

ONEMACON! 2.0

Community and Economic Development Strategic Plan (2020-2025)
Executive Summary and Full Report

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Executive Summary

The world is growing and evolving at a rapid pace. New advances in technology, an aging population, and shifts toward urbanization are challenging the way cities and regions think about growth. These changes make it imperative for leaders within communities to address their complex problems head-on through intentional partnership and strong governance, with an eye toward innovation, inclusivity, and resilience. A commitment to bold ideas and action is what will drive regional economies forward and set them apart from their competitors. It is what is needed to ensure a truly transformative and stable economy.

Five years ago a collaborative of community leaders came together to recognize their shared interest in the future success of Macon-Bibb. They charted the disparate activities underway and defined a new operating model, the OneMacon! Way. Trust is a critical element to the plan that follows and it is what has been built over the past few years - the trust to share challenges, to give more than one gets, and to share a dream for Macon-Bibb to be recognized as a national leader in transformed communities. Such trust is what helped catalyze many of Macon-Bibb's successes, including its growth of its downtown.

The visual impact of downtown Macon today can serve as a catalyst to realize county-wide opportunity. Planning, fundraising, and executing the next phase of growth can serve all of Macon-Bibb's neighborhoods.

Today, Macon-Bibb looks to seize the opportunity to chart a new path and serve as a model of inclusive economic growth for counties in central Georgia and across the nation. Known for its indelible southern charm, rich and soulful musical legacy, and deep history, the county's strengths are vital ingredients for success. **Macon-Bibb can capitalize on its strategic location to increase regional competitiveness; its cultural diversity to expand its arts, culture and creative economy; and its bold and passionate community leaders to effect change within its communities.**

Expansion, progress and competitiveness can't happen without a commitment to equity and inclusion, collaboration, and partnership. Applying an equity lens to Macon-Bibb's economic growth will help ensure isolated communities can experience the county's growth. It allows for investments in good jobs and opportunities for businesses to reach those most in need. When inclusion and shared prosperity is at the core of strategic development, the outcomes are a decrease in disparities that hinder progress and improved quality of life for all.

The challenges Macon-Bibb faces are multifaceted, but a better and more efficient approach to change make them possible to solve. Over the next decade, a collective impact approach must take precedence. Working collectively around the use of shared resources and being intentional about building stronger alliances and cross-sector partnership will help Macon-Bibb achieve unprecedented systemic change and prolonged sustainable growth.

Message From Judge Verda Colvin

***“Diversity is being invited to the party;
inclusion is being asked to dance.”***

- Verna Myers

Greetings,

Some 20 years ago, I fell in love with Macon. The city and all its gifts are especially rich and truly one-of-a-kind, including its vibrant communities, residents, and the endless possibilities that await. It is why - 20 years later - I joined the OneMacon! effort, adding to the many areas I am fortunate to participate in to make Macon-Bibb better. I saw OneMacon! as an opportunity to enhance what I knew was great about our community and promote prosperity and create upward mobility for ALL residents. If you asked me what excited me the most, I'd say how every effort, every strategy, every committee member is committed to inclusion, true and real inclusion.

Under the leadership of the the previous OneMacon! effort, led by Kathryn Dennis and Robbo Hatcher, our community charted a path toward greater collaboration. One success of this new way of working together can be seen within our education system. To this day, the partnership between the School Board, Superintendent, and the business community formed by the established OneMacon! vision for education continues to change the trajectory of our school system and the children it serves.

Macon-Bibb County is now at an inflection point. What we identify as most important to us as a community will be the guiding force in how we move forward. We've experienced upward developments in industry and education and we've met unprecedented issues with a greater appetite for collaboration. Yet, we also know all too well that not everyone is experiencing our recent growth. David Thompson and I are committed to engaging residents and community stakeholders to assist in empowering neighborhood residents by listening to their needs, desires, and vision.

This plan, OneMacon! 2.0, is all about opportunity for ALL. It uplifts organizations who need additional capacity, addresses quality of life issues that threaten historical communities, encourages partnership and collaboration, and considers all Maconites regardless of zip code, economic status or ethnicity. Together we can move forward as OneMacon! and begin to see a community where everyone is invited to the party with an expectation that they will dance and dance well. We are truly OneMacon! when everyone is included. And, “when everyone is included, everyone wins!”

Message from David Thompson

**“Out of need springs desire, and out of desire
springs the energy and the will to win.”**

- Denis Waitley

Greetings,

OneMacon! came to exist due to the efforts of the original tri-chairs – Kathryn Dennis, Robbo Hatcher, and Cliffard Whitby. They saw the need for a comprehensive five-year community planning effort in 2013 and embarked upon what seemed to be an outlandish journey. One year was spent emulating a similar community's efforts and reaching out to members of Macon's leadership to develop a three-pillar plan to focus on jobs, education, and sense of place.

It was amazing to see traditional walls crumble and silos disappear as participants showed their desire to create something better. I was fortunate to be a participant and witness first-hand the willingness to dream big and work together to make those dreams come true. As the tri-chairs have said on numerous occasions, the meetings were great at fostering collaboration between people and organizations, but the real successes often came as relationships and bonds of trust were built in the parking lot meetings that followed.

As OneMacon! quickly became a gathering place where organizations came to dream big, cooperation and collaboration spawned the mantra “The OneMacon Way.” The One Macon Way incubated the strategy and allowed the participants and organizations to achieve their lofty dreams. With the submission of the final scorecard, it was clear that the initial plan had achieved numerous wins.

As OneMacon! 2.0 embarks on the next five-year community plan, we draw upon the initial successes and embrace the desire to win for the community. We must ensure that all parties have the opportunity to participate and determine what we want Macon-Bibb to look like in 2024. I have the distinct honor of serving alongside Judge Verda Colvin. We have pledged to continue to improve the quality of life in Macon-Bibb by helping all to participate and experience a better Macon due to all the partners willing to work together for a brighter future.

The Road Ahead

The road to prosperity involves building on the momentum that Macon-Bibb as a community can feel and see: the investment in Downtown. The Macon Action Plan (MAP) charted a course that the Macon-Bibb Urban Development Authority, NewTown Macon and partners in the private and public realm have been steadily implementing. The release of the upcoming MAP 2.0 plan will illustrate that there is more to be done to secure a lasting impact. Great strides should be celebrated, but to rest now would lessen the impact and not allow the success of downtown investment and attraction to spread community-wide.

Downtown's trajectory is just a microcosm of what can and should happen county-wide for Macon-Bibb to be competitive. The road ahead requires a unified front of three essential elements of Macon-Bibb's economy:

❖ **A Strong Urban Core**

Downtown's future development - along with its surrounding intown neighborhoods - will be guided by the Macon Action Plan.

❖ **Thriving Neighborhoods**

OneMacon! will lead the strategy to strengthen neighborhoods and the residents within them, which will add value both economically and socially.

❖ **A Vibrant Arts and Culture Scene**

The Arts and Cultural plan serves as a pivotal economic development strategy and will make arts and culture offerings in Macon-Bibb the centerpiece of the county.

These three essential ingredients for success will establish a strong platform for Macon-Bibb's growth over the next decade. It will be important that the community is in sync with elected leadership. The Macon-Bibb County consolidation in 2014 has had numerous positive benefits and some impacts that have limited its potential success. Macon-Bibb's growth platform must be supported by political leadership, now tasked with thinking about new and more efficient ways of governing to achieve outcomes.

Therefore, over the next five years, Macon-Bibb will work towards greater collaboration and innovation within these areas. Outlined in the OneMacon! 2.0 are strategies for achieving greater **economic revitalization**, creating a **talent and education** system that works more efficiently, and strengthening **quality of life**. These strategies are people-focused and address systemic issues and legacy systems that have hindered holistic growth. They maximize existing programs, foster effective

partnerships, and bring new ideas that will position Macon-Bibb for economic success.



Economic Revitalization

VISION:

Macon-Bibb boasts a stable and diverse economy where every neighborhood is connected and thriving, residents have access to quality jobs, and the region is a community of choice for businesses and talent.

In recent years, Macon-Bibb County has seen strong and record-level economic growth. New businesses and industry are calling the community home and investments are being made to strengthen property values and attract visitors and families. To ensure this growth continues and Macon-Bibb remains competitive in a fast-paced and changing economy, Macon-Bibb will commit to investing in and strengthening its neighborhoods, strategically target industries of high potential, and chart pathways towards greater economic mobility for existing low-income residents.

Economic Revitalization Goals (ERG):

1. Prepare Neighborhoods for Renewal and Investment

Macon-Bibb County boasts a variety of unique neighborhoods, each with its own strengths and assets. However, some have challenges that slow the region's vitality. During this next phase of OneMacon!, resources to tackle blight, build capacity, and catalyze growth and investment will be concentrated in the Pleasant Hill, Tindall Heights, and Fort Hill neighborhoods.

2. Grow and Diversify the Economic Base

Macon-Bibb will focus on marketing its competitive assets to position the area as a top destination for businesses in high-demand industries (manufacturing, aerospace and defense), as well as highly-skilled talent and visitors. It will also focus on extending resources to support entrepreneurship and small business growth.

3. Build Wealth for Low-Income Residents and Families

Ensuring pathways for wealth-building leads to better economic conditions for residents and families and to a more equitable and sustainable economy. Macon-Bibb will focus on decreasing its poverty rate and amassing resources that advance its most vulnerable populations toward self sufficiency.

Economic Revitalization Strategies at a Glance

Strategy 1: Prepare Neighborhoods For Renewal & Investment						
Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Implementation
Strengthen code enforcement						Neighborhood Renewal Working Group Code Enforcement Action Committee
Increase local neighborhood capacity						Neighborhood Renewal Working Group Planning Action Committee
Transform blighted spaces into neighborhood assets						Neighborhood Renewal Working Group Community Investment Committee

Strategy 2: Grow and Diversify the Economic Base						
Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Implementation
Establish a one-stop business resource center						Industry and Business Working Group Entrepreneurship Committee
Recruit high-growth industries						Industry and Business Working Group Industry Recruitment Committee
Develop a comprehensive talent attraction strategy						Talent and Ed Working Group Talent Attraction Committee
Support downtown redevelopment and the updated Macon Action Plan						Various Working Group Alignments

Strategy 3: Build Wealth for Low-Income Families						
Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Implementation
Expand financial literacy programs						Poverty Working Group Wealth Creation Committee
Support housing rehabilitation assistance programs						Poverty Working Group Housing Assistance Committee



Talent and Education

VISION:

Macon-Bibb has a robust workforce development system that is providing quality education, skills training, and career opportunities for all residents and developing a prepared, highly-skilled workforce to meet the needs of industry.

The economic strength of the Macon-Bibb region is its ability to develop a pipeline of educated and skilled workers. The region will take an innovative approach to engaging its social support system so that low-income and minority residents can take full advantage of existing and future employment opportunities. Macon-Bibb will do this by providing and promoting resources to its K-12 schools, colleges, and universities that are built for the end user as well as ensure that training is aligned with promising industries.

Workforce Development Strategies:

4. Create A More Efficient Workforce System

From government and public schools to college and university programs and community education, there are a variety of workforce resources and service providers available in Macon-Bibb. Macon-Bibb will work toward making the workforce development system more user-focused and outcome driven.

5. Develop a Pipeline of Highly-Skilled Talent

One of the most significant challenges facing industries today is the shortage of a skilled workforce. Macon-Bibb will work closely with employers, colleges and universities to provide adequate training that aligns with the needs of promising industries, now and in the future, and builds pathways toward job opportunities.

6. Decrease Barriers to Employment and Advancement

In an effort to decrease the high rates of unemployment and provide the under-employed with meaningful and livable wages, Macon-Bibb will commit to eliminating barriers that exists for targeted population cohorts including single parents and the formerly incarcerated.

Talent and Education Strategies at a Glance

Strategy 4: Create a More Efficient Workforce Development System

Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Implementation
Create database and asset map of workforce resources						Talent and Ed Working Group
Establish an employer + post-secondary educator partnership						Talent and Ed Working Group
Market and provide career & training resources in public schools						Talent and Ed Working Group
Market career centers and make them accessible to those seeking work						Talent and Ed Working Group

Strategy 5: Develop a Pipeline of Highly Skilled Talent

Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Implementation
Establish industry HR consortiums						Talent and Ed Working Group Skills Training Committee
Increase availability of training options: accelerated training; apprenticeships and internships						Talent and Ed Working Group Skills Training Committee
Support out-of-school career/industry experiential learning						Talent and Ed Working Group K-12 Learning Committee

Strategy 6: Decrease Barriers to Employment and Advancement

Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Implementation
Engage in neighborhood-based workforce training programming						Talent and Ed Working Group Skills Training Committee
Support development of wrap-around services with existing training programs						Talent and Ed Working Group Skills Training Committee
Increase support for first-generation college students						Talent and Ed Working Group Skills Training Committee



Quality of Life

VISION:

Macon-Bibb is a safe and culturally vibrant community with a strong quality of life that promotes healthy living and provides a variety of opportunities for visitors and residents to live, work, and play.

Local residents, new and old, take pride in a place that has strong community infrastructure such as healthcare and social service institutions, schools, recreation centers, transportation, and places to eat and socialize. These amenities are vital pieces of community that create a great quality of life. Improving upon these amenities and providing greater access to them can increase the standards of health and living for residents, strengthen Macon-Bibb's economy, and foster true sustainable growth. Additionally, leveraging Macon-Bibb's cultural and natural assets can encourage visitors to not just visit, but to stay to live, work and play.

Quality of Life Strategies:

7. Enhance Mobility & Placemaking

Using creative placemaking techniques and thinking about smart growth, Macon-Bibb will make sure residents are given a variety of options to get around so that they have better access to jobs and services throughout the county, particularly those underserved by public transit.

8. Improve Access to Healthy Foods

To address regional health disparities and promote healthy lifestyles for residents, Macon-Bibb will focus on strategies to reduce food insecurity and help children and families gain access to healthy food options. This collaborative effort will serve as a model for improving other health indicators.

9. Strengthen Arts and Cultural Tourism

Macon-Bibb's musical and cultural heritage, natural assets, and overall Southern charm is a significant draw for visitors. Investing in the tourism industry will not only attract visitors, strengthen tourism-related businesses, and allow Macon-Bibb to compete for new investments, it will also create a strong sense of place for those who live in the community.

Quality of Life Strategies at a Glance

Strategy 7: Enhance Mobility & Placemaking						
Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Implementation
Create a public transportation and workforce transportation plan						Mobility and Placemaking Working Group Transportation Committee
Encourage connectivity/accessibility through investments in street improvements						Mobility and Placemaking Working Group Transportation Committee
Invest in trail development						Mobility and Placemaking Working Group Trail Development Committee
Activate underutilized transit stations, bike and pedestrian projects, and public spaces						Mobility and Placemaking Working Group

Strategy 8: Improve Access to Healthy Foods						
Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Implementation
Convene food partners to seek funding and assess capacity to address food insecurity						Poverty Working Group Food Access Committee
Enhance food distribution and delivery model						Poverty Working Group Food Access Committee
Explore a county-wide food rescue program						Poverty Working Group Food Access Committee
Focus on nutrition and food education						Poverty Working Group Food Access Committee

Strategy 9: Strengthen Arts and Cultural Tourism						
Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Implementation
Invest in tourism-related infrastructure						Arts and Culture Working Group Tourism Infrastructure Committee
Promote Macon-Bibb as a creative destination						Arts and Culture Working Group Creative Destination Committee

Implementation Strategy

OneMacon! 2.0 will require an enhanced level of implementation support to achieve the outlined goals and impacts. Over the past six years, the implementation of OneMacon! 1.0 was enabled by organizations who identified areas of focus, the collaboration of many groups around shared activities, and the support of staff capacity for logistics and communications by the Community Foundation.

OneMacon! 1.0 fostered relationships and trust amongst organizations and provided a platform (OneMacon! Way) that allowed the creation of a community-wide brand. This approach has served the community well and built a level of momentum that can propel the next generation of implementation.

To continue to ensure the success of OneMacon! 2.0, an Implementation Committee will be formed from existing Steering Committee members who will initiate a 'recommit' process, affirming their interest in continuing to engage as a member of the OneMacon! 2.0 Implementation Committee. The role of the Implementation Committee will be to provide oversight, direction, and accountability, and to be the lead cheerleaders, advocates, and fundraisers for the plan.

The Implementation Committee will be supported by a number of working groups and action committees associated with each strategy area. Lead convening partners have been identified to lead each working group. They are charged with conducting an open call to participants, inviting community organizations with a stake in a given strategy area to be a part of implementation.

Funding the Plan. The portfolio of prioritized recommendations require significant funds to support staffing capacity for OneMacon! 2.0 and subsequent actions developed by the working groups. OneMacon! 2.0 supports the hiring of a full-time Neighborhood Renewal and Investment Catalyst. This staff person will be housed in one of OneMacon!'s partner organizations and will support lead conveners in the administrative work of scheduling meetings and developing protocols for agendas, note-taking, and follow-up. Additionally, the Investment Catalyst will support neighborhood renewal and community investment priorities, as well as coordinate OneMacon! with existing efforts such as the United Way's Macon Prosperity Collaborative, the Macon Action Plan, and the Macon-Bibb Cultural Plan.

The combined staffing costs and planning investment is approximately \$250,000-\$275,000 per year. Concentrated investment in blight alleviation will leverage nearly \$5.2 million in special-purpose local-option sales tax (SPLOST) over the next five years. A grassroots grantmaking effort, modeled after the "Downtown Challenge," is recommended to spur neighborhood investments and support organizations whose projects are working within areas outlined in the plan.

Measuring Impact

Economic Revitalization	
PERFORMANCE MEASURES	2019 BASELINE
Percent reduction of vacant residential properties	17% Vacancy (2017, 5-year estimate)
Percent reduction of commercial vacancy, lower than the state of Georgia	14.8% Business Vacancy (2019)
Percent increase of live/work population in Macon-Bibb	83,236 work in Macon (41.4% also live in Macon—34,454 people).
Improved financial stability of families	26.75% Poverty Level, 52.75% of households own homes

Talent and Education	
PERFORMANCE MEASURES	2019 BASELINE
Percent increase of 18-24 year olds who are gainfully employed or enrolled in post-secondary education	18-24 y.o. school enrollment rate = 39.8%, 18-24 y.o. bach+degree rate = 6.1%, 20-24 y.o. employment rate = 57%
Decreased unemployment rate among African Americans	African-American unemployment rate = 14.6% (2017 ACS, 5-year), much higher than white unemployment (5.8%)

Quality of Life	
PERFORMANCE MEASURES	2019 BASELINE
Increased use of alternative modes of transportation	Only 2% of commuters take alternative transportation (bus, walk, bike) to work; 705,549 rider of public transportation
Increase access to healthy foods	21.8% food insecurity rate
Expansion of tourism revenues and visitors	10,000 hotel/motel visitors; \$5.1 million conventions economic impact; \$10.3 million local tax revenue; \$381.3 direct tourism spend

FULL REPORT FOLLOWS

Introduction

The OneMacon! 2.0 plan presents a unified vision and shared set of community and economic goals that will shift Macon-Bibb's trajectory and accelerate growth. It serves as a roadmap that builds on the area's economic strengths, identifies opportunities for improvement, seeks to attract new talent and investment, and provides an avenue by which the community can evaluate and measure its outcomes. It is a plan that responds proactively to the needs of the community and positions Macon-Bibb County and the greater region to aggressively pursue catalytic investments that strengthen its economic vibrancy and quality of life.

The Community Foundation of Central Georgia (CFGA), on behalf of the OneMacon 2.0! Selection Committee, engaged Fourth Economy Consulting to facilitate the process of updating its initial strategic plan launched in 2014. The consultant team along with the CFGA organized a steering committee of several public and private leaders to serve as trusted advisors to the strategic planning process.

At the start of the planning process, the Macon-Bibb County community hosted its first On The Table gathering, convening over 5,000 people in 600 conversations about the challenges and opportunities facing the future of the region. Fourth Economy built on this momentum by completing a comprehensive economic and workforce analysis. The analysis validated the perspectives shared during the On The Table gathering and informed a comprehensive engagement process that entailed the following:

1. Over-the-phone and in-person interviews and meetings with leaders and stakeholders to explore the community's response to these challenges.
2. Eight issue-focused community Build Sessions to begin drafting solutions and mapping existing (and new) assets, resources and initiatives.
3. A partnership with Middle Georgia State University and their THRIVE Summit to explore best practices and innovative collaborations that support the region's goals.

As a result, top economic priorities emerged around neighborhood housing, economic vitality, workforce development, tourism, and quality of life. Additionally, the Fourth Economy team worked alongside various concurrent planning processes to build recommendations related to these areas and a framework to prioritize investments in specific neighborhoods of opportunity over the next five years.

Throughout this plan, many organizations are highlighted for their existing and/or prospective roles in implementation. It is important to note that the organizations and efforts listed simply represent a starting point. In order to have the maximum impact, the implementation of OneMacon! 2.0 will require full participation. Working Groups will be formed around each strategy, and will issue a call for participants. It is the sincere intention of this effort that OneMacon! 2.0 provide a roadmap for the entire community to organize around in a shared effort to foster inclusive economic growth in Macon-Bibb.

Macon-Bibb Today

The Macon-Bibb community has been on a journey and is prepared to build upon the growing momentum of community renewal and economic growth. Six years ago, leaders in the community came together to create a platform for community-wide collaboration, to identify opportunities and needs, and to chart a course for the realization of OneMacon!. Rallying behind one shared vision of jobs, place, and schools, OneMacon! met regularly to support the implementation of its first strategic plan launched in 2014. Efforts over the last five years realized:

- \$2.76 million in private donations for the Bibb County School District's "Leader in Me" initiative, which has led to improved test scores and attendance rates in the schools where it has been implemented
- An increase of 5,606 jobs from 2013-2018
- An 18% increase in the Bibb County School District's graduation rate from 2012-2017
- A 5% increase in the tax digest base from 2013-2018
- \$280M in market value increase of Urban Core property values

These impacts will pay dividends for years to come as OneMacon! 2.0 continues to advance this progress.

With Assets That Are Working to Attract New Businesses and Industry, Macon-Bibb's Economy is Growing



Macon-Bibb has seen strong economic growth in recent years. Its core assets - such as nearby tier one research universities, proximity to highway interstates and regional and international airports, a growing quality of life, and relatively low cost of living - are creating opportunities for the region to attract business.

Between 2011 - 2017, Macon-Bibb's management and finance and insurance industries lead employment growth, outpacing the national average. The healthcare, accommodation, and food

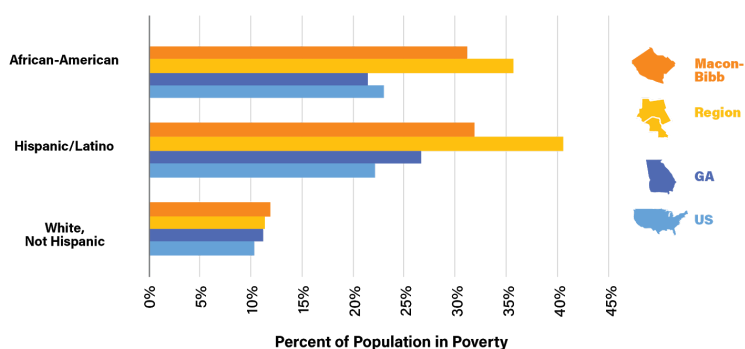
services industries also grew during the same period. Recent investment and expansion of manufacturing and aerospace and defense companies paint a new picture of future job availability.

The Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority has reported that Macon-Bibb County has seen nearly \$800 million in investment dollars. Investments in 2018 alone has generated 1,200 new jobs, 750 retained jobs, an average of \$30 million in payroll dollars and 2 million square feet of industrial and distribution warehouse construction in 2018.

The region is also showing strong signs of small business growth and entrepreneurial activity. New business activity in the downtown urban core is adding vibrancy to the area, attracting new visitors and strengthening quality of life. In 2018 alone, downtown has seen a total of \$84 million in public and private investment to revitalize its storefronts and activate the urban core, leading to 43 new businesses opening and expanding, 152 net new jobs and 173 additional units of housing. The number of events during the year has increased by 13% and attendance at these events by 42%.

Yet, Macon-Bibb's Poverty Levels Show That Economic Growth Hasn't Created Opportunity For Everyone

Macon-Bibb County, one of the largest counties in central Georgia with a population of 153,000, boasts a community that is racially and ethnically diverse. African Americans make up the majority of the population (54%), followed by 41% of residents who are White and a growing population of Hispanics and Latinos (3.2%) and Asians (1.9%). Macon-Bibb's cultural diversity is a significant ingredient to its vibrancy. According to data from the United States Bureau of Economic Analysis, Macon-Bibb has been losing about one percent of its population annually after leveled-growth during the 2008 - 2011 recession. This compares to the gradual growth of the Central Georgia region in recent years. Between 2012 - 2017, Macon-Bibb lost a total of 3,800 people, the largest population loss across all Central Georgia counties; in contrast, Houston County experienced nearly 7,400 in growth. Though more people are choosing to live and or work elsewhere, recent investments noted above promise a reverse trend in the coming years.



In considering Macon-Bibb County's demographic and workforce trends, income levels across racial lines and geography present a unique challenge. Macon-Bibb suffers from high rates of poverty, with

an overall rate of 28% percent. The poverty rate rises to 31% for the African American community, however, compared to just 11% for white residents.

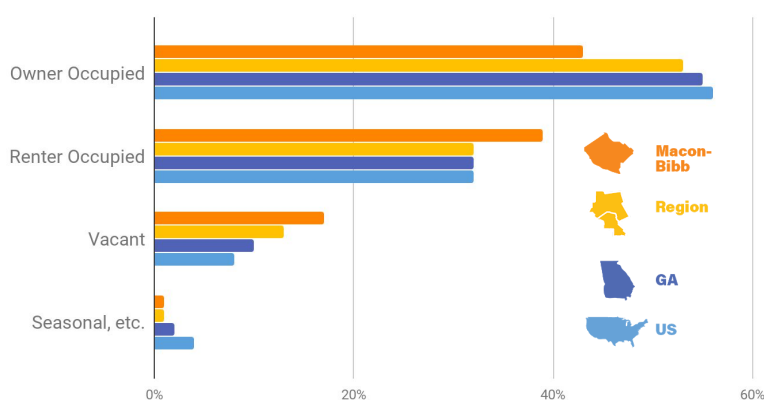
Macon-Bibb's inequality ranking is in the 98th percentile for all counties in the U.S. as measured by the Gini coefficient. The county's median household income is lower than the regional, state, and national average, and poverty is highest among African Americans and Hispanics.

Though there are many determinants of poverty, labor and wage data show that unemployment disproportionately affects African Americans. Across the board, wages in many industries in Macon-Bibb are lower than in the region, state and the United States. However, industries that are predominantly African American are the lowest-paying industries and industries that are predominantly White tend to be the higher wage-paying industries.

Education Outcomes Have Increased Year After Year, Presenting a Promising Path Towards Greater Economic Mobility For Some Residents

Macon-Bibb's math and reading proficiency levels outpace those of the state and region. Macon-Bibb has reported an increase in graduation rates each of the past five years, rising from 59% in 2014 to 79% in 2019. African American and Hispanic graduation rates are comparable to the region, state and nation. Macon-Bibb outperforms the state and the nation in math and reading proficiency levels, but trailed behind regionally due to high scores in Houston County. Increased graduation rates, coupled with the region's strong educational infrastructure - including high-school dual enrollment offerings and high-quality regional technical colleges and universities - present an opportunity for Macon-Bibb to strengthen its pathways to post-secondary education.

However, Where You Live in Macon-Bibb Determines Your Physical, Economic and Education Outcomes



With property values in Macon-Bibb's urban core rising and new investments coming online, some neighborhoods are having difficulty keeping pace with the rest of the county's growth. Over 40% of the housing stock in the area is owner occupied, 38% renter occupied and just about 17%

of its housing units are vacant. In comparison to the region, state, and nation, Macon-Bibb has more renters, fewer owners, and more vacancy. An uncommonly high vacancy rate places the county in the 98th percentile of the highest rates of vacancy among counties with 10,000 or more housing units.

This corresponds to a low-value housing stock, often concentrated in specific, high-poverty areas in Macon-Bibb. These same areas face the challenge of guaranteeing healthy outcomes for its residents.

Though there are many factors that contribute to concentrated poverty, residents and organizations in Macon-Bibb are proactively stabilizing the neighborhoods most in need. Historically, with partnership and significant financial investment, communities like Beall's Hill and Lynmore Estates have seen tremendous growth and revitalization.

The Voice of the Community



The On the Table gathering held in October 2018 included over 5,000 people participating in over 600 conversations, a testament to the desire of the community to come together. Over 800 Macon-Bibb residents also completed a survey that covered a wide range of inquiry. Their thoughts illuminated the progress that had been made to date and the work that still must be done:

2018 On The Table Macon survey participants expressed a strong sense of optimism about the direction of their community and what the future holds, but they had more mixed views on a sense of unity and equal opportunities for all.

- They are much more hopeful (66%) than worried (34%) about what the future holds for their community.
- 69% say the people who make up their community have shared goals and priorities.
- Overall, 68% think their community is changing for the better.
- Just over half (52%) of On The Table Macon participants think their community is more united, while 48% think it is more divided.
- They also have mixed views on whether their community provides equal opportunities for all; a 53% majority feel it does, 47% think it does not.

OneMacon! can and must be a force to find and build bridges to opportunity for all residents. This requires both the physical and social manifestations of opportunity that allow the community to see progress and that welcome individual residents to participate in that progress.

Recent years of strategic investments and partnership have moved the needle forward for Macon-Bibb. The community is now at a pivotal moment in its history and, with the right resources and infrastructure, it can grow its economy and thrive.

Vision and Goals

A shared vision and goals

- Macon-Bibb boasts a stable and diverse economy where every neighborhood is connected and thriving, residents have access to quality jobs, and the region is a community of choice for businesses and talent.
 - Reduce vacancy of residential and commercial properties
 - Increase the live/work population in Macon-Bibb
 - Improve the financial stability of families
- Macon-Bibb has a robust workforce development system that is preparing a highly-skilled workforce to meet the needs of industry and providing quality education, skills training and career opportunities for all residents.
 - Increase rate of 18-24 year old in Macon-Bibb who are employed and attending school
 - Decrease disparities in unemployment, particularly for African Americans
- Macon-Bibb is a safe and culturally vibrant community with a strong quality of life that promotes healthy living and provides a variety of opportunities for visitors and residents to live, work and play.
 - Increase use of public transit and alternative modes of transportation
 - Increase access to healthy foods
 - Realize an expansion of the hotel/motel tax and tourism revenues

Economic Revitalization

Macon-Bibb County has seen strong and record-level economic growth. Between 2013 and 2017, over 5,600 jobs were created and the tax base reversed a nine-percent decline and delivered a five-percent increase. In 2018, nearly \$800 million in industrial revenue bonds were issued for private investment, which generated over 1,200 new jobs, retained 750 jobs, and resulted in an annual payroll of over \$30 million. The growing central business district has seen an uptick in business and retail activity. Such growth can be attributed to the area's competitive strengths and core assets - including accessible major interstate highways, regional and international airports and nearby ports, relatively affordable cost-of-living, and the presence of tier-one research universities.

For Macon-Bibb to sustain this upward trajectory and economic momentum, it must ensure the right infrastructure is in place and that growth is benefiting everyone equally. There is an economic imperative to continue to support the county's large number of small businesses, particularly minority and women-owned enterprises; reimagine its existing retail and commercial blight; and pursue industry cluster strategies that diversify and further strengthen its economy. Macon-Bibb must commit to investing in its neighborhoods, strategically targeting industries of high potential, and achieving greater economic mobility for existing low-income residents.

Strategies

1. 7. Prepare Neighborhoods for Renewal and Investment
2. Grow and Diversify the Region's Economic Base
3. Build Wealth for Low-Income Residents and Families

Convening Partners

The following convening partners will lead the creation of working groups around each strategy. Working groups will be comprised of those organizations mentioned in the strategy descriptions, as well as any other interested organization.

- **Macon Housing Authority and Habitat for Humanity**
Neighborhood Renewal Working Group
- **Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority**
Industry and Business Working Group
- **United Way of Central Georgia and Economic Opportunity Council**
Poverty Working Group

STRATEGY #1:

Prepare Neighborhoods for Renewal and Investment

Macon-Bibb County boasts a variety of unique neighborhoods, each with its own strengths and assets that contribute to the region's vitality and quality of life. Communities like College Hill, Beall's Hill and Lynmore Estates have experienced revitalization in recent years due to collaborative efforts and multi-layered funding. These successes offer lessons learned and a starting point for shaping future neighborhood planning efforts. For example, the Macon Action Plan for downtown has had success using a mini-grant program to support implementation.

Now is the time to scale up those models of success so that other communities can experience growth. Tackling poverty and associated crime, unemployment, and blight requires an integrated approach to addressing the needs of each neighborhood, like reinvesting in blighted infrastructure and housing stock. Doing so will secure Macon-Bibb's economic future and ensure that it offers diverse and attractive neighborhoods for people of all different lifestyles and income levels.

Priority Actions:

- A. Strengthen Code Enforcement Operations
- B. Support Local Neighborhood Planning Capacity
- C. Transform Blighted Spaces into Neighborhood Assets

A. Strengthen Code Enforcement Operations

Implement an approach to code enforcement that is strong, proactive and responsive to Macon-Bibb's increasing levels of blight:

- Increase Macon-Bibb County Business Development Services' capacity to ensure municipal building and safety codes are enforced. This will include both an increase in financial resources and the hiring of 10 additional code enforcement officers dedicated to this role. Initial capacity should be focused on the three targeted neighborhoods.
- Establish a tiered violation system between the Municipal and Superior Court, where Superior Court upholds cases that have received multiple violations - up to a designated number - and bring them to resolution, leaving the Municipal Court to continue addressing minor code violations.

- Review Macon-Bibb’s municipal building codes. Revise existing laws or create new ones that tighten enforcement around property registration and maintenance violations, including the enforcement of the Community Redevelopment Tax Incentive Program. Utilize the data collected from the Loveland Survey to prioritize code enforcement in neighborhoods.

B. Invest in Local Neighborhood Planning Capacity

Build local-level neighborhood planning and leadership capacity and engage residents to establish a vision for their community:

- Fund and hire a neighborhood redevelopment coordinator to support blight-mediation and community investment work.
- Develop a county-wide approach to leadership training and capacity building for community residents, with the support and coordination of existing programs such as Shalom Zones, The Urban Leadership Academy, Historic Macon’s Leadership Institute and Georgia’s Department of Community Affairs training program.
- Establish neighborhood planning units (NPU’s), which are citizen advisory councils that can act as a liaison with the City/County Commission and Macon-Bibb Planning and Zoning on neighborhood planning-related matters and resources; engage support of the Middle Georgia Regional Commission and Planning and Zoning.
- Partner with Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta to leverage their data and capacity building tools via its community development function to support community visioning and strategic planning.
- Work closely with faith partners to model asset mapping approach completed by Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. Faith partners possess local knowledge of assets and resources that make up neighborhoods and serve as a vital convener of leaders to map the neighborhood ecosystem.

C. Transform Blighted Spaces into Neighborhood Assets

Restore vacant, dilapidated, and underutilized lots and structures and prepare prime real estate for investment that supports community growth:

- Conduct a housing needs assessment to identify the current and future landscape of housing stock and determine if the market for housing - rental, multi-family, etc. - will meet the needs of residents across various income levels, particularly for affordable and workforce housing. Engage Macon Housing Authority and Mercer University to support this work.

- Based on the successful approach modeled by NewTown and Historic Macon, conduct feasibility studies to support development in target neighborhoods.
 - Create a vacant lot recovery and education program through the Macon-Bibb County Land Bank to encourage local adoption and reuse. Engage the Center for Community Progress to leverage technical assistance in identifying economically viable options for vacant lot reuse, as well as to seek subsequent funding from the foundation community.
 - Support the Bibb County Board of Education in its efforts to acquire and develop vacant and blighted property adjacent to their school campuses.
 - Form a local working group of city leaders, community groups, and the county to explore the development/attraction of a Community Development Financial Institution, a financial intermediary providing capital and services to underserved populations to support housing and business lending.
-

Prioritizing Neighborhood Revitalization

Across Macon-Bibb are neighborhoods of varying shapes and sizes, all uniquely located and populated with people from diverse walks of life. From its downtown central core to the outer edges and suburbs, the county boasts a host of community assets, cultural and historic amenities, and activities for all to enjoy. An economy's strength is often evaluated not just by its economic output, but the state and strength of its communities. Therefore, a large part of Macon-Bibb's growth includes revitalizing its most distressed neighborhoods and those that present immediate opportunity for growth. Revitalization means reinvesting in housing and neighborhood infrastructure while fostering a greater sense of place and building collective action at its core.

The Opportunity:

The rebirth of Macon-Bibb's downtown area presents a significant opportunity to continue to invest in its urban core, and to do so in a way that positions the surrounding neighborhoods to build upon that growth. Committing to systematic and sustainable neighborhood change over the next decade will take time and require a collaborative and committed effort from community leaders and groups, government officials, and - in many cases - the private industry. How Macon-Bibb capitalizes growth within the urban core will determine its growth trajectory moving forward. Macon-Bibb must commit to focusing its investments on one community at a time, while navigating displacement pressures and addressing significant concentrations of poverty.

The Call to Action:

Over the next five years, Macon-Bibb will direct investment and resources towards strengthening its neighborhoods - with an initial focus on blight remediation given existing available public financing. Many of the Economic Revitalization strategies and the Neighborhood Revitalization strategies that follow will be piloted first in Macon-Bibb's Pleasant Hill, Tindall Heights, and Fort Hill neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were chosen based on analysis that includes the following variables.

Neighborhood Prioritization Variables

- Presence of blight and vacancy
- Level of existing investment
- Identified corridors of opportunity
- Strong neighborhood leadership and community capacity
- Development pressures from adjacent opportunities
- Strategically within an Opportunity Zone

The three communities of focus identified above and detailed below represent places where Macon-Bibb can concentrate its resources and create the critical mass necessary that can lead to greater investment. In addition, Macon-Bibb will focus its efforts around neighborhood planning and capacity in other parts of the county. Support will be provided to assist neighborhoods with renewal. This will require:

1. Developing a resident and local organization-led planning group
2. Engaging in leadership training and neighborhood capacity-building workshops with existing programs/partners
3. Establishing a community vision and shared goals
4. Embarking on asset mapping to explore neighborhood ecosystems of available neighborhood resources and services
5. Identifying projects for investment and strategies for action

Pleasant Hill

Adjacent to Macon-Bibb's Downtown and the Historic District, the community of Pleasant Hill is primed to see investment as the urban core continues to grow. The historic African American neighborhood boasts the childhood home of Little Richard, the Booker T. Washington Community Center, Bobby Jones Center, Jefferson Long Park and a host of residents with beaming community history and pride.

206	Blighted Units
\$2.3M	Blight Investment Needed (SPLOST, five-year estimates)
21.9%	Business Vacancy
\$18.3K	Median Household Income
49.2%	Families in poverty
598	Number of Households

Tindall Heights

Tindall Heights is an affordable housing community near Mercer University. Recent enhancements include the Housing Authority's recently completed redevelopment of Tindall Towers, now a fully-occupied Senior Living Complex. Additional projects include a SMART Park Project on Second Avenue and a \$75 million investment by Mercer University and Sierra Development, where new restaurants, a new Marriott Hotel, loft housing and a pedestrian-connector bridge with the Mercer University campus have all been recently completed.

211	Blighted Units
\$1.64M	Blight Investment Needed (SPLOST, five-year estimates)
13.3%	Business Vacancy
\$15.7K	Median Household Income
43.9%	Families in poverty
567	Number of Households

Fort Hill

An East Macon neighborhood that exhibits the greatest need of support among the three prioritized communities. It is home to Fort Hawkins Archeological Site, which is an asset in need of proper stewardship. Fort Hills also borders the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park, which provides an opportunity to attract economic development as the Park's recent designation attracts visitors from all over. The community benefits from the recently renovated Rosa Jackson Community Center and the Mill Hill Arts Village initiative of the Urban Development Authority and the Macon Arts Alliance

157	Blighted Units
\$1.22M	Blight Investment Needed (SPLOST, five-year estimates)
18.3%	Business Vacancy
\$17.5K	Median Household Income
43.9%	Families in poverty
1,341	Number of Households

STRATEGY #2:

Grow and Diversify the Region's Economic Base

The economic vitality of a region can be measured by the growth, diversity, and vitality of its local businesses, both large and small, across all industries. Industry strengths in Macon-Bibb's economic landscape include healthcare; business and financial services; transportation, construction and logistics; warehouse and distribution; aerospace and defense; advanced manufacturing; and automotive. Additionally, in Macon-Bibb there are promising levels of startup and business activity. Small business loans have roughly kept pace with state averages, and there is a strong entrepreneurial support ecosystem to encourage new and expanding businesses. To ensure continued growth and plan for a resilient future, strategic investments are needed to guarantee the long-term success of small businesses, the successful recruitment of high-growth industries, and high-wage jobs for the local workforce.

Priority Actions:

- A. Centralize Resources for Small Businesses and Startups
 - B. Develop, Recruit, and Expand High Growth Industries
 - C. Streamline Recruitment and Talent Attraction Strategies
-

A. Centralize Resources for Small Businesses and Startups

Macon-Bibb has many existing resources to support both small businesses and startups; however, it is not always easy for businesses to know how to access those resources. A central hub for resources would also help identify gaps. Given that the resources for, needs of, and organizations serving established small businesses and startups differ, this effort can be organized under two different, but connected, entities. Given the Chamber's existing role as a resource for small businesses, they are the natural organization to support further coordination of small business resources. Similarly, NewTown Macon has established itself as a resource for startups and small business growth in the downtown district, and could help to coordinate and streamline access to resources. This would of course require close collaboration between the two. Furthermore, the Office of Small Business would be a critical partner. Together, centralizing and advocating for resources will include:

- Promote resource organizations and the program offerings of Spark Macon, NewTown Macon, Middle Georgia SCORE, the UGA Macon SBDC office and others to existing businesses, prospective entrepreneurs and owners, and the community. One aspect of this would be a resource map/program that enables

entrepreneurs and small businesses to know what resources exist and how to utilize them at the right steps.

- Work within Macon-Bibb County to streamline the business and licensing permitting process, building on the work that has begun in 2019.
- Seek funding opportunities to support the expansion of programs like NewTown Entrepreneurship Academy that increase education offerings for minority and women entrepreneurs.
- Establish a Music Commission and support the Film Commission (See Arts and Culture Tourism recommendations) to cultivate an ecosystem of artists and creatives. Support the development of incentives to film in Central Georgia.
- Provide planning funds to support the work of increasing capital for small businesses and startups, particularly (1) exploring microlending opportunities through partnerships with Mercer University's Innovation Center, Central Piedmont Investment Group, and the Georgia Micro Enterprise Network, and (2) supporting the expansion of existing community development credit unions to increase assistance to those uniquely challenged in finding and securing startup business funding.
- Form a local working group of city leaders, community groups, and the county to explore the development/attraction of a Community Development Financial Institution, a financial intermediary providing capital and services to underserved populations to support business - and housing - lending.

B. Develop, Recruit, and Expand High-Growth Industries

Engage targeted industries for economic growth and formalize support to local businesses to increase responsiveness to business needs:

- Continue to support Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority's business engagement efforts through its established comprehensive business retention and expansion program.
- Work with Macon Chamber of Commerce to engage members in high-growth industries, identify common barriers to growth, and develop program and policy solutions to support their growth. This would entail a close partnership with the Office of Small Business to support this work and ensure business growth. Furthermore, the Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership supports business growth in many ways, but in particular in the integration of technology. A collaborative among the Chamber, Office of Small Business, GaMEP, and Industrial Authority would help Macon's small businesses in

high-growth industries expand.

- Led by Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority, conduct an updated targeted industry and recruitment plan informed by the development of an industry analysis, which will help identify opportunity industries for Macon-Bibb. Based on the updated targeted industry analysis, support the growth of identified industries.
- Identify specific properties for investment within designated Opportunity Zones, proactively market those to investors, and ensure a coordinated and robust package of support for potential investors and developers. This effort should be led by both the Development Authority and the Chamber of Commerce, with support from the MBCIA, the Regional Commission, and others. It will be critical to ensure alignment with Macon-Bibb neighborhood investment priorities.

C. Streamline Recruitment and Talent Attraction Strategies

Led by the Macon Chamber of Commerce, develop a comprehensive talent attraction/retention strategy to grow the region's talent pool:

- Through the MBCIA business retention and expansion program, continue to gain information from local business leaders about barriers to talent attraction, convening sector-specific consortiums of human resources professionals from top major employers (see Develop a Pipeline of Highly Skilled Talent recommendations).
- Work in partnership with Visit Macon to explore opportunities to assist employers around recruitment strategies and marketing job and quality of life opportunities to talent; this includes supporting Visit Macon's "I Am Macon" program.
- Develop a digital job board and platform to promote Macon-Bibb's job opportunities to external and internal audiences.
- Engage regional colleges and universities' career services departments to educate students on existing and future job opportunities and leverage programs such as the Young Professionals Network to amplify Macon-Bibb's quality of life.

STRATEGY #3:

Build Wealth for Low-Income Residents and Families

Macon-Bibb suffers from high rates of inequality and poverty, which disproportionately impact concentrated communities of color. Ensuring pathways for wealth-building and economic mobility will better the economic conditions of residents and families and lead to more equitable communities. Homeownership is often the most significant way for families to build wealth and is a viable pathway for Macon-Bibb as it addresses many of its neighborhood-level issues.

Recommended Actions:

- Increase support and expand the reach of financial literacy programs such as the Family Advancement Ministries and the Operation HOPE Inside Macon partnership, which provides financial literacy programs for families, into all neighborhood recreation centers.
- Scale up programs that support housing rehabilitation assistance for families who can't afford repairs, like the Fuller Center for Housing's "Greater Blessings" programs, and seek opportunities to fund and coordinate efforts around home repair.
- Support implementation of the United Way's second generation model, Macon Prosperity Collaborative
- Partner with the Economic Opportunity Council and Worksource Georgia to decrease barriers to employment for the currently unemployed and formerly incarcerated (see Decrease Barriers to Employment recommendations)

Talent and Education

Macon-Bibb is a major employment center and workforce hub, attracting a significant working population from outside the county - a larger population than it sends out to other areas. According to the Middle Georgia Regional Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, more than 46,000 people commute into the county for work. Additionally, nearby Houston County is home to the region's largest employer, Robins Air Force Base. The County's ecosystem of public schools, colleges, and universities give the county a talent advantage, as it graduates hundreds of top-tier students each year.

Despite existing economic opportunity, growth, and excellent educational assets, Macon-Bibb's unemployment rate is higher than that of the state and the nation, particularly among African Americans. This, in-part, is due to a mismatch between the education of the local workforce and employer needs, as well as the existence of barriers to employment including transportation and childcare. In order for Macon-Bibb to thrive, area residents need to be given the necessary education and skills that leading and emerging employers require so they may take advantage of living wage job opportunities in large and growing industries. The economic strength of Macon-Bibb is its ability to develop a pipeline of educated and skilled workers, along with an innovative approach to engaging its social support system to ensure residents can take full advantage of existing and future employment opportunities.

Strategies

4. Create a More Efficient Workforce Development System
5. Develop a Pipeline of Highly Skilled Talent
6. Decrease Barriers to Employment

Convening Partners

The following convening partners will lead the creation of working groups around each strategy. Working groups will be comprised of those organizations mentioned in the strategy descriptions, as well as any other interested organization.

- **Macon Chamber of Commerce**
Talent Attraction Action Committee - Talent and Ed Working Group
- **Worksource Georgia and Regional Colleges and Universities**
Skills Training Action Committee - Talent and Ed Working Group
- **Bibb County Public Schools and Business Education Partnership**
K-12 Career Learning Action Committee - Talent and Ed Working Group

STRATEGY #4:

Create a More Efficient Workforce Development System

From public school activities to university programs and community education initiatives, there are a variety of available workforce resources and service providers in Macon-Bibb County. Resources exist to help in providing students and graduates with the necessary information and skill development needed to ensure pathways to advance education and career success. Yet, few people are fully aware of them and many providers could benefit from more efficient coordination and partnership.

Recommended Actions:

- Engage with Middle Georgia P20 Collaborative to generate information about workforce development resources available across the county and collaborate on the development of a database and/or asset map of the workforce system listing those providers and their respective services, locations, administration and implementation structures.
- Establish an employer-educator partnership to ensure university curriculum aligns with existing industry needs and future industry needs.
- Through the Business and Education Partnership, create resource guides of workforce development and career resources for counselors in public schools to better educate students and families about career and training opportunities.
- Increase user engagement with Georgia's Department of Labor one-stop job center in Macon-Bibb by making its resources and information more accessible to those seeking employment and job training.

STRATEGY #5:

Develop a Pipeline of Highly Skilled Talent

One of the top priorities for industry is the availability of a skilled workforce. As employers are seeking trained professionals to sustain and grow their operations, Macon-Bibb must ensure skills training in existing and future industries such as aerospace and defense, manufacturing, transportation, and logistics. Additionally, it is imperative that the county creates clearly defined career pathways that begin with exposure to learning opportunities as early as middle school. Macon-Bibb is well positioned to reframe its worker pipeline by investing in specialized, short-term training opportunities, increasing internship and apprenticeship opportunities, and decreasing barriers to employment for targeted populations. Under the direction of the Macon Chamber, Macon-Bibb will take the following actions.

Recommended Actions:

- Establish industry-specific consortiums, convening industry leaders to understand current and future jobs and skills gaps. Align this work with the Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority industry analysis.
- Work with Worksource Georgia to fund additional industry-specific training curriculum and programs that align with high-demand, high-growth sectors of Macon-Bibb's economy.
- Support efforts of the Central Georgia Technical College to increasing the availability of accelerated, short-term training opportunities to allow participants to quickly enter the workforce with qualified credentials.
- Seek state assistance to increase the availability of apprenticeships and internships with employers in leading and growing industries, and ensure minority participation.
- Partner with the Bibb County Public Schools and related partners to provide additional out-of-school industry and career learning, entrepreneurship training, and coaching opportunities for middle and high school students.
- Scale up entrepreneurship training by marketing existing opportunities like the programs and resources of NewTown Macon and Spark Macon in neighborhoods to increase engagement and participation.

STRATEGY #6:

Decrease Barriers to Employment

To decrease the high rates of unemployment and provide the under-employed with meaningful and livable wages, Macon-Bibb County will commit to focusing on eliminating barriers that exist for target population cohorts - single parents, the formerly incarcerated, and 16 - 24 year olds who have dropped out and aren't working. Barriers to employment include transportation, criminal history, and childcare.

Recommended Actions:

- Community colleges and universities should work toward providing educational programming and continuing education courses at the neighborhood-level, leveraging recreational centers and churches as hubs, to increase access to programming for local residents and provide them the opportunity to upskill and attain higher-wage jobs.
- Increase support for first generation college students, providing mentoring workshops on soft skills to increase achievement (e.g. scale up Central Georgia Technical College's Institutional Effectiveness Division's "Raising Expectations of Achievement" (REACH) Program for African American males).
- Create a partnership with the Economic Opportunity Council to ensure wrap-around services are provided to participants in all Macon-Bibb County training, adult education, and reentry programs, placing emphasis on childcare solutions.
- Support the United Way's Macon Prosperity Collaborative so families can gain access to hard/soft skill training.

Quality of Life

Local residents, new and old, take pride in a place that has strong community infrastructure: healthcare and social service institutions, schools, recreation centers, transportation, and places to eat and socialize. These amenities are vital pieces of community that create a great quality of life. Improving upon these amenities and providing greater access to them can increase the standards of health and living for residents, strengthen Macon-Bibb's economy, and foster true sustainable growth.

Macon-Bibb's musical and cultural heritage, natural assets, and overall Southern charm is a significant draw for visitors and are reasons why residents chose to call the area home. Macon-Bibb can strengthen its quality of life for residents and visitors by focusing on enhancing mobility and providing opportunities to connect to jobs, services, and neighborhoods; committing to improving the health outcomes of its most vulnerable residents through community programming that addresses food insecurity; and investing in the tourism industry to create a strong sense of place for visitors and those who currently live in the community.

Strategies

7. Enhance Mobility & Placemaking
8. Improve Access to Healthy Foods
9. Strengthen Arts and Cultural Tourism

Convening Partners

The following convening partners will lead the creation of working groups around each strategy. Working groups will be comprised of those organizations mentioned in the strategy descriptions, as well as any other interested organizations.

- **Macon Transit Authority and Urban Development Authority**
Mobility and Placemaking Working Group
- **Central Georgia Food Bank and United Way of Central Georgia**
Food Access Working Group
- **Visit Macon and Macon Arts Alliance**
Arts and Cultural Tourism Working Group

STRATEGY #7:

Enhance Mobility & Placemaking

Residents living in Macon-Bibb need better access to jobs and services throughout the county and are currently underserved by public transportation routes and safe, convenient bicycle and pedestrian facilities. According to Macon Transit Authority, though ridership and funding has decreased in recent years, Macon-Bibb is in a position to make some improvements and recent efforts have shifted the perception of public and alternative modes of transportation. Macon-Bibb can model community growth that is centered around sustainability and creative placemaking, where the design of public places supports community cohesion and enhances opportunities for all residents.

Recommended Actions:

- Establish a public transportation planning initiative, led by the Macon Transit Authority and in partnership with the Economic Opportunity Council, to understand and provide viable multi-modal transit solutions for the mobility pain-points of low-income, transit-dependant residents.
- Additionally, Macon Transit Authority and Macon Chamber should cooperate to convene a regional consortium of industry and workforce partners to lead a coordinated regional workforce transportation strategy, addressing the short-term and long-term challenges of getting residents to work.
- Macon-Bibb County should support targeted investments made by the Macon-Bibb Parks and Beautification department to improve street, park and community infrastructure in key corridors that encourage activation, bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and accessibility to natural assets and open space.
- Engage Macon-Bibb Parks and Beautification Department to develop a fundraising strategic plan to advance proposed capital trail improvement projects identified in partnership with NewTown Macon.
- Create vibrant, welcoming neighborhoods and foster a strong sense of place by strengthening efforts around branding and signage throughout Macon-Bibb, particularly in major corridors and entry-points into the city. Enhance entry points into the community to create clean and attractive entry corridors.

- Engage the Public Arts Commission and Macon-Bibb Arts Alliance to activate underutilized transit stations, bicycle and pedestrian tactical urbanism projects, and corridors and spaces with public murals and art.
- Identify and prioritize historic preservation by leveraging Historic Macon's 1772 Foundation and Trust for Public Land partnership. This includes support of the Scenic Preservation Index - a collaborative effort engaging the community to identify priority places for preservation and conservation in Macon-Bibb County.

STRATEGY #8:

Improve Access to Healthy Foods

Macon-Bibb falls behind the region, state and U.S. averages across all health indicators: diabetes, heart disease, substance abuse, mental health and infant health. Understanding and addressing the social determinants of health is Macon-Bibb's most immediate priority. With additional health clinics coming online, health partners are making extensive efforts to provide quality health education and awareness of health services. Macon-Bibb has the opportunity to develop innovative, community-based programs and partnerships to address food insecurity, which disproportionately impact predominantly African-American neighborhoods.

Recommended Actions:

- Convene a collective of food partners to better understand the food ecosystem and the gaps in access and organizational capacity. Engage with Georgia Food Policy Council to support this work, and partner with the Healthcare Georgia Foundation, Georgia Health Foundation, Georgia Department of Community Health, and additional partners to fund Macon-Bibb's food access goals and initiatives.
- Collaborate with local hospitals, farms, and community gardens to explore an efficient food distribution and delivery model to expand their reach to more families and children in need. This includes partnerships with Macon Transit Authority and the Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning Department to provide routes to grocery stores in identified food desert communities. The United Way is currently researching the feasibility of several food access interventions, including setting up a system to partner with churches and other neighborhood-based assets to deliver food on a regular basis; this effort should be leveraged to implement this strategy.

- Explore a county-wide food rescue program to tackle food waste. Partners include regional colleges and universities, local restaurants, and food retailers.
- Leverage schools as incubators of nutrition and food education, incorporating educational programming within the curriculum and supporting the development of a mobile meal program for after-school and summer programs. Partner with the Macon County Extension Office to support this work.

STRATEGY #9:

Strengthen Arts and Cultural Tourism

Macon-Bibb's musical and cultural heritage, natural assets, and overall Southern charm is a significant draw for visitors. With activities spanning from historical tours and museum events to music festivals, as well as a growing presence of restaurants, pubs and breweries, the tourism industry stands to become a significant engine of economic growth and prosperity for Macon-Bibb. Arts and culture alone generated 3,222 jobs and \$3.6 million in local revenue to government in 2018. Additionally, Macon-Bibb's Ocmulgee Mounds' recent national historical park redesignation and the activation of its arts and culture venues such as the Capricorn Studios provide unique opportunities to attract visitors and generate additional tourism spending.

Investing in the tourism industry will not only attract visitors, strengthen tourism-related businesses, and allow Macon-Bibb to compete for new investments, it will also create a strong sense of place for those who live in the community

Priority Actions:

- A. Invest in Tourism-Related Infrastructure
- B. Promote Macon-Bibb as a Creative Destination

A. Invest in Tourism-Related Infrastructure

Under the guidance of Visit Macon as a convener, strategically invest in facilities and services needed to support a growing tourism industry within Macon-Bibb:

- Develop a stronger trail focus, investing in new trails, extensions and upgrades to existing trails and providing connections to amenities in towns and hubs (see Enhance Mobility and Placemaking recommendations).

- Increase short-stay accommodation capacity, incentivizing development of large and boutique hotels around Macon-Bibb with adequate event space.
- Prepare and activate vacant retail storefronts as temporary event spaces and venues for arts and culture programming, and establish a pop-up live music program for local and international artists.
- Fund upgrades to the Macon Convention Center, bringing it up to par with statewide venue standards, to increase event and entertainment opportunities.
- Enhance and support the Film Commission in efforts to develop studio and film spaces, attract entertainment management companies to set up satellite offices, and meet the housing needs of talent.
- Work with the Urban Development Authority to establish a public-private partnership to capitalize on Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park, developing surrounding land into residential and retail development. This will position Ocmulgee as a gateway and complement/support continued development of Macon's Mill Hill Arts Village, a neighborhood revitalization project in East Macon.
- Dedicate funding to tourism product development that enhances the visitor experience and ensures the community is delivering on its brand promise. These investments should also compliment the Quality of Life priorities for residents.
- Develop an Urban Core Hospitality Zone Assessment to create a safe urban nightlife, and work in partnership with NewTown Macon and the board of the downtown Business Improvement District to deploy a Knight Foundation grant.

B. Macon-Bibb as a Creative Arts and Culture Destination

Destination promotion around Macon-Bibb's creative assets will generate new visitors and investments and drive economic growth.

- Establish a brand reflective of Macon365's creative assets and leverage Macon365's platform to promote the brand. Partner with other organizations charged with sharing the message of opportunity outside of Macon-Bibb.
- Collaborate with Visit Macon on enhancing digital marketing promotion to reach key audiences, internally and externally.

- Engage Student Life representatives at regional universities to amplify the Macon365 website and promote creative/cultural/nightlife offerings to students.
- Support recommendations to strengthen diverse arts and culture events and increase tourism product and programming in the Macon Arts Alliance Arts and Cultural Plan, including arts and culture festivals targeting immigrant growth in Middle Georgia.
- Develop a Music Commission (mirroring that of the existing Film Commission), with its creation led by the Macon Arts Alliance, to support the growth of the music industry. The Commission will be responsible for promoting partnerships, facilitating music and community connections, ensuring diverse music events, and supporting existing and new tourist venues.
- Update “Creative Arts and Culture Destination” strategy upon receipt of the final Cultural Study Plan (currently underway) and incorporate into overall OneMacon! 2.0 plan.

Implementation

OneMacon! 2.0 will require an enhanced level of implementation support to achieve the goals and impacts outlined. Over the past six years, the implementation of OneMacon! 1.0 was enabled by organizations who identified areas of focus, the collaboration of many groups around shared activities, and the support of staff capacity for logistics and communications by the Community Foundation.

OneMacon! 1.0 fostered relationships and trust amongst organizations and provided a platform (OneMacon! Way) that allowed the creation of a community-wide brand. This approach has served the community well and built a level of momentum that can propel the next generation of implementation.

As the most recent OneMacon! status report card illustrates, significant progress has been made in most of the areas identified as priorities in the first OneMacon! plan.

The consulting team has identified barriers to scaling the OneMacon! activities, including:

- Most organizations that have been engaged during the planning process are 'capacity stretched' - they have little to no capacity to take on additional assignments without adding staff and/or financial capacity.
- There is collaboration occurring across organizations that is built on existing relationships; more support is needed to institutionalize this collaboration, so that it is not dependent upon particular individuals. There are still some siloing/turf-related issues that must be addressed through a collaborative implementation process.
- The community can be more aggressive in seeking outside resources to invest in key priorities. This pursuit will require dedicated staffing capacity.
- The planning process engaged representatives at the organizational level and through leveraging results of prior individual-level engagement. Neighborhood-level challenges have been identified and the next step will be to engage residents. This barrier may be short lived as it aligns with the focus area of the recently initiated **United Way: Macon Prosperity Collaborative**.

The Implementation Path

Implementation Committee

The demonstrated success of OneMacon!'s first years dictates that the structure of an Implementation Committee is critical to ensuring the success of this next generation plan. The existing Steering Committee will initiate a 'recommit' process whereby members can affirm their interest in continuing to engage as a member of the OneMacon! 2.0 Implementation Committee.

The role of the Implementation Committee will be to provide oversight, direction and accountability, and to be the lead cheerleaders, advocates, and fundraisers for the plan. This will be manifested in the following ways:

Oversight: The Strategy Working Group chairs (described below) will report quarterly to the Implementation Committee on their progress.

Direction: The Implementation Committee will track progress against established goals, and convene partners to readjust strategies as needed if goals are not being met.

Accountability: The Implementation Committee will organize an annual public event to report on progress made by the Strategy Working Groups and Action Committees (described below).

Cheerleaders: The Implementation Committee will coordinate with marketing consultants to identify opportunities to share stories about progress through traditional and social media. However, they will also be cheerleaders for the work to their own personal networks, building a community of supporters for OneMacon!

Advocates: Many of the strategies in this plan will require political will and action to implement. The Implementation Committee will be prepared to go to bat for the changes that are needed to ensure the success of this plan.

Fundraisers: The Implementation Committee will be responsible for identifying funding sources to support implementation, and leveraging their social and political capital, as well as institutional resources, to support fundraising efforts.

Strategy Working Groups + Action Committees

The day-to-day work of implementing this plan will fall to Strategy Working Groups. Working groups will be established around each of the strategies. Where there are defined priority actions, Action Committees will be established within the working group. The accompanying Implementation Matrix identifies lead conveners for each

working group. Where there are action committees, the co-chairs of those Committees would comprise the strategy working group.

Initial working group members are identified as well; however, one of the first orders of business for the lead conveners will be to issue a call for members. It is critical that as many willing partners as possible be welcomed into the fold, as this is truly a community-driven effort that will require full participation to succeed.

The other initial task of the lead conveners, with support from the working group members, will be to develop an annual work plan. While the OneMacon! plan provides guidance on the overall intention and direction of each strategy (and corresponding priority actions, where applicable), it will require the expertise of the working group to articulate the detailed how-to steps and resources that will be required to execute them. It is assumed that each working group (or action committee, as appropriate) will meet every 4 - 6 weeks.

Enhanced Staffing Capacity

The portfolio of prioritized recommendations requires capacity to implement. Capacity can take different forms and does not signal a 'new' organization - just new or expanded roles.

While the lead conveners of the working groups will be responsible for shepherding the day-to-day implementation of OneMacon!, those conveners will be assuming that responsibility in addition to their pre-existing responsibilities (though ideally, these strategies can be aligned with and integrated into the work of leading organizations). In order to support lead conveners in the administrative work of scheduling meetings and developing protocols for agendas, note-taking, and follow-up, for each of the up-to-15 working groups/action committees, additional capacity is needed. Similar support will be required for shepherding the work of the Implementation Committee.

While the level of effort described above is significant, it is likely not a full-time role, and could be combined with providing capacity to support implementation of the **Prepare Neighborhoods for Renewal and Investment** goal. There are several tasks that are documented under this goal that will benefit from enhanced actions and support of Macon-Bibb staff. What is clear though is that there is a level of coordination and focus for integrating public and private partners that will require the support of a staff person dedicated to this role. This **Neighborhood Renewal and Investment Catalyst** role can be served by a newly created staff or contract position housed at one of the primary partners such as the Community Foundation, NewTown Macon, Historic Macon, or Habitat for Humanity.

This Catalyst role will serve as a resource to the various partner organizations that are working collaboratively to address this goal. As a resource they will:

- Initiate and coordinate meetings between organizations to more efficiently plan and execute on the strategies detailed here.
- Support the development of research and analysis to support identified actions.
- Prepare and submit funding requests for regional, state and national investment to accomplish the prioritized tasks.
- Engage outside resources to serve as advisors and supporters of the effort (e.g. Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Center for Community Progress).
- Work with partners to problem-solve when barriers are presented to implementation.

Neighborhood renewal is the proposed lead effort of this plan, as it will provide benefit in the communities most in need in Macon-Bibb; therefore, it requires an increased level of investment. In addition to the staffing capacity, a budget to support neighborhood planning in various forms will be required to create an environment that attracts investment.

Finally, the implementation of OneMacon! 2.0 must be transparent and create opportunities for public engagement. The Implementation Committee's responsibilities for accountability and their role as cheerleaders and advocates will provide opportunities to communicate with and engage the public. Beyond that, there will likely be other opportunities as part of the working group activities. In order to support these public engagement and communications needs, OneMacon! 2.0 should also engage an individual or firm to provide ongoing communications support. The Macon Now platform will continue to provide a vehicle for organizations to highlight their work and serve as a collaboration network. This individual/firm would work closely with the Neighborhood Renewal and Investment Catalyst.

Combined, the staffing costs and planning investment will cost approximately \$250,000-\$275,000 per year.

Coordinated Efforts

The **Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce** is due in 2020 to pursue a capital campaign (Macon Now) and the stated preference is to focus on economic prosperity. This will allow the Chamber to support activities related to the Economic Vitality and Education and Talent recommendations. They can also partner with United Way on poverty reduction and racial inclusion efforts as they relate to existing employers in the region.

The **Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority** is continuing to serve as a critical investor in economic vitality through its recruitment of and support for larger employers. Recent work on industrial blight mitigation will enhance key corridors and provide opportunities for continued economic growth.

United Way's strategic plan is focused on disrupting family poverty. The focus on the family, or a "two gen" approach, is built on the premise that conditions that affect the family will have an impact on child development. Breaking the cycle encompasses three primary needs: health and safety, education, and financial stability. Grants will be awarded to support collaborations aligned with this overall goal. This activity can operate in coordination with the targeted neighborhood focus.

The **Macon-Bibb Cultural Plan** is in development and will call out specific areas of focus to strengthen community culture and identify opportunities to grow Macon-Bibb through an arts and culture focus.

Conclusion

The three focus areas within this plan - Economic Revitalization, Talent and Education, and Quality of Life - are not mutually exclusive. Having and equipping the right people is what will drive industry growth. Livable communities, not just job opportunities, influence whether people choose to raise families in Macon-Bibb. Cultural amenities matter to corporate CEO's and industry leaders in choosing a location to operate. The synergy and marriage between community and economic development, people and place, small business owners and industry giants matters and is what will fuel the movement of Macon-Bibb's economy forward.

In ten years, Macon-Bibb can grow to become a choice destination boasting a stable and diverse economy; a robust workforce system that is meeting the needs of residents and industry; and a safe and culturally vibrant community for all who desire to live, work, and play. The current success stories and those anticipated over the next decade will only accelerate what Macon-Bibb is able to achieve.