

Key Issues and Opportunities Summary

April 2025



Orangeburg County is at a key point in its history. With its strategic location near major highways, ports, and growing metropolitan areas, the County has strong potential for economic growth. To responsibly manage this growth and meet community needs, the County is creating a Sustainability Plan. This report summarizes the issues and opportunities identified thus far, which will be addressed in the Sustainability Plan.

The Sustainability Plan will be a multijurisdictional framework for guiding and investing in Orangeburg County's growth over the next 20 years. This plan will identify targeted areas to support growth (and potentially areas to protect from growth), infrastructure needed to serve growth areas, and roles of partner agencies and organizations. The plan will be based on many components, including community feedback from a recent Smart Growth Summit, meetings with stakeholders, and a recently completed community assessment.

This Key Issues and Opportunities Summary is a mid-process summary of the strengths, issues, and opportunities identified so far for the Sustainability Plan project. This summary is based on community discussions to date, and on technical analyses performed by the consultant team.

Sources for Community Issues and Aspirations

Important information from community members was gathered in several different ways:

- ★ **Smart Growth Summit.** Two public meetings and an online survey shared information about the current conditions and state of growth in Orangeburg County and asked for ideas and input on a number of growth, infrastructure, and quality of life topics.

- ★ **Stakeholder Interviews.** Organizations and leaders from across the county were interviewed about existing growth efforts, opportunity areas, and community preferences and needs.
- ★ **Steering Committee Meetings.** Community leaders, including leaders of major institutions in Orangeburg County and political leaders, provided feedback and guidance for this project at regular intervals.

Sources for Technical Analysis

The Community Assessment is a technical analysis of the current conditions in Orangeburg County. It is a collection of four reports:

- ★ Population, Economy, and Land Use
- ★ Transportation and Mobility
- ★ Water and Wastewater
- ★ Cost of Land Use

These reports contain detailed information that can be used to guide Orangeburg County's future growth.

Both the community issues and aspirations and the technical analysis have shaped the existing strengths, planning issues, and planning opportunities identified in the following sections. This report comes in the middle of the planning process; additional strengths, issues, and opportunities will likely emerge as this process continues.

EXISTING AND EMERGING STRENGTHS

Orangeburg County already has many important strengths.

- ★ Orangeburg County has a **strategic location** — it is located along I-26 and I-95, near Columbia and Charleston, and close to the ports of Charleston and Savannah. This location is beneficial for both residents and businesses.
- ★ Orangeburg County has thousands of acres of **land ready and available for development** and close to key corridors, offering major economic development opportunities. The County has invested in assembling several key sites and in infrastructure serving these sites, making them more

attractive to potential employers; key examples include the Orangeburg Power Site and the John W. Matthews, Jr. Industrial Park.

- ★ Orangeburg County is home to several **excellent educational institutions**, including Claflin University, South Carolina State University, and Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College. Orangeburg County School District has made significant capital investments in local schools and has expanded career-track programs for students.
- ★ MUSC Health – Orangeburg is a **growing regional hub of medical care**, and is expanding its services with a new location in Santee. This new facility will likely result in additional development interest nearby.
- ★ **Natural resources** are abundant in Orangeburg County, including fertile soil, Lake Marion, and the North Fork Edisto River. These natural resources allow for a strong agricultural industry, create recreational opportunities, and promote **the rural way of life** that is important to some residents and rural businesses.
- ★ Orangeburg County is an **affordable place to live** due to its low cost of living.
- ★ **Historical and cultural opportunities** abound in the County, from restored historic buildings in several municipalities, the Cecil Williams South Carolina Civil Rights Museum, and major events like homecomings at the universities and the Festival of Roses. These offer historic charm and a strong sense of place.
- ★ The **friendly and close-knit community** in Orangeburg County was frequently mentioned by community members as an important part of what makes Orangeburg County great.
- ★ **Strong leadership and collaboration** across the County and its partners empower the County to make coordinated, strategic decisions. Major educational institutions, regional employers, and County and municipal leaders are working together to improve the future of the County.

PLANNING ISSUES

Orangeburg County is facing many important issues. Some available data may initially be discouraging, but it is important to note that this information shows the

past — it shows where Orangeburg County has been. The future of Orangeburg County is not set in stone, and will be shaped by policies, actions, and investments by the County, its municipalities, and other strategic partners.

- ★ Recent data suggest that Orangeburg County's **population has been decreasing and getting older** over the past decade, posing a challenge for attracting the types of employers and amenities desired by residents. However, recent residential development suggests a change in this trend and future Census reports should be evaluated to identify these changes.
- ★ Several **housing challenges** combine into a difficult puzzle: incomes are increasing more slowly than housing prices, existing homes are older than the state and national average, and much more of the housing stock is manufactured housing than the state and national average. Stakeholders shared that the existing housing stock does not always meet the expectations of potential residents with respect to housing quality, housing type, and availability to rent. The growing supply of residential housing suggests there is demand to be met and the County and municipalities have an opportunity to shape future residential development to better meet expectations.
- ★ Orangeburg County does not have the **employment opportunities** desired by residents: about two-thirds of employed residents commute to jobs outside of Orangeburg County, and some of the most common job types in the county are also the lowest-paying. The County is actively pursuing new economic development in several strategic locations to address this gap.
- ★ The **existing water and sewer infrastructure** in much of the county is near capacity, constraining potential growth. A key focus of the Sustainability Plan will be to identify needs and potential funding sources for future water and sewer improvements.
- ★ **Local road maintenance** is a significant challenge. A strategic funding approach to prioritize critical repairs and improvements is needed and will be a focus of this planning effort.
- ★ **Walking, biking, and transit opportunities** are limited, even though transit demand is growing. Flexible transit options like on-demand micro-transit,

alongside sidewalk and bicycle infrastructure improvements, can help address this issue.

- ★ Some Orangeburg County residents lack **access to important services and amenities**, such as nearby healthcare, nearby groceries, broadband internet at home, and recreational opportunities. Adding more population and jobs to the county will create a greater market for these amenities and likely result in new businesses and services that will increase quality of life in the county.

PLANNING OPPORTUNITIES

Supporting Commercial Growth

Based on feedback from community engagement and from stakeholder interviews, Orangeburg County **residents support commercial growth**, especially for diverse industries and for higher wages than existing employment opportunities. Residents generally support the idea of a **central economic hub** in the county, though many also express a desire for retail and employment growth in and near various municipalities. Restoration and redevelopment of vacant buildings is broadly supported.

Commercial growth is made possible by residential growth, since a larger customer base can support more businesses. In unincorporated Orangeburg County, new residential development that is relatively high-end has a net positive fiscal impact on the County, so such growth should generally be supported. Residential growth within the municipalities would also support commercial growth.

Economic Development

There are many **strategic sites available for future economic development** in Orangeburg County. Some of these sites are owned or jointly owned by the County, including the Orangeburg County-City Industrial Park, the Orangeburg Power Site, the Tri-County Global Industrial Park, the Western Orangeburg County Industrial Park, and the John W. Matthews, Jr. Industrial Park. Many of the available sites are located south and east of the City of Orangeburg.

Orangeburg County also has untapped **tourism potential**, especially related to historic and natural resources. Lake Marion, the North Fork Edisto River, the Cecil

Williams South Carolina Civil Rights Museum, the unique festivals and events, and historic downtowns could all become major tourism draws. Adding additional lodging and restaurant offerings can support this tourism potential.

Recommended Growth Areas

Based on the results described above and detailed in the assessment reports, three general **recommended growth areas** emerged:

- 1) In and near the **City of Orangeburg** where a variety of housing, regional commercial, and tourism development could be supported;
- 2) In and near **other municipalities**, particularly in the eastern part of the county, where new residential development and neighborhood-scale nonresidential development are in demand; and
- 3) Along **major interstate and highway corridors** supporting major industrial and business investments. This includes the Global Logistics Triangle mentioned in the Eastern Orangeburg County Sustainability Plan.

These recommended growth areas offer the opportunity to concentrate development and infrastructure to make projects possible, and would ultimately benefit residents in outlying areas of the county also, by bringing additional amenities and investment to the area.

Orangeburg County is at a key point in its history. With careful investment and policy guidance, the County will be on its way to supporting responsible growth that meets the needs and aspirations of all residents.