Savannah’s Poverty Reduction Initiative

A Poverty Reduction Action Plan for Savannah

A result of the work of Savannah’s Anti-Poverty Task Force, Business, Government, and Community Leaders

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Executive Summary

Savannah has experienced significant economic development and improvement within the last few decades. This economic growth is not reflected in a corresponding reduction in the poverty level, however. Studies indicate a strong link between levels of poverty and future economic development. If the discrepancy is not addressed, poverty will impact economic growth negatively in the future.

This Action Plan includes research and analysis gathered by Savannah’s Anti-poverty Task Force and The University of Georgia’s Initiative on Poverty and the Economy. The resulting goals and actions arise from the Poverty Reduction Symposium planning sessions. The framework is intended to serve as Savannah’s road map for poverty reduction. It will provide the ability to hold one another mutually accountable through ongoing analysis and periodic reports of progress.

This report consists of three sections:
1) an analysis of income growth in the City of Savannah with regard to poverty rates;
2) contributing factors within the population living in poverty and the community at large that exacerbate and perpetuate existing income trends; and
3) a framework of strategic goals with recommended actions and action steps.

Key points in the first section are:
- The rate of poverty is not declining.
- Poverty is disproportionate by race.
- Female heads of household are moving out of poverty more slowly.
- The middle class is small and disparities between rich and poor are growing.
- Poverty is high; wages are low.
- Educational attainment is low.

Key issues in the second section are:
- The high cost of basic necessities to participate in the workforce.
- The movement of new employment centers farther out from the city.
- The difficulty in acquiring marketable skills in relationship to the changing local economy.

Strategic goals are:
- Developing an educated and skilled workforce.
- Improving access to quality jobs.
- Supporting working families.
- Helping families build assets.
- Building quality neighborhoods.

These lead to an action plan that includes:
- Formalizing a collaborative structure.
- Selecting priority actions for implementation.
- Developing benchmarks for monitoring progress.
- Identifying resources.
- Continuing to engage stakeholders.
- Building public awareness and will.
Introduction

Savannah has seen good times and bad during her more than 250-year history. In many ways, recent decades have been good to the city. Redevelopment of neglected historic neighborhoods, revitalization of the downtown business district along Broughton and Bay Streets and in the City Market, growth in the port and associated businesses, and growth in the arts community and civic infrastructure are but highlights of the last decade. Despite the visible and dramatic improvement on the face of our city, a disturbing trend has emerged, however. More than 21% of Savannah residents live in poverty. If this problem is ignored and not reversed, it will threaten the capacity for further economic growth.

The impact of Savannah’s persistent poverty is significant not only to those living in poverty; it also inhibits the entire community from realizing its full potential. A Brookings Institute study for Miami reported, “a growing body of research suggests that the fates of large cities and their metropolitan areas are intertwined – they grow together or decline together.” While poverty is clearly located within the center city, the employers of the community that ultimately play the largest role by offering jobs and moving people out of poverty are not necessarily located in the center city. The challenge for Savannah is linking those in the most need with the greatest opportunities.

Why is a concentration of poverty in the city a problem for the rest of the community? Cities and suburbs are interdependent. A Brookings Institute study for Miami reported:

A growing body of research suggests that the fates of large cities and their metropolitan areas are intertwined – they grow together or decline together. Economist Richard Voith has shown that income gains in central cities also benefit the entire regional economy. His modeling considered patterns of growth in income, house prices, and population in cities and suburbs between 1970 and 1990 for virtually all US metropolitan areas, and found that city income growth positively affected suburban growth in all three indices... Manual Pastor and his colleagues examined 74 major metropolitan areas and found reductions in central city poverty rates led to metropolitan income growth. Income inequality, in short, depresses economic performance.¹

While it may be tempting to view the existence of high poverty rates as a part of the human condition and a market economy, potent reasons exist for a city and region concerned about its economic future to address the challenge. And the nature of the challenge, while significant, is not as daunting as to make the effort impossible. It may be helpful to dismiss some of the myths.

- **Myth**: The federal threshold for poverty is sufficient to allow a modest lifestyle.
- **Reality**: Poverty rate for a family of 4 is $18,600. Based on local cost of living, the income necessary to live without government subsidy for a Chatham County family of 4 is $36,419.²
- **Myth**: That people in poverty are lazy.
- **Reality**: Sixty percent (60%) of all families in poverty (including Savannah) report earning wages.³
- **Myth**: There is a large government welfare support system.
- **Reality**: Welfare reform has reduced the government support system. In Georgia the number of people receiving cash assistance has declined by 50% in the period from 1997 to 2003; in Chatham County the number dropped 68%.⁴

³ US Census Bureau, Census 2000.
**Background**

This Action Plan is the result of work begun by the Anti-Poverty Task Force in 2003 and includes the outcomes partnerships and efforts rooted of the Task Force. The Task Force was charged with identifying the challenges faced by individuals and families living in poverty in Savannah and identifying systemic barriers and effective practices to assist in the struggle to move up and out of poverty. While the Task Force was not able to research and analyze all aspects and contributing factors to poverty in Savannah, it did focus on four key areas:

- An overall analysis of poverty in Savannah
- The efficacy of service provision
- Barriers to self-sufficiency
- Strategies for community engagement.

The Task Force engaged the University of Georgia's Initiative on Poverty and the Economy as a research partner to assist in quantifying the scope of the problem and identifying best practice research from other communities. With greater insight to the dimensions of the problem, the Task Force then engaged a broader cross-section of community stakeholders in an effort to understand and respond to the problem. As a result of those efforts, business, government and other community leaders participated in poverty simulations and a subsequent day-long Poverty Reduction Symposium as initial steps toward crafting a plan to address the persistence of poverty in Savannah.

This report defines the challenge by examining underlying trends and some of their causes. It is the first step in what must be a long-term solution to the poverty issue in Savannah. The framework of the strategic goals will be the basis for initial responses by service providers, government, and businesses. The framework also will engage stakeholders from the faith-based and education communities in 2005. The framework is intended to serve as Savannah's road map for poverty reduction. It will provide the ability to hold one another mutually accountable through ongoing analysis and periodic reports of progress.

The first section of the document includes analysis of income growth in the City of Savannah with regard to poverty rates. Key Points:

- The rate of poverty is not declining.
- Poverty is disproportionate by race.
- Female heads of household are moving out of poverty more slowly.
- The middle class is small and disparities between rich and poor are growing.
- Poverty is high, wages are low.
- Educational attainment is low.

The second section outlines contributing factors within the population living in poverty and the community at large that exacerbate and perpetuate existing income trends. The key issues behind the trends that affect the community's ability to impact rates of poverty are:

- The high cost of basic necessities to participate in the workforce.
- The movement of new employment centers farther out from the city.
- The difficulty in acquiring marketable skills in relationship to the changing local economy.

The final section provides a framework of strategic goals, recommended actions and action steps that will measurably reduce or impact persistent poverty in Savannah. Both the local research concerning individuals and families in poverty in Savannah and the analysis of poverty data prepared for the symposium strongly indicate a framework for action to reduce poverty rates. The strategic goals include:

- Developing an educated and skilled workforce
- Improving access to quality jobs
- Supporting working families
• Helping families build assets
• Building quality neighborhoods

The first steps of an action agenda to implement a poverty reduction plan include:
• Formalizing a collaborative structure.
• Selecting priority actions for implementation.
• Identifying resources.
• Developing benchmarks for monitoring progress.
• Continuing to engage stakeholders.
• Building public awareness and will.

**About the Analysis**

**The data**
The information presented in *A Poverty Reduction Action Plan for Savannah* derives in large part from the US decennial censuses conducted in April 1980 and April 2000. Statistics showed some slight improvement between 1970 and 1980 in general. Poverty has been a persistent problem in Savannah for the past 25 years, however. This comprehensive data source provides detailed characteristics of population, housing and employment at the neighborhood level. It is the most complete of any demographic data that exists.

Reliance on decennial census data means much of the data reported here is five years old. Given the persistence of the trends, however, we do not believe the analysis lacks currency or applicability. Comparisons between the city and surrounding county are likely to be consistent over time as well. Though comprehensive census data tracks trends over time, the gaps between census reports limit the ability of planners to track progress of initiatives or significant swings caused by market and other unanticipated forces. So, we have a clear picture of the trends in poverty and its distribution in the city in 1999, but any progress we make between 2005 and 2013 (the time 2009 local data will be available) will have to be tracked using process milestones and other benchmarks that will be gathered locally.

This Action Plan includes highlights of the data collected by the Task Force. Additional Task Force data is attached and available from the City’s Economic Development Department including data highlighting the “costs of poverty” and sources for the analysis contained in this plan.

**Definition of terms**
As ‘poverty’ is used throughout this report, it is measured by the individual and family income thresholds established for Federal government programs and reported in the decennial census. We recognize the limitation of the poverty threshold formula that was established in 1960; it is believed to overstate the proportion of a family budget required for food while understating current realities in the increased costs of housing, healthcare and child care. For this reason, we present data on the “self-sufficiency” wage as well. In this report the “self-sufficiency” wage is a level at which an individual or family has sufficient income to purchase basic needs, housing, food, transportation, child care and healthcare, without subsidy.

‘Middle class’ is a term hard to define and easy to recognize. This report quantifies it in purely economic terms. The national distribution of household incomes indicates that the middle 20% of the country made between $34,000 and $52,000 in 1999. The middle 60% of the nation makes between $18,000 and $81,000. These measures provide a standardized means of comparing the size of the middle class from region to region.
Poverty Data: The Trends

Savannah is a beautiful city in a favorable climate. Residents enjoy, by many measures, an above average quality of life with access to cultural, historic and natural attractions. Tourists increasingly view it as an attractive destination. The economy is diversified and has weathered a decline in the manufacturing sector by expansion in the port facilities, the transportation sector, financial services, leisure and hospitality, and healthcare. As a result, one might expect to see a decline in poverty in the city that matches or exceeds those experienced in the state of Georgia and the nation as a whole during the recent decades of economic expansion. The data, unfortunately, reveal a different result and point to troublesome income trends for the region. The following economic problems persist.

- The rate of poverty is not declining.
- Poverty is disproportionate by race.
- Female heads of households are moving out of poverty slower.
- The middle class is small and disparities between rich and poor are growing.
- Poverty is high, wages are low.
- Educational attainment is low.

Poverty rates are not declining.

High rates of poverty among Savannah's residents may constrain the community's ability to provide good schools, safe streets and affordable neighborhoods for families of all income levels. Correspondingly low income levels restrict the ability of individual residents to provide for themselves and their families, support neighborhood businesses, and build their assets.

Poverty Rate 1980-2000

Source: US Census Bureau.
From the decennial census report of 1980 through 2000, the percentage of persons in poverty in Savannah has declined modestly from 22.4% to 21.8%. In Georgia, rates dropped from 16.6% to 13%. The rate of decline for the entire state is six times greater than that of the city of Savannah. Chatham County, including, the city declined 18.4% to 15.6%.

**Poverty is disproportionate by race.**

African Americans experience a far higher rate of poverty than do whites in relationship to their representation in the population. Ideally, the composition of the population experiencing poverty would mirror roughly the composition of the population at large. In Savannah, that would mean about 60% of the persons in poverty would be African American. The graph below shows that this projection does not reflect reality; in fact the percentage of African Americans is much higher.

This graph describes poverty levels nationally, at the state level, county-wide and locally. It reflects a disproportionate burden of poverty by race. Nationally, whites are 75% of the population and represent only 55% of people in poverty. African Americans are 12% of the population but represent 22% of people in poverty.

In Georgia, whites are 65% of the population and 42% of people in poverty while blacks are 29% of the population and 50% of the persons in poverty. In Chatham County, whites are 55% of the population and 29% of people in poverty while blacks are 41% of the population and represent 67% of people in poverty.

In Savannah, whites are 40% of the population and constitute 20% of the population in poverty. African Americans are 58% of the poverty yet constitute 76% of those in poverty.

African American and Latino children are 5 times more likely to live in poverty in Chatham County than white or Asian children. Of all persons in poverty in Chatham County in 1999, 41% were children under the age of 18; nationally 37% of persons in poverty are children.
In addition to the disproportionate impact of poverty by race, households headed by single women also lag in income improvement. In the 2000 census, households headed by single women increased from 68% to 75% of all households in poverty in Savannah.

**The middle class is small and disparities between rich and poor are growing.**

The chart above illustrates a particularly disturbing income distribution pattern for Savannah. Household incomes in both the state of Georgia and the nation are distributed fairly evenly across the defined ranges on the chart with a noticeable dip in the middle range of $35,000 to $50,000 per year, which represents only 16% of households. The Chatham County data indicates 25% of the population in the lowest income range, 16% in the middle, and 20% of households with income over $75,000. Savannah, however, has nearly 35% of its households earning less than $20,000 per year and only 13% of households over $75,000. The apparent weakness in the middle is as disturbing as the percentage of low-income families. Across the state and nation there are population clusters at the higher and lower end of household income distribution. In Savannah there are fewer households at the high end and a steady decline of population in each of the quintiles.

**Poverty is high, wages are low.**

The percentage of persons in Savannah in poverty is higher than that of the county, state or nation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Center city</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a concentration of poverty in the center city. Six census tracts with more than 50% of persons living in poverty are depicted in the map below.

Two of the census tracts are on the east and west sides of downtown and the other four are contiguous and located south of Forsyth Park and mostly west of Abercorn Street, north of Victory Drive. Three of the census tracts - 1, 101.1 and 12 - contain large public housing developments. The other three - 13, 18 and 19 are in the Victorian district. All of those census tracts are in the larger Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) target area, which includes census tracts with poverty rates above 20% and has an average poverty rate of 33%. The CDBG target area comprises a ring around the downtown business district located in census tracts 3, 8 and 9.

Census block groups are smaller geographic areas than census tracts. When looking to the census block group level, the census tract (CT) block groups (BG) with the highest poverty and risk factors include the following: CT101.01BG1, CT12BG2, CT1BG1, CT13BG1, CT22BG1. The combined poverty rate for this area is 72.6%. The table below compares other variables within these block groups to the nation.
### Census Block Groups Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorization</th>
<th>Target Area</th>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Target Area : Nation Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons below the poverty level</td>
<td>2,254</td>
<td>33,899,812</td>
<td>6:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate for persons 16 years or older</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>7,947,286</td>
<td>14:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS dropout rate¹</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>367,000</td>
<td>4:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>$12,417</td>
<td>$41,994</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS expulsion rate¹</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>97,177</td>
<td>4:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS suspension rate¹</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>3,053,449</td>
<td>3:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing units vacant</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>10,424,540</td>
<td>3:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing units renter occupied</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>35,664,348</td>
<td>2:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 Part I Crimes (total Part I crimes, Part I crimes per capita)²</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>11,807,435</td>
<td>4:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: High poverty area includes the following Census Block Groups: CT101.01BG1, CT12BG2, CT1BG1, CT13BG1, CT22BG1. All numbers for school are for SY 2000-2001 unless otherwise noted.

National figures from US Census Bureau 2002 Current Population Survey and target area figures from Savannah-Chatham County Board of Education (figures for 4 high schools that the census block group population attends) for the following data: high school drop outs, high school expulsion and high school suspension rates.¹

National figures from the FBI’s 2003 Preliminary Uniform Crime Reports and target area figures from Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department for the following data: crimes per capita -- number of crimes per person.²

The median household income for the city of Savannah is only 68% of that for Georgia and in the center city CDBG area the median household income of $19,060 is 45% of the state median. While Savannah’s economy has remained diverse and grown, the number one occupation for annual openings in the Coastal Region according to the Georgia Department of Labor is food preparation, serving and related occupations. The average weekly wage for these occupations is also among the lowest at $252/week.
The steady and long term growth in employment has not resulted in a growth in incomes since these are low-wage jobs and pay below what is needed to support an individual, let alone a family. Of Savannah's 122,489 individuals in the labor force, 18% (21,480) earn less than a self-supporting wage even at full time employment. Overall the 2002 average weekly wage for employees in Chatham County of $598 is 13% lower than the state average of $687.5

**Educational attainment is low.**

While steady progress has been made in increasing the proportion of the labor force with at least a high school diploma, 21% of Chatham County’s workforce in 2000 had not completed high school. A view of the workforce data by age group provides some useful perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chatham Area</th>
<th>Percent Distribution by Age</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-64</th>
<th>65+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not High School Graduate</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college/Associate degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Professional degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals are based on the portion of the labor force between ages 18 – 65+.

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The trends have been moving in the right direction; only 13% of the 25-35 age group as compared to 39% of the 65+ workforce are not high school graduates. The delayed achievement rate in the 18-24 year old group, 25% are not high school graduates and only 6.5% have completed a Bachelor’s degree, is a concern. Failure of the new workforce to complete high school or completing it in a timely way by traditional means threatens an expanding economy.

The root cause of the Census data indicating lower than expected numbers of high school graduates in the workforce is reflected in the completion rate (the number of students who began 9th grade in a Savannah-Chatham schools, remained in our district, and then graduated, four years later).

Education affects earning power and regional competitiveness. The chart below illustrates the annual variances in earning power based on educational attainment.

Compounding earning power over the lifetime of a full-time worker further illustrates the link between earning power and educational attainment. According to a 2002 US Census report, the 20.7% of Savannah residents without a high school diploma can expect to earn $1.1 million less in lifetime earnings than the 14.2% of Savannah residents with bachelor’s degrees. The estimated lifetime earnings of an individual with a high school diploma are nearly $1 million less than an individual with a bachelor’s degree. Even having an associate’s degree increases earnings by about $400,000 over that of a high school graduate.  

### Contributing Factors

The absence of systemic supports in the community that aid individuals in escaping poverty constitute real barriers to progress. Low income residents use a far larger share of their incomes on basic items, leaving little left over to save. Without savings, families have no safety net and an extremely limited ability to accumulate the money needed to build assets and move into the middle class. The issues discussed in this section do not necessarily cause high poverty rates, but they do make it difficult to change the status quo. The key forces behind the trends that affect the community’s ability to reduce poverty are:

- High cost of basic necessities to participate in the workforce.
- New employment centers moving further out from the city.
- Difficulty in acquiring marketable skills in relationship to the changing local economy.

In addition, other factors are important. While this report acknowledges a number of community conditions such as teenage pregnancy, juvenile crime, and substance abuse that correlate with high rates of poverty, these conditions also depend on a number of other risk factors and require specific, targeted approaches. This plan focuses on those economic issues that our local survey data indicates are not being addressed and need to be enhanced.

Qualitative research assembled by the Task Force also indicates the need for coordination of community resources for optimum impact to provide the necessary community support system. Improvements are necessary in Savannah. Reliance on government and human service agencies for solutions has not resulted in significant poverty reduction throughout the nation. Additional community stakeholders and strategies are needed to address poverty. A culture that supports an open and honest dialogue on race, gender and income disparities in Savannah is critical. Future engagement of key stakeholders, such as the faith-based community, may be an appropriate approach to moving this long-term need forward.

**High cost of basic necessities to participate in the workforce.**

Data collected by the Women’s Policy Center in 2002 quantify the average monthly costs for individuals or families for basic needs: housing, child care, food, transportation, healthcare, and miscellaneous expenses. The table below shows the costs for several typical family groupings:

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## The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Selected Family Types

**2002 Chatham County Standard***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Expenses and Shares of Total Budgets</th>
<th>One Adult</th>
<th>One Adult, One Preschooler</th>
<th>One Adult, One Preschooler, One Schoolage</th>
<th>Two Adults, One Preschooler, One Schoolage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Costs</td>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes**</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Earned Income Tax Credit)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-44</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Child Care Tax Credit)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-44</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Child Tax Credit)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-50</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Percent</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Self-Sufficiency Wage-Hourly***               | $7.82     | $11.82                    | $13.87                                   | $8.62 per working adult                    |
| Monthly                                      | $1,376    | $2,081                    | $2,441                                   | $3,035                                     |
| Annual                                       | $16,518   | $24,972                   | $29,293                                  | $36,419                                    |

* The Standard is calculated by adding expenses and subtracting tax credits.  
** Taxes include federal and state taxes, payroll taxes and sales taxes.  
*** The hourly wage is calculated by dividing the monthly wage by 176 hours (8 hours per day times 22 days per month).  

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.  
Source: The Self Sufficiency Standard for Georgia, June 2002, prepared by Diana Pearce PhD with Wider Opportunities for Women for Women's Policy Group, Atlanta, GA.

Access to some of these essential services is available through community programs funded with state and federal subsidies for low-income people. As an individual or family increases its earnings, the eligibility for support decreases and an individual needs to be earning a wage sufficient to replace the resources lost. Essentially welfare support provides a 24-month window, once a person is employed, to become self-sufficient. If self-sufficiency is not achieved within that 24-month period, support from the public welfare system ends and self-sufficiency depends more and more on personal and community support systems.

The chart below illustrates how a wage earner needs to move from a minimum wage to a family supporting wage simply to afford the basics.
The Task Force’s surveys of service providers and input from focus groups with Savannah residents living in poverty, confirmed that five barriers prevent many from achieving self-sufficiency. These are also the key barriers for one increasing segment of people who live in poverty -- female head of households. A concerted, collaborative effort by the community to address these barriers can help these individuals achieve self-sufficiency. The barriers are:

- Lack of healthcare
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of quality and affordable dependent care
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of access to financial institutions

Health Care

Because of spiraling healthcare costs, employers are providing fewer subsidies for family health insurance benefits, so more and more adults and children are uninsured. The overall costs to society increase dramatically when the uninsured lack access to routine and preventive healthcare. Adults with access to health care and specific source of ongoing care more likely to access are more likely to benefit from preventive health care services, early diagnosis of chronic diseases, appropriate treatment, which results in a reduced incidence of complications and more costly interventions.

Many low income women of childbearing age do not access health care until they are pregnant. Poor infant outcomes including low birth weight and pre-mature birth frequently are the result of poor pre-conceptual health of the mother –e.g. obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and infections.

A profile of uninsured adults in Georgia reveals that the majority of the uninsured are employed. The percentage of uninsured females is higher than males and women often begin using healthcare services under Medicaid and are more likely to be uninsured after age 35. Men are more likely to be uninsured at an earlier age, however. Adults with household incomes less than $35,000 are less likely to have health insurance, as are African Americans.
For the uninsured health problems are most likely to manifest themselves in middle adulthood, while chronic illness is more difficult and expensive to manage without appropriate early intervention and specific source of care, and complications result in higher cost of health services, increased absenteeism from work and disability.7

**Transportation**

Transportation alone cannot reduce poverty, but it serves a crucial complementary role; it is a means to an end. Access to transportation reduces absolute poverty mainly by increasing economic efficiency – by lowering costs and prices – and thus enhancing opportunity.

Low income people often do not own cars and are therefore constrained to live in urban zones with good access to public transportation. Over 5,000 (30%) of Savannah’s center city residents do not own a vehicle. Over 7,000 (43%) of Savannah’s center city residents own just one vehicle. This compares to just under 5,000 (10%) of all Savannah residents outside the center city that do not own a vehicle. In Chatham County (excluding the center city), only 591 (2%) are without a vehicle. Eight percent (8%) of Georgians do not own vehicles and 10% nationally do not own a car.8 Low income households spend a high percentage of their income on transportation. If you own a car and make $8/hour, then if your commute is 8,000 miles/year (12 miles/day), then you spend 23% of your income on transportation needs, and if your commute is 11,200 miles/year (22 miles/day), then you spend 32% of your income on transportation needs. (Based on average annual cost of 0.38/mile to operate, insure and purchase a vehicle.)

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7 National Center for Primary Care at Morehouse School of Medicine, “Georgia’s Safety Net – Access to Primary Care for Georgia’s Uninsured and Underinsured”, 2003.
8 US Census Bureau, Census 2000.
Dependent Care

Both the high cost of care for young children or frail elderly dependents and the limited availability of resources constrain an individual's ability to support a family. Further, the limited availability of supervised after-school care leaves vulnerable children with unstructured time and less opportunity for physical recreation and extracurricular activities.

Relative to the population of pre-school aged children, Chatham County has a reasonably good supply of licensed or regulated child care openings. The issues for most low-income parents are affordability and quality. The average monthly cost for a pre-school aged child is $360. Subsidized slots are limited and waiting list is long – 532 families sought assistance since May 2004 when openings were filled. In addition, eligibility for subsidies is restricted and complex, which leaves gaps for those seeking to improve education. Before April 2004 there was a two-year wait for families seeking childcare subsidy.9

Concerns about the quality of child care centers on the high rates of turnover and low wages for child care workers exists. Also, of the approximately 10,000 children in day care, 24% are served in registered home care settings that range from extremely high quality to very poor quality. Due to the sheer number, 398 homes, there is no on-site inspection or quality control mechanism for these facilities.10

The availability of after-school care is not as well documented as early child care, but the main concern for working poor parents is affordability and transportation from school to program or home. There are a variety of after-school program options from the YMCA's Pryme Tyme in thirty (30) elementary schools and two (2) middle schools to center-based care at the Boys and Girls Club. While both programs receive community support and serve large numbers of children, supply does not meet demand. School bus regulations can also limit the ability of parents to have their child picked up from home but dropped off at an after-school program location, further complicating access to after-school programs for children of parents unable to leave work to transport them.

Data on eldercare is much more difficult to come by. An undefined percentage of the elderly have health needs requiring a degree of care and supervision during the day while their family member or caregiver works. Day services for the frail elderly even when subsidized by community giving and grants remain expensive and out of reach for lower income families. This gap often results in the elderly person entering a nursing home at far greater public expense or caregivers finding significant complications trying to maintain a work schedule.

Housing

The cost of renting or purchasing an affordable home in good condition presents challenges for low-income Savannah residents. Housing is considered affordable when the mortgage payment does not exceed 30% of gross household income and overall household debt, including the mortgage payment, does not exceed 40%. Affordable houses in basic, livable condition often range in price between $80,000 and $160,000. The house a buyer can afford is often related to household income, debt burden, credit history, and the availability of down payment and gap financing. The income required to purchase a house in good condition for $80,000 with a $600 monthly PITI (principal, interest, taxes and insurance) mortgage payment is $24,000 annual income which translates to $11.54 per hour for a 40 hour work week, $7.50 per hour for a 62 hour work week, or $5.15 per hour for a 90 hour work week. Approximately 14,400 (56%) of Savannah’s 25,538

9 Chatham County DFCS.
reenter households cannot afford to purchase an $80,000 house in good conditions with a $600 monthly PITI mortgage payment without paying more than 30% of their income.

According to the 2000 Census, 13,437 (53%) of Savannah’s 25,538 renter households pay more than 30% of their income for rent and are, therefore, cost burdened. Further, 16,800 (66%) of Savannah’s 25,538 renter households cannot afford to rent a 3-bedroom dwelling in good condition for the $765 monthly Fair Market Rent without paying more than 30% of their income. It is of interest to note that for a family seeking a three-bedroom dwelling, the cost burden to purchase is apparently lower than the cost of renting.

**Financial Institutions**

A further complication to the ability to build assets is the large number of low-income residents with limited access to mainstream financial institutions. While difficult to measure, national research indicates 30% of households making less than $25,000 a year have no checking or savings account. They are “un-banked.” For these people, up to 2% of their annual income is spent on simply cashing checks and purchasing money orders. These individuals are also far more vulnerable to exploitive “pay-day” lending and refund anticipation loan schemes.\(^{11}\)

**New employment centers are moving further out from the city.**

The industrial and employment growth patterns for Chatham County increase dependence on transportation from residence to work site. Two maps are displayed on the next two pages. The first map shows by color coded intensity the location of the highest poverty census tracts in red and is overlaid in blue with the existing CAT bus routes. The center city is the site of concentrated poverty but also well served by bus routes and this pattern supports the CAT data indicating that of CAT riders:

- 8% of adult residents use CAT 10 times or more per year;
- 64% of these trips are work related; and
- 56% of CAT riders have annual incomes of less than $10,000.

A second map of existing and projected industrial use for Chatham County shows that growth is expected to the west and northwest of the City. The map shows land that has been zoned industrial (blue lines) and land that is already home to industry (represented by the pink dots). The concern for the future is that, according to the Savannah Economic Development Authority (SEDA) the following conditions are likely to occur:

- Over 50% of all job growth will occur in the west of Chatham County in the next decade.
- When the mega-site at I-16 and I-95 is developed and if 5% of the workforce used public transportation = 78,000 annual trips.
- Once at the mega-site, not all jobs will be clustered.

Though it is recognized as the primary provider of transportation services to low-income residents, CAT cannot now effectively serve the entire County because municipalities like Pooler have “opted out” of service and there is not enough committed public funding to expand or diversify services.

While it is in CAT’s transportation development plan, CAT has not yet been given a clear mandate to coordinate existing public services transportation programs such as a ride-match program in place or a “one number” to call to find out what transport services are available. Nor is there an established

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“network” of public and private resources to serve the county or the ability to participate in creating a regional approach to enhancing mobility.
**Acquiring marketable skills in relationship to the local economy.**

Over the past decade (1990 - 2000), Savannah underwent an overall 4% decrease in job growth. The contributing and inter-related factors responsible for the decrease include:

- the integration of the national and global economies
- manufacturing job losses as U.S. manufacturing plants take advantage of cheap labor costs in foreign countries
- a national shift to a service economy
- the alteration of types of jobs and skills in high demand.

These trends have decreased the chances of attracting new manufacturing to Savannah and have diminished employment opportunities for unskilled laborers. Despite the decline, Savannah’s diverse economy has managed to minimize the effect of economic downturns. Savannah’s largest industrial employers manufacture corporate jet planes, craft paper, liner-board, recycled paper products, tractor-trailers and food products. Healthcare, manufacturing, distribution, tourism, military bases, government offices, port operations and retail sectors provide a strong business and employment base. Also, many responsive federal legislative actions, state programs and local incentives for existing and startup businesses continue to spur growth. The following table lists employment and average wages by economic sector for Chatham County in 2003.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2003 Chatham County: Top-level sector Employment and Wages</th>
<th>% of Total Firms</th>
<th>% of Total Employment</th>
<th>% of Total Wages</th>
<th>Avg. Wages per Employee (Annual Salary)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>$ 64,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>$ 51,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge-Based Business</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>$ 50,137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>$ 42,567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care and Social Assistance</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>$ 38,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Insurance</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>$ 37,649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>$ 37,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Warehousing</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>$ 36,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>$ 32,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Services</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>$ 32,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate and Leasing</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>$ 26,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>$ 21,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and Hospitality</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>$ 13,503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Businesses</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>$ 29,196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>$ 31,988</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Georgia Department of Labor, 2003.
The table above reveals a disproportionate percentage of jobs in the county versus total payroll. For example, 3.4% of all jobs in Chatham County are knowledge-based businesses yet this sector is 5.3% of the total payroll. Inversely, the leisure and hospitality sector represents 13.1% of the jobs in Chatham County yet only 5.5% of the total payroll.

Emerging workforce requirements highlight the fact that educational attainment impacts the ability of an economy to grow. Savannah needs to make some progress in the following areas:

- 42,000 Savannah residents without diplomas (nearly 1/3 of workforce)
- 60% of jobs require skills possessed by only 20% of the present workforce
- having a diploma doesn’t assure basic skills at 12th grade level.

Improvement in these areas is critical in order to have individuals who get and keep family-supporting jobs, attract new business that supports all parts of the community, and employers who can hire workers from an available, skilled workforce.

Project Workforce, a collaborative effort led by the Chamber of Commerce is addressing three areas of workforce development: matching workforce development strategies to economic development trends, supporting workforce readiness of high school graduates, and developing training for the evolving under and unemployed workforce based on job skill requirements and job demand data. Local surveys of 500 residents from low income neighborhoods and in focus groups in 2002-03, conducted in support of their program planning, has revealed helpful insights to the following questions.

**What's important for individuals in workforce development?**

- Family-supporting wages, benefits
- Skills and training
- Work ethics
- Career ladders
- Working environment
- Interpersonal relationships

**What can schools do to help students prepare for jobs?**

- Job related training/experiences
- Social interaction/people-support services/skills
- Basic skills
- Comments: Understand work ethics; more trade/skill classes; teach to job market needs; job shadow experiences

**What can the community do to help unemployed and underemployed people get jobs?**

- Provide neighborhood supportive services to their residents
- Provide job skills training in neighborhoods
- Comments: job fairs; find them jobs; gather around and talk to each other and convince each other to be successful

Community needs for workforce development include

- More community based programs
- Expanded neighborhood training
- Schools open – after hours
- Strategies to encourage skills – female head of household
- Technical High School
- Increased value of technical education (marketing campaigns)
Policy Agenda

Both the local research with individuals and families in poverty in Savannah and the analysis of poverty data prepared for the Poverty Reduction Symposium suggest a framework for action to reduce poverty rates. The strategic goals, recommended actions and action steps contained within this Policy Agenda are just a beginning; as new collaborators are brought to the table and new actions are developed, they will be added to this “living” document.

Comprehensive approaches addressing the underlying trends and barriers to progress must be implemented over long enough periods of time and in sufficient intensity to allow for progress. One effective means of assuring a comprehensive approach for a high-need population is to layer strategies in neighborhood settings such as the high poverty center city census tracts. The Annie E. Casey Foundation recognizes the importance of the social networks in the neighborhoods and the need to place services in neighborhoods. In implementing comprehensive approaches to community change it is important to keep the overarching goal of reducing poverty in sight and measure implementation progress with strategic goals and benchmarks.

- **Develop an educated and skilled workforce.**
  - Focus: education/workforce development

- **Improve access to quality jobs.**
  - Focus: transportation

- **Support working families.**
  - Focus: healthcare and dependent care

- **Help families build assets.**
  - Focus: asset building

- **Build quality neighborhoods.**
  - Focus: affordable housing

There are a number of existing programs and resources at work on these strategic goals. The appendix includes a matrix of agencies and programs addressing each strategic goal. Included below are new or additional actions to consider. New actions should leverage existing infrastructure and focus as much as possible on neighborhood based service delivery.

Actions will be prioritized by poverty initiative participants including those who attended the November 9, 2004 Poverty Reduction Symposium. Many actions are dependent upon partnerships among service providers, businesses, faith-based organizations, the education community and government. Because of this, the actions below will be fleshed out into specific program responses with measurable objectives by those parties that will implement them. It is planned that business and government will join the list of partners in early winter 2005 and faith-based organizations and the education community will be engaged throughout 2005.
**Develop an educated and skilled workforce.**

**Match workforce development to economic development**
- Assure that training programs match employers’ skill needs and emerging/growth occupations through employer participation in workforce development programs tailored to their industry through job profiling, pooling resources, participating and investing in programs provided in neighborhood and community centers.
- Complete and publish annual *Workforce Trends* for all constituencies to use in their planning.
- Expand training resources to match the current and growing jobs and coordination in target industries.
- Provide training opportunities within neighborhood centers that reflect the jobs and jobs’ skills the areas employers’ need while eliminating barriers for participants through place-based learning.
- Inform employers about basic skills and retraining tax credits for employer-provided or sponsored education/training.
- Encourage Department of Labor to establish satellite centers to link residents to jobs and training.
- Work to focus economic development efforts to bring more family-supporting jobs to Savannah.

**Improve work readiness results from Primary-College (P-16) system**
- Expand mentoring program opportunities through business-education partnerships with measurable outcomes.
- Support development within the public school system of strategies to increase on-time completion.
- Expand availability of technical education at secondary school level.
- Provide employer-based job skill information (job profiles) throughout the school system for improved student preparation.
- Support the return to full accreditation of the Savannah-Chatham Public School System.
- Support the School Superintendent in the effort to achieve the academic benchmarks of his/her plan.
- Increase the community’s value for technical education/skills as an educational outcome and career path through strategies such as a “Skill Up Savannah” marketing campaign.

**Provide job skill opportunities for the Evolving Workforce**
- Implement a placed-based basic skills and literacy program that ties directly to job training with outcomes of jobs with career ladders.
- Train residents in skills that result in jobs with career ladders.
- Assist/provide support for entry employees to continue training and moving up career ladders and follow their progress.
- Provide intake processes so that individuals are fully informed when they choose career pathways.
- Link individuals to jobs if their current skills match job requirements/availability.

**Improve access to jobs.**

**Assist employers to consider transportation options for employees**
- Utilize tax credits to encourage non-single occupant vehicle (SOV) travel – (e.g., Memorial Health University Medical Center).
- Inform employers about tax credits available for employer-provided transportation fringe benefit for employees.
- Create or subsidize van pools.
- Support car pooling by employees.
- Survey employees to encourage ride-shares or use of public transit.
- Support a non-SOV user Emergency Ride Home Program.

**Encourage employers to locate operations in high density areas within the transportation network**
- Study location-based tax incentives for new and re-locating employers.
- Encourage regional economic development efforts to market center city options.
- Provide fast track approval of zoning that encourages transit oriented development and creates mobility choices.

**Coordinate, integrate and expand transportation resources**
- Create an inventory of all public and private transport resources.
- Encourage publicly funded agencies to coordinate their transportation services.
- Develop a central call and dispatch system to provide information and rides.
- Establish networks of service using a variety of transport strategies including:
  - Van pools and car pooling,
  - Neighbor for neighbor service, and
  - Volunteer programs.
- Establish community cars: renting a car by the hour with the car located in the neighborhood or near a transfer point such as Flexcar and Zipcar programs in Oregon and Virginia.

**Develop service hubs within the transportation network**
- Create Park & Ride / transfer locations integrated with bill paying centers and other basic retail services.
- Locate key support services, such as daycare, in clusters to reduce travel demands.

**Create regional access to opportunities**
- Network with economic development entities to support mobility options.
- Develop a regional mechanism to develop and network mobility services (e.g., include all surrounding municipalities in a transit tax district which would allow public transportation throughout Chatham County and/or support bi-state and regional transportation).

**Support working families.**

**Expand access to dependent care resources**
- Advocate with state for increased availability of childcare subsidy, reduction of waiting list times and redirection of TANF funds to support childcare subsidy longer for workers no longer requiring cash assistance.
- Encourage location of child and elder care facilities at or near worksites, major residential developments or in transportation hubs such as municipal garages and bus transfer centers.
- Inform employers about tax credits available for employer-provided or sponsored childcare for employees and purchasing childcare property.
- Improve awareness of disabled adult and elder care resources and needs, and determine whether gaps in resources are affecting working families.
- Communicate to employers benefits of on-site dependent care and increase employer participation in the development of dependent care services.
- Advocate for expanded funding of after school programs and school bus transportation policies to increase access.
• Expand opportunities at neighborhood level for supervised after school activities.

**Support expansion of access to healthcare through employer and publicly subsidized insurance**
• Advocate for the state to re-establish continuous eligibility for PeachCare and end the three month lock out period for newly eligible children or missed payment re-instatements.
• Increase access to healthcare, including behavioral health, through employer-sponsored and publicly supported insurance programs.
• Support the activities of collaborative initiatives supporting the uninsured or under-insured such as SafetyNet.
• Support the growth of organizations that provide maintenance medication assistance such as MedBank Foundation.
• Support delivery system improvements to coordinate access for existing safety net providers, reduce redundancy and waste in existing systems.
• Emphasize wellness and preventive care -- through all means possible (including workplaces, places of worship, public institutions, informal and formal gathering places) -- to keep people healthier through programs such as the Health Promoter Program.

**Create a culture of family support among employers**
• Encourage local governments and larger employers to give contract preference to companies providing benefits and family supportive wages to their employees.
• Develop a database and recognition/reward program for employers such as Corporate Voices for Working Families' model programs and policies for lower wage and hourly employees.

**Improve interagency collaboration systems and reduce policy and program barriers to service**
• Expand 211 information and referral capacity including data resources, telephone response capacity and a web interface to allow it to function as a multi-service hub for all human services sector information and referral.
• Examine need for policy and planning modifications between the Social Security Administration and the Department of Family and Children Services to ensure the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program eligibility determination and appeal process does not negatively impact children and families.
• Examine policy options for 48-month Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients that have made a good faith effort to work.
• Encourage family service providers to share training and information resources on a regular (quarterly) basis.
• Continue work with The UGA Initiative on Poverty and the Economy to extend analysis work on poverty conditions, continue research on best practices and conduct policy analysis.
• Engage Savannah State University and Armstrong Atlantic State University to build the local knowledge base on Savannah's poverty.
• Support BellSouth development of community resources section in the phonebook highlighting anti-poverty program resources and 211 information and referral services.
• Explore the possibility to work with a finite number of families in poverty as part of a case management pilot project for the census block group(s) with the highest poverty rates.
Help families build assets.

Increase home ownership by reducing credit and down payment barriers
- Identify and publicize loan products that have low interest rates and fees for borrowers with blemished or no credit.
- Encourage development of employer assisted home ownership program.

Increase low-income residents’ ability to acquire and save money
- Expand Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) programs to include:
  - expanded access,
  - reduced use of refund anticipation loans,
  - advocacy for state EITC, and
  - development of “using your EITC” workshops prior to receipt of funds.
- Expand Individual Development Accounts to include:
  - involving employers in IDAs,
  - developing savings programs for older youth,
  - tying to workforce and skills development programs, and
  - expanding housing-focused IDA programs that enable prospective home buyers to save down payments while resolving credit, debt load or other problems (may be part of Employer Assisted home purchase program).
- Increase the supply of financial literacy programs including responsible credit and financial literacy courses to youth as a part of high school curriculum and college credit programs; and credit repair and sound financial management skills to adults.
- Provide estate planning classes to lower income home owners – encourage use of wills to pass on property.
- Continue communication to business and community at large about self-sufficiency wages.
- Establish volunteer program for post-ownership counseling and estate planning.
- Promote and coordinate financial literacy programs as part of the Mayor’s National Dollar Wi$e Campaign and other publicity outlets.
- Expand public housing sponsored home ownership workshops for section 8 qualified recipients.
- Identify entrepreneurial opportunities as a result of the Action Plan (e.g., community cars) and link closely to the Savannah Entrepreneurial Center and other business development programs.

Assist low-income home-owners to acquire maintenance skills and resources
- Develop partnerships with unions, home improvement stores on housing maintenance workshops and resources.
- Establish home owner warranty fund for first time owners of older houses (wiring, insulation, plumbing, weatherization for elderly).

Build quality neighborhoods.

Increase supply of affordable housing
- Improve Land Bank Authority including providing staff and funds necessary to enable it to abate delinquent property taxes, acquire property, bank property and transfer property to non-profit and for-profit developers willing to develop it into affordable housing.
• Seek State of Georgia legislative changes permitting municipalities to 1) charge development impact fees, 2) charge real estate transfer taxes, and 3) use SPLOST funds for affordable housing.
• Encourage mortgage lenders to pay mortgage originators a minimum fee of $1,200 per home purchase loan made to a low-income buyer as a means of encouraging mortgage originators to originate loans less than $120,000.
• Seek State of Georgia approval for additional low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) and historic tax credit projects that result in the development of high quality, affordable, rental housing. This would include finding ways for local non-profit organizations and local investors (including businesses and institutions to participate and benefit from these programs).
• Support expansion of, and additional funding for, the State Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless that would support the development of additional forms of affordable housing.
• Research, identify, and where appropriate, participate in affordable housing programs offered by Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae, The Federal Home Loan Bank, FHA, VA and other national, regional and state housing organizations/programs.
• Support development of Local Housing Trust Fund capitalized and funded annually by City of Savannah local revenues and other sources.
• Support the development of employer-assisted home purchase programs that provide down payment and other forms of financial assistance to employees as an incentive to attract and retain quality, responsible and productive employees.
• Continue to develop and expand home repair programs that utilize volunteers to improve the homes of low-income home owners.

**Focus on entire neighborhoods to plan for improvements**

• Continue to adopt and implement Mini-Urban Redevelopment that incorporate targeted infrastructure, housing, economic and other improvements and opportunities that improve quality of life in CDBG neighborhoods.
• Encourage the development of place-based services such as the proposed Leadership Neighborhoods program which assists residents in high poverty neighborhoods to become human resources by developing their capacity to connect with other resources to address barriers to self-sufficiency and establish poverty reduction strategies in their specific neighborhoods.
• Communicate results of neighborhood improvements to appropriate constituencies.
Implementation and Accountability

Implementation of the Action Plan depends entirely on the collaborative will of the partners who participated in the Task Force, Poverty Reduction Symposium and additional stakeholders brought to the table in 2005. As a collaborative effort the shared work will require coordination and monitoring. Ongoing commitment to comprehensive community change efforts is maintained through awareness of progress. Periodic meetings of the stakeholders to review implementation status and share both successes and failures will ensure effective ongoing implementation. Annual benchmark reports to the community at large will help nurture community investment and measure progress toward the vision.

The Task Force identified the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Logic Model as the tool to develop measurable short and long-term outcomes for the programs/response addressing each action step. As programs are developed the logic model should be used by the implementing partners to identify the factors, assumptions, existing programs/activities, resources that will lead to service changes, people changes and ultimately long-term community change. The Task Force has already gathered factors, assumptions and existing programs/activities in support of future program development.

Investments have already been made and a significant number of stakeholders are already engaged.

- Participation in the poverty simulations included over one hundred (100) business and government leaders.
- Participation in the poverty simulations included thirty-two (32) business and government representatives who committed to work on follow-up planning.
- One hundred and thirty-three (133) community leaders from business, government, media, human services, education and the community participated in the November Poverty Reduction Symposium.

The Anti-Poverty Task Force with forty-eight (48) members from across the spectrum of human services delivery has operated as an ad-hoc collaboration since March 2003 with:
- Financial support for the poverty simulations and symposium from Savannah Electric
- Research support from UGA
- Staffing support from the Economic Development Department of the city.

All three of these elements -- resources, research and staffing -- will be critical to the potential for future success of a collaborative effort to reduce poverty.

A structure for ongoing collaboration should be developed with staffing support to keep the initiative together and to monitor and communicate implementation status. A recommended structure is provided below.
The Task Force has secured some commitments from partners for resources to continue.

- Six community leaders committed to provide guidance to the development of this initiative. They are: Otis S. Johnson, Ph.D., Mayor of Savannah; Pete Liakakis, Chairman of the County Commission; Anthony James, President of Savannah Electric; Rick Winger, President of Savannah Economic Development Authority; Bill Hubbard, President of the Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce; and Gregg Schroeder, Executive Director of the United Way of the Coastal Empire.

- Strategic Goal Champions and Business Partners have volunteered to work in collaboration with the Action Plan's Implementation Leader and the community to address the Poverty Reduction Symposium's five (5) barriers through the Action Plan's strategic goal framework.

- The UGA's Initiative on Poverty and the Economy will continue to provide research support through December 2005.

- Funding from the city of Savannah ($50,000), Savannah Electric ($10,000), Liberty Mutual - Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce and United Way of the Coastal Empire ($10,000), Memorial Health ($5,000), St. Joseph's Candler ($5,000) has been secured to hire an Implementation Leader to move the Action Plan forward.

- Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce will provide space and basic office needs for the Implementation Leader.

- The Authority for the Homeless will continue to dedicate a full-time Americorps volunteer for administrative support.

- BellSouth has offered space in the local telephone directory for a community resources section to highlight anti-poverty programs and resources.
A Poverty Reduction Action Plan for Savannah  
April 2005

- A successful neighborhood workforce model has produced significant, accountable results for skill development, jobs and job advancement. The Chamber of Commerce through its work with Project SAV and Savannah Technical College will expand training offerings to reflect higher wage jobs with career ladders.

Next Steps – Six steps for the next six months

1. **Formalize a collaborative structure.** At its December 14 final meeting, the existing Anti-Poverty Task Force agreed its initial phase was completed. A new collaborative body needs to be formed with stakeholders from across the community representing government, business, service providers, advocates, residents, media and the faith community.

2. **Select priority actions for implementation.** This report will be provided to the participants from the November Poverty Reduction Symposium at the follow-up meeting in early 2005. The goal for the follow-up meeting will be to identify priority actions from those proposed, address existing gaps, and secure commitment from partners for implementation.

3. **Identify resources.** Work with partners to identify resources either new or redirected for implementing the adopted actions [e.g. investigate the “P” SPLOST (poverty special option local sales tax), dedicated fee and other revenue sources].

4. **Develop benchmarks for monitoring progress.** Using the goals and actions adopted at the early 2005 meeting, a format to identify, monitor and report annual benchmarks of progress toward the long term goal of reducing rates of poverty needs to be developed.

5. **Continue to engage new stakeholders.** The poverty simulation exercise used to engage business community members for the symposium should be repeated with other stakeholder segments to continue the stakeholder engagement and public awareness strategy. This strategy creates a common frame of reference.

6. **Build public awareness and will.** There was helpful participation by all segments of the local media (print, radio and television) in the poverty simulations and November Poverty Reduction Symposium. The media made a commitment to provide their leadership to keep the poverty issue on the minds of Savannah residents through their outlets. We will need to plan campaigns such as “Skill Up Savannah” to open the door and awareness to avenues to economic self-sufficiency.
Additional Reading


Brookings Institute Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy. 2004. *Growing the Middle Class: Connecting All Miami-Dade Residents to Economic Opportunity*.


