

In the REGION

U.S. Department of Commerce Invests \$1.9 Million to Support Business Expansion in Ben Hill County

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina M. Raimondo recently announced that the Department’s Economic Development Administration (EDA) is awarding a \$1.9 million grant to Ben Hill County for road construction and drainage improvements.

This project will support the expansion of local plastic resin manufacturer Modern Dispersions, and help attract new businesses, supporting job creation and private investment. This EDA grant will be matched with \$481,753 in local funds and is expected to create 60 jobs, and generate \$13 million in private investment.

“President Biden is dedicated to supporting communities with resources needed to boost economic development,” said Secretary of Commerce Gina M. Raimondo. “This EDA investment will enable a local employer to expand and take full advantage of its industrial campus, creating

jobs while building economic resiliency in the region.”

“Economic Development Administration investments play an important role in advancing locally-led economic development strategies that drive critical business expansion efforts to create stronger, more resilient regional economies,” said



Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development Alejandra Y. Castillo. “This EDA investment will enhance the local transportation infrastructure to support current and future local business needs.”

continued on next page

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission proudly serves Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware Counties.

Community and Economic Development

U.S. Department of Commerce Invests \$1.9 Million to Support Business Expansion in Ben Hill County (continued)

“I’ve been laser-focused on creating jobs and strengthening the quality of life for all Georgians,” said Senator Raphael Warnock. “It’s great to see that the EDA will be investing nearly \$2 million into Ben Hill County’s road infrastructure, creating jobs and empowering small businesses across South Georgia.”

This project was made possible by the regional planning efforts led by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC). EDA provides funding to SGRC to bring together the public and private sectors to create an economic development roadmap to strengthen the regional economy, support private capital investment, and create jobs. SGRC Community and Economic Development staff will administer the project.



“I commend Ben Hill County Chairman Steve Taylor and County Manager Michael Dinnerman for their diligence in seeking funding to complete this much needed infrastructure project, and I am grateful that they asked the SGRC to assist in this endeavor,” said Community & Economic Director Kimberly Hobbs. “Industrial expansion and the creation of new jobs in Ben Hill County will build resilience that will enable the County to endure future economic shocks.”

Robbie Stone on SGRC Council



Robbie Stone was sworn in May 26, 2022, at the SGRC Council meeting, as a private sector representative for Atkinson County on the SGRC Council. He is the EMA Director and P.W.A.F.S Fire Chief for Atkinson County. Stone is pictured above.

Buddy Willis on SGRC Council



Buddy Willis was sworn in May 26, 2022, at the SGRC Council meeting, to represent Atkinson County on the council. He is an Atkinson County Commissioner. Willis is pictured above.

Transportation and Environmental



Amy Martin, Corey Hull, and James Horton

SGRC Transportation Division Receives Georgia Safe Routes to School Friend of the Year Award

The SGRC received a Friend of the Year Award for 2021-2022 from the Georgia Safe Routes to School Resource Center for its School Safety Observations and the development of school crash reports for the following county schools: Atkinson County, Bacon County, Ben Hill County, Pierce County and Tift County. School Crash Reports include all crashes, within a half-mile radius of all schools, that occur during morning drop-off and afternoon dismissal. They are used to pinpoint areas where the most crashes occur and make recommendations for safety improvements to those areas.

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program is administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) through the Georgia Safe Routes to School Resource Center and by traveling SRTS representatives in regions throughout the state. Chelsea Weldon is the SRTS Representative for the SGRC Region. She works with SGRC Transportation Department staff to perform Safety Observations at schools in the region, facilitate meetings with school officials to present findings, and suggest safety improvements.

The National Safe Routes to School program was initiated in 2005 as part of a national movement to improve the health and well-being of children in grades Kindergarten through the Eighth Grade. The program strives to make it safe, convenient and fun to walk or bike to school every day. Others in the state to receive Friends of the Year Awards included Bike Coweta, CSRA Regional Commission, and Safe Kids Dekalb County.

Local Government Services

SGRC Planning Staff to Update Regional Plan

The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) requires that Regional Plans be updated every five years. The current rules regarding Regional Planning (GA DCA Chapter 110-12-6, et seq., effective October 1, 2017), establish the framework by which the plans are to be prepared and the standards and procedures by which they are to be reviewed.

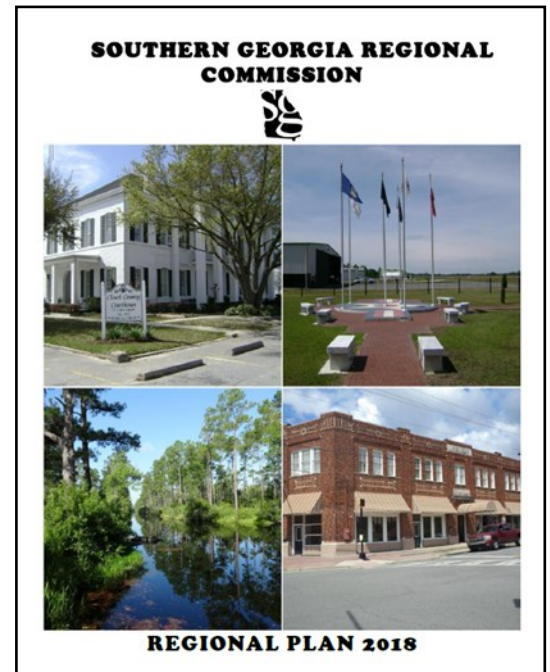
An annual implementation program report is required in intervening years between full updates of the plan. Planning staff will begin the process of updating this plan in July, 2022.

Regional Planning is established to fulfill the following regional planning needs:

- Involve all segments of the region in developing a vision for the future of the region, ensuring the plan is representative of the entire region
- Generate pride and enthusiasm about the future of the region
- Identify priority needs and opportunities affecting the region and customize technical assistance efforts to promote impactful change related to those needs and opportunities
- Engage the interest of regional policy makers and stakeholders in implementing the plan
- Provide a guide for everyday decision-making to government officials and other regional leaders

Required elements in the Regional Plan include: Executive Summary, Regional Goals, Needs and Opportunities, Implementation Program. Appendices for the plan include: SWOT (Strengths, Needs, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis, Analysis of Consistency with Quality Community Objectives, Data and Mapping Supplement, and Stakeholder Involvement Report.

The SGRC will begin the public involvement portion of the process of updating the Regional Plan with a Public Hearing, to likely coincide with the Council meeting scheduled for August 25, 2022. SGRC Planning staff are available at 229.333.5277 to answer any questions.



Cover page from the most recent five year update of the SGRC's 2018 Regional Plan

Small Business Lending

SGRC Small Business Lending Program Assists Croft's Country Kitchen, LLC. with RLF Loan

Croft's Country Kitchen is a new, full service restaurant located at 8419 Valdosta Highway in Morven, Georgia. Upon opening, Croft's Country Kitchen will serve good ol' fashioned country cooking for breakfast beginning at 6am until 10:30am with lunch service following until 2pm, six days a week, Monday-Saturday. With a capacity of fifty customers at one sitting, there will be plenty of room to come and enjoy a great meal and atmosphere to start your morning or to drop in for lunch to satisfy your mid-day hunger.

David and Misty Croft are the owners of Croft Country Kitchen. It has been Misty's lifelong dream to be an owner of a full service restaurant. Misty has many years of experience in the food service business having worked with various companies from serving customers, prepping food, to opening and closing the businesses. Misty understands all aspects of the restaurant industry but she receives the most enjoyment from the interaction with the customers. Her goal is to provide the best dining experience for everyone.

Mr. and Mrs. Croft sought funding to enable them to purchase the land, building, furniture and fixtures for the restaurant. The Southern Georgia Area Resource Development Agency's assistance was sought in partnership with Citizens Community Bank in Hahira Georgia for the financing of the loan in which both parties share equal funding. SGARDA's Revolving Loan Fund provided 50% of the loan at a below market fixed interest rate at an extended period than conventionally offered.



For more information on SGRC Lending and the programs offered, contact us today at (229) 333-5277 or lwilcher@sgrc.us.

Area Agency on Aging

Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program In Full Swing Across the SGRC Region



The Pierce County Senior Center, operated by Action Pact, Inc. was the site of a Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) event on June 9 in Blackshear. Two hundred bags of fresh produce and vegetables were distributed to seniors.

Area Agency on Aging

SGRC-AAA Recognizes 2022 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15th

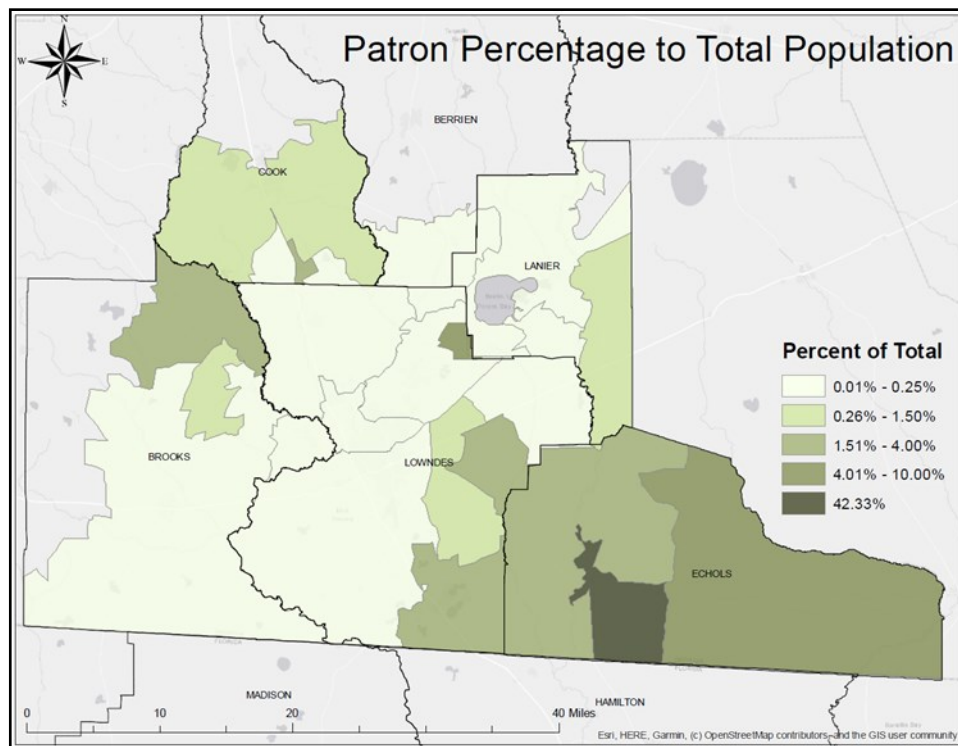


Geographic Information Services (GIS)

SGRC-GIS Supports Public Libraries

Local public libraries provide multiple services to constituents in the SGRC Region. More than simply offering books to borrow, libraries provide educational courses, printing and copying services, meeting rooms, and internet access via both computers and wi-fi. In support of libraries, the SGRC-GIS division recently provided population and broadband information in both static map and interactive mapping formats.

First, mapped population data was provided to the Southern Georgia Regional Library (SGRL) system to help identify areas of high and low patron density. The SGRL system supplied the SGRC-GIS division with the number of library patrons by zip code, and those numbers were compared to the population totals of the same area. Then a series of maps were created for each zip code that displayed the trends in the area. The maps depict some areas that are highly populated with library patrons while others may be sparse. The goal is to allow the system to visualize areas where the library should focus on outreach.



Map that depicts the total percentage of library patrons based on the total population in the Southern Georgia Regional Library area.

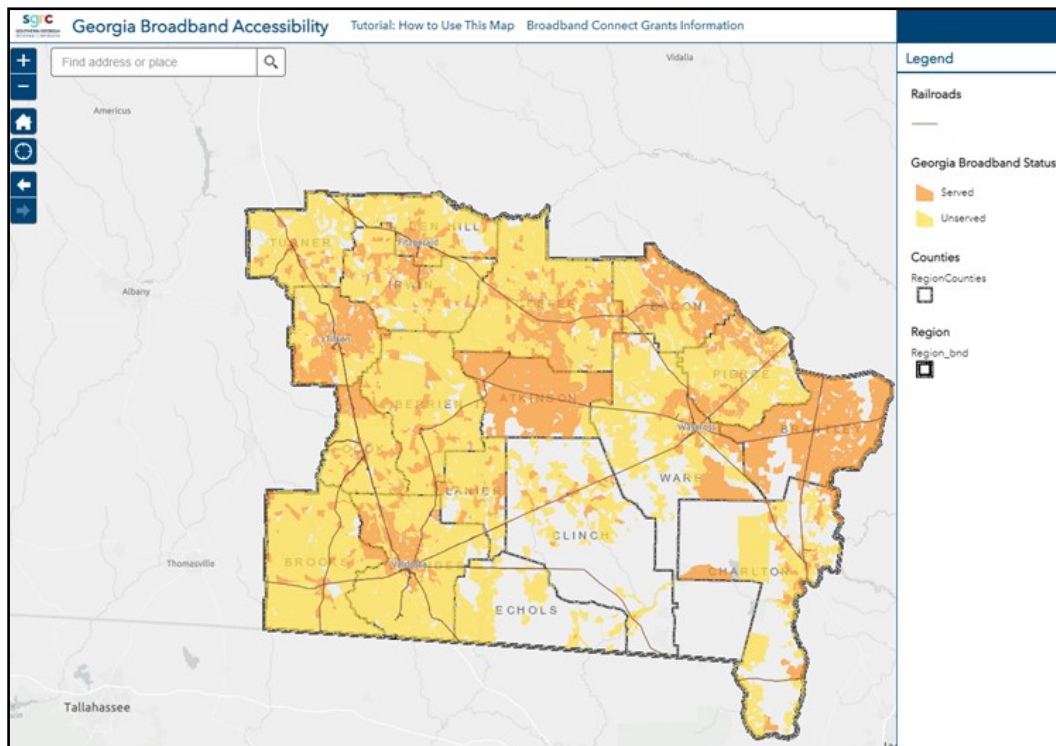
Geographic Information Services (GIS)

SGRC-GIS Supports Public Libraries (continued)

Currently, the SGRC-GIS division is working with the Coastal Plain Regional Library System in support of a new program that will provide broadband connectivity access to communities with limited, or no broadband access. The initial request for mapping assistance expanded and developed into a connection with the Georgia Technology Authority to obtain access to the granular broadband data. This data will allow the SGRC-GIS division to assist the project further by using GIS to analyze the best possible routes for the broadband activity to reach those in unserved areas.

Inspired by this project, a web application has been created for this region depicting served and unserved areas. Following is the web address to the web application:

<https://sgrc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=51bba56a637f44c883e35961e02763ad>



Georgia broadband accessibility map of served and unserved counties.

Workforce Development



Left to right above: Jason Dunn, Melissa Dark, Pam Popham, Amy Jones, and Ashley Miller

SGRC Workforce Staff Attend Georgia Chamber of Commerce New Economy Tour

On Wednesday, May 11, Pam Popham and Amy Jones attended the Georgia Chamber of Commerce New Economy Tour in Tifton. The event was held at the Center for Rural Prosperity and regional leaders gathered to better understand how to grow rural Georgia. Chris Clark, President and CEO of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce shared an Economic Snapshot of 2021 data for Georgia. The data showed 1102 project locations, \$32.7 billion in capital investment, 103,250 jobs created, and \$11 billion real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, surpassing 2019 growth. The data also indicated that 2021 was the eighth year that Georgia was named the Best State for Business.



Pictured above is presenter, Chris Clark, President and CEO of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce

For suggestions, questions, or to learn more, please contact the Southern Georgia Regional Commission at 912-285-6097.

In Remembrance



Lace Futch

October 13, 1938 - June 17, 2022

Marion "Lace" Futch, age 83, passed away Friday morning, June 17, 2022, in Savannah, Ga. following a brief illness. Lace, as he was known to all, was a lifelong resident of Willacoochee, Georgia. He was born October 13, 1938, the son of Clarence and Effie Futch and was one of seven children. In addition to his parents, he is preceded in death by son, Keith; daughter, Melinda; four brothers, Luther, Clyde, Clarence and Reuben; sister, Dorothy Lott; and granddaughter, Kay Morris.

Lace spent his life working on the growth, development and making a better life for all in his beloved South Georgia. He was Mayor of Willacoochee, GA from 1978 to 1989. Following that, he was appointed by Governor Zell Miller to head up the Georgia Finance Authority in Atlanta. In 1991, he was appointed as Director of the Regional Development Center in Waycross where he served until retirement in 2009. He was past president and an active member of the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA). In 2010, he was once again elected as Mayor of Willacoochee, GA until 2014 when he was elected Chairman of the Atkinson County Board of Commissioners, a post he was still serving at the time of his death.

Lace is survived by his wife, Nancy Williams Futch; son, William Futch (wife, Rachael) of Scott, LA; daughter, Susan Chancey of Nashville, GA.; sister, Glenda Yawn of Willacoochee, GA; brother, Ray Futch of Smithdale, MS; grandson, Clay Morris, of Nashville, GA.; granddaughter, Cara (husband, Evan) Williams of Wewahitchka, FL.; several great grandchildren, numerous nieces, nephews, cousins as well as, many other relatives.

The family will receive friends Thursday, June 23rd, at Relihan Funeral Home in Pearson, Ga. from 5:00 to 7:00 pm. A Celebration of Life will be held at the Pearson Civic Center at 3:00 pm, Friday, June 24, 2022. Burial will follow in Willacoochee City Cemetery. Masks are recommended at all events. In lieu of flowers the family asks that donations be made to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Lace's name. This can be done online at the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital or mail your donation to: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, 501 St. Jude Place, Memphis, TN, 38105.

Relihan Funeral Home in Pearson, Ga. is in charge of the arrangements.

Contact the SGRC

SGRC Council 2022 Meeting Schedule Meeting Locations TBD

No Meeting - July

August 25, 2022 – 11:00 am

September 22, 2022 – 11:00 am

No Meeting - October

Area Officials Appreciation Dinner -October
27, 2022

(subject to change)

November – No meeting (combined with De-
cember meeting)

December 8, 2022 – 11:00 am

(subject to change)



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2022 SGRC Wellbeing Challenge Winner



Pictured above are SGRC Wellbeing Program Implementation Champion Rachel Strom and the 2022 SGRC Wellbeing Program Challenge Winner Lindsay Ray. Ray completed the most wellbeing challenges across all categories of competition. She was awarded a trophy and will have a reserved parking spot at each SGRC location through July. Congratulations, Lindsay!