

Heart of Coastal Georgia Plan

**Comprehensive Plan of McIntosh County
and City of Darien**



McIntosh County
Georgia



Darien
Georgia

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Acknowledgments

Steering Committee Members

City Appointments

- Mayor - Hugh "Bubba" Hodge
- Mayor Pro Tem - Augustus "Bubba" Skeen
- City Manager - Richard Braun
- City Zoning Board Chair - Father Bill Barton
- City Building Inspector - Kieran McMullen
- DDA Board Member - Ruster Quarterman

County Appointments

- Vice Chairman - Kate Karwacki
- Commissioner - Roger Lotson
- County Manager - Patrick Zoucks
- Building and Zoning Administrator - Archie Davis
- McIntosh County Zoning Board Chairman - Jamie Brenton
- McIntosh County IDA Member - Chris Harper

Joint Appointments

- McIntosh School Superintendent - Dr. Jim Pulos
- Chamber of Commerce Director - Kat Hoyt
- Joint Historic Preservation Commission - Onetha Hart

Stakeholder Committee Members

County Appointments

- Micheal Hardy
- Davis Poole
- James McKenzie
- Maurice Bailey
- Lee Brant
- Michael Gumulauskas
- Jackie Mull
- Genevieve Wynegar
- Jen Ferguson
- Dionne Lovett
- Martha Williams
- Frank Williams

City Representatives

- Clay Hutchinson
- Kathy Scott
- Zack Rath
- Carrie Rath
- Chad Simpson
- Charles Potts
- Zach Crumpler
- Caterina Crumpler
- Noel Gielghem

Acknowledgments

Coastal Regional Commission Staff

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Karen Saunders, Grants Specialist

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Plan Overview

The Plan Overview provides a brief summary of the Comprehensive Plan elements:

- *Executive Summary*
- *Scope*
- *Boundary and Description*
- *Methodology*

Executive Summary

The McIntosh County and City of Darien Joint Comprehensive Plan is a living document updated and shaped by its leadership, staff, and citizens. It is a policy guide for making zoning and land use decisions, and it sets policies for City officials and staff concerning the future development of the community.

The Comprehensive Plan is a long-range land use plan to guide future growth and the physical development of the community. The goals and policies within the Comprehensive Plan are designed to help McIntosh County and City of Darien become prosperous, healthy, equitable, and resilient.

The Heart of the Coast Comprehensive Plan is updated every five years, as required by the "Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning," (Minimum Standards) adopted by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The latest version of these standards can be found in O.C.G.A Chapter 110-12-1, effective March 2014.

In meeting these standards, this Plan enables McIntosh and Darien to maintain its Qualified Local Government (QLG) status, making it eligible to receive certain types of state funding. This plan update reassesses where the communities are today and how it intends to grow in the future. Following the Minimum Standards, the plan presents a community vision, goals, and a work program designed to make the vision a reality.



Scope

In keeping with the Minimum Standards, this plan is presented in three components:

1. Community Vision – which lays out the future vision and goals that the community wants to achieve in text and maps; and
2. Needs and Opportunities – which provides a list of the various needs and opportunities that the community will address; and
3. Community Work Program – which provides a 5-year Short Term Work Program designed to address the needs and opportunities. This program includes activities, initiatives, programs, ordinances, and administrative systems to be put into place or maintained to implement the plan.

In addition, the plan incorporates planning elements as defined by the DCA Minimum Standards that are important to shaping the future of the community.

A Record of Accomplishments highlighting the success of the previous Short-Term Work Program, a description of the public involvement process, and a report on how this plan is consistent with the Regional Water Plan and Environmental Planning Criteria is a part of this report.



Boundary and Description

McIntosh County is one of six coastal counties in Georgia and is home to the second oldest city in the state. McIntosh County was created in 1893 and became the state's 17th County. The County has a total area of 575 square miles; 433 square miles is upland and 142 square miles is water. Nearly one-third of the land area in McIntosh County is owned by state and federal governments. Adjacent counties include Liberty County to the north, Glynn County to the south, Wayne County on its western corner, and Long County on the northwest corner.

The City of Darien is the second oldest city in the State of Georgia and was originally called New Inverness. Darien was founded in 1736 by Scottish Highlanders recruited by James Oglethorpe to act as settler-soldiers protecting the frontiers of Georgia, and the city was designed in accordance with the Oglethorpe Plan. Into the early 1900s, Darien was one of the largest Southeastern ports for shipping lumber, but its dominance in the lumber industry ceased by 1916 due to overharvested trees along the Altamaha. By 1930, Darien's population had declined by 50 percent and led those who chose to stay to take up commercial fishing. Over time, Darien's commercial fishing industry evolved from its simple beginnings in the largest commercial fleet in Georgia. Today, the City has a total area of 2 square miles and has an elevation of 30 ft above sea level.



The McIntosh and Darien community is rich in historical, cultural, and environmental resources. The natural environment boasts live oak canopies, expansive marshland vistas, and barrier islands, creating a distinctive atmosphere that defines this community at the center of Georgia's coast.

Methodology

The public outreach effort launched for this plan update included two public hearings, a kick-off meeting, four joint steering/stakeholder meetings, three community wide listening sessions, a public survey that was available online on the McIntosh County Commissioners website and the Coastal Regional Commissions website available for two months. The survey was available in paper form at all three listening sessions.

Meeting June 1, 2022 - Discussed combining McIntosh and Darien to have a joint comprehensive plan. Agreed on upcoming dates to meet and officials were tasked with providing a list for the steering committee.

June 30, 2022 - Public Hearing-Kick-Off Meeting. The purpose of the public hearing was to announce the update of the comprehensive plan for Darien and McIntosh County. At this meeting, the current 2018 comprehensive plan was reviewed followed by a public input opportunity. The CRC shared the process that it would follow in completing the 5-year update.

July 19, 2022 - First Steering Committee met and established a stakeholders committee. Discussed the elements of a comprehensive plan and visions and goals from the 2018 plan along with baseline data. Discussed target dates for future meetings.

August 11, 2022 - Steering Committee and Stakeholders present. Had a PowerPoint presentation discussing common visions, needs, and opportunities for Darien and McIntosh.

August 31, 2022 - Steering and Stakeholder Committee meeting. Discussed visions and goals. A S.W.O.T. Analysis was held. Members separated into five groups and developed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the community.

Public Listening Sessions - Three public listening sessions were held as follows:

1. Nov. 12, 2022 - 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. a table was set up at Downtown Darien during The Second Saturday Event.
2. Nov. 15, 2022 - 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. a table was set up at Sweet Tee's Log Cabin Restaurant in Darien.
3. Nov. 17, 2022 - 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 pm a table was set up at Sapelo Hammock Golf Club in Shellman Bluff.

An online survey was conducted and available on the McIntosh County Commissioners website and on the Coastal Regional Commissions website. The survey was available from Nov. 8, 2022, to Dec. 9, 2022, with 88 recorded surveys taken.

Advertisements for the draft of the Joint Comprehensive Plan to be reviewed were placed in the Darien News Jan. 4, 2023, edition and Jan. 11, 2023, edition. The transmittal public hearings were held on January 17, 2023, at 5:30 at the Darien City Hall and Jan. 19, 2023, at 5:00 pm and the McIntosh County Courthouse.



Community Vision and Goals

The Community Vision and Goals identify a direction for the future and are intended to serve as a guide to McIntosh and Darien officials. The element embraces the common vision captured through the public participatory process and include the following components:

- *Vision Statement*
- *Community Goals*
- *General Policies*
- *Future Land Use Map*

Vision Statement

The Community Vision paints a picture of what McIntosh and Darien desire to become. The vision statement offered below was refined through discussion with the Steering Committee members:

“The communities of McIntosh and Darien are the thriving Heart of Coastal Georgia, taking pride in their countless coastal treasures. Accessible natural and infrastructure arterials invite all to experience the unmatched natural beauty and preserved cultural history only to be found here. These communities welcome residential and economic growth that compliments the small-town, coastal environment, while taking into consideration the lifelong residents.”

While the vision above is descriptive of the McIntosh and Darien communities, it is necessary to understand the framework by which this vision was created. The following descriptors should help understand the vision:

1. Environmental and Historical Stewardship: The unique natural and historical resources must be preserved for the benefit of current and future generations. Residents describe these resources as vital to the character and identity of the community.
2. Economic Growth: The residents of McIntosh and Darien do not believe that economic growth must be sacrificed in order to be good stewards of the community's natural and historic resources. That is, industrial development should be small to medium in size and be focused to identified industrial areas. Commercial growth should promote tourism, grant safe access to natural attractions, or support livable community initiatives.
3. Enhanced Infrastructure: McIntosh and Darien must ensure adequate infrastructure exists to make this vision a reality. The Stakeholder Committee stressed the importance of maximizing infrastructure capacity where development already exists.
4. Livable Communities: The McIntosh and Darien community desires more support services and businesses for residents of all ages. To realize the vision of this plan, decision makers should prioritize alternative transportation options, family and elderly services, and healthcare. Livable communities are necessary for growth.

The vision addresses the community's desire to maintain the small-town, coastal identity, while promoting complementary economic development opportunities.

The vision is supported by the following overarching goals to help shape McIntosh and Darien future

Community Goals and Policies

The McIntosh and Darien community identified several goals to make the vision a continuing reality. The following goals represent the recurring themes and received the highest rankings among community stakeholders. Like the vision statement, the goals were derived from a vetting process involving County staff, the steering and stakeholder committees, and members of the public.

Policies set preferred direction and describe general guidance to decision makers to achieve goals. Policies are specific enough to help determine whether a proposed project would advance the values expressed in the goals, but flexible enough to allow for varying solutions. The plan's policies are intended to provide on-going guidance and direction to county and city officials in implementing the Heart of the Coast Comprehensive Plan. The policies are organized by goal.



Community Goals and Policies

Goal 1

Preserve, enhance, and promote the area's natural, cultural, and historic resources

The natural, historic, and cultural resources associated with the people, events, and characteristics of the McIntosh and Darien community provide a sense of identity and collectively tell a most unique story. These resources are tangible resources of this community. Throughout the planning process, participants expressed pride in these abundant assets, with the goal of developing and incorporating them into economic development efforts while preserving and protecting them.

- **Work with private landowners and the State of Georgia to enhance the access, safety, and educational facilities on Sapelo Island.**
- **Seek to provide public dockage for day-visitors and work with the State of Georgia to make ferry schedules visitor friendly.**
- **Collaborate with the federal government to enhance access and educational opportunities at the Harris Neck Wildlife Refuge.**
- **Collaborate with the Chamber of Commerce to promote natural, historical, and cultural assets.**
- **Promote the Altamaha River Corridor, including access to boating, kayaking, commercial fishing, and sports fishing.**
- **Create additional opportunities for kayak/boating tours in various waterways.**
- **Partner with the State of Georgia on enhancing eco-tourism throughout the community.**
- **Identify and pursue sources of funding to preserve historic structures.**

Community Goals and Policies

Goal 2

Improve the reputation of the community's schools as a place to invest, work, and educate

During the planning process, the stakeholder committee identified making the connection between educational attainment and economic development opportunities a pressing goal. Though the school system has improved in the past five years with a graduation rate of 99 percent, the McIntosh and Darien community is facing dreary social indicators, including: cost-burdened homeowners and renters, an exodus of families and aging demographic, and little private investment.

A thriving, robust education system is vital to the economic lifeblood and family foundation of a community

- **Collaborate with the Board of Education and other partners to strengthen schools in education, reputation, and workforce preparedness.**

Goal 3

Remove blight and improve cost-burdened housing

The government standard for cost-burdened housing is where housing expenses, including utilities, exceed 30 percent of one's income. The goal for McIntosh and Darien is to remove blight, ensure zoning ordinances support affordable housing solutions, and offer a diverse range of housing options.

- **Develop and implement ordinances that remove blight and foster affordable, diverse housing opportunities.**

Community Goals and Policies

Goal 4

Maintain the sense of place and small-town character of the community

Defining a community's sense of place is a complex, multi-faceted process. It's a blending of physical characteristics of the area with its culture, history, natural environment, and residents. A sense of place emerges through knowledge of these components.

Throughout the public participation process, residents expressed the uniqueness of the McIntosh and Darien community. The goal is to invite development that maintains the sense of place and small-town character.

- **County and city officials shall ensure that development, programs, and partnerships support the community's sense of place and adhere to the objectives detailed in the comprehensive plan.**

Goal 5

Develop transportation alternatives and ensure urban areas are pedestrian freindly

Offering pedestrian and cycling friendly alternative transportation is a key component to a livable community. As the population of the community continues to increase in age, transportation alternatives will offer an aging demographic increased mobility.

The goal of McIntosh and Darien is to ensure pedestrian and cyclist safety in urban areas and developing the East Coast Greenway throughout the county.

- **Expand pedestrian and biking access throughout the community.**
- **Promote bike and pedestrian safety.**
- **Pursue the completion of the East Coast Greenway in McIntosh County.**

Community Goals and Policies

Goal 6

Attract development and ecotourism that complement the area's natural resources

The Stakeholder Committee communicated a strong desire to invite economic growth to the community. Small to medium industrial development is desired in the county's industrial park and commercial growth that supports the tourism sector.

The goal of the community is to invite development that supports the industrial park, existing tourist industry, and natural and historical preservation initiatives

- **Promote development that supports the ecotourism industry.**
- **Support small to medium industrial development at designated industrial sites.**
- **Work with the state to promote and develop safe access to the community's natural resources.**
- **Promote the community's**



Land Use

The Future Land Use Maps are a visual representation of the County's future land use. Interpretation of the Future Land Use Map is provided in the supporting Future Land Use table.

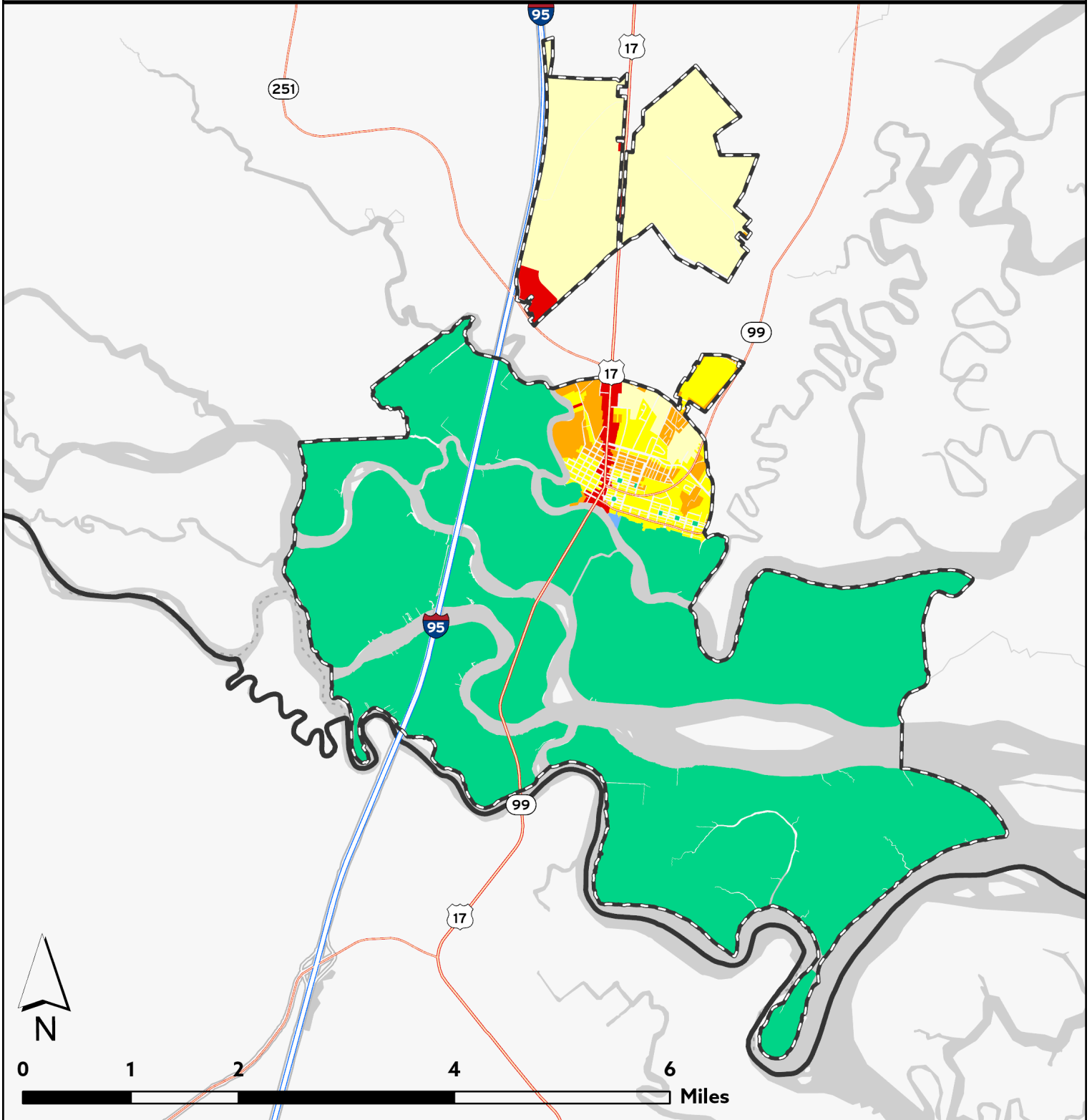
- *Darien Character Areas*
- *Darien Future Land Use*
- *McIntosh Character Areas*
- *McIntosh Land Use*

City of Darien Future Land Use

Description	Land Use
Agriculture	
This category is for land dedicated to farming (fields, lots, pastures, farmsteads, specialty farms, livestock production, etc.), agriculture, or commercial timber or pulpwood harvesting. This category is also for land dedicated to active or passive recreational uses. These areas may be either publicly or privately owned and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, golf course, recreation centers or similar uses.	Residential Agriculture
Residential	
The predominant use of land within the residential category is for single-family and multi-family dwelling units organized into general categories of net densities. This land use is protected from encroachment of industrial or other uses capable of adversely affecting the residential character.	Residential Single-Family
	Planned Unit Development
	Residential Multi-Family
	Residential Mobile Home
Commercial	
This category is for land dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, office, service and entertainment facilities, organized into general categories of intensities. Commercial uses may be located as a single use in one building or grouped together in a shopping center or office building. Communities may elect to separate office uses from other commercial uses, such as retail, service or entertainment facilities.	General Commercial
	Neighborhood Commercial

Future Land Use

City of Darien



1:85,000

- | | |
|---|---|
| Residential Agriculture | Neighborhood Commercial |
| Single-Family Residential | Conservation Preservation |
| One- and Two-Family Residential | General Maritime Zone |
| General Commercial | |



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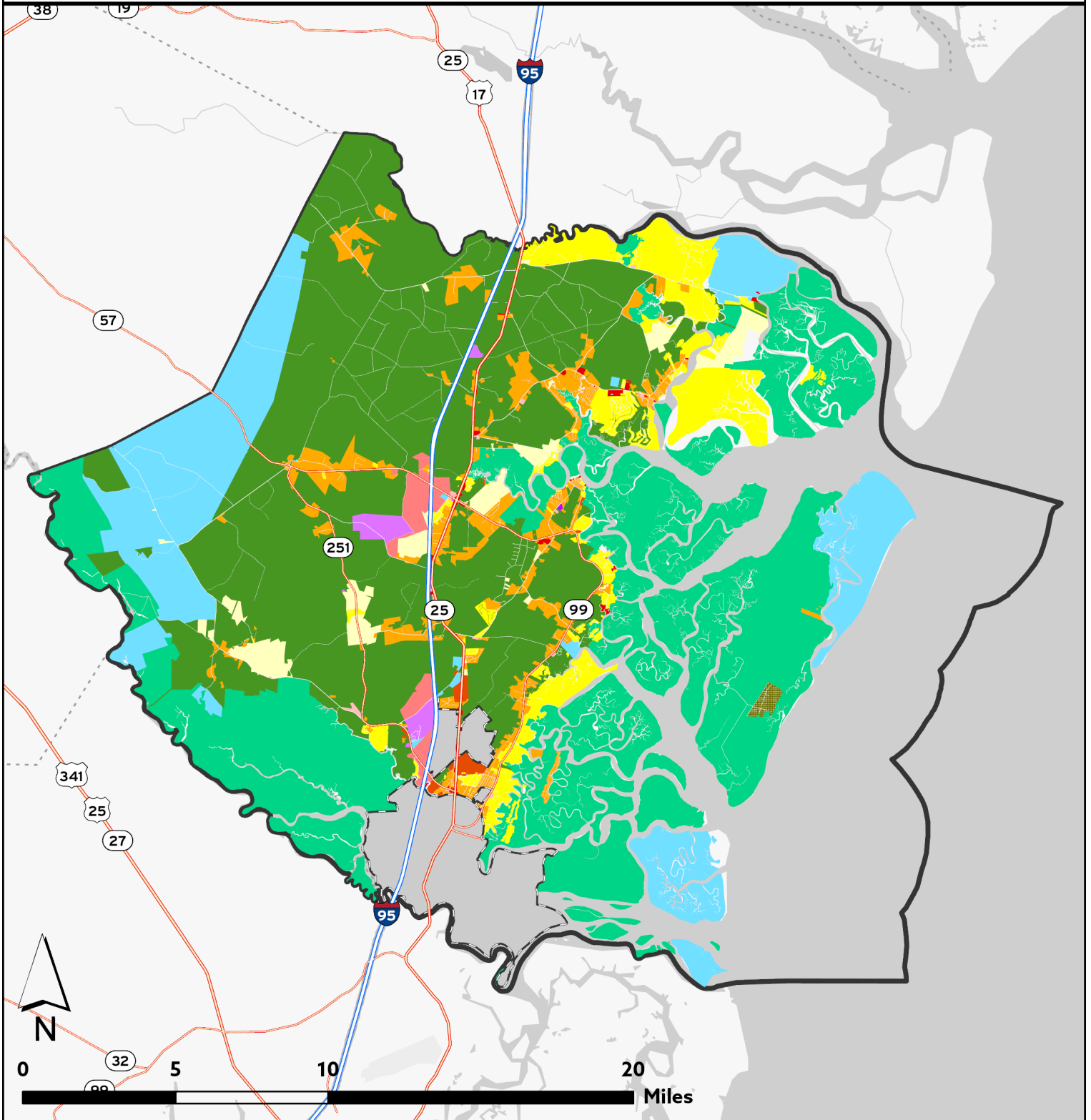
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McIntosh County Future Land Use

Description	Land Use
Agriculture	
This category is for land dedicated to farming (fields, lots, pastures, farmsteads, specialty farms, livestock production, etc.), agriculture, or commercial timber or pulpwood harvesting. This category is also for land dedicated to active or passive recreational uses. These areas may be either publicly or privately owned and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, golf course, recreation centers or similar uses.	General Agriculture
	Residential Agriculture
Industrial	
This category is for land dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction activities, or other similar uses.	Industrial - Heavy
	Industrial - Light
Residential	
The predominant use of land within the residential category is for single-family and multi-family dwelling units organized into general categories of net densities. This land use is protected from encroachment of industrial or other uses capable of adversely affecting the residential character.	Residential Single-Family
	Residential One-and-Two-Family
	Residential Multi-Family
Commercial	
This category is for land dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, office, service and entertainment facilities, or organized into general categories of intensities. Commercial uses may be located as a single use in one building or grouped together in a shopping center or office building. Communities may elect to separate office uses from other commercial uses, such as retail, service or entertainment facilities.	General Commercial
	Interchange Commercial
	Neighborhood Commercial

Future Land Use

McIntosh County



1:85,000

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Residential Agriculture | General Commercial | General Industrial |
| Single-Family Residential | Interchange Commercial | Restricted or Light Industrial |
| One- and Two-Family Residential | Neighborhood Commercial | Public/Institutional |
| Multi-Family Residential | Conservation Preservation | City of Darien |
| Hog Hammock | General Agriculture-Forestry | |

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Economic Development

- *Economic Base*
- *Unemployment and Places of Employment*
- *Occupation*
- *Workforce Development Issues*
- *Ecotourism*

Economic Development

Economic development creates the conditions for economic growth and improved quality of life by expanding the capacity of individuals, firms, and communities to maximize the use of their talents and skills to support innovation, and responsibly produce and trade valuable goods and services. Economic Development requires effective, collaborative institutions focused on advancing mutual gain for the public and the private sector.

Economic development is policy intervention with the goal of improving the economic and social well-being of its community. Economic growth is observable through productivity and the rise in the value of services produced. Increasing productivity can raise living standards because more income improves the ability to purchase goods and services and improve housing and education.

Economic development opportunity via tourism for McIntosh County is tied to its coastal assets through waterways and the natural, historic, and cultural resources. McIntosh County's economic development and economic growth can also be leveraged through industrial development in the main industries identified including manufacturing; logistics & warehousing, and hospitality. The projections of modest growth in in-demand industry sectors are important to the future of McIntosh County's economy especially.



Economic Base

The McIntosh and Darien labor force has steadily decreased in the previous decade. Moreover, the decrease in labor force is proportionate to the reported decrease in population in the 2020 Census. This table provides the percentages of the McIntosh and Darien workforce employed in each industry by type from years 2010, 2015, and 2021¹. These numbers only include full-time, year-round employees.

Industry Type	McIntosh & Darien		
	2010	2015	2021
Total Employed (16 years and over Civilian Labor Force)	6,230	5,410	3,437
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining:	5.3%	1.8%	1.8%
Construction	13.1%	5.8%	4.9%
Manufacturing	8.6%	10.3%	16.2%
Wholesale trade	1.6%	1.1%	5.1%
Retail trade	10.8%	12.5%	11.3%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities:	4.7%	7.8%	10.9%
Information	1.2%	3.3%	1.3%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing:	3.6%	5.5%	2.3%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	6.5%	4.9%	17.8%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance:	18.2%	21.9%	16.9%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	11.0%	10.5%	3.3%
Other services, except public administration	5.6%	4.1%	5.2%
Public administration	9.8%	10.5%	2.8%

¹ ACS 5-Year Estimates

Unemployment and Places of Employment

Although the labor force continues to decline in the community, unemployment rates have also steadily decreased. As of October 2022, the unemployment rate for McIntosh County is 3.2 percent².

This table details the inflow and outflow of employees. In 2019, roughly 67 percent of McIntosh and Darien workforce residents worked outside the county.

2019 ³	
Employee Inflow/Outflows	Job Counts
Employed in McIntosh County but Living Outside	1,057
Living in McIntosh County but Employed Outside	3,648
Living and Employed in McIntosh County	742

This table shows where McIntosh and Darien residents are employed, with a plurality of employees working in Glynn County.

2019 ⁴		
Where Workers are Employed	Number	Share
Total	4,390	100.0%
Glynn	1,192	27.2%
McIntosh	742	16.9%
Chatham	662	15.1%
Liberty	293	6.7%
Others	1,501	34.2%

² Bureau of Labor Statistics

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics

Occupation

The U.S. Census reports five primary occupation types and the trends of total employed in each occupation. These numbers include full-time and part-time employees.

2021 ⁵		
Occupation Type	Number	Share
Total Civilian Workforce	4,697	100.0%
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	1,274	27.1%
Service occupations	865	18.4%
Sales and office occupations	1,292	27.5%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	555	11.8%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	711	15.1%

⁵ 2021 U.S. Census Data

Workforce Development Issues

Workforce development issues that threaten quality economic development in the region include:

- High poverty rate
- Low rates of education attainment
- Inferior skill levels for high-wage jobs
- A poor level of occupational soft skills

These factors present the risk of disinvestment and pose difficulty in recruiting new firms to the area.

Coastal Workforce

One of the primary roles of the Coastal Workforce is to provide leadership and coordination of economic development and workforce programs. Coastal Workforce coordinates and participates in partnerships that align with business, such as organized labor, community organizations, economic development practices, and education that enhances the economic viability. Coastal Workforce also coordinates with government agencies, such as human services, education systems (e.g., public school systems, community colleges, and universities), unions, and industry and trade associations. Coastal Workforce is charged with ensuring that its job centers are business/customer-focused and outcome-based, with the placement of job seekers who meet businesses' hiring needs being a high priority. Because Coastal Workforce maintains effective workforce development systems, it enables many quality connections, matching employers' specific needs with those seeking gainful employment. All centers concentrate on the existing and emerging economic conditions and in-demand target industries.

Department of Community Affairs

DCA offers a variety of economic development incentives and tools designed to help promote growth and job creation throughout the state.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development

USDA provides economic opportunity through financial assistance programs for a variety of rural applications, including funding to develop essential community facilities, projects that will create and retain employment in rural areas, and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas.

⁵ 2021 U.S. Census Data

Ecotourism

To protect sensitive ecological areas like marshes, estuarine waters, and islands of the McIntosh coast, the State of Georgia has acquired significant holdings throughout the years; federal agencies have also acquired important resources in McIntosh County. While preserving the beauty and ecology of the coast, these actions have severely inhibited increasing future tax base advantage by development. As a result, the Steering and Stakeholder Committees state the development of a robust ecotourism strategy is necessary to offset these conditions.

Developing historic, recreational, and environmental resources in balance with environmental stewardship is vital to real economic advantage for the McIntosh and Darien community. How then, might better economic and employment opportunities be identified and developed for McIntosh and Darien, without infringing upon the delicate coastal environment? Developing a strong recreational-tourism base is key to taking advantage of the natural resources while avoiding their abuse.

The McIntosh natural and historic features provide substantial opportunity for recreation attractions: the estuarine/salt marsh environment, the Altamaha River and river swamp, the barrier islands, dozens of historic sites, and more.

With the number of potential visitors who pass through the area, primarily on Interstate 95, the McIntosh area is favorably located to become a must-stop attraction for travelers.



⁵ 2021 U.S. Census Data

A full-page background image featuring a wooden boardwalk that stretches from the foreground into the distance, cutting through a vast, flat, marshy landscape. The sky is filled with large, dramatic clouds, and the overall color palette is a mix of deep purples, blues, and greys, giving it a moody and atmospheric feel.

Housing

- *Housing Types and Costs*
- *Cost-Burdened Housing*
- *Housing Conditions*
- *Job Housing Balance*

Housing Types and Costs

The Housing section provides a framework for promoting a diverse housing supply predicated on the idea that the County should attempt to meet the housing needs of all residents regardless of age, tenure, or economic background. The County must foster housing that protects and enhances the health and livability of the community while being affordable and attainable to those of all income levels.

Housing demand is largely driven by the economic and demographic forces acting upon a community. Economic characteristics influence the housing costs households are able to afford while demographic characteristics influence market demand with regard to the number of households; household size; tenure (owner v. renter); and preference for styles and amenities.

The County's distinct communities include residential districts that are differentiated by housing density, age, size, architectural style, condition and other features, and neighborhood commercial districts with mixed housing types. These communities, each with their own unique character, offer a variety of housing and lifestyle opportunities.

The most pressing and complex challenge facing the County is housing affordability. With housing costs making up, by far, the largest expenditure in most households, the ability of families and individuals to be able to find the type and size of housing that fits their needs, while remaining affordable, is paramount to a community's success.

Local governments have several tools at their disposal in order to help address this challenge. They can increase the supply of available residential land, particularly land that is zoned for multi-family. They can relax restrictions on existing land that is zoned residential to allow for more housing units to be constructed. They can increase the availability of public services in residential areas to encourage development. Finally, they can look to support low- and moderate-income households by pursuing private, state, or federal grant resources to construct or rehabilitate existing housing units for the explicit purpose of serving these households.

The vast majority of occupied housing types in McIntosh continues to remain single-family detached units, representing 60.7 percent of the total housing supply in 2021. This number has increased by 3.2 percent from what it was a decade ago. Mobile or manufactured homes remain the second most common housing type representing 33.4 percent of the market, down 3.9 percent over the same time period.

Multi-family units remain a relatively small proportion of the housing supply in McIntosh making up only 4.8 percent. Broken down, 2-unit apartments are 0.2 percent, 3- to 4-unit apartments are 0.5 percent, 5- to 9-unit apartments are 0.9 percent, and apartments with 10 or more units are 4.1 percent.

The remaining housing stock is comprised of single-family attached units at 0.9 percent and boats, RVs, Vans, or other at 0.2 percent.

Housing Types and Costs

Category	2011	2016	2021	% Change 2011-2021
Single Family De-tached	57.5%	57.2%	60.7%	3.2%
Single Family At-tached	0.0%	0.5%	0.9%	0.9%
2 Units	0.6%	0.6%	0.2%	-0.4%
3 to 4 Units	1.4%	2.4%	0.5%	-0.9%
5 to 9 Units	1.3%	0.9%	0.9%	-0.4%
10 to 19 Units	1.1%	0.8%	2.6%	1.4%
20 to 49 Units	0.7%	0.7%	0.5%	-0.2%
50 or More Units	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
Mobile Home	37.3%	36.5%	33.4%	-3.9%
Boat, RV, Van, etc.	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%

Over half the supply of housing in McIntosh was constructed in either the 1990s (22.6 percent) or the 2000s (33.7 percent). Roughly one-quarter was constructed prior to 1980. From 2010 onwards, only 432 housing units have been constructed, representing only 6.3 percent of the total housing stock.

Following the recession of 2008, vacancy rate in McIntosh were elevated as a large amount of housing units went unoccupied. Those numbers have since decreased quite substantially to the point where today, demand far outstrips supply and development has subsequently taken back off. 31.9 percent of housing units are vacant today, down from 37.7 percent a decade ago and the vacancy rate (the number of housing units for sale or rent) is down to 3.2 percent from 5.7 percent over the same time period.

Category	2011	2016	2021	Change 2011-2021	% Change 2011-2021
Median Monthly Gross Rent	\$514	\$717	\$691	\$177	34.4%
Median Monthly Owner Costs (w/ Mortgage)	\$1,091	\$1,209	\$1,238	\$147	13.5%

Cost Burdened Housing

Housing is considered affordable if housing expenses, primarily being rent or mortgage payments, utilities, and insurance, comprise no more than 30 percent of a household's gross family income. This number is calculated as the threshold that a resident can be expected to pay for housing while also being able to afford critical expenses such as groceries, medication, transportation, etc. If a household pays more than 30 percent of their gross family income on housing costs, it is said that they are "cost-burdened".

	2011			2021		
Category	Darien	McIntosh County (Total)	Georgia	Darien	McIntosh County (Total)	Georgia
Occupied Units Paying Rent	374	860	1,158,069	142	764	1,274,576
Gross Rent Exceeds 30% of Household Income - B25070	34.5%	53.1%	47.7%	54.9%	53.7%	49.7%
Housing Units with a Mortgage	539	2,295	1,655,578	189	1,715	1,610,977
Selected Monthly Owner Costs Exceed 30% of Household Income - B25091	40.4%	41.4%	36.1%	34.9%	42.0%	25.1%
Housing Units without a Mortgage	300	2,067	656,430	258	2,062	869,465
Selected Monthly Owner Costs Exceed 30% of Household Income - B25091	16.0%	11.4%	14.0%	10.5%	12.4%	10.8%

In 2011, 53.1 percent of renters, 41.4 percent of mortgagors, and 11.4 percent of non-mortgagors were cost-burdened to some degree. In 2021, the percentage of cost-burdened households in all three of these groups increased slightly to 53.7 percent, 42.0 percent, and 12.4 percent respectively. Compared to the state of Georgia, far more McIntosh renters and homeowners find themselves cost-burdened.

Housing Conditions

Good housing conditions are essential for people's health and play a crucial role in childhood development. Therefore, it is imperative that housing in a community is not only attainable, but meets the minimum standards of quality as well. To track this, the Department of Housing and Urban Development uses four key housing conditions to assess the adequacy of a housing market:

1. Housing lacks complete kitchen facilities
2. Housing lacks complete plumbing facilities
3. Housing is severely overcrowded (more than 1.5 persons per room)
4. Housing is severely cost-burdened (monthly housing costs exceeding 50 percent of gross income)

In McIntosh, according to the most recent 2015-2019 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data, 13.4 percent of households have at least one of these severe housing problems. The most widespread of this being severe cost-burden at 12 percent up from 8.5 percent in 2011. 2.7 percent of households lack complete kitchen facilities while 2.5 percent lack complete plumbing facilities, both decreased from where they were a decade ago. The American Community Survey reported no McIntosh housing units with severe overcrowding problems.

Housing Conditions and Job Balance

Housing Conditions

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Job Housing Balance

A job to housing ratio in the range of 0.75 to 1.5 is considered beneficial for reducing vehicle miles traveled. The job to housing ratio indicates whether an area has enough housing for employees to live near employment and sufficient jobs in residential areas. An imbalance in jobs and housing creates longer commute times, more single driver commutes, and loss of job opportunities for workers without vehicles.

As of 2021, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports 1,667 jobs in McIntosh County while the American Community Survey lists the number of total housing units at 6,908. This indicates a job to housing ratio of 0.24, far below the recommended ratio. The lack of job opportunities present in the county combined with the older population is the primary cause of this.

The background image is a landscape photograph of a marshy field. A wooden boardwalk, made of several parallel planks, starts in the foreground and extends straight into the distance, leading the eye towards a dark line of trees on the horizon. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The entire image has a semi-transparent green overlay, which is darker on the left side and lighter on the right.

Transportation

- *Roads and Highways*
- *Transportation Map*
- *Road Network Hierarchy*
- *Alternative Modes of Transportation*

Roads and Highways

Transportation is one of the most important components of a healthy local economy as economic opportunities are closely linked to the mobility of people, goods, and information. The relationship between the quantity and quality of transport infrastructure and the level of economic development within a community is apparent. Highly connected networks are efficient and provide economic and social opportunities that result in positive multipliers effects such as better accessibility to markets, employment, tourism activities, and additional investment.

In McIntosh County transportation contributes directly to economic activity through road and can potentially contribute through maritime local services.

Transportation facilities are the artery for economic growth and proper management and maintenance of these facilities is imperative.

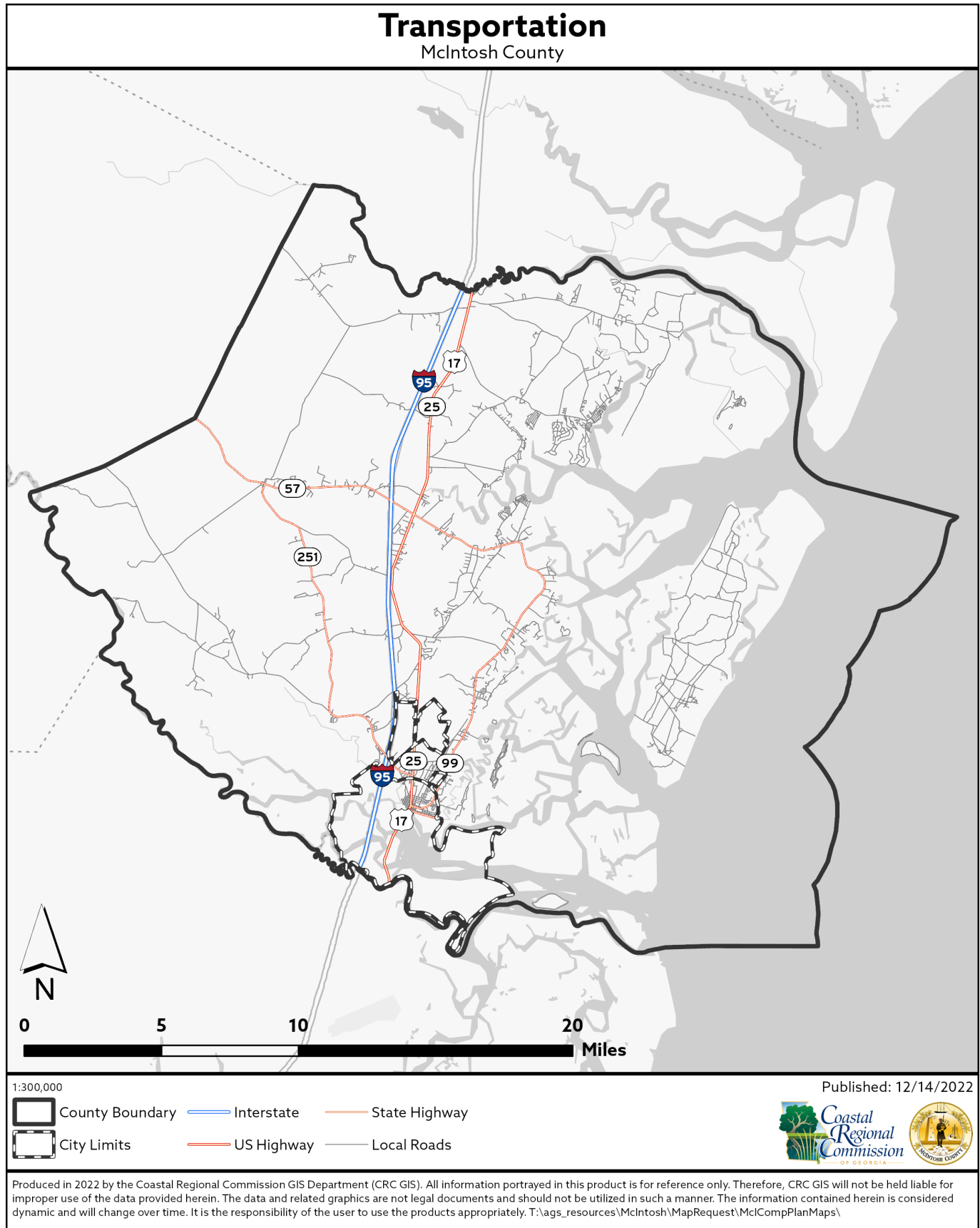


Roads and Highways

McIntosh County is primarily traversed by Interstate 95 (I-95) and U.S. Route 17 (HWY 17), both run north-south from the border with Liberty County in the north to the border with Glynn County in the south. These two routes provide residents and businesses with easy access to Savannah in the north and Brunswick to the south. With I-95 one of the most traveled interstates as well, this leads to a large amount of traffic transiting McIntosh on a daily basis.

With the open ocean to its east, McIntosh is connected west to Long County and its county seat, Ludowici, by State Route 57 (SR 57). There is also State Route 25 (SR 25), State Route 99 (SR 99), and State Route 251 (SR 251) which facilitate further travel within the county. The remainder of the county consists of primarily local roads with collectors providing access to the more major routes.

Transportation Map



Road Network Hierarchy

Freeways

Limited access roads, freeways, or motorways, including most toll roads are at the top of the hierarchy. These roads provide largely uninterrupted travel, often using partial or full access control, and are designed for high speeds. Interstate 95 in McIntosh County is a limited access freeway.

Arterials

Major through roads that are expected to carry large volumes of traffic are designated as arterials. These are often divided into major and minor arterials, and rural and urban arterials. Examples of rural minor arterials in McIntosh County include US 301/US 25/SR 57/SR 251. SR 57 has no passing lanes and is an important route that carries commuter traffic east-west.

Collectors

Next in the hierarchy are collector roads, which collect traffic from local roads, and distribute it to arterials. Traffic using a collector is usually going to or coming from somewhere nearby. Examples of collectors in McIntosh County include Blount Crossing, Smith Road, Shellman Bluff Road, Churchill Road, Warsaw Road, and Harris Neck Road.

Local Roads

These roads are at the bottom of the hierarchy, have the lowest speed limit, and carry low volumes of traffic. In some areas, these roads may be unpaved.

Bridges

McIntosh County has identified 7 major bridges within the county. There are three bridges that span over the Altamaha River, (one on I-95 and two over HWY 17), a bridge over the Butler River, and a bridge over the Champney River, the Darien River, and the Cathead Creek.

Signalized Intersections

McIntosh County has no signalized intersections. There is one flashing light in the County at a four-way stop intersection of US HWY 17 and GA HWY 99 in Eulonia.

Signage

The County has identified a need to invest in signage at community access points including the US HWY 17 Scenic Route, US Bike Route 1, and the East Coast Greenway. Additionally, wayfinding signage to the area's natural assets including the historic areas and the fishing villages help to inform visitors and direct them to the unique resources within the County.

Alternative Modes of Transportation

Pedestrian and Bicycle Paths

The Coastal Georgia Greenway is a 155-mile trail system which connects South Carolina to Florida through Georgia's six coastal counties. The centerpiece of the Coastal Georgia Greenway is a continuous trail along various north-south routes including the US HWY 17 corridor. The Highlander Trail runs from Sapelo Dock Road along State (SR) 99 and connects to the pedestrian/bike trail in Darien.

The US HWY 17 corridor is part of the U.S. Bike Route 1, a cross-country bicycle route that will run the length of the eastern seaboard from Florida to Maine. US Bike Route 1 is one of the two original US bicycle routes.

Public Transportation

The Coach buses operated by the Coastal Regional Commission provide rural transit service to residents of McIntosh County.

Intracoastal Waterway

McIntosh County sits at the center of the Intracoastal Waterway that runs from Massachusetts all the way down the eastern seaboard and Gulf of Mexico to the Mexican Border. This consists of a vast collection of inlets, canals, bays, sounds, and saltwater rivers that allow boats to travel this vast distance without having to face the hazards of the open sea. The city of Darien possesses waterfront access with a public marina for ships travelling along the coast.



Coastal Resiliency

- *Natural Hazards and Storm Surge*
- *Vegetation and Open Water Buffers*
- *Vulnerable Populations*
- *Coastal Resiliency Maps*

Natural Hazards and Storm Surge

Resilient communities strive to minimize the disruptions to everyday life and their local economies caused by disasters. They are not only prepared to prevent or minimize the loss of life as well as damage to property and the environment, but they also have the ability to quickly return citizens to work, reopen businesses, rebuild and repair homes, and restore other essential services necessary for a complete and timely economic recovery.

Natural Hazards

McIntosh County is located in the low-lying coastal plains of the Atlantic Coast. With its highest point at roughly 60 ft above sea level, it is particularly susceptible to flooding from rivers and canals as well as regular inundation from king tides. As a coastal community, it is also subject to flooding by tropical storms and hurricanes. The waterways of St. Catherine's Sound, Sapelo Sound, Doboy Sound, and Altamaha Sound all intersect the County and pose a significant threat of flooding.

McIntosh County is a part of the Community Rating System that allows it to earn points based on the amount of open space reserved for conservation purposes. These points are then used to allow residents discounts on their flood insurance should they choose to develop within a FEMA designated flood zone.

Storm Surge

In addition to the flooding danger posed by tropical storms and hurricanes, storm surge presents the most serious disaster risk for McIntosh County. While the vast majority of people live outside the projected category 1 and 2 storm surge impact area. Many of the transportation routes connecting them together and to the outside world would be affected to some degree. In addition to this, storms stronger than category 2 have the potential to affect many residential areas far inland and cause significant property damage and risk to life.

The culturally significant community of Hog Hammock, found on Sapelo island, is home to many descendants of the Gullah/Geechee, and is only accessible by a single ferry that leaves three times a day from the mainland. Considering 90% of the island is subject to be inundated with at least one foot of water during a category 2 storm, particular attention should be given to ensure the residents have access to readily available transit for evacuation should it be necessary.

Vegetation and Open Water Buffers

Riparian buffers can be given a value based on their presence and allowance from open water and wetlands towards the built and developed environment. Three categories of consideration include: 100, 150, and 200-foot riparian buffers. A 100-foot riparian buffer is the recommended minimum based on literature reviews by the scientific community. As reported by the U.S. Agriculture and U.S. Environmental Protection agency in 1997, there are specific riparian widths that are associated with specific objectives. The recommended buffer width for flood control should be up 200 feet. This buffer width provides flood and sediment control as well as wildlife habitat.

Buffers narrower than 35 feet can provide some limited benefits but may require long-term maintenance since their ability to trap sediments is reduced.

McIntosh County has ninety percent vegetation coverage within the 100-foot riparian buffer. The state currently mandates a 25-foot buffer from hydrology, which is inadequate for protecting the vital natural system.



Vulnerable Populations

A key factor in examining resiliency is quantifying vulnerable populations. These populations include those residents who live in vulnerable areas, the 100-year and 500-year flood plains, but also those who may have difficulty in heeding evacuation orders due to age, income, and mobility.

The most vulnerable populations include children less than five years old, the elderly and frail elderly, persons living in poverty, and persons without reliable transportation that live in communities with limited public transportation. For elderly, we have identified the percentage of the population 65 and older. There is no specific age cohort for frail elderly, but the literature defines frailty in people 65 and older that called for the diagnosis when three or more of the following five criteria were present: unintentional weight loss of 10 pounds or more in the past year, self-reported exhaustion, weakness as measured by grip strength, slow walking speed and low physical activity. The frail elderly are individuals, over 65 years of age, dependent on others for activities of daily living.

In McIntosh County, the percentage of children under the age of 5 fell from 4.4% in 2011 to 2.6% in 2021 while the percentage of those over the age of 65 rose from 16.6% in 2011 27.0% in 2021.

Income and Poverty Level

Income can directly relate to a family's ability to have reliable transportation, which then directly relates to a family's ability to evacuate their homes in the event of an evacuation order. Income also impinges upon a family's ability to secure temporary lodging (hotels or motels) beyond publicly provided shelter, or to obtain replacement housing should they lose their homes due to a storm event or natural disaster.

As of 2021, Median Household Income in McIntosh County is \$49,951. The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines low- and moderate-income as households making up to 80 percent of the Median Household Income in an area, which would be \$39,961 in the case of McIntosh County. Poverty levels are set by the federal government and are based upon income and family size. The official poverty rate for McIntosh County in 2021 is 11.9 percent, up from 7.9 percent a decade ago. This is slightly higher than the statewide average of 10.3 percent.

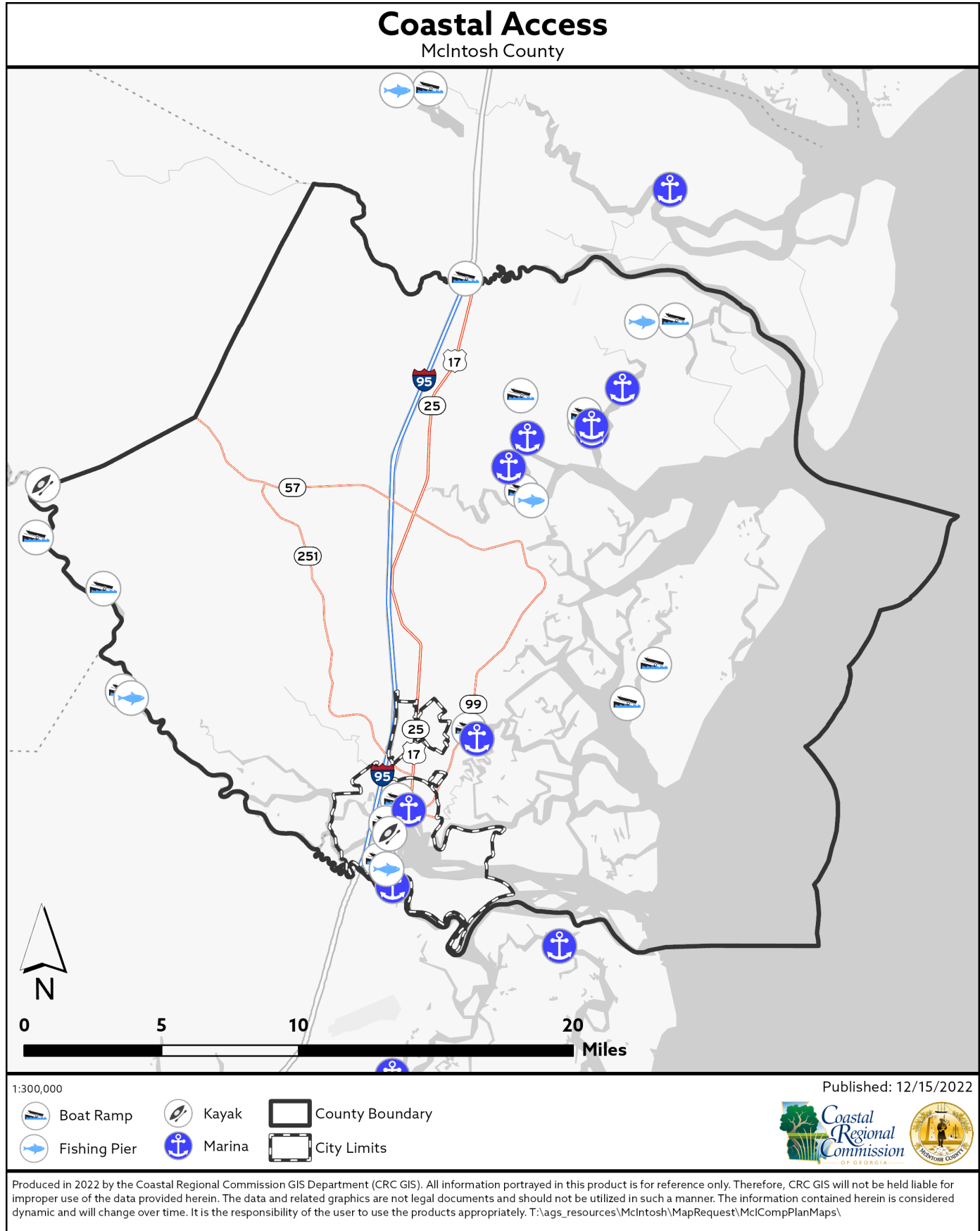
Means of Transportation

The US Census Bureau reports on the number of vehicles available to households. This is an important indicator of the percentage of the population that has access to reliable transportation should they need to evacuate in the event of a storm or other natural disaster. As of 2021, 3.5 percent of households in McIntosh County do not have access to a vehicle.

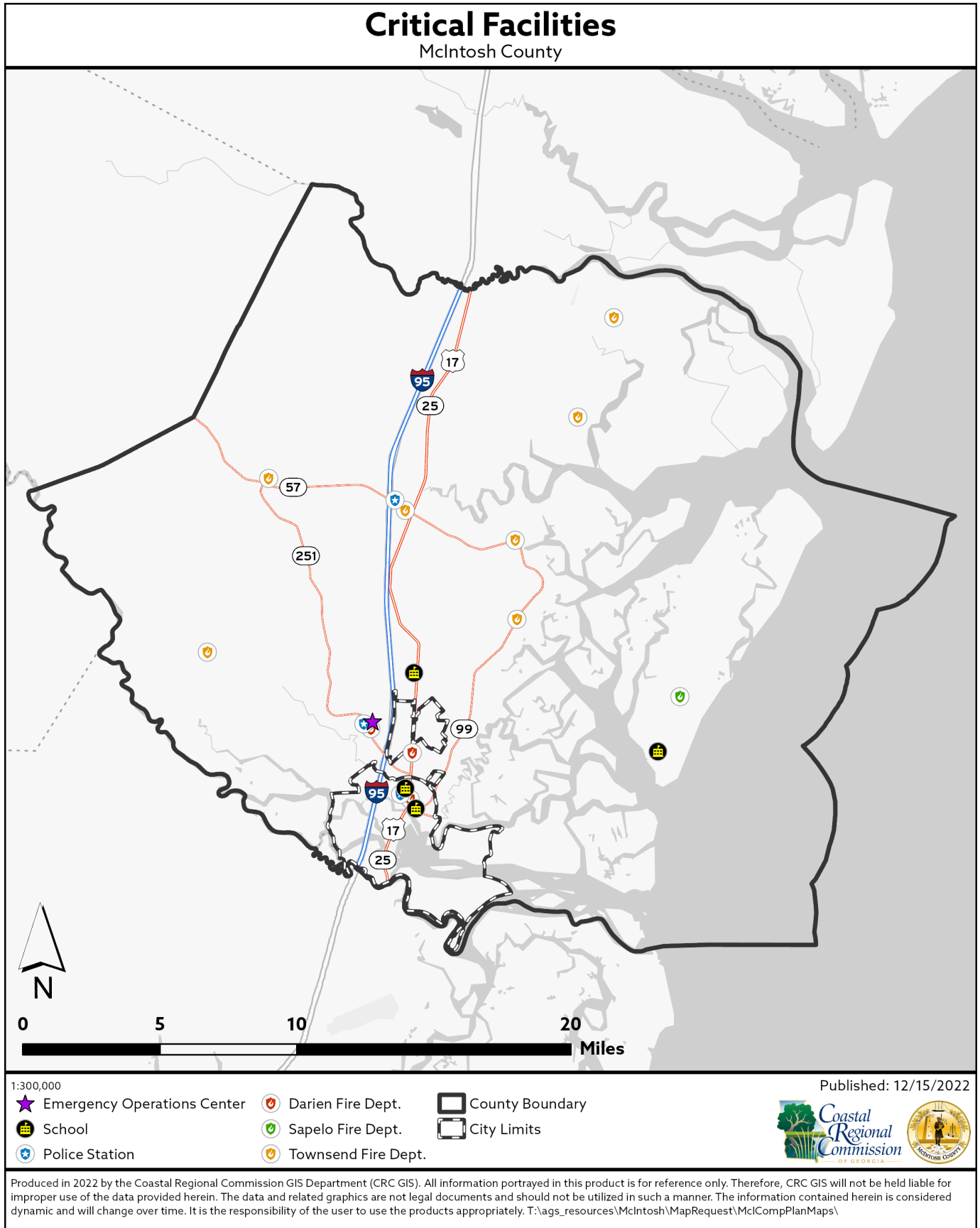
Housing Type

Mobile or manufactured homes have been identified as a particularly vulnerable type of housing during storm events due to their susceptibility to damage caused by high winds and flying debris. As of 2021, 33.4 percent of the housing supply in McIntosh County is comprised of mobile or manufactured homes.

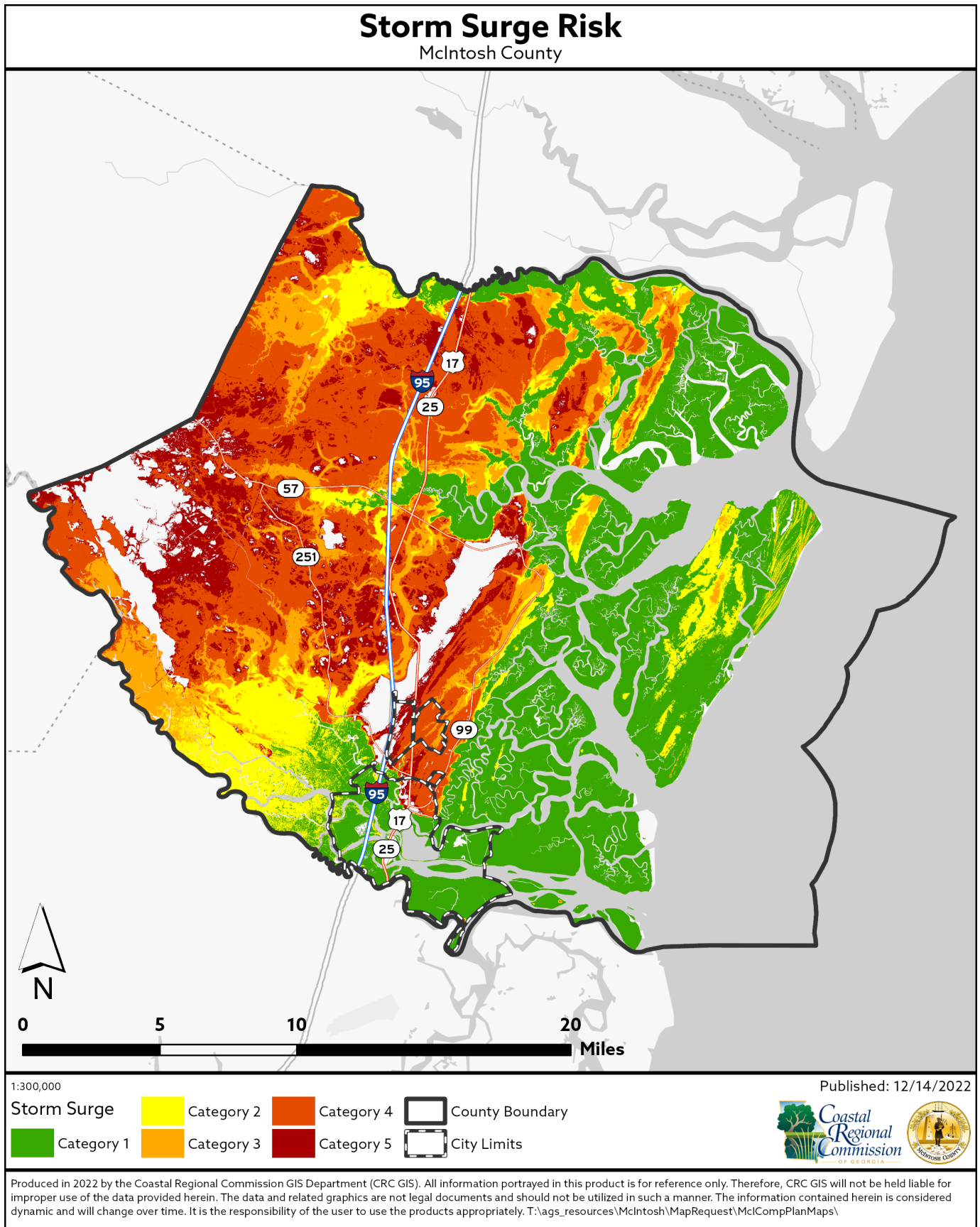
Coastal Resiliency Maps



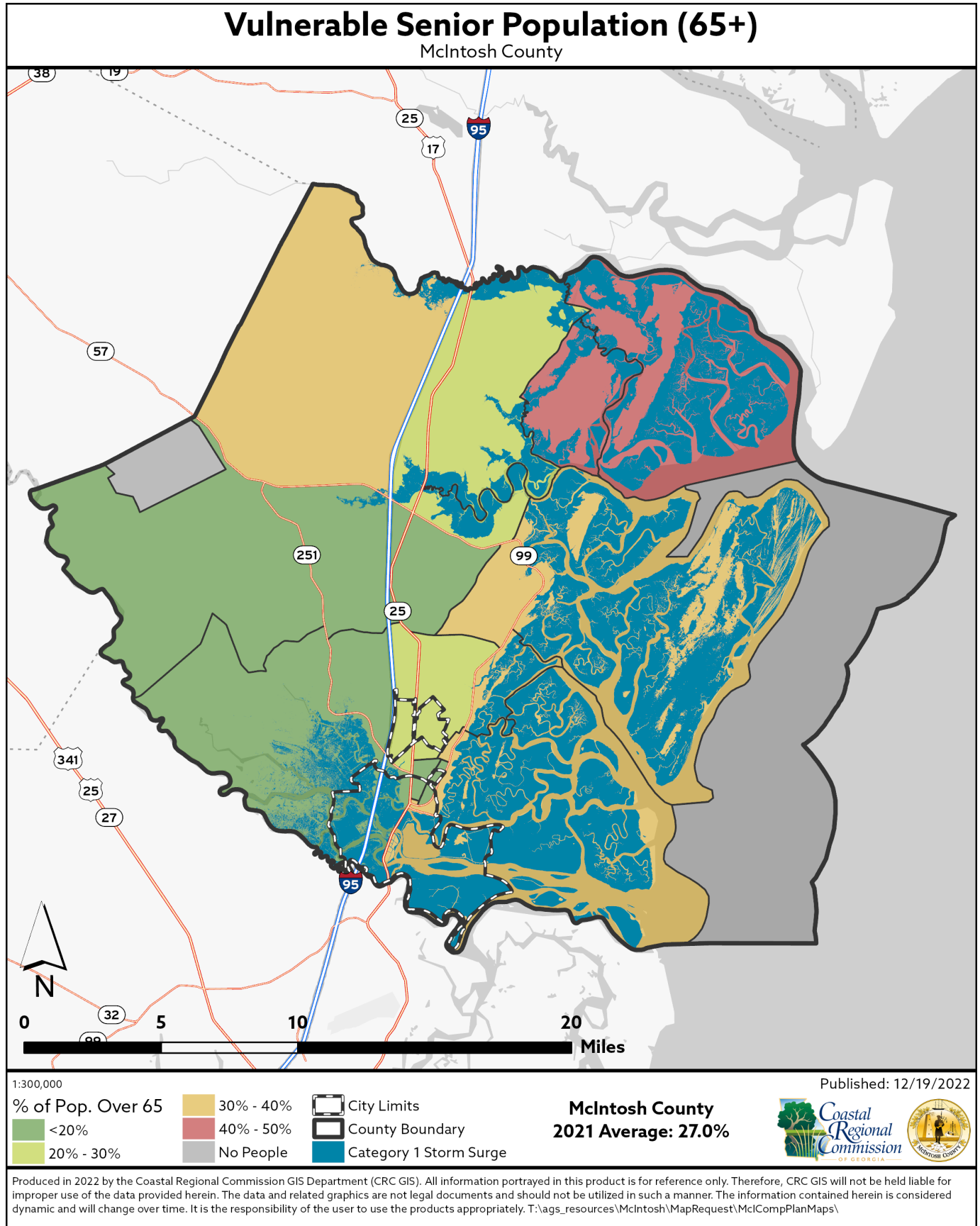
Coastal Resiliency Maps



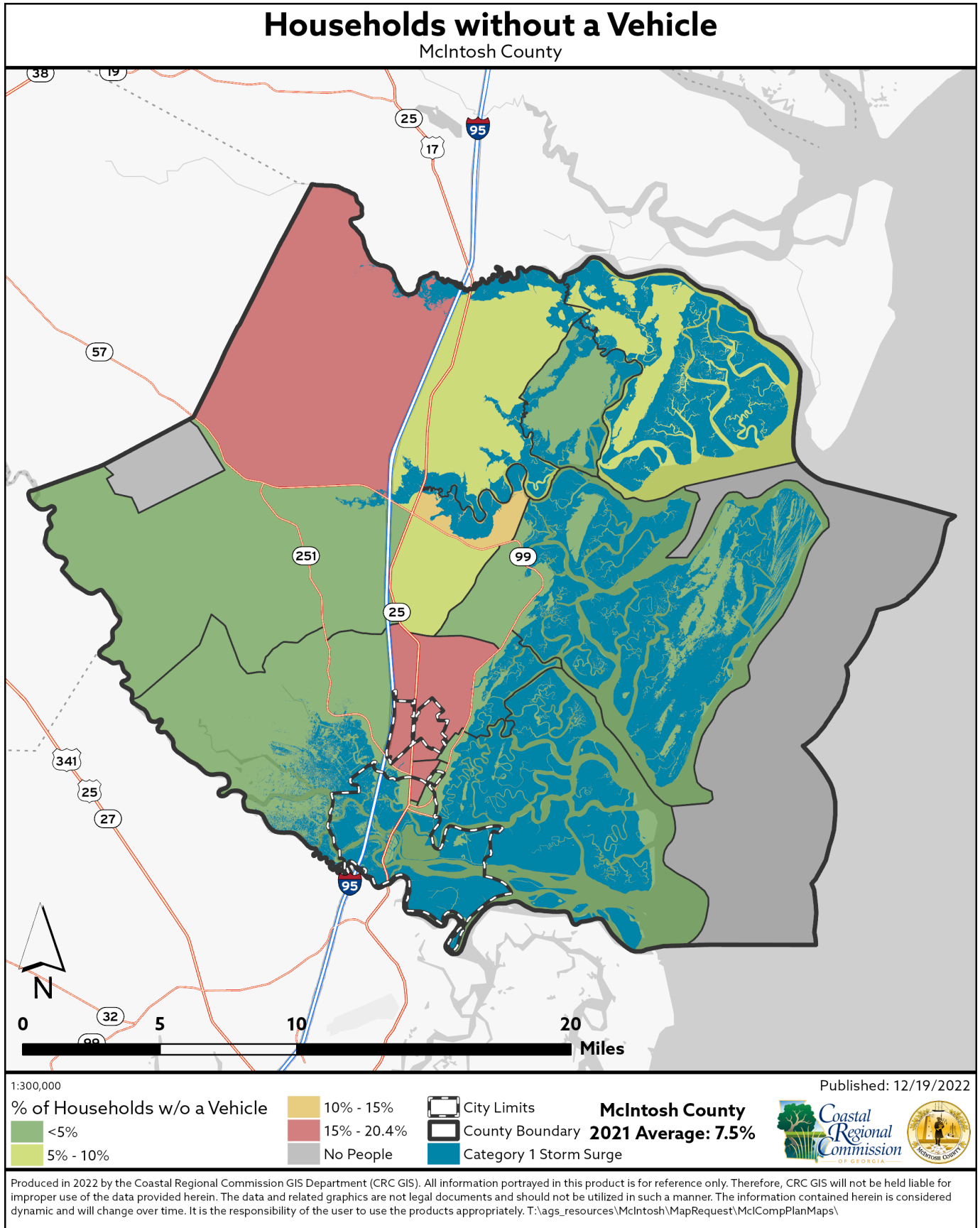
Coastal Resiliency Maps



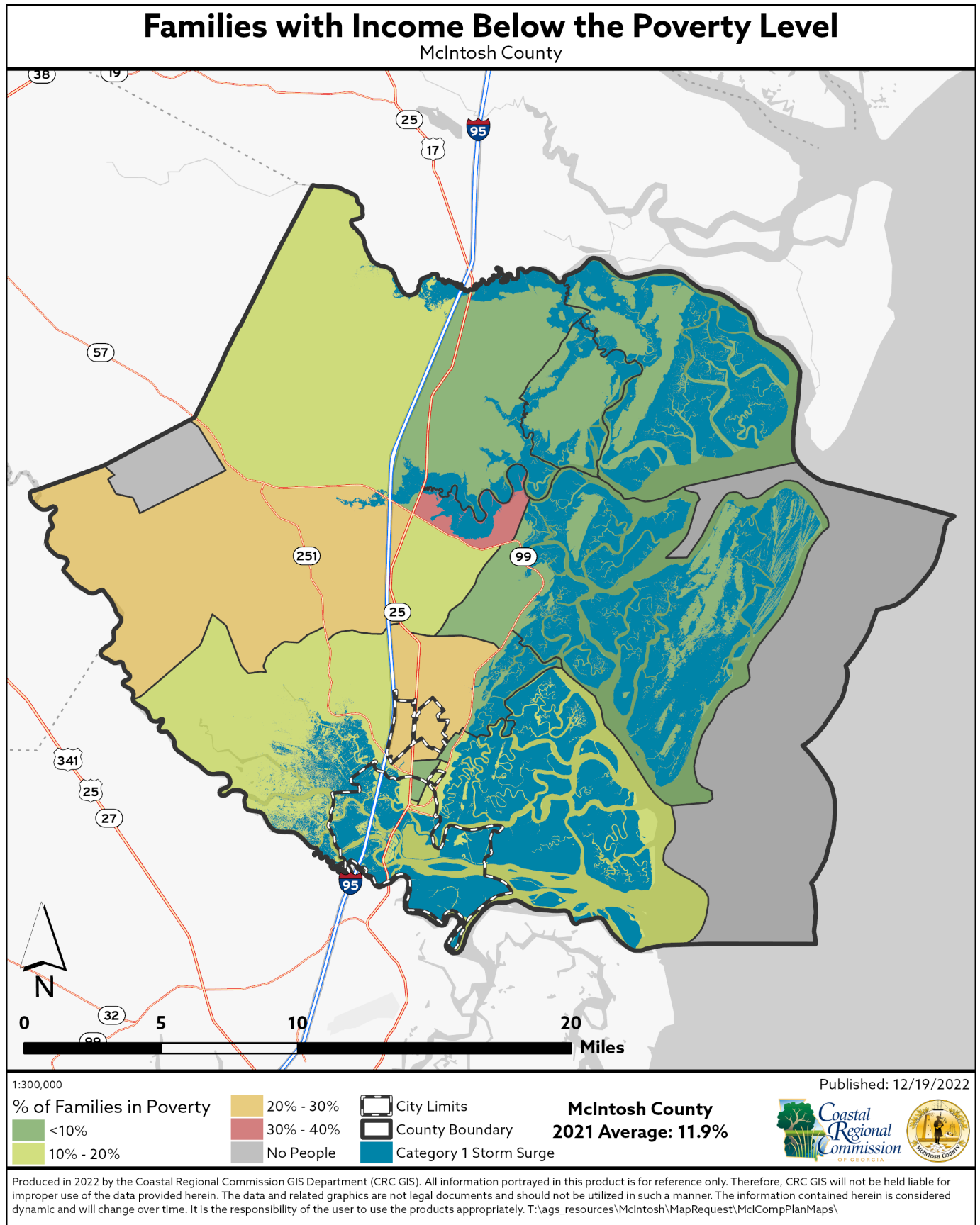
Coastal Resiliency Maps



Coastal Resiliency Maps



Coastal Resiliency Maps





Needs and Opportunities

- *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)*
- *Needs and Opportunities*

SWOT

The process that identified the Needs and Opportunities unique to the community was based on technical indicators and input collected as part of the public engagement process.

A need can be defined as a condition of something that is required or wanted, while an opportunity is a chance for progress or advancement. To achieve the Community Vision and goals for the future, several Needs and Opportunities were identified.

The information derived from the SWOT analysis informs the needs and opportunities. This analysis was performed with the Steering and Stakeholder Committees. Items colored were identified as priorities to be addressed in the Needs and Opportunities.



SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Size • Engaged Citizens • Rich Heritage (Gullah Geechee, Highlands) • Natural Resources • I-95 Access • Waterways • Hunting, Fishing, Recreation, Wildlife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of public transportation or ride sharing • 17 Corridor traffic • Pedestrian Flow • School System/Educational Opportunities • Lack of Workforce • Lack of Childcare • Lack of Medical Services
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecotourism • Cultural and Historical Tourism • Industrial Development • Planned growth • Proximity to I-95 • State and Federal Representative Relationships • Developable Land • Basketball Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of emergency infrastructure (fire/flooding) • Changes in shrimping industry • Unplanned development (waterfront and downtown) • Hesitancy to change • Darien Bridge • Lack of Affordable Housing • Climate Change

Needs and Opportunities

In this section, items colored are identified as priorities and those items directly correlate to strategies and actions specifically in the Implementation Plan section of the Comprehensive Plan.

ISSUES

OPPORTUNITIES

Population

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aging Population• Declining Average Household Size | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Livable Communities |
|---|---|

Economic Development

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low Educational Attainment• Declining Employment• Lacking an Educated Workforce• Declining Median Household Income• Decling Property Values• Develop and nurture a workforce with access to technical education | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unrivaed Historic and Cultural Resources• Broadband Capacity• Eco-Tourism Education• Boating and Kayaking Opportunities• Abundant Natural Resources• East Coast Greenway• Downtown Infill• Oglethrope Grid• Promote tourism with a focuse on natural and historic recreation• Encourage development of industrial businesses by marketing location and developable land |
|--|--|

ISSUES

OPPORTUNITIES

Housing

- Cost Burdened Housing
- Infill Housing
- Managing Development
- Incorporate Universal Design

Community Facilities

- Restricted Infrastructure
- High-Tech Infrastructure
- Sprawl and unplanned developments
- Improve community services and infrastructure to underserved neighborhoods

Transportation

- Travel Patterns
- East Coast Greenway
- Traffic Lights for Safety
- Bike Routes
- Trails
- Historic Grid

Land Use

- City Ordinances need to regulate building materials in highly visible areas
- Proximity to waterways

Intergovernmental Coordination

- Historic Preservation District
- Coastal Regional Commission
- McIntosh County and City of Darien
- Community Partners

Quality of Life

- Dreary social indicators
- Natural, Cultural, and Historic Resources
- Poor Reputation and High Crime



Implementation Plan

- *Work Program*

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