

**COMPREHENSIVE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE
REGION 10: LEE AND RUSSELL COUNTIES
SEPTEMBER, 2010**



Downtown Opelika Streetscape

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REGIONAL VISION STATEMENT:

“To promote and maintain a healthy environment for growth and development in Lee and Russell Counties.”



Riverwalk; Phenix City



Toomer's Corner; Auburn



Russell County Courthouse

ORGANIZING AND STAFFING FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) serves as a framework for future economic development activities in Lee and Russell counties that will help create jobs, foster a more stable and diversified economy and improve the quality of life in the region. Regional planning provides an opportunity to take a broader planning perspective and focus on issues that may be beyond the abilities of individual local governments to address.

In preparing this annual CEDS Update, planning staff at Lee-Russell Council of Governments utilized the expertise of planners at the cities of Auburn, Opelika and Phenix City, as well as administrators at Lee and Russell County. Strategic plans from member governments were reviewed. Additionally, updated information from the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Alabama Department of Education, Alabama Rural Action Commission, Alabama State Data Center, US Census Bureau, US Department of Commerce, and US Department of Labor was examined.

Lee Russell Council of Governments is not an Economic Development District (EDA) but prepares and updates the CEDS according to EDA guidelines on behalf of our member governments.



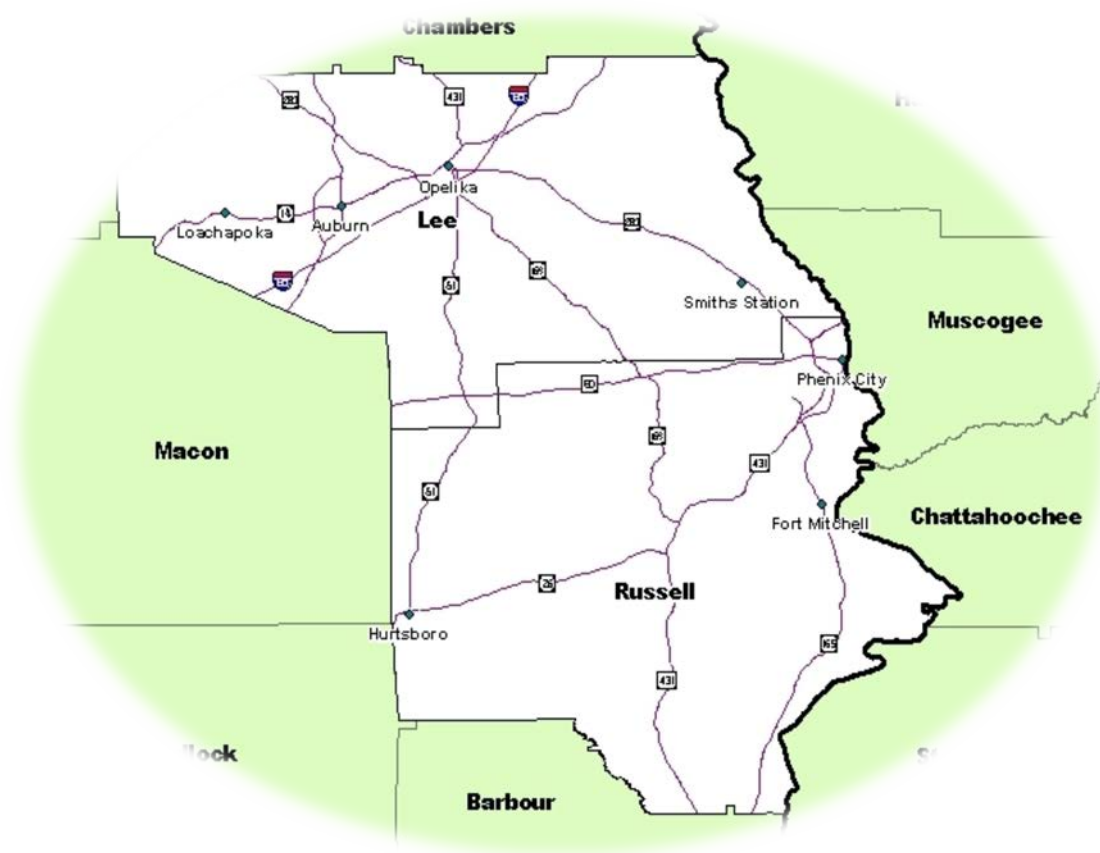
Lee County Courthouse

WHERE ARE WE NOW? A REGIONAL PROFILE

Location

Region 10 is comprised of two Alabama counties, Lee and Russell, located in East Central Alabama, along the Chattahoochee River. The land area is 1,250 square miles. The region rises from 250 feet above sea level in Russell County to 700 feet above sea level in Lee County.

At the region's eastern border is the State of Georgia. To the north, south, and west are the Alabama counties of Chambers, Tallapoosa, Macon, Bullock and Barbour. The region is along and near Interstate 85 and Interstate Spur 185, which provide easy access and proximity to Atlanta, Georgia, Montgomery, Alabama and Mobile, Alabama.



Geography, Environment, and Natural Resources

The terrain in the northern portion of the region is Piedmont Plateau characterized by hilly topography with gently to steep slopes. The terrain for the southern portion of the region is coastal plan, which is level to gently rolling. Types of soil follow the same line as the terrain

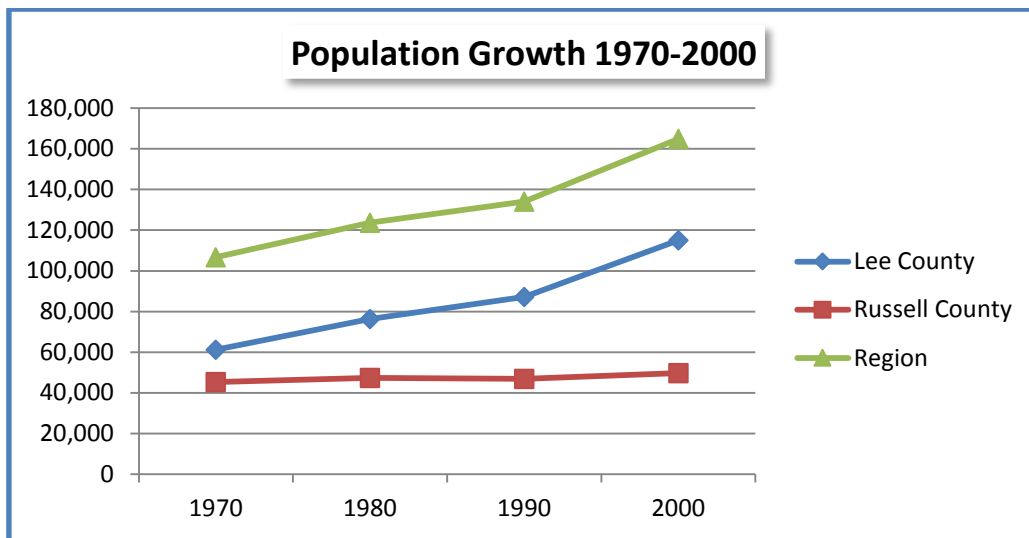
across the region with rocky clay soil to the north and more sandy soil to the south. Loblolly and shortleaf pine forests are common across the region.

Many large creek systems form watersheds in the region. The western areas are drained by the Saugahatchee and Chewacla creeks as they flow to the Tallapoosa River. The creeks in the eastern areas, Little Uchee, Halawakee, and Wacoochee flow to the Chattahoochee River. The Chattahoochee forms the border between Alabama and Georgia. The network of creeks, lakes and Chattahoochee River make the area desirable for both tourism and industry.

The region's climate is characterized by short, mild winters and long, warm summers. The growing season is 230 to 240 days long. The annual mean temperature is 65 degrees. The average annual precipitation is about 55 inches.

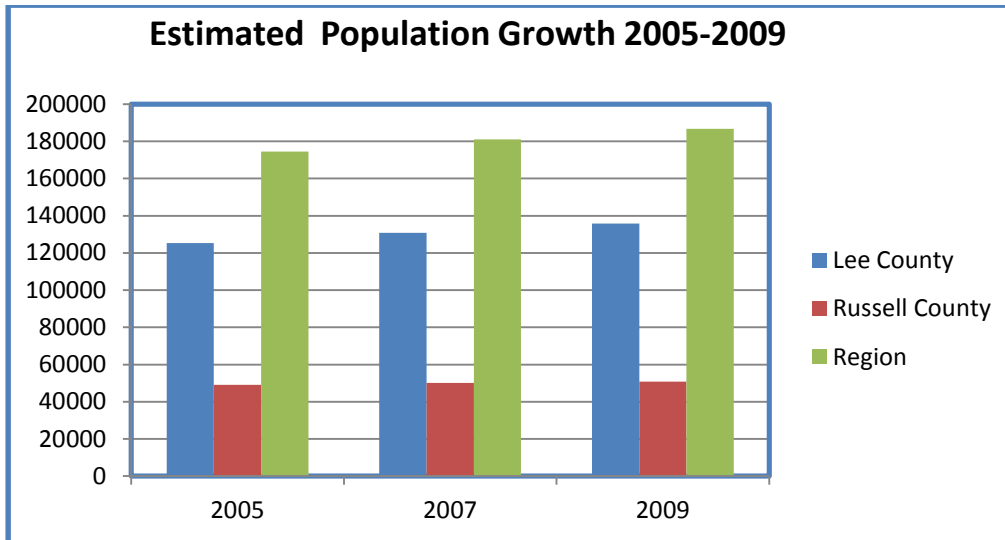
Population

Lee County has been among the fastest growing counties in Alabama for many years while Russell County's rate of growth has been much slower. Back in 1970, 57% of the region's population resided in Lee County. In 2000, 70% of the region's population resided in Lee County. From 1990 to 2000, Lee County experienced a 32% increase in population. During this same time frame, Russell County's population growth was 6.18%.



Source: US Census Bureau

The Alabama State Data Center estimates the regional population to have reached 186,729 in 2009. ASDC estimates and projections for future growth are based on past growth. Since it has been 10 years since Census 2000, it is helpful to look at estimated population growth.



Source: Alabama State Data Center

Lee County Data

According to the Alabama State Data Center, in 2009, the estimated population of Lee County was 130,485. Lee County ranks as the eighth most populous county in Alabama. The major population areas in the County are the cities of Auburn, Opelika and Smiths Station. Sixty-seven percent of the county population resides in these three cities. Thirty-three percent reside in the unincorporated/rural areas of the county.

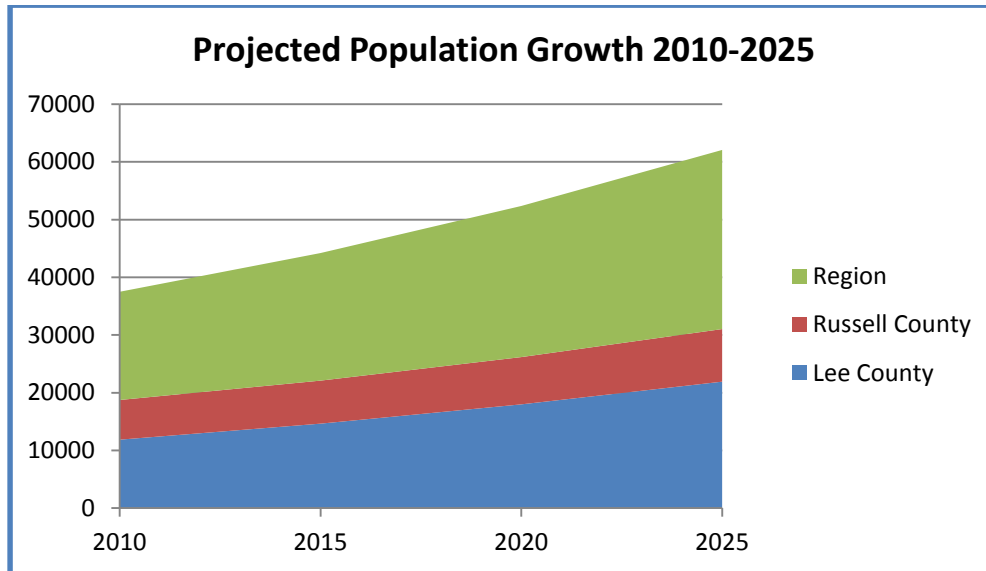
Russell County Data

According to the Alabama State Data Center, in 2009, the estimated population of Russell County was 50,111. Russell County ranks as the 25th most populous county in Alabama. The major population areas are in the northeastern areas of the county, in and near Phenix City. Sixty-four percent of the county population resides in this area. Thirty-six percent reside in the unincorporated/rural areas of the county.

Projected Population Growth

The Alabama State Data Center also projects population growth for all counties in Alabama. The projections are based on past growth. ASDC projects that by 2025 the population of the region will have reached 235,000.

A Regional Growth Management Plan completed in 2009 believes the actual growth in the region will be much high than census and data center projects. Since the 2000 census data was released, two important economic development catalysts have occurred which will likely attract more families to the region.



Source: Alabama State Data Center

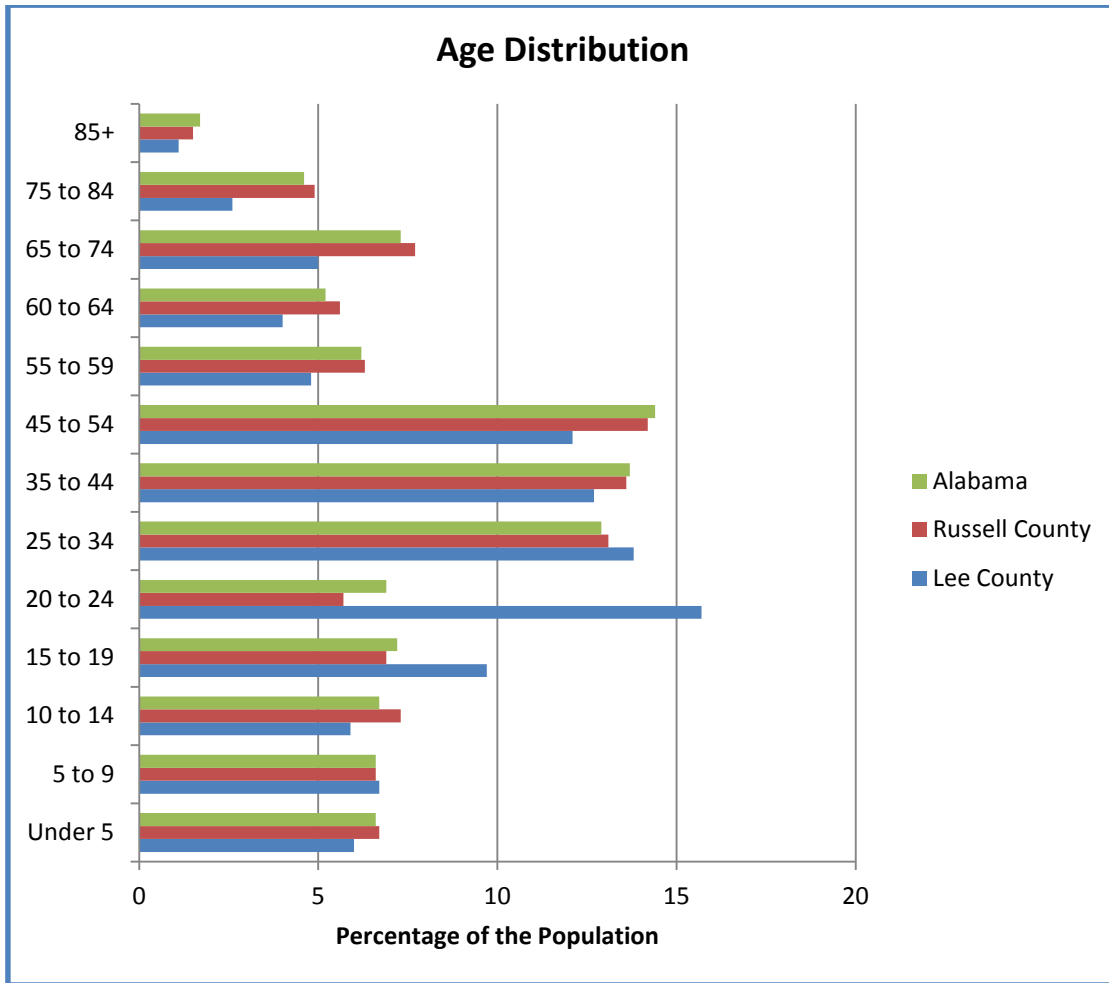
A billion dollar state of the art KIA automotive plant opened in February, 2010 in West Point, Georgia, on I-85 just across the state line. The plant currently has 1,200 employees and plans to expand to 2,400 employees by year end. The Kia plant has also attracted several Tier-1 and Tier-2 manufacturers to the region. Combined, these manufacturers will bring an additional 5,100 jobs to Alabama and Georgia.

The second economic development is the expansion of Fort Benning due to Base Realignment and Closure mandates of the United States military. The projected population growth, including military personnel, Department of Defense civilian and contract company personnel and their families will total 30,000 when BRAC implementation is complete.

The Regional Growth Management plan expects the impacts of these economic drivers on the population growth to be an additional 5,482 in Russell County and 4,280 in Lee County between 2008 and 2028.

Age Distribution

Age distribution can be an indicator of a county with increasing or declining population. In 2007, the median age in Lee County was estimated at 28.5. In Russell County the median age was significantly higher at 38. Age distribution within the region shows the highest percentage of the population, 29%, falls into the 25-44 age range. Twenty-one percent of the population is between the ages of 45-64. The large student population of Auburn University has a significant effect on the 21% of the region's population between the ages of 15 and 24.



Source: 2006-2008 American Community Survey

Senior Citizens as a Percentage of the Population

In 2008, the American Communities Survey estimated there were 10,847 individuals age 65 or older in Lee County. This was 8.5% of the total population. In Russell County, 13.8% of the population, or 6,843 individuals were age 65 or older.

Portions of the region, especially the cities of Auburn and Opelika, are increasingly seen as desirable locations for retirement. Projections from the Alabama State Data Center show the elderly population in Lee County growing to 22,418 by 2025. The elderly population in Russell County is expected to increase to 9,135 by 2025.

Education

Education is an important factor in both preparing a skilled workforce and attracting and retaining business and industry to the region. Education is considered an area of strength for both Lee and Russell Counties.

There are three public school systems in Lee County: Lee County, Auburn City and Opelika City. All three public school systems located in Lee County met No Child Left Behind Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements in 2008. Access to technology, student attendance, percentage of highly qualified teachers, teachers with advanced degrees and fiscal management in these systems were well above state averages. Combined attendance at the three Lee County public school systems averaged 19,899.

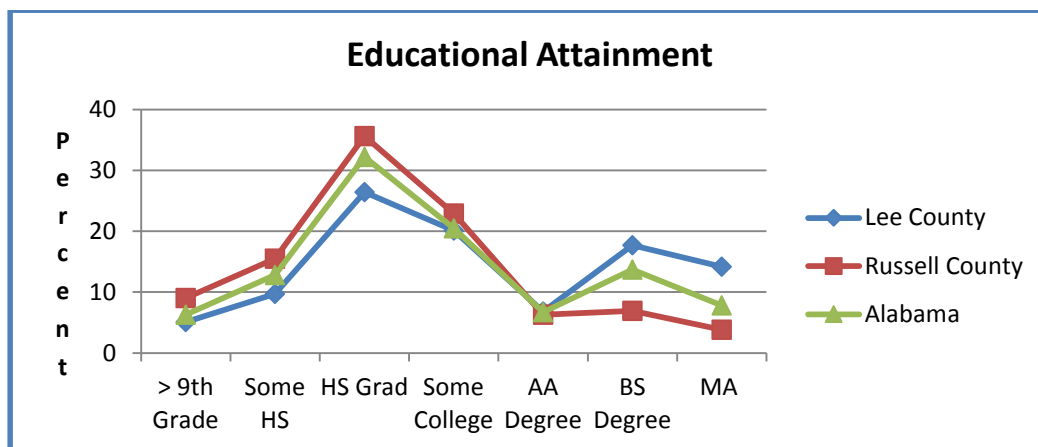
There are two public school systems in Russell County: Phenix City and Russell County. Both systems achieved their AYP goals in 2008. Access to technology, student attendance, percentage of highly qualified teachers, teachers with advanced degrees and fiscal management in these systems were above state averages. Combined attendance at the two Russell County public school systems averaged 15,083.

Public School Graduation Rate and Dropout Rate

School System	Avg. Daily Attendance	Graduation Rate	4 Year Projected Drop Out Rate
Auburn City	5,668	92%	6.06%
Lee County	9,957	89%	14.65%
Opelika City	4,274	86%	11.02%
Phenix City	5,850	98%	4.32%
Russell County	3,383	76%	19.95%

Source: Alabama Department of Education

The educational attainment of the region's citizens mirrors national trends with the highest percentage of residents reporting a high school diploma or equivalent. Russell County has a higher than expected percentage of residents reporting less than 9 years of schooling (9%) and attending high school without receiving a diploma (15.5%). Lee County's percentage of citizens with a graduate or doctorate degree (14.2%) is well above national averages.



Source: 2006-2008 American Community Survey

INFRASTRUCTURE

Access to potable water and sanitary conditions is an important ingredient to economic development. Companies are much more likely to invest when infrastructure is in place to support their investment. In both Lee and Russell Counties, water and sewer services outside of the incorporated areas have been cited as areas of weakness for many years. As the population expands, particularly in the Fort Mitchell area of Russell County and the Smiths Station area of Lee County, these longstanding weaknesses have become critical issues for the region.

Water

Water service in the region is provided by both private and public entities. In Lee County there are two municipal public water systems and four rural public water authorities. The two municipal systems, Auburn City Water Works and Opelika Water Board, serve approximately 57% of the county's total population. The remaining water systems of Lee County include the Beauregard Water System, Lee-Chambers Utilities District, Loachapoka Water Authority, and Smiths Station Water System. These four water systems serve approximately 107,000 persons. About 7% of the Lee County population is unserved by an organized water system and must rely on well water.

Sewer

Sewer service continues to be seen as an area of concern throughout the region.

Public sewer service is available to 27,621 households in Lee County, but only in the Auburn and Opelika area. Smiths Station, one of the fastest growing areas in the county, has very limited sewer service.

Nearly one half of the households in Russell County do not have access to public sanitary sewer service. Only portions of Phenix City and Hurtsboro are served by a public sewer system. The remaining areas of Russell County, including fast growing Fort Mitchell and Ladonia must rely on septic systems.

TRANSPORTATION

High quality, accessible and affordable transportation services for people and goods are important to the ongoing economic growth of communities.

The region is bisected by Interstate 85 and lies midway between the capital cities of both Alabama and Georgia. Atlanta, Georgia is one hour northeast. Montgomery, Alabama is one hour to the west. I-85 is the main transportation corridor between the Port of Mobile and the east coast. The region is also convenient to Birmingham, the largest metropolitan area in Alabama, which is located 90 miles northwest via state highway 280. There are 984 miles of paved roads and 424 miles of unpaved roads in the region. Maintenance of the unpaved roads is an area of concern in both Lee and Russell Counties.

The average work commute in Lee County is 19.9 minutes. It is slightly longer in Russell County at 22.3 minutes. The overwhelming majority of workers in the region drive to work alone. (Lee County 81%; Russell County: 78%). A small percentage carpool (Lee County: 11.6%; Russell County: 16.8%). Less than one percent of workers rely on public transportation to get to and from work.

The Robert J. Pitts airport in Auburn provides services to private planes and corporate jets. A new terminal opens in the fall of 2010. Access to commercial air travel continues to require drives to Columbus, GA, Montgomery, or Atlanta. Rail freight service in the region is provided by the Norfolk Southern and Seaboard railroads.

Public transportation is seen as an area of weakness in the region. Public transportation is provided by two public transit systems, Lee-Russell Public Transit (LRPT) and Phenix City Express (PEX). LRPT provides demand response service Monday-Friday from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm Monday-Friday to the cities of Auburn and Opelika. A more limited demand response service is provided by LRPT to rural areas of the counties one or two days a week. Public transportation is difficult or impossible to find at night or on weekends.

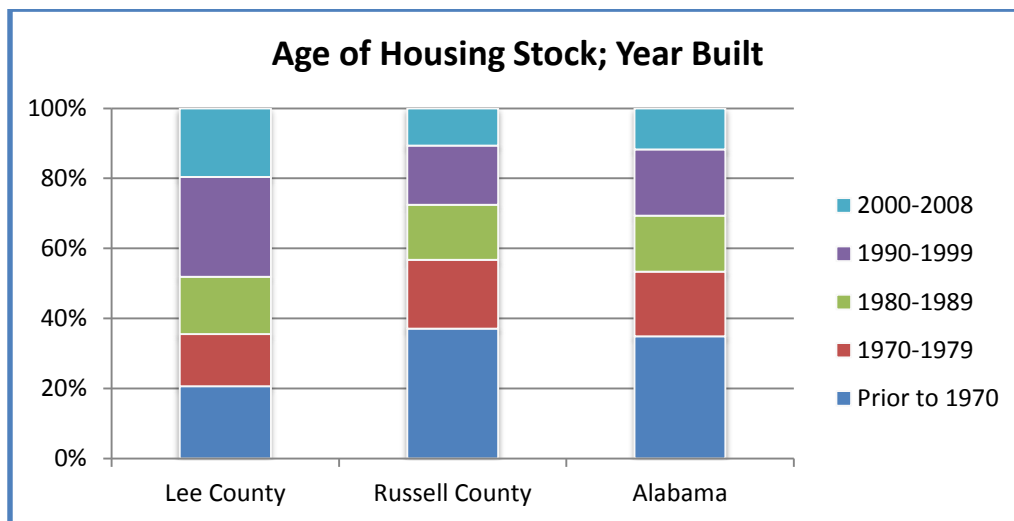
Auburn University provides Tiger Transit to students, faculty and staff while school is in session and during football weekends. A number of not-for-profit agencies and senior living communities have vans to provide clients with transportation to and from their homes to appointments. There are also several taxi services in Auburn, Opelika and Phenix City.

HOUSING

Housing is a basic necessity of life. An adequate supply of affordable housing available for rent or purchase is necessary for communities to attract and retain business.

Lee County has a total of 61,000 housing units, 53% of which are single family units. Multi-unit structures make up 24% of the housing stock and 23% were mobile homes. Ten percent of the housing units were vacant. Of the occupied housing units, 64% were owner occupied and 36% were renter occupied.

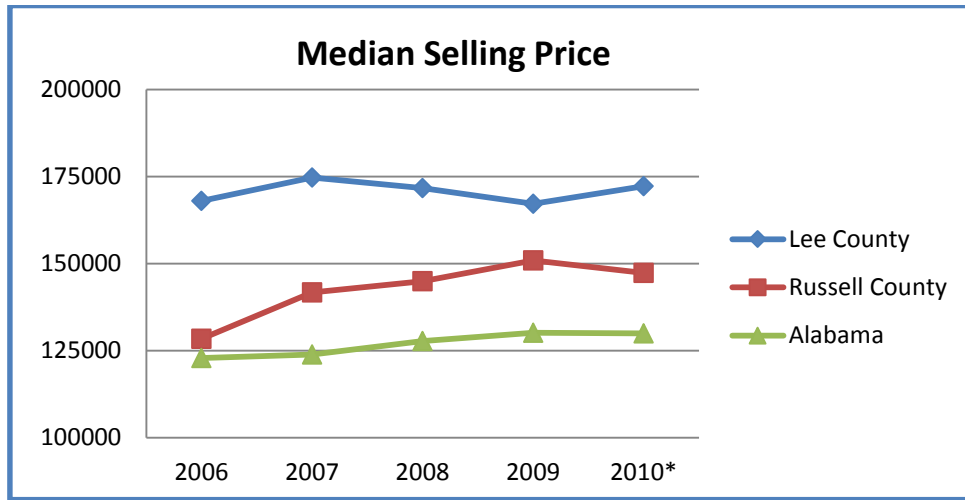
Russell County has a total of 26,000 housing units, 63% of which are single family units. Multi-unit structures make up 18% of the housing stock and 19% were mobile homes. Seventeen percent of housing units were vacant. Of the occupied housing units, 63% were owner occupied and 37% were renter occupied.



The age of housing stock in the region compares favorably to the age of housing stock across the country. Both Lee and Russell counties have a lower percentage of houses built prior to 1970 than the national percentage of nearly 49%. Nearly 50% of the housing stock in Lee County has been built since 1990. In Russell County 27.5% of the housing stock has been built since 1990. It is expected that the percentage of homes less than 20 years old in Russell County will be higher once the figures for homes built in 2009 and 2010 are factored in to the available housing stock. This is because of the large number of homes that have been built in the Fort Mitchell.

In recent years the availability of affordable housing was an area of concern for Lee County. According to the Alabama Center for Real Estate (ACRE), the annual median sale price for a home in Lee County reached \$174,759 in 2007. Prices declined to a median of \$171,670 in 2008 and declined further in 2009 to \$167,135. From January to July 2010, the median price was \$172,226. In July, 2010 there were 1,472 houses on the market in Lee County. This is the second highest

market inventory since 2000. Annual sales have declined from 1,434 in 2007 to 1,023 in 2009. From January to July 2010, 638 properties were sold.



Source: Alabama Center for Real Estate
*January-July 2010

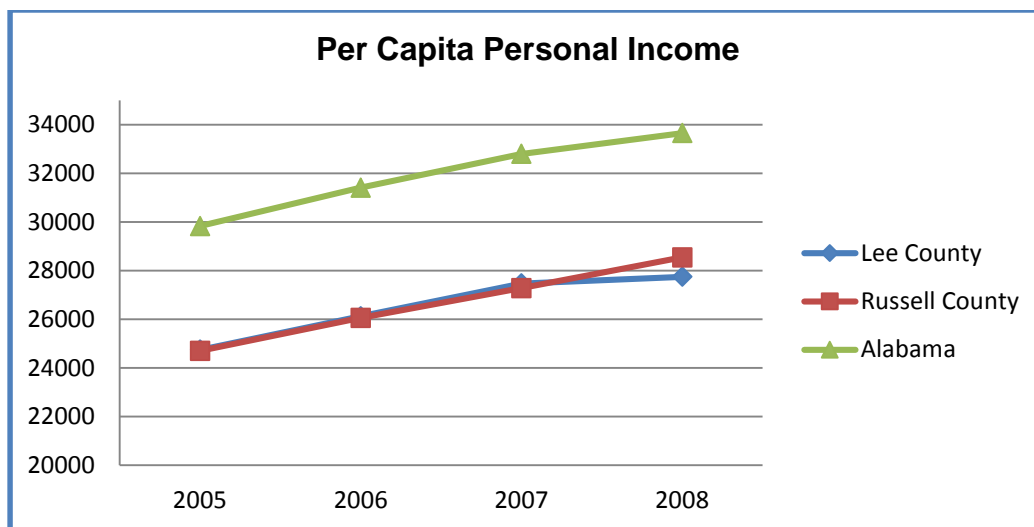
Russell County's housing market has been on the upswing despite the current recession. In 2006, the median price for a home in Phenix City was \$128,358. In 2007, the median price increased to \$141,758. Prices continued to increase in 2008 and 2009, reaching \$150,907 in 2009. The first 7 months of 2010 have shown a slight decrease, with the median price falling to \$147,304. In July, 2010 there were 925 properties on the market in Phenix City. The highest inventory of homes was 1,300 in February of 2007. Annual sales have fluctuated from a high of 1,123 in 2007 to a low of 891 in 2008 before rebounding to 1,012 in 2009. From January to July 2010, 551 properties were sold.

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Per Capita Income

Per capita personal income is the total personal income of an area divided by the population of the area. It is an indicator of the economic well being of residents and the character of consumer markets.

Per capita personal income continues to rise in the region but it also continues to be below state and national levels. In Lee County, the 2008 per capita personal income was \$27,749, which was 82% of the state average of \$40,166. The 2008 per capita personal income reflected a 1% increase over 2007 level and ranked 39th among Alabama's 67 counties. In Russell County the 2008 per capita personal income was \$28,548, which was 85% of the state average. Russell County's 2008 per capita personal income reflected an increase of 4.6% over the 2007 level and ranked 33rd among Alabama's 67 counties.



Source: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2009

Percent of the Population Below Poverty

According to the Alabama Data Center, 19,990 individuals or 15.5% of the population in Lee County live in poverty. In Russell County, 11,599 individuals or 23.3% of the population live in poverty. Statewide ___ % of Alabama citizens live in poverty.

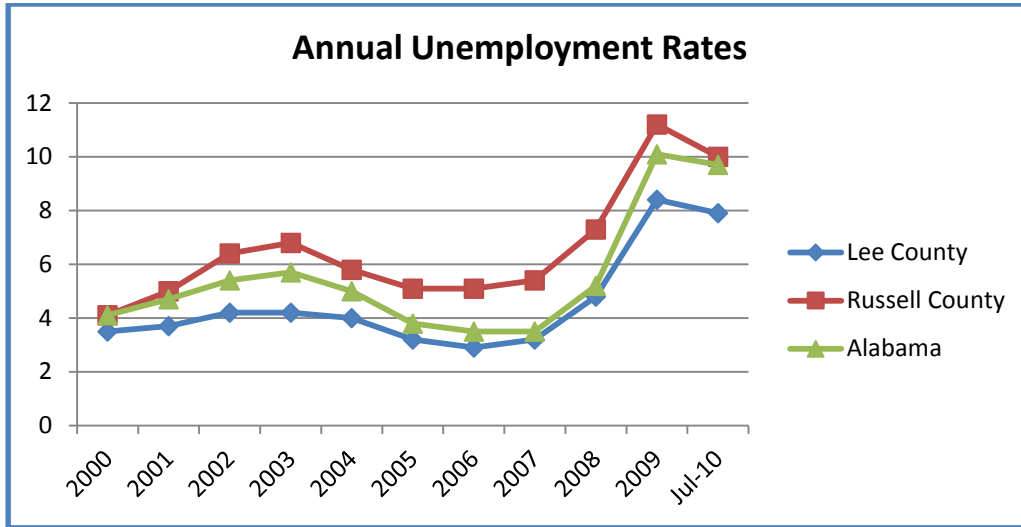
Unemployment

Unemployment rates in Alabama rose sharply over the past 2 years just as they have across the country. In July, 2010 the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Alabama was 9.7%. The only higher annual unemployment rate in the state in the past 25 years, occurred in 2009.

Lee County' unemployment rate has been among the lowest in the state throughout the last decade. The unemployment rate in Lee County in July 2010 was 7.9% with 4,937 individuals searching for

jobs. Only six counties had lower rates in July. The 2009 annual unemployment rate for the County was 8.4%. This was a significant rise over the 4.8% annual rate of 2008.

Russell County's unemployment rate has trended higher than the state unemployment rate since 2001. In July of 2010, unemployment in Russell County was 10%, with 2,129 individuals searching for jobs. Thirty-two of Alabama's 67 counties had higher unemployment rates. The 2009 annual unemployment rate for Russell County was 11.2%. This was a significant rise over the 2008 annual rate of 7.3.



Source: Alabama Department of Industrial Relations

Employment

In 2008 total full and part time employment in Lee County reached 68,995. This was a slight increase over total full and part time employment in 2007 and the smallest increase since 2003. There were declines in manufacturing, administrative and information sectors. Increases were seen in health care, real estate, and finance and insurance.

The largest employers in Lee County are Auburn University, East Alabama Medical Center, Lee County Schools, Briggs and Stratton, and WalMart.

In Russell County, full and part time employment in 2008 reached 17,687, up 203 from 2007. Most sectors of private employment showed no significant increases or declines. Manufacturing decreased 4% and real estate increased 10%.

The largest employers in Russell County are the Phenix City Board of Education and Mead Westvaco Coated Board.

Lee County Full and Part Time Employment by Industry

ITEM	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Employment	54,545	56,530	57,648	60,653	63,249	66,646	68,493	68,995
Wage and Salary Employment	46,047	47,830	48,575	51,210	53,060	55,073	56,202	55,281
Proprietors Employment (2)	8,498	8,700	9,073	9,443	10,189	11,573	12,291	13,714
Farm	374	372	363	355	353	348	347	308
Non Farm	8,124	8,328	8,710	9,088	9,836	11,225	11,944	13,406
Farm Employment	551	566	541	556	514	534	510	393
Non Farm Employment	53,994	55,964	57,107	60,097	62,735	66,112	67,983	68,602
Private Employment	40,570	41,784	42,267	44,473	46,818	50,099	51,775	52,255
Forestry, fishing	153	183	165	D	172	195	217	214
Mining	71	58	64	D	75	92	89	101
Utilities	172	186	190	182	160	165	171	172
Construction	3,482	3,401	3,311	3,575	3,775	4,218	4,486	4,419
Manufacturing	6,147	6,224	6,665	6,879	7,112	7,624	7,028	6,850
Wholesale trade	1,006	1,117	1,010	1,114	1,213	1,424	1,501	1,451
Retail trade	6,966	7,054	6,497	6,818	7,137	7,113	7,495	7,682
Transportation, warehousing	953	979	1,547	1,633	1,816	2,041	2,127	2,194
Information	621	627	631	632	663	711	1,030	741
Finance, insurance	1,272	1,282	1,251	1,240	1,273	1,425	1,542	1,722
Real estate, rental, leasing	1,803	1,725	1,782	1,898	2,088	2,152	2,240	2,639
Professional/technical services	D	D	D	2,223	2,471	2,743	2,973	3,096
Management	D	D	D	199	236	239	223	174
Administrative, waste services	3,247	3,849	3,704	4,025	4,235	4,511	4,676	4,257
Educational services	567	625	656	711	808	897	917	906
Health care, social assistance	3,328	3,393	3,398	3,296	3,420	3,663	3,840	3,961
Arts, entertainment, recreation	849	878	822	835	890	1,079	1,134	1,092
Accommodation, food service	4,790	4,883	5,180	5,586	5,693	5,935	6,033	6,015
Other services	3,170	3,300	3,290	3,411	3,581	3,872	4,053	4,569
Government and government enterprises	13,424	14,180	14,840	15,624	15,917	16,013	16,208	16,347
Federal, civilian	339	337	337	343	350	338	315	312
Military	750	728	726	827	797	832	821	708
State, local	12,335	13,115	13,777	14,454	14,770	14,843	15,072	15,327
State government	6,254	6,748	7,080	7,372	7,493	7,491	7,638	7,754
Local government	6,081	6,367	6,697	7,082	7,277	7,352	7,434	7,573

Source: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2009

Russell County Full and Part Time Employment by Industry

ITEM	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Employment	17,440	16,206	15,997	16,768	16,911	17,192	17,484	17,687
Wage and Salary Employment	15,024	13,616	13,320	13,998	13,973	14,152	14,291	14,155
Proprietors Employment (2)	2,416	2,590	2,677	2,770	2,938	3,040	3,193	3,523
Farm	279	277	270	265	264	260	259	259
Non Farm	2,137	2,313	2,407	2,505	2,674	2,780	2,934	3,264
Farm Employment	326	328	317	318	307	309	302	373
Non Farm Employment	17,114	15,878	15,680	16,450	16,605	16,883	17,182	17,305
Private Employment	14,232	13,014	12,758	13,436	13,486	13,754	14,013	14,150
Forestry, fishing	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Mining	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Utilities	93	89	87	88	74	67	66	68
Construction	1,792	1,293	1,269	1,571	1,459	1,484	1,562	1,545
Manufacturing	3,708	3,059	2,791	2,817	2,683	2,488	2,437	2,330
Wholesale trade	162	189	241	224	214	213	243	266
Retail trade	2,316	2,270	2,298	2,366	2,447	2,519	2,381	2,366
Transportation, warehousing	314	308	339	351	360	371	348	386
Information	143	118	122	122	129	130	D	D
Finance, insurance	413	439	478	493	503	522	600	635
Real estate, rental, leasing	354	385	407	455	479	528	589	658
Professional/technical services	319	362	363	381	404	375	380	389
Management	12	42	D	20	37	50	49	43
Administrative, waste services	454	446	D	458	510	500	474	505
Educational services	40	45	45	D	D	D	D	D
Health care, social assistance	1,394	1,143	1,077	D	D	D	D	D
Arts, entertainment, recreation	155	137	127	144	155	149	156	177
Accommodation, food service	1,165	1,211	1,289	1,336	1,384	1,445	1,502	1,471
Other services	1,157	1,239	1,218	1,247	1,274	1,301	D	D
Government and government enterprises	2,882	2,864	2,922	3,014	3,118	3,129	3,169	3,155
Federal, civilian	97	90	87	92	99	96	97	92
Military	286	279	273	310	288	290	283	239
State, local	2,499	2,495	2,562	2,612	2,731	2,743	2,789	2,824
State government	464	515	538	578	653	663	654	658
Local government	2,035	1,980	2,024	2,034	2,078	2,080	2,135	2,166

Source: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2009

Regional Total Full and Part Time Employment by Industry

ITEM	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Employment	71,985	72,733	73,645	77,421	80,160	83,838	85,977	86,673
Wage and Salary Employment	10,914	11,290	11,750	12,213	67,033	69,225	70,493	69,436
Proprietors Employment (2)	10,914	11,290	11,750	12,213	13,127	14,613	15,484	17,237
Farm	653	649	633	620	617	608	606	567
Non Farm	10,261	10,641	11,117	11,593	12,510	14,005	14,878	16,670
Farm Employment	877	894	858	874	821	843	812	766
Non Farm Employment	71,108	71,842	72,787	76,547	79,340	82,995	85,165	85,907
Private Employment	54,802	54,798	55,025	57,909	60,307	66,892	65,788	66,405
Forestry, fishing	153	183	165	D	172 D	195 D	217 D	214 D
Mining	71	58	64	D	75 D	92 D	89 D	101 D
Utilities	265	275	277	270	234	232	237	240
Construction	5,274	4,694	4,575	5,146	5,234	5,702	6,048	5,964
Manufacturing	9,855	9,283	9,456	9,696	9,795	10,112	9,465	9,180
Wholesale trade	1,168	1,306	1,251	1,338	1,427	1,637	1,744	1,717
Retail trade	9,285	9,326	8,794	9,184	9,584	9,632	9,876	10,048
Transportation, warehousing	1,267	1,287	1,886	1,984	2,176	2,412	2,475	2,580
Information	764	745	753	754	792	841	1,030 D	741 D
Finance, insurance	1,685	1,721	1,729	1,733	1,776	1,947	2,142	2,357
Real estate, rental, leasing	2,157	2,110	2,189	2,353	2,567	2,680	2,829	3,297
Professional/technical services	319	362	363	2,604	2,875	3,118	3,353	3,485
Management	12	42	D	219	273	289	272	217
Administrative, waste services	3,701	4,295	3,704	4,483	4,745	5,011	5,150	4,762
Educational services	607	670	701	711	808 D	897 D	917 D	906 D
Health care, social assistance	4,722	4,536	4,475	3,296	3,420	3,663 D	3,840 D	3,961 D
Arts, entertainment, recreation	1,004	1,015	949	979	1,045	1,228	1,290	1,269
Accommodation, food service	5,955	6,094	6,469	6,922	7,077	7,380	7,535	7,486
Other services	4,327	4,539	4,508	4,658	4,855	5,173	4,053	4,569 D
Government and government enterprises	16,306	17,044	17,762	18,638	19,035	19,142	19,377	19,502
Federal, civilian	436	427	424	435	449	434	412	404
Military	1,036	1,007	999	1,137	1,085	1,122	1,104	947
State, local	14,834	15,610	16,339	17,066	17,501	17,586	17,861	18,151
State government	6,718	7,263	7,618	7,950	8,146	8,154	8,292	8,412
Local government	8,116	8,347	8,721	9,116	9,355	9,432	9,569	9,739

Source: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2009

Economic Development

Both Lee and Russell County have strong leadership in economic development from elected officials, economic development departments, active Chambers of Commerce and educational institutions, such as Auburn University and Troy University's Phenix City campus.

Auburn, Opelika and Lee County have strategic plans which include economic development. Russell County has been working on their strategic plan for most of 2010. All jurisdictions in the Region collaborated with each other and the jurisdictions in 8 other Alabama and Georgia counties to develop a Regional Growth Management in response to the expected growth at Fort Benning due to the Base Alignment and Closure initiative. Phenix City opened an Economic Development office in the spring of 2010, in partnership with Troy University. This department will focus on supporting existing business as well as attracting new industry to the city.

There are a total of 8 industrial and technical parks in Lee County. Four are located in Opelika and four are located in Auburn. Two industrial parks are located in Russell County, both in Phenix City. The City of Auburn in collaboration with Auburn University, has developed a Research Park on the University campus.

Workforce Development

There are several training and education programs in the region to assist in the development of a skilled workforce. The Auburn Technology Network (ATN), Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT), Columbus Technical College and Industry Training Center of Southern Union Community College provide instruction in a variety of technical fields. AIDT also contracts with employers to recruit and train individuals to meet the employer's job needs.

For anyone seeking employment the Alabama Career Center is located in Opelika and serves both Lee and Russell County. Services include job referral, placement, counseling and training.

ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

REGIONAL ASSETS

A. Education

Auburn University is one of the region's greatest assets. Located in Auburn, Alabama, the land grant college has an enrollment of over 25,000 students. Auburn University offers undergraduate, graduate and professional programs in a large number of disciplines including agriculture, forestry, architecture, building science, pharmacy, business, engineering, veterinary medicine, education, liberal arts, science and math. The graduate school offers master's programs in more than 64 areas of study and doctorate studies in more than 40 disciplines. Auburn is consistently ranked among the top public colleges and universities in the country. It is also an economic driving force for the region, attracting about 500,000 visitors annually to athletic, cultural and academic events. Recent studies estimate that Auburn University has a 4 billion economic impact on the state of Alabama.

Southern Union Community College is located in Opelika, Alabama. Southern Union specializes in two-year academic, technical and health science programs. Southern Union has forged strong partnerships with the region's vocational and technical public schools, providing excellent opportunities for workforce development, while individuals are still in high school. Southern Union has an enrollment of 4,500 full and part time students.

Troy University's Phenix City campus has an enrollment of nearly 2,000 students. Troy seeks to meet the needs of full-time working adults and offers bachelors and graduate degrees in business, counseling, education and nursing. Chattahoochee Valley Community College, also located in Phenix City, is committed to preparing students to transfer to four-year colleges by providing a strong foundation in core curriculum. They also strive to develop the region's workforce through career fields such as health sciences, business, information technology and public safety. CVCC has an enrollment of 2,000 students.

In adjacent Columbus, Georgia, Columbus State University offers more than 70 majors and serves 5,500 students. Columbus Technical College offers associates degrees in business, health and technical fields.

The five public school systems in the region have all achieved their annual yearly progress goals and four of the systems consistently exceed the state average on scholastic achievement test scores, graduation rates and performance on college entrance exams. There are also several outstanding private schools serving children from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade throughout the region.

B. Recreation and Cultural Facilities

The number of recreational and cultural resources is another asset for the region.

The parks and recreation departments in Auburn and Opelika have both received awards for the outstanding programs they make available to the community. In addition to eight parks open to the public, the City of Auburn offers an adult and youth sports leagues, arts and crafts classes, dance classes, fitness program, photography, martial arts, soccer, tennis and other special events. The City of Opelika has three recreation centers, seven parks and also provides classes in dance, piano, dog obedience, crafts, and programs for soccer, tennis, football, baseball, softball, basketball and swimming. The Opelika Sportsplex and Aquatic Center opened in 2009. This state of the art health and fitness center offers swimming, indoor and outdoor running tracks, basketball, racquetball and a weight room.

The Auburn Opelika area is also home to seven 18-hole golf courses, including two championship courses which are part of the renowned Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.

Lee County Park at Smiths Station has three recently constructed baseball and softball fields and is beginning development of a walking trail and football/soccer field. Chewacla State Park, just south of Auburn offers a 26-acre lake, boating, hiking and biking trails, campsites and rustic cabins.

The Opelika Arts Association (OAA) brings quality performances to the 1200-seat Opelika Center for the Performing Arts. The OAA also sponsors the Arts Center Gallery at the Lewis Cooper Jr. Memorial Library and Arts Center. In addition, the OAA fosters an appreciation of the arts by its involvement in the Opelika City Schools. The Jan Dempsey Community Arts Center in Auburn offers community theatre, musical concert, and quarterly art exhibits of local artists. The Center also hosts an arts education program for elementary school students. The Jule Collins Smith Art Museum in Auburn has an extensive permanent collection of paintings, sculpture, pottery, china and textiles. The museum also hosts traveling exhibits of many kinds.

Phenix City has five municipal parks open to the public, which offer fishing, playgrounds, walking trails, picnic areas sports facilities and swimming pools. In Seale, Alabama, the Russell County Sports Complex has two t-ball fields and two little league ball fields.

The Riverwalk along the Chattahoochee River is a lighted area for walking, jogging or just enjoying the beauty of the river from three observation decks. The Phenix City Amphitheatre, overlooking the Chattahoochee River, is home to a variety of outdoor concerts and events throughout the year.

Fort Mitchell Historic Site is a unique facility offering visitors a glimpse into frontier Alabama in the early 1800's. The fort has been reconstructed at its original site along what was once the Old Federal Road. Adjacent to the fort is the Chattahoochee Indian Heritage Center, which memorializes native Alabamians.

C. Health Services

East Alabama Medical Center (EAMC) is located in Opelika Alabama. It is a 340-bed facility with 145 physicians on staff. EAMC services include the Cancer Center of East Alabama, Women's and Children Center, Diabetes and Nutrition Center and one of the top 100 Cardiology programs in the nation. Jack Hughston Memorial Hospital, located in Phenix City, is a 70-bed facility specializing in orthopedic procedures, diagnostics and emergency medicine.

Columbus, Georgia, directly adjacent to Phenix City provides much of the eastern portion of the region with medical care through St. Francis Hospital and the Columbus Regional Healthcare System which includes Doctor's Hospital, The medical Center, Hughston Hospital and the John B. Amos Cancer Center.

D. Social Services

A large number of social service organizations provide programs and services for the region. Local philanthropic giving and volunteers help these agencies maximize their effectiveness.

Alabama Council on Human Relations
Alabama Council on Human Relations
American Red Cross
Area Agency on Ageing
Churches Cooperative Industries
Crisis Center of Russell County
Domestic Violence Intervention Center
East Alabama Food Bank
East Alabama Mental Health Center
East Alabama Services for the Elderly
Easter Seals Achievement Center
Food Pantry at Auburn United Methodist Church
Goodwill Industries
Habitat for Humanity
His Place
House of Restoration Homeless Shelter
Lee County Department of Human Resources
Russell Baptist Center
Russell County Department of Human Resources
Russell County Family Service Center
Salvation Army
United Way of Lee County

AREAS OF REGIONAL CONCERN

Water

There are four organized water systems in Russell County. Approximately 15% of residents in Russell County do not have access to public water and must rely on private wells. Customers with access to public water in rural areas and in the older areas of Phenix City are served by aging and undersized waterlines. The result is frequent service interruptions, low water pressure and discolored water. Water service in Lee County is provided by two municipal public water systems and four rural public water authorities. About 7% of current Lee County residents do not have access to any of the water systems and rely on private wells.

Sewer

Presently, 50% of the households in Russell County and 40% of the households in Lee County do not have access to sanitary sewer service. Residents who do not have access to sewer use septic tanks for their waste disposal. Land in the Smiths area of Lee County and Fort Mitchell area of Russell County has been shown to have a high rate of septic system failures. This is very concerning because these areas are experiencing high rates of growth.

VISION: WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

Throughout 2009-2010, public forums and planning meetings were held in both Lee and Russell County as well as in adjacent Columbus, Georgia. The goal of the meetings was to determine how the region could prepare for the expected impacts of the Base Realignment and Closure expansions at Fort Benning and the developing automobile industry along the I-85 corridor. Information from these meetings was used to compile the Regional Growth Management Plan and separate plans for each of the 10 counties involved. Information from this plan has been consulted in the development of the CEDS. Additionally, Regional Hazard Mitigation Plans, the State of Alabama Workforce Development Plan, the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan, and the Fort Benning Futures Land Use Study and Growth Management Initiative have been consulted.

Lee County Citizens believe their three greatest strengths are Auburn University, the public school systems and their geographic location. The growth of the automotive industry, access to I-85, and the Highway 280 corridors were seen as areas of great opportunity for Lee County. For southeastern areas of the County, the BRAC expansion at Fort Benning was designated as an area of great opportunity. The lack of rural land use planning and zoning were seen as threats.

In Russell County Troy University and Chattahoochee Community College were identified as strengths. Affordable land and housing, revitalization of downtown Phenix City and the BRAC expansion at Fort Benning were seen as areas of opportunity. The lack of public sewer in areas outside of Phenix City and the town of Hurtsboro were seen as weaknesses. Retail development competition from Columbus, Georgia, and the lack of rural land use planning and zoning were listed as threats.

STRATEGIC Projects, Programs and ACTIVITIES Suggested and Vital Project Listings

Lead Organization	Project Category	Project Description	Estimated Cost
Auburn	Downtown Revitalization	Parking improvements to increase access to retail, dining and business establishments	\$850,000
Auburn	Industrial Park Development	Expansion of Auburn Technology Park West	
Auburn	Public Safety	Construction of Fire Station #6	\$1,000,000
Auburn	Roads/Bridges	Proposed new I-85 interchange; Exit 50	
Auburn	Roads/Bridges	Highway 147 re-route; Outer loop	
Auburn	Roads/Bridges	Slaughter Avenue; sidewalk improvements	\$84,273
Auburn	Roads/Bridges	Carlisle Street resurfacing	\$30,000
Auburn	Roads/Bridges	Drainage improvements at Judd and Stubb intersection	\$80,000
Auburn	Roads/Bridges	Martin Luther King Drive resurfacing	\$190,000

Auburn	Workforce Development	Addition of CNC milling machine to Auburn Training Connection	\$80,000
Auburn	Workforce Development	Addition of precision measurement lab to Auburn Training Connection	\$85,000
Lee County	Energy	Expand solar photovoltaic power systems at the Lee County Justice Center	\$2,000,000
Lee County	Public Building/Public Safety	Renovate existing County Courthouse and other county properties	\$8,000,000
Lee County	Roads/Bridges	Improve bridge on Lee Road 054	\$973,000
Lee County	Roads/Bridges	Improve bridge on Lee Road 010	\$762,000
Lee County	Roads/Bridges	Improve road and bridges on Lee Road 379	\$4,695,000
Lee County	Roads/Bridges	Improve Lee Road 236, Lee Road 240, Lee Road 248, and Lee Road 427 to handle increased traffic in southeast Lee County	\$6,358,400
Lee County	Roads/Bridges	Resurface Lee Roads 188, 401, 170, and 129	\$2,500,000
Lee County	Water/Sewer	Improve sewer capacity in southeastern Lee County via a main sewer trunk line	\$2,000,000
Opelika	Downtown Revitalization	North Railroad Street Project; Phase I from 6 th Street to 8 th Street	\$450,000
Opelika	Downtown Revitalization	North Railroad Street Project; Phase II from 8 th Street to 10 th Street	\$450,000
Opelika	Public Safety	Oak Bowery Road Fire Station	\$900,000
Opelika	Public Safety	Police Department Communication Upgrades	\$312,000
Opelika	Public Safety	Renovation of existing 42 year old police station	\$4,000,000
Opelika	Roads/Bridges	Industrial Road from Northeast Industrial Park to Chambers County Line	\$5,500,000
Opelika	Roads/Bridges	Frederick Road Extension; arterial connector	\$2,100,000
Opelika	Roads/Bridges	Bridge replacement; Oak Bowery Road	\$450,000
Opelika	Water/Sewer	Expand sewer service from NE Opelika Industrial Park to Eastside Sewer Treatment Plant	\$5,500,000
Opelika	Water/Sewer	Extend sewer service to Celebrate Alabama development site	\$2,000,000
Opelika	Water/Sewer	Excessive Wastewater Diversion Project; West Side to East Side Treatment Plant	\$600,000
Opelika	Water/Sewer	SCADA system for sewer lift stations	\$250,000
Opelika	Water/Sewer	New pump station and force main at East	\$1,600,000

		Side Sewer Treatment plant	
Opelika	Water/Sewer	Upgrade golf course lift station, force main and sewer line	\$960,000
Phenix City	Roads/Bridges	Replace bridges on 10 th and 12 th Ave	\$2,500,000
Phenix City	Roads/Bridges	Resurface residential city streets	\$4,500,000
Phenix City	Roads/Bridges	Improve lighting on Hwy 431 and MLK Parkway	\$1,500,000
Phenix City	Information/technology	Expand GIS Capabilities	\$50,000
Phenix City	Water/Sewer	Rebuild sewer lift station at Holland Creek	\$1,000,000
Phenix City	Water/Sewer	Install new pump station at Knowles Road Tank	\$900,000
Phenix City	Water/Sewer	Extend sewer services to newly annexed areas of Phenix City	
Phenix City	Public Buildings/Public Safety	Construct and new fire station to improve fire protection to newly annexed areas of Phenix City	\$940,000
Phenix City	Public Buildings/ Public Safety	Renovate Phenix City Library	\$500,000