

**Rockbridge Road
Commercial Corridor
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
VISION & PLAN**

PINE LAKE, GEORGIA
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Economic Development Task Force

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- A. Market Overview
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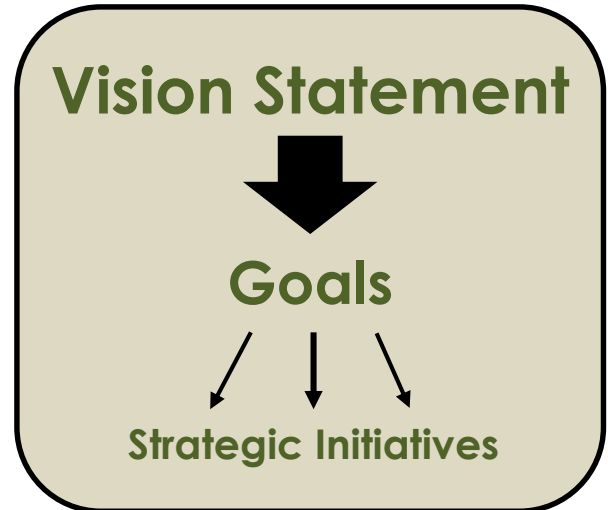
INTRODUCTION

The following document represents a vision and strategic economic development plan for the Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake, Georgia. This plan was undertaken with the understanding that economic development is necessary to maintain and improve the quality of life for citizens and to maintain the economic viability of the community.

The Rockbridge Road Economic Development Vision and Plan is designed as a roadmap for action. It is based on local market statistics and builds on previous activities of city government, local civic organizations, and citizens. The efforts required to complete this planning document were coordinated by an Economic Development Task Force.

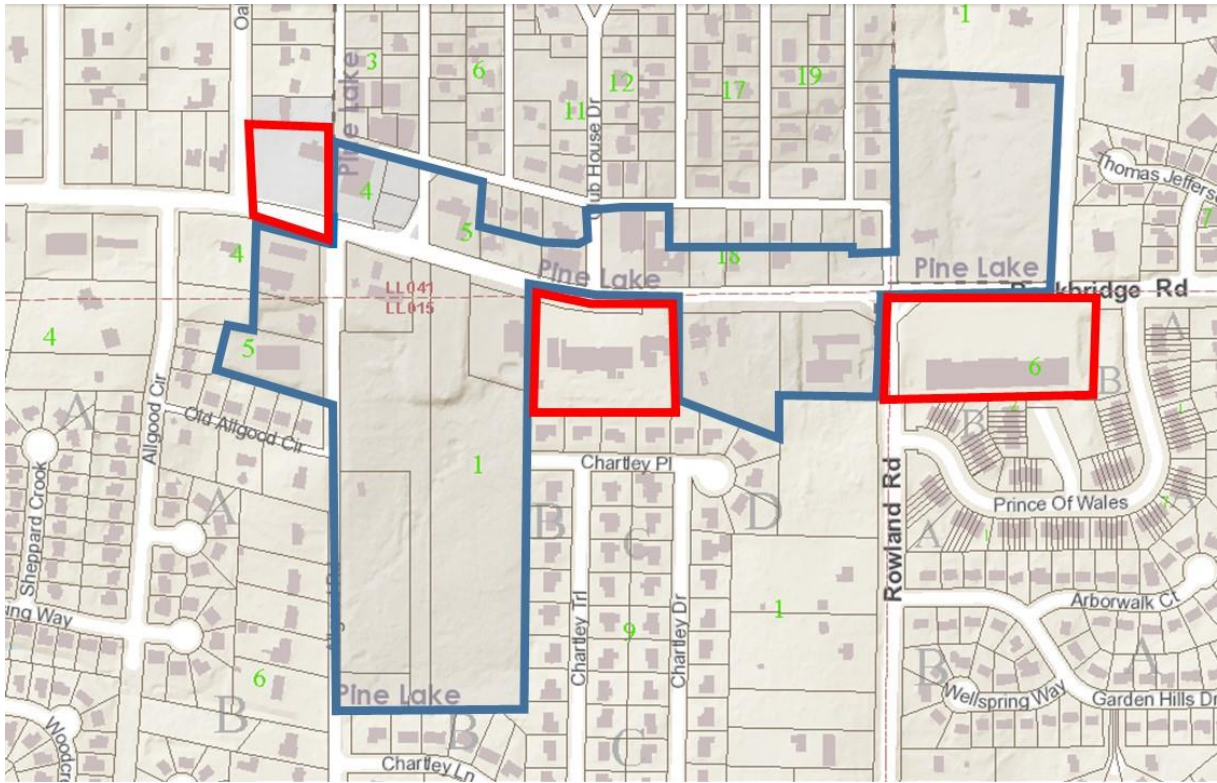
To be effective, this long-range plan should be used to guide short-range decisions made over the next several years that affect the policies, programs, and actions of the City government as related to the Rockbridge Road corridor. However, because most economic development takes place outside of government, this plan encourages a collaborative effort between the City, the citizens, local businesses, and civic institutions.

The recommendations in this document are presented from the broadest category to the simplest, beginning with a “Vision Statement” that outlines the overall vision for the area. This is broken down into a list of “Goals” to achieve the vision, and then a set of “Strategic Initiatives” designed to reach those goals.



The “Strategic Initiatives” in this plan represent a list of fairly straightforward projects designed to create visible progress in achieving the community’s vision for Rockbridge Road. It is anticipated that these initiatives will be championed by a variety of groups including City Government, the Economic Development Task Force, business and property owners, civic organizations, and local residents.

STUDY AREA



The Study Area for this plan includes all of the parcels along Rockbridge Road between the eastern and western boundaries of the City of Pine Lake. It includes twenty-four parcels in the City and three additional parcels located outside of the city limits. The three parcels not located in Pine Lake were included in this study because they are an integral part of the Rockbridge Road corridor and provide some of the best opportunities for growth and improvement. The Study Area includes an area of approximately 41 acres, with slightly more than 32 acres located inside the Pine Lake city limits.

There are 21 buildings in the overall Study Area with approximately 98,600 square feet of space. In the portion of the Study Area within the City of Pine Lake, there are 17 buildings with 55,300 square feet.

The 2018 taxable value of property within the Study Area is approximately \$8.8 million dollars, with \$6.6 million dollars of this value within the City of Pine Lake.

Most of the property within the Study Area is commercial in nature and subject to property taxes, with the exception of property owned by Pine Lake Baptist Church and the new City Hall facility.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake is an automobile-oriented commercial district located along the southern boundary of the community. While there are some newer and well maintained buildings, a significant number of the structures are older and suffer from varying levels of deferred maintenance. The area also has a great deal of signage that appears to be somewhat haphazard. Landscaping along the area is often poorly maintained.



The pedestrian infrastructure in the corridor is inconsistent. While there are sidewalks in many areas, there are also long stretches with no sidewalks. There is very little street furniture for pedestrians along the road.

Retail is the predominate use along the corridor, but there is also a significant number of automobile repair businesses. Family Dollar is the only major retail chain operating a location in the area. Other retailers are small, locally-owned businesses. Institutional uses in the area include the Pine Lake Post Office, the Woodstock Church, and the new Pine Lake City Hall. Most of the property in the area is developed, but there are two tracts over five acres that are largely vacant. One tract of approximately 13-acres is actively listed for sale.



VISION STATEMENT

The Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake will be a vibrant commercial district with a unique atmosphere that is welcoming to everyone and that serves as a departure from the chronic sameness of the typical American commercial landscape. The Rockbridge Road corridor will be a safe and thriving commercial area consisting of a mosaic of small businesses in a setting that reflects Pine Lake's passion for the environment and the arts while also celebrating the tremendous ethnic diversity in and around Pine Lake.

GOALS

- 1.** Improve the aesthetics of the Rockbridge Road corridor to create a setting that is “uniquely Pine Lake” and that celebrates Pine Lake’s passion for the arts and the environment.
- 2.** Create an atmosphere along the Rockbridge Road corridor that sends a message that “all are welcome” in Pine Lake.
- 3.** Create an environment that is safe in both perception and reality for customers, business owners, and visitors.
- 4.** Retain and support the success of existing small businesses along the Rockbridge Road corridor.
- 5.** Recruit new businesses that provide opportunities to build community and that represent the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of Pine Lake and the surrounding area.
- 6.** Create an organizational framework to support economic development along the Rockbridge Road corridor.

GOAL 1: Improve the aesthetics of the Rockbridge Road corridor to create a setting that is “uniquely Pine Lake” and that celebrates Pine Lake’s passion for the arts and the environment.

The appearance of a community has a direct impact on the willingness of individuals and businesses to invest in the area. In the community survey completed for this Study, 65% of survey respondents rated the appearance of the Rockbridge Road corridor as “poor.” Efforts to improve the appearance of the area should focus on respecting the existing built environment while also celebrating Pine Lake’s appreciation of the arts and the environment.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- Commission the creation of new public art to serve as entrance signs at both ends of the Rockbridge Road Corridor. Ideally, each entrance should have its own artwork and identity
- Add directional wayfinding signage created by artists
- Create small pocket parks including original works of sculpture
- Paint a series of murals on local businesses
- Commission artists to paint sidewalks and/or curbs
- Utilize small unpaved areas to add landscaping consisting of native plants
- Commission artists to design and create new street furniture including seating and trash cans



STRATEGIC INITIATIVES (Continued)

- Install original and unique works of textile art over the streets. While this installation may not be possible over Rockbridge Road because of its status as a state highway, these works of art could occupy space over City-controlled streets leading from Rockbridge Road into the residential neighborhood, serving to connect the residential and commercial areas visually.



- Utilize small open spaces and sections of underutilized parking lots throughout the corridor for urban gardening in raised beds
- Work with local artists to paint the walls of the raised beds and to install folk art in the beds



STRATEGIC INITIATIVES (Continued)

- Create a unique activity center(s) along the Rockbridge Road corridor that can serve as a location for a variety of programming including outdoor music, farmers markets, pop-up shops, food trucks etc. - To attract both local residents and visitors from outside of the community, this activity center should be original and unique, representing not only an appreciation for the arts and environment, but also boldly celebrating the existing gritty, automobile-centric environment along Rockbridge Road.



El Comisco Kitchen in Marfa, Texas



Overnight lodging in Marfa, Texas

A potential site for this activity center could be the front of the vacant 13-acre tract near the intersection of Allgood and Rockbridge Roads. Alternatively, a variety of uses could be split up in different locations along the corridor.



GOAL 2.: Create an atmosphere along the Rockbridge Road corridor that sends a message that “all are welcome” in Pine Lake.

In interviews with local stakeholders, a sense that Pine Lake is often viewed as “separate” from surrounding communities was noted as a concern. The Rockbridge Road corridor has the potential to become a vibrant commercial district that serves to build a sense of community shared with Pine Lake residents and the residents of surrounding communities.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- Host a rotating series of events along the Rockbridge Road corridor designed to attract not only residents of Pine Lake but residents of the surrounding areas as well – Examples could include a pet adoption, antique car show, children’s festival, a Pine Lake 5k run, art walk, etc.
- Create a display of signs with the word “welcome” written in a variety of languages
- Install a public art project consisting of a series of signs throughout the Rockbridge area with phrases signifying that all are welcome
- Create an international food event that celebrates the diverse cultures represented by residents of the larger area surrounding the City of Pine Lake



GOAL 3: Create an environment that is safe in both perception and reality for customers, business owners, and visitors.

Safety concerns along Rockbridge Road include both pedestrian safety along the busy state highway and the perception and reality of criminal activity in the area. The planned widening and improvements to Rockbridge Road will provide an opportunity to create a safer pedestrian experience. The issues with criminal activity will require a great deal of communication and coordination between the business community and the City. In interviews with business owners along the corridor, crime was often mentioned as one of the top concerns. However, many of these same business owners also cited Pine Lake's past reputation for aggressive policing as a factor that deterred customers from patronizing their businesses. Improving the reality and perception of crime along the Rockbridge corridor will require continued dialogue.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- Work with the Department of Transportation to create safer crosswalks along Rockbridge Road
- Investigate the possibility of a pedestrian bridge over Rockbridge Road
- Institute an organized "Meet-an-Officer" program with local businesses
- Support additional dialogue between the police department and the owners and employees of local businesses
- Investigate the voluntary coordination of local business security cameras with the police department



GOAL 4: Retain and support the success of existing small businesses along the Rockbridge Road corridor.

In the community survey undertaken for this study, almost 46% of survey participants stated that they rarely patronize businesses along Rockbridge Road. Efforts should be made to support local businesses and to assist them in marketing their goods and services to Pine Lake residents and to residents in the surrounding neighborhoods.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- Create a “brand identity” for the Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake including a logo that can be used in marketing efforts
- Feature a local business each quarter in the PLAINtalk newsletter
- Create and maintain an online business directory
- Assist in the formation of a Pine Lake Business Association
- Institute a façade grant program to match local property owners’ investments in their buildings
- Create an investment pool to support the growth of local businesses
- Institute an “Adopt-a-Business” program to build connections between Pine Lake residents and businesses
- Provide free booths for businesses at local events to help build awareness of the goods and services offered by small businesses located in Pine Lake
- Create an “Art Wall” that features local business owners
- Provide an appreciation gift to be given to local businesses annually
- Host an annual breakfast reception for local businesses at City Hall



GOAL 5: Recruit new businesses that provide opportunities to build community and that represent the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of Pine Lake and the surrounding area.

In the community survey undertaken for this study, survey participants listed a variety of new businesses that they would like to see in Pine Lake. Based on stakeholder interviews, there seems to be a strong desire within the community to add businesses that will provide the opportunity for Pine Lake citizens to interact with their neighbors and to build community. Because the population of Pine Lake is small, new businesses will need to have a broad enough appeal to attract both Pine Lake residents and the residents of surrounding areas.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- Create an information packet to be given to those looking to open a business in Pine Lake
- Release a series of press releases to increase awareness of Pine Lake and its business community
- Create a list of potential businesses to approach based on market feasibility and local demand
- Create a location for outdoor “pop-up” shops - Many aspiring small business owners have difficulty finding sufficient capital to cover overhead when opening a new business. The City of Pine Lake should consider the creation of a pop-up market along the Rockbridge corridor to serve as an incubator for new businesses. These businesses, if successful, could later move into permanent space along the corridor.



GOAL 6: Create an organizational framework to support economic development along the Rockbridge Road corridor.

The Main Street America organization has outlined a series of “transformation strategies” to support the revitalization of central business districts. These transformation strategies are focused around the “four points” of Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization. According to Main Street America, “Organization” involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources to support revitalization. While Pine Lake is not large enough to sustain a traditional Main Street Program with a full-time manager, efforts to spur growth and change on the Rockbridge Corridor will require an organized structure.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- Create an ongoing task force to support the realization of the goals in this plan
- Activate the Downtown Development Authority – An active DDA would have the legal ability to institute programs that a committee or task force could not
- Create an annual work plan to coordinate the efforts of the Task Force, the Mayor and Council, and the City staff.
- Designate a “New Business Ambassador” to market Pine Lake to provide information to potential new business owners



COMMUNITY SURVEY

A survey was undertaken to gain a better understanding of the community's perceptions of the current state of the Rockbridge Road corridor and their vision for the future. Survey participants included residents of Pine Lake, residents of surrounding communities, business owners, and visitors. A total of 183 individuals participated in the survey. The following is a synopsis of the results. Complete survey results can be found in Appendix C.

Question 1: Are you a Pine Lake resident, business owner, frequent visitor, or resident of a nearby neighborhood?

Resident (129); Business Owner (7); Frequent Visitor (9); Resident of a nearby neighborhood (48) (Note: Survey participants could choose multiple answers to this question.)

Question 2: If you are a Pine Lake resident, how long have you lived in the community?

Less than one year (5.6%); From one to five years (28.9%); Over five years (40.0%); Not applicable (25.6%)

Question 3: What are three words or phrases that you would use to describe the Pine Lake community?

Most common responses (and number of responses): Art (40); Friendly (35); Eco-Friendly (21); Quiet (19); Creative (18); Eclectic (17)

Unique (16); Community (14); Small (12); Cliquish/Insular/Racist (11); Beautiful (10); Quirky (10); Inclusive (8); Natural (8); Peaceful (8); Quaint (8); Fun (7); Neighborly (7); Progressive (7)

Question 4: What makes Pine Lake special?

This was an open-ended question with all of the individual responses listed in Appendix C.

Question 5: What three words or phrases would you use to describe the Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake?

Most common responses (and the number of responses): Ugly (23); Run down (15); No restaurants or shops (12); Under-developed (10); horrible (9); Traffic (9); Busy (8); Pot holes (8); Underutilized (8); Unsafe (8); Unattractive (7)

Question 6: What do you like about the Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake?

This was an open-ended question with all of the individual responses listed in Appendix C.

Question 7: What changes would you like to see along the Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake?

This was an open-ended question with all of the individual responses listed in Appendix C.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Question 8: How would you rate the current appearance of the Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake?

Survey participants were able to choose a number between 1 and 5, with 1 being “Poor” and 5 being “Excellent.” The average rating from survey participants was 1.5 which is just slightly above a rating of “Poor.” No participant gave a rating of 4 or 5.

Question 9: How safe do you feel when patronizing businesses along the Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake?

Survey participants were able to choose a number between 1 and 5, with 1 being “Very Unsafe” and 5 being “Very Safe.” The average rating from survey participants was 2.7 which is very close to the midpoint between “Very Unsafe” and “Very Safe.”

Question 10: On average, how often do you patronize businesses along the Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake (NOT including visits to the Post Office)?

Rarely (less than once per month) 45.9%; Occasionally (one to two times per month) 28.1%; Frequently (more than twice per month) 26.0%.

Question 11: Which businesses do you most often patronize on the Rockbridge Road corridor in Pine Lake? This was an open-ended question with all of the individual responses listed in Appendix C.

Question 12: What types of new businesses would you like to see in Pine Lake?

Most common responses (and the number of responses): Restaurant (65); Coffee (34); Groceries (9); Hardware Store (5); Café (4)

