

Economic Development Element

The Economic Development Element for Athens-Clarke County includes highlighting initiatives identified by the community to encourage prosperous growth through financial stability, proactive marketing, and consistent business development. As one of the (15) topics divided among the (5) common themes in this document, Economic Development is essential to ensuring a high quality of life. Previous elements within the 2018 Comprehensive Plan have already highlighted Goals, Strategies, Policies, Needs and Opportunities, as well as associated Community Work Program items directly related to the topic of Economic Development. Because Athens-Clarke County has been classified as a Georgia Job Tax Credit Tier 1 local government, it is vital that this mandatory element address factors such as diversity of the economic base, quality of the local labor force, effectiveness of local economic development agencies, and program and tools, as outlined in the minimum standards and procedures for local comprehensive planning.

Per these same requirements, Athens-Clarke County has also included a copy of the Northeast Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy produced by the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission. This document serves as a key instrument in guiding Athens-Clarke County and the surrounding counties toward economic prosperity from a regional perspective. The CEDS can be found in the appendix section of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan, and serves as the official component of the Economic Development Element. This information is supplemented by all other related economic development information found throughout this plan.

The following is a list of associated facts and data directly related to Economic Development in Athens-Clarke County. This information was taken from Envision Athens, but has significant applicability to the 2018 Comprehensive Plan, further strengthening the relationship between the two efforts. Use of the various assessment statistics was meant to influence comments and ultimately decisions pertaining to Community Goals, Needs and Opportunities, and the Community Work Program.

Informative facts depicted in the Envision Athens Community Assessment as produced by Planning Next:

- 48,000 Private Sector Jobs as of 2017, a moderate increase of 8% from 2005, indicating a major shift from manufacturing to health care (pg. 3).
- 36.7% Poverty Rate, the 4th highest in Georgia. If adjusted for the student population, the rate is ~28.4% (pg. 3).
- As of 2017, the unemployment rate registered at 4.5% (pg. 9).
- The University of Georgia is the county's largest employer at 10,370 employees (pg. 9).
- The three largest private sector employers include Healthcare and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, and Accommodation and Food Services, accounting for 55% of total private employment. Self-employment estimates include another 16,500 jobs (pg. 9).

- \$8.1 billion Economic Output (GDP) as measured in 2015 (pg. 10).
- Manufacturing jobs still remain strong at 5,924, despite more than 2,000 jobs lost since 2005 (pg. 10).
- Hospitals and health care are recognized as regional assets, helping to offset the loss in manufacturing jobs since 2005 (pg. 10).
- 59,366 Total Workforce, or those over the age of 16 employed or actively seeking employment (pg. 11).
- 40,000 workers commute into the community each day while 18,000 residents commute out of the county. Slightly more than 20,000 residents live and work in the county (pg. 11).

Informative facts depicted in the Envision Athens Economic Targeted Analysis as produced by Ninigret Partners:

- More than 5,000 businesses in Athens-Clarke County (pg. 11).
- Small business represent nearly 90% of all businesses in region, but makes up less than 25% of all employees (pg. 11).
- Large businesses represent ~75% of all jobs (pg. 11).
- Retail and hospitality represent 30% of all private industry establishments (pg. 13).