



City of Milton 2028 Comprehensive Plan Community Assessment

Overview

The City of Milton was established in 2006 and has initiated the preparation of the City of Milton 2028 Comprehensive Plan to identify key issues that may affect the City over the next 20 years and to establish a comprehensive program to guide the City's decision-makers as they deal with future needs, challenges, and opportunities. The mission of the Comprehensive Plan is to:

- Provide an assessment of existing conditions,
- Identify future needs,
- Consider how the anticipated growth and changes will affect the health, safety, and welfare of present and future community residents, workers, and visitors, and
- Advance the mission statement and values of the community through consistent policies and procedures.

The Comprehensive Plan should serve as a policy guide regarding the future needs, limitations and opportunities facing the community and advance the coordination of land use and transportation planning. Furthermore, it should address the provision of infrastructure and services, support sustainable economic development, protect natural and cultural resources, and provide adequate housing for the entire community.

1. Purpose of the Community Assessment

The Community Assessment is one of three required elements of a comprehensive plan as required by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) under the Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning, Chapter 110-12-1, Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (effective May 1, 2005). The three components of a comprehensive plan meeting the quality growth requirements of the DCA are the Community Assessment, the Community Participation Program, and the Community Agenda.



The Community Assessment provides a baseline of information regarding existing and projected conditions in the subject city or county. The Community Participation Program (CPP) provides the program for engaging public input and participation. The Community Agenda provides the action plan, short-term work program, future development map, and implementation programs for the city or county.

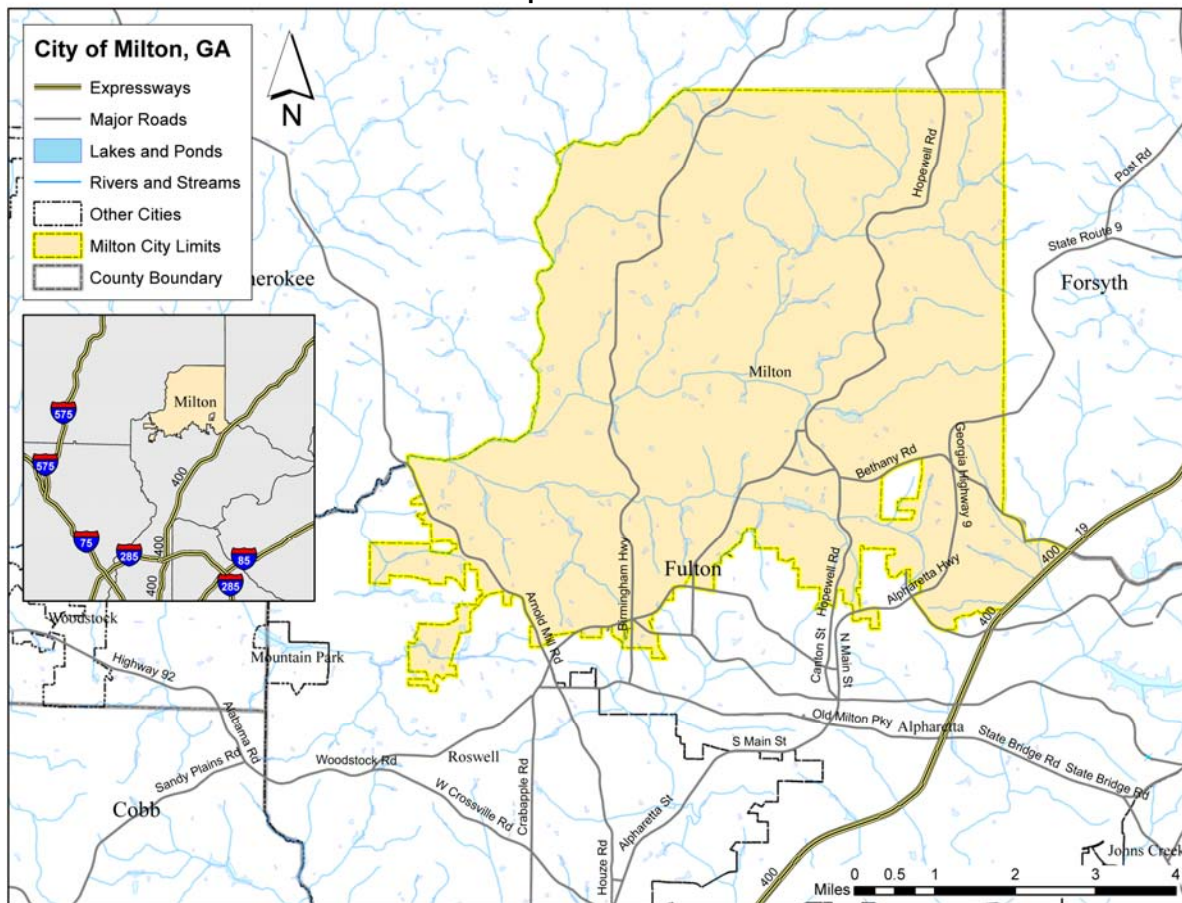
The Community Assessment is the first part of the City of Milton 2028 Comprehensive Plan and is a professional and objective **review and evaluation** of information about the City of Milton. While the development of the Community Agenda portion of the Comprehensive Plan relies more heavily on public



input, visioning, and strategic planning, the Community Assessment provides an observational baseline inventory of the community and **should** include a list of potential issues and opportunities the community may wish to take action to address.

Other aspects of the Community Assessment include an analysis of existing development patterns, including a map of recommended character areas for consideration in developing an overall vision for

Map 1.1: Location



future development of the community. Also included in this phase are an evaluation of current community policies, activities, and development patterns for consistency with the State's Quality Community Objectives and a review **of** the evaluations and preliminary issues and opportunities.

The product of the Community Assessment must be a concise and informative report (such as an executive summary) to encourage its use to provide a base of information to decision-makers regarding the issues raised by stakeholders during development of the Community Agenda portion of the plan.



2. Scope

The bill creating the City of Milton was passed in the Georgia House of Representatives (127-21) and in the Georgia Senate (49-0) on March 9, 2006. On March 28, 2006, Governor Sonny Perdue signed HB 1470 into law at 2:00 p.m. On July 18, 2006, the referendum to establish the City of Milton was approved by 85% of the voters (3876 yes vs. 651 no), and the first general election for mayor and city council was held on Tuesday, November 7, 2006. The City of Milton began operations on December 1, 2006.

The area encompassed by the City of Milton was part of unincorporated northern Fulton County prior to the City's establishment on December 1, 2006. Fulton County has created and worked with a comprehensive plan for many years and the current comprehensive plan for the area including Milton is the Focus Fulton County 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update, adopted by the Fulton County Board of Commissioners in November 2005. As part of the incorporation program for the City of Milton, the City accepted and will continue to operate under the Focus Fulton County 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update until its city council adopts a new comprehensive plan for the City.



The Community Assessment element of the 2028 Comprehensive Plan is intended to provide baseline information and establish basic assumptions for planning. Some of the materials regarding existing conditions are included in a Data Appendix which forms an integral part of the Community Assessment. However, the heart of the Community Assessment is the professional planning review of the issues and opportunities that are recommended to be addressed in the Community Agenda and the discussion of existing development patterns and their consistency with the Quality Community Objectives established by the State of Georgia.

Relevant supporting information regarding existing conditions and current trends provides dimension and background to the community's list of issues and opportunities. The planning analysis should also consider how the community's issues, goals and objectives may be affected over a 20 year time frame. Environmental protection of air and water quality, important natural areas, cultural and historic resources, protected farmlands, and other elements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) should be observed as part of the assessment.

The State requires that the analysis also consider whether "Part V" ordinances have been adopted to comply with the State's Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria and whether action has been taken or is underway to address the City's service delivery strategy in the Comprehensive Plan and its updates.

Milton includes the northwest portion of Fulton County and is bordered by Cherokee County to the north and west; Forsyth County to the east; Roswell to the southwest (a little west of Arnold Mill Road); and Alpharetta to the south and southeast.

According to the City's website, Milton has a population of approximately 20,000 persons and covers approximately 23,000 acres. However, projections by county and regional agencies indicate an estimate



of more than 24,000 persons in 2007, and boundary agreements between the City of Milton and the adjacent cities of Roswell and Alpharetta have identified an area slightly greater than 25,000 acres. Some residents disagree with the population projections although they are based on recent permits and historic occupancy rates.

For comparison, the area of the City of Milton is approximately twice the physical size of the City of Alpharetta, but has approximately half the population of that city.

Historically, plans for the area that now comprise the City of Milton were prepared by Fulton County as a small part (7.4%) of a very large county (528.7 square miles) that ranged from rural farms on AG-1 zoned land in the northern and the southern ends of the County to the highly developed urban center of the City of Atlanta, the political and cultural hub of the State of Georgia. Milton, Atlanta and Fulton County are part of the surrounding Atlanta/Sandy Springs Combined Statistical Area of 28 Piedmont-region counties.

The City of Milton is unique! The City is adjacent to the Georgia 400 mega corridor and has received strong interest from developers to develop residential, commercial, and office projects due to the City's desirable location. The rolling topography, scenic roadway corridors, pastoral nature, and equestrian lifestyle make the City a highly sought after location for home buyers and companies offering services to successful residential communities. Consequently, Milton's per-capita and household incomes are significantly higher than county, State, and national averages, and intense development pressures are centered on high-value residential development. Prices for new housing units range from \$300,000 for an attached unit to more than \$2,500,000 for a single family home with acreage.

Although there are some areas of older homes, primarily on larger lots that developed along the rural road corridors, most of the development in the City is recent, built since the 1990's. Businesses that cater to these economic generators seek locations along the major highways near important intersections.

The pace of growth in the area that comprises the City of Milton followed the widening of Georgia 400 from four lanes to eight lanes between I-285 and Holcomb Bridge Road in 1989 and the extension of the Georgia 400 Toll Road to Interstate 85 in 1993. Originally opened in 1971, the segment between Holcomb Bridge Road and Windward Parkway was widened to six lanes in the 90's. In 2006, the Georgia Department of Transportation widened the six-lane portion of the corridor to eight lanes. Georgia 400 is a limited-access highway between I-285 and State Route 306 (Keith Bridge Road) in Forsyth County.

The great majority of the City of Milton was developed in traditional residential subdivisions on one-acre or larger lots with septic tanks providing wastewater treatment. Residents have strenuously maintained support for AG-1 (Agricultural) zoning throughout the majority of the area for many years when the area was unincorporated Fulton County and since the City was formed in 2006. The unique pastoral character of the area has been cited in previous plans as a major "quality of life" asset, and local citizens have strongly supported





the efforts of the Fulton County Comprehensive Land Use Plan to maintain rural character.

Only a small portion of the City is served by wastewater collection sewer systems. The largest area is located along and to the east of State Route 9 Corridor in the Camp Creek tributary basin of Big Creek. The Crooked Creek community also is served by sewer, as are other, smaller areas located along the southern edge of the City near Crabapple Crossroads and at the southern ends of Hopewell and Cogburn Roads at the edge of the city boundary between Milton and Alpharetta. Some portions of The Manor subdivision have purchased sewer services from Forsyth County to allow development of the golf and country club in the City's northeastern quadrant.

The majority of the City is located in the Upper Etowah River Basin along the eastern flank of the Little River. The Cooper Sandy Creek and Chicken Creek tributaries of Little River flow from east to west across the City. These drainage basins are not served by sewer, and the dominant development forms are small equestrian farms and one-acre and larger residential lots that allow site development for a residential structure and septic tank wastewater treatment. The rolling green pastures throughout Milton, characteristic of the Appalachian foothills, provide scenery which is unmatched throughout most of the Atlanta Region.

City policies have continued the long-standing resistance of the County to the extension of sewer lines into Northwestern Fulton County. This policy has received strong support from numerous local citizens as a means of preserving rural character and maintaining low density in Northwestern Fulton and in approximately 75% of the City.

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) designates the appropriate planning level for all communities in Georgia as "Advanced", "Intermediate", and "Basic" Planning levels based on the population of the County. As a city within Fulton County, the most populous county in Georgia, Milton is required to be considered as an Advanced Level Planning Community. The designation as an Advanced Level planning jurisdiction is consistent with the previous planning efforts prepared by Fulton County, including the current Focus Fulton 2025 Comprehensive Plan. An "Advanced Level" Planning Community requires additional transportation analysis in the preparation of the Community Assessment because of the importance of the effects of transportation infrastructure and congestion on air quality, environmental preservation, economic development, and land use. In addition to considering the impacts of transportation facilities and conditions, alternative routes and modes should be addressed within the Community Assessment.

3. City of Milton Profile

The City of Milton covers approximately 39 square miles in the northernmost area of Fulton County, which is the heart of the 28-County Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and the 10-County Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) Region. Milton is a new city, incorporated and beginning operations in 2006. The City was established a year after the City of Sandy Springs was established and at the same time as the City of Johns Creek as all of the unincorporated areas in northern Fulton County were either annexed into existing cities or formed new ones.



The City of Milton takes its name from its location in the area of the former Milton County, which was named for John Milton, Georgia's first Secretary of State. Alpharetta was the county seat of Milton County from the 1850s until 1931.

Milton County's topography and soils were not suited to most agricultural uses, and the area remained rural and poor. After the soils became too depleted for cotton or other cash crops, many acres were returned to woodlands and pastures for raising horses, cattle, and goats. To the south, Fulton County and the City of Atlanta thrived, as Atlanta became the State capital and emerged as a powerful economic engine for Georgia. In 1931, Milton and Campbell Counties merged with Fulton County to prevent bankruptcy during the height of the Great Depression, and Atlanta became the center of local government for what is now the City of Milton.



Milton is located in an area where there are no railroads and few highways or expressways, and the area remained relatively rural even as metropolitan Atlanta experienced rapid growth between 1945 and 1990. However, the rate of growth dramatically changed when the State constructed the Georgia 400 limited access highway in the 1980s and then widened the expressway to eight lanes in the early 1990s.

In the 1960s, the growth of the City of Atlanta spawned new suburbs that continued to expand for the remainder of the century. Property was assembled for Georgia 400 and unincorporated Sandy Springs, and the **Cities of Roswell and Alpharetta** began to grow rapidly as development occurred along the existing rural road network feeding the new expressway. **Although significant areas of small farms and large rural lots remained, many** new subdivisions were established providing single-family homes to serve the region's economic vitality and employment growth. Some of the more valuable properties for residential development were located on metro Atlanta's northern side, and the 3,000 acre Windward development heralded a planned community that offered numerous amenities.

As new businesses located along the northern arc of Interstate 285 and then along Georgia 400 to the north, economic activity moved much closer to northern Fulton County. Residential development along the existing road system accelerated, followed by the development of new subdivisions creating nearby demand for commercial retail and offices for local services. **Although a number of subdivisions were located north and west of Highway 9 and Mayfield Road, most of the homes in this segment of the City were sited on large, one acre (and larger) lots, and the area retained a rural, residential character that was desired by both existing and new residents for its combined low density and rural lifestyle.**

The area southeast of Highway 9 developed on much smaller lots including subdivisions to the north and south of Bethany Road. The southeastern corner of the City between Georgia 400 and State Route 9 was acquired by Hines Interests, Inc. in 1996 and incorporated into a mixed use development named Deerfield. Construction of the Deerfield mixed use commercial, office, and residential development began in 1997 with an expected build-out period of approximately eight years. Even with a slow-down in the economy, much of the original plan for Deerfield was complete by 2007, although the office buildings were not fully leased and a number of residential units were still to be completed.



3. Population Estimates

The Fulton County Department of Environment and Community Development (D.E.&C.D.) tracks zoning changes, building permits, housing starts, occupancy averages and other information within the cities and the unincorporated areas of the County to generate population estimates and projections. Estimates can be compared to the US Census Bureau’s decennial census to determine changes to the methodology for estimating or forecasting. The following table illustrates the population data for the portion of Fulton County located north of the Chattahoochee River in 1980, 1990 and 2000:

<u>Year:</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>% Change</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Alpharetta	3,128	13,002	(315.66%)	34,854	(168.07%)
Mountain Park	376	242	(-35.64%)	496	(104.96%)
Roswell	23,337	53,743	(130.29%)	79,334	(47.62%)
Unincorporated	<u>12,859</u>	<u>34,152</u>	(165.59%)	<u>91,400</u>	(167.63%)
Total North Fulton	39,700	101,139	(154.76%)	206,084	(103.76%)

Based on re-sampling the 2000 Census information using the new boundaries, Fulton County D.E.&C.D. revised the Year 2000 population of the area encompassing the City of Alpharetta’s current (2007) boundaries to 47,097. This illustrates that annexation added more than 12,240 persons to Alpharetta’s Year 2000 population. We assume that it reduced the unincorporated area population by the same amount.

Fulton County D.E.&C.D. has been working with the City of Alpharetta to develop a new estimate for 2007. Using the revised Base Year 2000 population for the City of Alpharetta in 2007 and considering household size, vacancy rates, permits, and other data, the estimated population (April 1, 2007) for Alpharetta was 51,045.

The City of Johns Creek recalculated their population for 2007 as 70,050 persons using housing counts, vacancy rates, and economic development information.

Using the 2000 Census (based on April 1, 2000) and permits, housing starts, and other information to determine growth rates between 2000 and 2007, the Fulton County D.E.&C.D. provided the following population estimates and projections for the City of Milton:

- Existing Population Estimate (2006): 23,014
- Existing Population Estimate (2007): 24,218



It is assumed that Fulton County D.E.&C.D. used approximately 3% as the vacancy rate for the existing housing stock to determine the population figures. A variation of 2% would mean approximately 500 persons. Therefore, if the vacancy rate has increased because of the slowdown in the housing market, it may be likely that the original projection from Fulton County D./E.&C.D. may add population faster than should be expected if this trend were projected forward.



4. Population Projections

The **Fulton County D.E.&C.D. estimated population projection for Milton in 2008 was 25,400**. However, the housing market has visibly slowed since 2006. Although the number of foreclosures has increased along with vacancy rates, developers have indicated that the vacancy rate in Alpharetta is still about 3%. With wary lenders reducing the flow of money into the real estate construction market and the reduction in the rate of housing absorption, the real estate market can be assumed to remain slow for at least one or two years.

This difficulty in selling existing stocks of completed housing units has resulted in fewer housing starts than were originally projected. Therefore, population projections for 2008 and the near future **may be higher than expected**, as the future economic conditions assumed when those projections were made have changed.

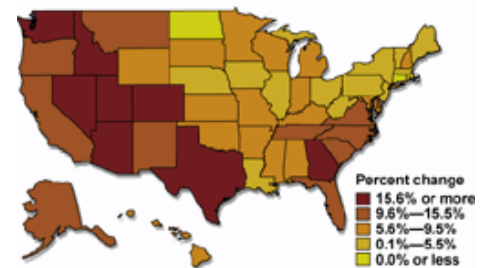
The projections prepared by Fulton County as part of the Focus Fulton 2025 Comprehensive Plan provided the following trends through 2025:

Year:	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Alpharetta	37,132	42,210	44,027	45,509	47,194
Mountain Park	500	606	642	672	687
Roswell	82,912	90,587	94,911	98,325	101,274
Unincorporated	<u>93,192</u>	<u>100,300</u>	<u>106,553</u>	<u>111,850</u>	<u>117,211</u>
Total North Fulton	213,736	233,703	246,133	256,356	266,366

In 2006, the cities of Milton and Johns Creek were created, and the rest of the unincorporated areas of northern Fulton County were annexed by the Cities of Roswell and Alpharetta. The above projections for Unincorporated Fulton County need to be redistributed to show the population gains added by annexation in Roswell and Alpharetta and the split increases. **The projections for the unincorporated areas were not broken out by sub-areas in the 2025 Plan. However,** on request, the Fulton County D.E.&C.D. provided a population projection for the City of Milton based on their allocation of historical trends and the available land remaining that could be absorbed into residential uses. The initial Fulton County Department of Economic & Community Development’s demographic projections for the City of Milton identified a growth of approximately 109% over 20 years as shown here:

- Projected 2010 Pop: 27,800
- Projected 2015 Pop: 33,850
- Projected 2020 Pop: 39,900
- Projected 2025 Pop: 45,800
- Projected 2030 Pop: 51,900

This estimate provided a **projected population estimate for the City of Milton of 49,400 in 2028 and 51,900 in 2030**. This estimate provides one basic scenario for future planning purposes.





The population increases for the City of Milton estimated by Fulton County D.E.&C.D. are about four times the projected growth rates for the formerly-unincorporated area of northern Fulton County or the City of Alpharetta and five times the rate of projected growth for the City of Roswell proposed by the Focus Fulton 2025 Comprehensive Plan. But, Milton has very small areas for providing infill at higher densities because that would require sewer services, and less than 20% of the City's land area is served by public wastewater collection systems. The great majority of existing development in the City is new, stable, and located on septic tanks at low density. The community has expressed a desire to maintain low residential densities to maintain its rural and rural residential character.

The majority of the land area in northwestern Milton is located in the Little River basin; however, the Little River and its tributaries in Milton have limited water flow in dry seasons. They also are part of the Etowah River tributary of the Coosa River drainage basin that provides water for several communities in Northwest Georgia including the City of Cartersville. The uppermost elements of the river basin are the most sensitive to impacts on water flow and water quality, and they could not accommodate any significant addition of treated effluent.

There are no existing gravity-flow wastewater collection (sewer) lines in the Little River drainage basin located in Milton. With the exception of a small existing pump station for the Manor Club facilities and portions of Forsyth County west of State Route 9, and the existing Crooked Creek pump station near the State Route 9 corridor, the portion of the drainage basin to the east of the Little River has no public wastewater collection and no public wastewater treatment facilities. City policies in Milton do not support the extension of sewer into the Little River basin, and embrace the concept of no inter-basin transfers.

The majority of the City of Milton lies within the interstitial area between the two northern regional growth corridors along Georgia 400 and Interstate 575. State Route 140 connects Roswell and Alpharetta with Canton on the I-575 corridor and establishes the primary transportation corridor serving the western half of the City. The location of the City between the two prongs of northern growth help affirm the likelihood that the City will develop to a lesser extent than areas closer to the major transportation corridors. Although these existing conditions could be changed by major investments in roads and transportation assets, increased accessibility through Milton was identified as a threat rather than an opportunity.

Cherokee County and the cities of Canton and Holly Springs to the northwest and Forsyth County and the City of Cumming to the northeast are positioned to receive more growth than can be accommodated in Milton, and the new City of Johns Creek to the southeast is in a much better position to add sewer lines, waste treatment capacity, infill development, and population. These areas are considered much more likely to accommodate and welcome growth than Milton.

Therefore, the initial population projections provided by the Fulton County Department of Environment and Community Development (F.C.&C.D.) may be assumed to represent a high projection of population growth than desired by the City. Assuming that the City of Milton adopts stringent policies to protect the existing rural, low density residential, and environmentally sensitive areas, it is likely that the future population may be significantly lower than the F.C.&C.D. projections suggest. Based on the strong input and desire of the residential community to maintain lower densities and the continued policies to support



existing agricultural zoning and restrict sewers from the Little River basin, a lower estimate of future population can be expected.

A growth rate of 26% (as projected for the 2005 unincorporated area of Fulton County north of the Chattahoochee River) is only slightly higher than that projected for Alpharetta (27% compared to 26% over the next 20 years) and would yield the **2028 population for Milton as approximately 31,500**. This estimate provides a second scenario for future planning and is recommended as an alternative for consideration for the City of Milton's growth and development.

Whereas the City has a policy to limit any expansion of the sewer system into the Coosa River basin and supports maintenance of the existing rural suburban character of the community, this estimate may be appropriate as the low growth scenario for the City's future. The visioning element of the forthcoming Community Agenda process will help resolve the future recommendations by identifying areas where growth can occur and their extent.

Additional scenarios may be developed as more information is shared between the five cities north of the Chattahoochee River, Fulton County and the Atlanta Regional Commission. The Community Agenda will provide the opportunity to use one of these alternatives or to consider whether another population projection should be created based on additional information.