions that are consistently developing an educated and prepared workforce. City leadership and collaborative efforts to strengthen the partnerships between higher education and local government can increase the long-term positive impacts of local higher education on the Statesboro community.

Places

Historic downtown and the many city neighborhoods have character, uniqueness, quality and, in many cases, new vibrancy. Efforts to preserve, revitalize and reinvent these places must continue, and must be planned and implemented in a manner that is sensitive to physical structures and the people that make the places special.

Expand Financial Capacity

The ability of local government to provide services and execute projects is inextricably linked to financial capacity. And while it is not always true that more funds solve problems, there is a critical connection between financial capacity and the ability to sustain services and infrastructure. For Statesboro to enhance services and execute high priority projects, the City's financial outlook must be improved. Existing revenue sources must be expanded and/or extended, and the most advantageous new potential revenue sources pursued.

Property Tax Revenues

The long-term decline of property tax revenues is a significant challenge for the City. Property taxes contribute greatly to the City's General Fund, which is relied on heavily, especially for City staff salaries and benefits. While there are several options for funding infrastructure projects, the General Fund is the only option for funding many City services. A relatively unique challenge for Statesboro's General Fund is the fact that the City does not draw any revenue from the Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) in Bulloch County. In all but a very few Georgia communities, a portion of the 1% LOST is available to support the General Fund, but this is not an option for Statesboro (or Bulloch County) as all LOST revenues are directed to the School Board. Therefore, Statesboro's General Fund is significantly more reliant on Property Taxes than the typical municipality in Georgia.

Due to the combined effects of inflation, limited/marginal increase in the overall assessed value of property, and a property tax millage rate that has remained flat for a decade, the City of Statesboro's real revenue from property taxes has effectively decreased from 2007 to 2016. The property tax millage rate increase approved in September 2017 is required in order to address this problem in the short term. This is the first millage rate increase in ten years, and the impact of tax increase will be borne more by owners of non-residential property than by residential property owners due to the fact that approximately 70% of the tax base

today is non-residential. An increase from 6.358 to 7.308 mils will bring property tax revenues up to approximately \$400,000 (less than 10%) above the 2007 revenue level measured in 2017 dollars (recognizing that \$1 in 2007 dollars is equal to \$0.84 in 2017 dollars).

SPLOST

Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) revenues have consistently contributed to Statesboro's ability to fund critical projects for two decades. Though restricted to uses consistent with the SPLOST referendum and variable due to changing sales volumes, SPLOST is the critical revenue source to accomplish critical infrastructure projects. Without SPLOST, the General Fund would be stressed further, as SPLOST reduces the need to use General Fund revenues for capital improvements. Reauthorization of SPLOST is a time-sensitive and critical objective to accomplish.

New Revenue Options

Of several potential options for new major public revenue sources, the recently established (by State of Georgia) potential for Statesboro and Bulloch County to establish a Transportation SPLOST (TSPLOST) in addition to the traditional SPLOST warrants serious consideration. Though a TSPLOST referendum previously failed at the regional level, there are success stories from other regions that passed TSPLOST (ex. Augusta region). If passed, a Statesboro/Bulloch TSPLOST would complement SPLOST, making more funding available for quality of life projects such as parks, trails and greenways. As an additional benefit, transportation projects funded by TSPLOST (and not involving federal transportation funding) can typically be executed quicker and more efficiently.

Other potential new revenue options, including MOST, CIDs and Development Impact Fees, should be explored as well. Impact fees, in particular, provide a flexible option to raise revenue specifically tied to new growth and development. Many Georgia communities use impact fees to keep up with the pace of growth and

demands on parks, transportations, public safety and other factors. (See also **Financing Alternatives**.)

Implement High Priority Projects

Project prioritization through the CIP and other planning tools is an ongoing process. Some required infrastructure requirements simply address unseen functional needs and have no real potential for additional quality of life benefits. However many projects, if not most, have the potential for visible associated quality of life benefits. By assessing each infrastructure project in the pre-design and design stages, opportunities for multiple benefits can be identified. For example, the need to fix a deteriorated stormwater pipe could lead to daylighting a previously hidden stream and incorporating portions of a greenway trail. Key means to enhance quality of life benefits from infrastructure projects include coordinating early stage project planning, actively seeking multiple benefit opportunities, involving expert managers and establishing sound funding strategies.

Once the prioritization and maximum benefit analyses have been completed, it is critical for projects to proceed to implementation as quickly as possible. The longer a project waits for construction, the more likely to experience cost increases, complaints, and complications. Effective management is most important for the critical stage of moving a project from paper to built reality.

Improve Communications

Effective two-way communications with community stakeholders is critical. As the highest percentage of questionnaire respondents indicated the Statesboro Herald as their primary information source, enhancing the partnership between the City and local media outlets including the Herald is of strategic importance. This should include close coordination to get new information broadcast to the community quickly, and also identifying opportunities for more in-depth feature stories.

The City website and associated/linked social media platforms are also critical for communications. Web-based communications is a fast changing environment, and Statesboro needs to regularly review and update City web and social media platforms to remain current and effective.

Technology also facilitates effective citizen reporting, and there are increasing options for effective citizen reporting systems that can empower citizens to assist the City. To gain the greatest benefit from a new investment, explore options for a coordinated system that will allow citizens to report issues using multiple forms of technology.

Retain and Attract Value Generating Businesses

Economic development often focuses on new business recruitment, which is important in most communities, but equally or more important is retention of existing businesses. By placing emphasis on both retention and recruitment, and by performing adequate due diligence to accurately understand the value of individual businesses to the community, investments in economic development can pay off at a higher level. As a starting point, there are recommendations from many previous plans/studies to carry through (Blue Mile, TAD/Redevelopment Plan, Downtown Master Plan, etc.). Related and additionally, partnerships for economic development are critical, and great benefits can come from expanded partnerships with Georgia Southern University, Ogeechee Technical College, East Georgia State College, the local business community and other governmental entities. Smart investment in economic development is the key.

Organize Public-Private Partnerships

Many effective partnerships are already in pace and bearing fruit. The example of the partnerships forming around the Blue Mile can give rise to additional partnerships to address a wide range of com-

munity issues, including public safety, code enforcement, education/workforce development, historic preservation, neighborhood revitalization, parks/greenspace/trails and business expansion.

■ Strategic Initiatives

Analysis comparing strategies to identified needs, including those brought forth through community survey results, leads to definition of initiatives that Statesboro leadership can rally around and push forward in a coordinated manner. By definition, an initiative is “an introductory act or step; a leading action.” City leadership is required to start (or in many cases continue to lead) efforts that will result in accomplishment of objectives that are consistent with strategy. Each initiative described below is rooted in the work that the City of Statesboro has been engaged in for some time, or a long time. The purpose of defining these distinct and recognizable initiatives is to rally support and encourage the allocation of appropriate resources to push forward. These initiatives are generally achievable in a five year timeframe, with most starting immediately. Cost estimates reflect spending anticipated for 2018-2023. Initiatives will change over time as objectives are accomplished and projects are constructed, while the underlying strategies will remain relevant and useful to inform future initiatives.

1. Bike/Ped Improvements Initiative: \$3 million

Implement connected bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects citywide in accordance with established plans (e.g. Long Range Transportation Plan) and consistently engage with residents to identify additional needs to provide a comprehensive network of sidewalks, paths and greenways.

- Secure funding for bike/ped projects through SPLOST, TSPLOST and other appropriate sources.
- Ensure the quick and complete repair of sidewalks and paths when necessary (e.g. due to road projects, utilities projects, etc.).

2. Business Recruitment & Retention Initiative: \$100,000

Proactively and strategically reach out to existing businesses to encourage retention and expansion in concert with efforts to identify and recruit desirable new businesses for the community. Staff efforts and partnerships

- Prepare a joint Economic Development Strategy to inform and foster frequent and ongoing collaboration on economic development efforts by the Bulloch County Development Authority, Statesboro-Bulloch Chamber of Commerce and City of Statesboro Planning & Development Department.
- Explore innovative and creative economic development options in partnership with higher education institutions in Statesboro.
- Pursue the potential opportunity to participate in the UGA Archway Partnership.

3. Clean and Beautiful Community Initiative: \$500,000

Improve community attractiveness and property maintenance through a combination of City staff efforts, incentive-based and enforcement-based methods.

- Continue to support the Keep Statesboro-Bulloch Beautiful Commission.
- Clearly identify key aspects of property maintenance codes along with the roles and responsibilities of City code enforcement personnel.
- Use a public information campaign to communicate code enforcement-related information to residents and encourage compliance.
- Conduct a study for establishment of a recycling program.

4. Community Communications Initiative: \$250,000

Update City communications tools and manage relationships with key partners that allow effective communications with the widest range of residents and employees in Statesboro.

- Enhance existing City communications tools (e.g. website update, wide distribution email contact, social media outlets use, etc.)
- Add a resident response system to allow residents to easily communicate concerns, questions or requests to City officials (dedicated phone system, smartphone app, website-based mechanism or combination of all three)
- Assign and empower staff to manage partnership with local media outlets (e.g. Statesboro Herald)
- Assign and empower staff to manage partnership with University media/communications (GSU as well as Ogeechee Tech, etc.)

5. Essential Infrastructure & Facilities Maintenance Initiative: \$12 million

Accomplish maintenance and enhancement of essential City infrastructure and facilities in a manner that is sustainable, proactive and prioritized based on objective technical analysis. Include consideration of "soft indebtedness", meaning yet to be quantified infrastructure costs. The extent of soft indebtedness should be understood through completion of infrastructure and facilities condition assessment.

- Complete a comprehensive public infrastructure and facilities condition assessment to provide an accurate baseline for prioritization and investment decisions.
- Maintain a Capital Improvements Plan that is based on assessment and updated annually.

- Prepare a long-range essential infrastructure and facilities plan that is coordinated with planning for land use, transportation, economic development and historic preservation.

6. Greenspace Improvements & Maintenance Initiative: \$1.1 million/\$220,000 per year

Maintain and improve all public greenspaces in the City (in partnership with Bulloch County, as appropriate) to a high level of quality, attractiveness, functionality and environmental sustainability. Cost estimate does not include maintenance for County-maintained parks (whether City-owned or County-owned).

- Ensure adequate staffing and funding of greenspace maintenance operations.
- Promote opportunities for community/business partnerships in greenspace maintenance and beautification.
- Engage an arborist in the greenspace maintenance process to provide technical assessment of existing trees for proper maintenance, and to identify opportunities for urban forestry enhancement.

7. Neighborhood Development Initiative \$250,000

Establish a broad community and multi-agency partnership to accomplish revitalization and enhancement of city neighborhoods, including repair/renovation to existing homes as well as infill development and redevelopment, where required, to add new homes to existing neighborhoods.

- Maximize beneficial use of tools available to the Housing Authority, Land Bank, and other local agencies.
- Foster and support non-profit community development corporations.
- Engage with lending institutions and State and Federal entities/programs (e.g. the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Georgia Dream Homeownership Program) to promote and facilitate home ownership.

- Track the status/statistics of owner-occupancy, renter-occupancy and vacancy across the community on an annual basis; target increase in the rate of owner-occupied housing.

8. Optimize City Department Staffing Levels and Competitiveness Initiative: \$750,000

Complete a Staffing and Salary Study (to be updated regularly) to serve as a guide for efforts to appropriately staff City departments and retain experienced City personnel.

- Engage a qualified human resources consultant to complete a Staffing and Salary Study, including evaluation of the competitive position of Statesboro relative to the region.
- Partner with community businesses and institutions (e.g. churches) to regularly express appreciation for City personnel and welcome new employees into the community.

9. Optimize Public Safety Staffing Levels and Competitiveness Initiative: \$2 million

Complete a Staffing and Salary Study (to be updated regularly) to serve as a guide for efforts to appropriately staff Police and Fire departments and retain experienced public safety personnel. Funding provided through millage increase approved September 2017.

- Engage a qualified human resources consultant to complete a Staffing and Salary Study, including evaluation of the competitive position of Statesboro relative to the region.
- Partner with community businesses and institutions (e.g. churches) to regularly express appreciation for first responders and welcome new employees into the community.

10. South Main Street (Blue Mile area) Implementation Initiative: \$4.4 million

Implement the improvements to South Main Street between Fair Road and Tillman Road consistent with the Blue Mile plan through

effective use of grant funds awarded; pursue additional funding to accomplish planned objectives for the Blue Mile.

- Cultivate the partnerships that are required to realize successful Blue Mile implementation.
- Expedite construction of planned improvements to maintain momentum created by America's Best Community program recognition.
- Use the Blue Mile Tax Allocation District strategically to support the highest impact opportunities.
- Coordinate design and construction of infrastructure improvements/enhancements associated with Blue Mile with all entities involved in infrastructure maintenance to ensure effective use of limited funds to accomplish multiple purposes.

11. Traffic Safety Implementation Initiative: \$14.4 million

Design and construct/install high priority traffic safety improvements quickly and in accordance with established plans/engineering studies.

- Implement LRTP traffic safety improvement recommendations as highest priority investments.
- Proactively coordinate with GDOT to identify and accomplish traffic safety improvements on State Routes in the city limits.
- Complete priority local roadway improvements.

12. West Main Street Initiative: \$2.5 million

Fund, design and construct enhancements to the West Main Street corridor in accordance with plans and objectives.

- Include West Main Street funding in SPLOST and/or TSPLOST initiatives.
- Coordinate and connect West Main Street improvements with the broader bike/ped facilities network.

■ Financing Alternatives

TSPLOST

Bulloch County and Statesboro are authorized to jointly adopt a sales tax for transportation purposes (Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, or TSPLOST) pursuant to Title 48, Chapter 8, Article 5A, Part 1 of the State Code.

History

Senate Bill 369 was passed by the Georgia General Assembly in the 2015-2016 legislative session to authorize the City of Atlanta and Fulton County to hold referendums for the levy of TSPLOST sales taxes within each jurisdiction. Under the title “Special District Mass Transportation³ Sales and Use Tax”, the law authorized sales taxes to be collected for road projects as well as mass transit systems. As amended by HB 323 in 2017, all counties in which SPLOST taxes were being collected were authorized to also adopt transportation sales taxes for transportation purposes.

Authorized Use of Revenues

The following is drawn from O.C.G.A. § 48-8-260 through 269.6:

- A TSPLOST tax may be authorized under this law for “road, street and bridge” projects for a period of five years by referendum approval and meeting other requirements of the law.
- Eligible “road, street and bridge” projects include sidewalks and bicycle paths. Improvement costs include maintenance and renovations as well as new construction, and run the full gamut from land acquisition and construction/improvement costs, to debt financing. The retirement of existing debt related to these types of transportation projects is also allowed.

³ “Mass transportation” is defined in the Act to include “any mode of transportation serving the general public which is appropriate to transport people by highways or rail.”

Process

To establish a TSPLOST for Statesboro and Bulloch County, the following process would be required:

1. County convenes a joint meeting of the Board of Commissioners and the City Council to discuss possible projects and the tax rate.
2. After the meeting, an intergovernmental agreement may be prepared establishing their agreement to levy the TSPLOST tax and the tax rate. With an intergovernmental agreement, the tax may be at a rate of up to 1 percent. Without an agreement, the tax is limited to .75% (or less, as determined by the County). Any tax rate less than the maximum must be in an increment of 0.05%.
3. The intergovernmental agreement must include:
 - A list of the projects to be undertaken, the estimated costs to be funded by the tax, and the priority or order in which the projects will be funded. At least 30 percent of the estimated revenue must be spent on projects consistent with DOT’s Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan.
 - The procedures and a schedule for distributing the tax proceeds to Statesboro must be described.
 - Relevant accounting, record-keeping and audit procedures.
4. Based on the list of transportation projects to be funded and the estimated cost (including debt service if applicable), as well as the proposed period of time in years and the tax rate, a referendum is then called by the County, to be held during the next scheduled election.

Upon approval by referendum, the T-SPLOST tax may start on the first day of the next succeeding calendar quarter which begins more than 80 days later.

The tax collections will stop when the stated time period is reached (up to 5 years) or at the end of the calendar quarter within which net collections will have generated the stated amount to be raised by the tax. [Note that 1% of the taxes collected are to be remitted to the State "to defray the cost of administration".]

A new TSPLOST tax can be authorized by referendum while an existing TSPLOST tax is being collected, but cannot begin until the existing tax is terminated. The new tax must follow the same process as that required for the initial tax (summarized above).

The tax is limited to those items subject to State sales tax, except for certain specified items (such as gasoline and the purchase or lease of a motor vehicle), but can be levied on food and food ingredients.

Estimated Revenue

The table on the following page provides a rough preliminary estimate of potential TSPLOST tax returns **countywide**, assuming a start date by the beginning of 2019. For the five-year TSPLOST program, possibly a bit more than \$41 million would be collected.

Based on the current 2013 SPLOST City/County program, the City is receiving about 60% of the countywide sales tax collections. Assuming that rate represents a fair share of sales tax generated within the city, for the TSPLOST the City may expect to receive \$24.6 million over the five-year program period. At a lower rate of 30%, the City may receive half that (\$12.3 million).

MOST

Though not a current or previous revenue source for Statesboro, the City is authorized to adopt a sales tax for water and sewer projects (Municipal Option Sales Tax, or MOST) pursuant to Title 48, Chapter 8, Article 4 entitled "Water and Sewer Projects and Costs Tax" of the State Code.

Criteria / Authorized Use of Revenue

The following is drawn from O.C.G.A. § 48-8-200 through 212:

- To qualify, the City must have an average wastewater flow of 85 mgd or more.
- Costs can include water, stormwater and sewer system capital improvements, maintenance and operations.

There are various arcane limitations in the State law that should be carefully studied by the water and sewer administration, but do not appear to be serious or unsurmountable. Legal advice and interpretation may be required.

Process

To initiate a MOST, the City must forward a resolution to the County calling for a referendum for the imposition of the tax. If the County decides to not be involved, the City can take appropriate action, subject to the requirement of referendum approval, to seek to impose within the city a special sales and use tax for the purpose of funding water and sewer projects and costs.

The allowed tax rate is 1%, for a period of up to 4 years, up to a stated maximum cost of the project and maintenance and operation costs, including the principal and interest on any General Obligation bond to be issued for the project.

In addition to the items subject to the State sales tax (but not including the sale of motor vehicles), the following are also taxable:

1. Sales of motor fuels as prepaid local tax as that term is defined in the State Code (Section 48-8-2);
2. The sale of food, food ingredients and alcoholic beverages;
3. The sale of natural or artificial gas used directly in the production of electricity which is subsequently sold; and
4. The furnishing of any room or rooms, lodgings, or accommodations which is subject to taxation under Article 3 of Chapter 13 (Excise Tax on Rooms, Lodgings, and Accommodations) of Title 48.

There is a cap on taxes: the aggregate amount of all excise taxes and all sales and use taxes shall not exceed 14 percent. If the tax is approved by referendum, it may start on the first day of the next succeeding calendar quarter which begins more than 80 days later.

Projected Retail Sales in Bulloch County

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Retail Sales	\$ 979,591,000	\$ 1,003,997,000	\$ 1,028,290,000	\$ 1,052,544,000	\$ 1,076,950,000
Motor vehicles and parts dealers	178,060,000	181,999,000	185,989,000	189,680,000	193,198,000
Furniture and home furnishing stores	19,762,000	20,610,000	21,364,000	22,045,000	22,670,000
Electronics and appliance stores	9,005,000	9,289,000	9,528,000	9,738,000	9,930,000
Building materials, garden equipment and supplies	120,476,000	123,186,000	125,922,000	128,605,000	131,298,000
Food and beverage stores	76,619,000	77,818,000	78,831,000	79,911,000	81,016,000
Health and personal care	72,043,000	74,292,000	76,356,000	78,373,000	80,393,000
Gasoline stations	97,765,000	100,179,000	102,675,000	105,267,000	107,958,000
Clothing and clothing accessories stores	37,048,000	37,797,000	38,553,000	39,326,000	40,105,000
Sporting goods, hobby, book, and music stores	14,339,000	14,484,000	14,655,000	14,848,000	15,050,000
General merchandise stores	179,355,000	185,049,000	190,725,000	196,420,000	202,145,000
Miscellaneous store	25,298,000	25,888,000	26,485,000	27,096,000	27,719,000
Nonstore retailers	26,070,000	26,845,000	27,636,000	28,451,000	29,286,000
Eating and drinking places	123,751,000	126,561,000	129,571,000	132,784,000	136,182,000
TSPLOST taxable	\$ 703,766,000	\$ 721,819,000	\$ 739,626,000	\$ 757,597,000	\$ 775,794,000
Potential Countywide Return at 1% maximum tax	\$ 7,037,660	\$ 7,218,190	\$ 7,396,260	\$ 7,575,970	\$ 7,757,940
Five-Year Total					\$ 41,044,880
MOST taxable	\$ 801,531,000	\$ 821,998,000	\$ 842,301,000	\$ 862,864,000	
Potential Countywide Return at 1% maximum tax	\$ 8,015,310	\$ 8,219,980	\$ 8,423,010	\$ 8,628,640	
Four-Year Total				\$ 33,286,940	

Source: US Department of Commerce retail sales data for 2002, 2007 & 2012; interpolated and projected by Woods & Poole Economics, 2017.

Estimated Revenue

The table below provides a rough preliminary estimate of potential sales tax returns countywide, assuming a start date by the beginning of 2019. For the four-year period, possibly a bit more than \$29 million could be collected countywide (assuming 60% of sales would occur in the City). Actual collections within the city would be less, although the majority of businesses collecting the tax would be located within the city.

The tax collections would stop when the stated time period is reached (up to 4 years) or at the end of the calendar quarter within which the City would have received the stated amount to be raised by the tax.

The City may receive approval through referendum to re-impose a MOST tax when the current tax ends, but for no more than three times.

Community Improvement Districts (CIDs)

Community Improvement Districts are, in essence, geographic areas where the owners of business properties come together to tax themselves for improvements or services beyond those provided by the City. While this does not represent “tax relief” for the City—it still must provide city services to the area as available citywide—it addresses the desire of a particular business community for a higher level of service than the City provides citywide and therefore in their particular area.

There are presently no CIDs in Statesboro or Bulloch County. Creation of a CID requires a local enabling act of the General Assembly, which would apply countywide without application to a specific area. Once enabled, the creation of a particular CID requires the written consent of the owners within the proposed CID who collectively own at least 75% by value of all nonresidential real property that would be subject to the CID taxes, consent by a majority of all owners of real property within the CID, and a resolution of the City consenting to the creation of the CID.

Process

Owners of property used for residential, agricultural or forestry purposes do not pay the CID millage assessment, but can be included geographically within the boundaries of a CID for continuity.

Upon creation, a Board of Directors is elected by and from among the nonresidential property owners to tend to the affairs of the district, to receive and budget the CID taxes collected by the County, and to control the expenditures of those funds on behalf of the district. City representation is required on the Board for coordination purposes.

Through a CID, a special taxing district is created to pay for the exceptional infrastructure or service needs of the CID. The taxes are collected by the County Tax Commissioner and rebated directly to the CID Board of Directors. CIDs in Georgia have particularly focused on transportation and mobility improvements and public

safety services, but can otherwise focus on a wide range of “public” services and facilities to which the City agrees.

Assessments are established by the CID Board, but cannot exceed 2.5% of the assessed value of the real property, i.e. 25 mills. Most CIDs have adopted millage rates around 5 mills at most.

Bonded debt is permitted but rarely used because such debt may not be considered an obligation of the State or any other government other than the CID.

Development Impact Fees

Communities provide public facilities, such as parks and recreation facilities, fire stations and fire engines, police facilities, etc., at a certain level of service. For instance, the number of park acres available for each household or the number of fire trucks to serve the city’s residents and businesses. As a community grows, however, there are typically two basic choices—should the facilities remain the same and thus serve the larger population at a lower/deteriorated level of service, or should the facilities be increased so that the level of service, enjoyed by the existing population, is not allowed to deteriorate in the face of new growth? In other words, should new growth contribute in a specified way in order to be served equally to today’s population?

The Georgia Development Impact Fee law was enacted to address this specific dilemma. When property taxes are relied upon to fund expansions of the capital infrastructure serving all residents and businesses, the slowly growing tax contributions from new growth and development are miniscule compared to the tax contributions from the existing tax base. An impact fee program seeks to level this playing field by charging a fee as new growth occurs (i.e., new building permits are issued) so that new growth contributes its fair share of the cost of providing the facilities needed to serve the new residents and businesses at the same level of service as existing development.

Process

To enact an impact fee, the City would need to determine the “fair share” contribution from new growth needed to maintain or achieve the City’s preferred level of service that would apply to all residents and businesses. The facilities needed to achieve that level of service would be included in a Capital Improvements Element, which would be reviewed and approved by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and, upon approval, be adopted by the City as part of its Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, the City would adopt an Impact Fee Ordinance creating the fee and providing for its administration.

If the City felt that the impact fees would be too high and detrimental to the desired growth of the city, it could share the burden between new growth and existing taxpayers by adopting an impact fee at a level less than the maximum allowed.

The City has a wide range of public facility categories from which to choose to consider, including:

- Water supply production, treatment, and distribution facilities;
- Wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal facilities;
- Roads, streets, and bridges, including rights of way, traffic signals, landscaping, and any local components of state or federal highways;
- Storm-water collection, retention, detention, treatment, and disposal facilities, flood control facilities, and bank and shore protection and enhancement improvements;
- Parks, open space, and recreation areas and related facilities;
- Public safety facilities, including police, fire, emergency medical, and rescue facilities; and
- Libraries and related facilities.

Importantly, impact fees can work in conjunction with sales tax programs, such as TSPLOST, MOST and SPLOST, in providing a full court press for funding future needs.

It is not possible to estimate the potential income that could be generated by impact fees until a detailed analysis of public facility categories selected by the City, level of service standards, and potential new growth demands can be assessed and calculated. As noted, however, impact fees shift the cost of the construction of new public facilities from the City (and its property tax base) to new growth as it occurs. Interim financing solutions, however, may be required as the need for the new facilities occurs in anticipation of new growth’s financial contributions.