



## Section Summary

It was announced December 10, 2009 that approximately 1,043 military, civilian, and full time contractors are scheduled to arrive at Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield through 2013. This growth will add to the regional demand for housing.

To help prepare for this growth, the planning team has compiled a list of recommendations that are as follows:

- Focus future housing development in and near established areas,
- Update and/or develop apartment complexes with a higher level of amenities,
- Increase diversity of rental housing stock, and
- Promote alternate tax-producing options to lessen dependence on local property taxes.

These recommendations, including specific action items, can be found in the following Recommendations Section.

## Growth and Assessment Analysis Findings

### Growth Analysis

The majority of population growth projected in the region by 2030 is focused in or close to established areas. This outcome is largely predicated on the availability of permitted and/or platted land in these areas and accessibility to major employment centers and the military installation. The following summaries describe the projected growth in each county.

#### Bryan County

Most of the population growth in Bryan County is projected to occur southeast of Fort Stewart. In fact, the areas with the greatest population in the northern portion of the County, near Pembroke and the intersection of Interstate 16 and Route 280, show relative stability in population densities. Comparatively, the City of Richmond Hill shows strong population increases during this time. Much of this increase can be attributed to accessibility to Savannah and the Interstate, as well as proximity to Fort Stewart.

#### Liberty County

Liberty County is projected to receive the greatest amount of new residents, which is due, in part, to the substantial inventory of available land permitted for residential development. Most of the growth in Liberty County is projected to occur in Hinesville and neighboring areas. Unlike the growth in and around Richmond Hill in Bryan County, Hinesville and the surrounding areas provide direct access to Fort Stewart. It is likely that much of the growth in these areas and subsequent housing demand is attributable to impacts related to military growth. In addition, the rapid turnover often experienced by military populations will likely have a substantial impact on the rental housing market.



## Long County

Population growth in Long County is projected to be concentrated in the northeast portion of the County. The population growth allocation maps in the Land Use section of this report show the growth is located north of Route 84 and near the eastern county line. While this growth projection greatly increases density in this part of the county, the area between this growth area and Ludowici further southwest along Route 84 is projected to remain largely rural and unaffected by regional population growth.

## Tattnall County

Tattnall County is projected to remain largely rural between 2010 and 2030 as population growth is modest and focused in Glennville. The lack of easy accessibility to major roadways and the entrance into Fort Stewart contribute heavily to the relative stability in population growth.

## Issues

### Development Occurring Outside of City Limits

The meetings and interviews conducted with county planners indicate that there has been scattered development. In Long County, all of the new and pipeline developments are occurring outside of Ludowici City limits. The developments are therefore not able to be connected to city sewer and water lines. The new developments are on septic tanks, which can often be overloaded or fail. This is a major concern of county officials; however there are minimal regulations or incentives in place that can encourage new subdivision connections to city utility lines.

### Development in Sensitive Areas

Many developments are occurring in sensitive areas. A great portion of Long County is wetlands or low-lying areas. There are minimal regulations to prevent development in these areas. It will be very important for the counties to take a look at developing regulations or incentives that will help guide development to desired locations.

### Minimal Diversity of Land Uses

The lack of retail and commercial uses in Long County and the resulting absence of a diverse tax base is making it increasingly difficult for this county to provide services to the growing population. Counties have had to raise taxes in the recent past in order to accommodate the growth. Having a more diverse tax base, which includes retail development, would help offset the increasing cost of providing public services.

### Minimal Diversity in Rental Housing Types

Although there is a large rental population in the region, especially in Liberty County, there does not appear to be a great diversity in the types of rental properties available. Most rental properties are single family homes. Although there are new apartments being built at Independence, there may be opportunity in the Fort Stewart Region for additional new apartment buildings that would be targeted to both military and natural population growth.

### Lack of Amenities

Many of the developments in the region lack a higher level of amenities. There are few apartment buildings with on-site managers or other amenities such as pools, computer centers, hardwood floors, etc. Although there are these types of apartments in the Savannah area, the rental properties in the Fort Stewart study area are generally older buildings equipped with the bare essentials.

Many developments in the study area are occurring in sensitive areas. Minimal regulations are in place to prevent development in these areas.



In terms of ownership, housing developments within Liberty, Long, and Tattnall Counties tend to meet just the minimum requirements. There are exceptions, such as such as Oak Crest in Liberty County, which has incorporated sidewalks and amenities such as pools into the development. Although Richmond Hill contains more up-scale developments, there may be demand in the market for this type of housing in the other three counties.

### **Housing Affordability**

It is important to note that the majority of incoming personnel will be enlisted soldiers. Enlisted soldiers at Fort Stewart receive a Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) that ranges from \$889 for a single E-1 (\$1,052 for family E-1) to \$1,203 for a single E-9 (\$1,443 for family E-9). Research indicates that this housing allowance falls within the rent ranges for a unit in the higher-amenity new apartment developments within the Fort Stewart Region.

## **Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The following recommendations are based on identified needs pertaining to regional housing options and issues expressed by local stakeholders involved in the planning process. Each recommendation is followed by multiple action items that address the need or issue.



## Short-Term Recommendations

### Recommendation

Given the close link between the military mission and housing demand, study partners should work with county and city officials to create a “living” graphic representation displaying the location and status of proposed developments. The process would also define a protocol for updating/maintaining the map, as well as making the public access widely available. The program could encompass all counties and jurisdictions or only those electing to participate. This service would enable the community and private developers to better monitor the housing needs associated with Fort Stewart in relation to the market inventory and reduce the risk of overbuilding as seen in the wake of the cancellation of the 5th brigade.

### Action Items

1. Establish and maintain a Housing Trends and Growth Management Data Tracking system

### Recommendation

Focus future housing development in and near established areas.

Many stakeholders interviewed for this study expressed concern over the way planned housing developments are scattered across the region. Developing housing in this manner will likely provide undue strains on public services due largely to proximity issues. It is stated anecdotally that the magnitude of permitted and platted subdivisions in the region follows limited regulations.

**Action Items**

1. Create Localized Development Strategies
2. Increase regulations on developing housing in wetlands or other low-lying areas
3. Hold developer/builder outreach forums to disseminate relevant information and findings from the regional growth management plan

**Long-Term Recommendations****Recommendation**

Update and/or develop apartment complexes with higher level of amenities. Although Richmond Hill contains more up-scale developments, there may be demand in the market for this type of housing in the other three counties.

**Action Items**

1. Survey active military personnel to better understand housing preferences.
2. Provide density bonuses and/or other financial incentives to increase localized multi-family housing.

**Recommendation**

Increase diversity of rental housing stock.

Although there is a large rental population in the region, especially in Liberty County, there does not appear to be a great diversity in the types of rental properties available. Most rental properties are single family homes.

**Action Items**

1. Track and publish regional rental data. Periodic reporting on the regional rental market will help real estate developers make more informed decisions about the size, location, and scale of new developments.