



SALUDA FORWARD: A Promise for Tomorrow

Saluda County Comprehensive Plan 2026-2036

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Introduction

Executive Summary

About Saluda Forward

Saluda Forward is the comprehensive plan, or blueprint, for how Saluda County will grow and develop over the next ten years. The Saluda Forward planning process provided citizens with the opportunity to help shape the vision and recommendations that will guide decision-making in Saluda County for the next decade.

Regular comprehensive planning represents good stewardship and establishes a foundation for well-supported policies to create the best possible future for Saluda County. A comprehensive plan is a long-term guide that expresses a community's values and aspirations. It is the broadest public policy document a community can create, and it establishes a long-range vision for our county.

A comprehensive plan is also a tool to prepare for change and acts both as a business plan and a guidebook for decision makers. The plan is not a regulatory document but a foundation for county budgeting, zoning and land development regulations, capital improvements, development decisions, and more.

Our Mission

Saluda Forward builds upon the mission statement established by the Saluda County Council, which states:

“The mission of Saluda County Government is to serve the citizens of the county by providing ethical, respectful, and quality service.

We will be good stewards of the resources entrusted to the county. We will continue to provide for the safety and security of all citizens.

We will strive to deliver the highest quality of life for our community, residents, and businesses.”

Public Engagement

A critical component of the Saluda Forward planning process was developing opportunities to engage with the public. By providing opportunities for discussion and feedback, the planning team could better understand community desires and concerns and distill these to develop and later test a shared vision for Saluda County. To accomplish this, seven public meetings were held throughout the county.

What We Heard

The wealth of feedback received through the public meetings is summarized throughout the plan, and this feedback was essential to charting the course for our future through the development of our goals and strategies.

Values

Throughout the process, citizens noted how much they value the rural atmosphere of Saluda County and the rich history of each area of the county. Many of the county's families have called Saluda County home for generations and desire to preserve the pastoral lifestyles they have come to cherish, free from traffic congestion, noise, and other downsides of rapid growth.

The Next Ten Years

The real work of Saluda Forward is in the next ten years. Learning from our past, we can strategically focus on bringing our shared vision to life by using this document as a tool and guide for action. The course that the county chooses for the next ten years should reflect and build upon this shared vision. Through regular reporting on the plan outcomes, we will be celebrating our successes and learning from our failures in the years to come. This will help us adhere to our priorities and recognize where these priorities may need to be modified.

Navigating the Plan

Using the Plan

Saluda Forward is meant to serve not only county staff and decision makers, but everyone in Saluda County. As such, this document attempts to set forth the complexities of planning for Saluda County in a concise and accessible manner. This section is meant to provide a road map to Saluda Forward and help the reader navigate and utilize the plan. As an official Saluda County policy document, Saluda County residents and business owners can and should engage with Saluda County and help move these recommendations forward by partnering with the county to implement recommendations.

Plan Elements

The SC Code of Laws requires that comprehensive plans address each of the elements listed on the next page. However, as the name implies, the elements of a comprehensive plan are interwoven, and together they tell the story of Saluda County's future.

Population

A study of historic trends and population projections helps us better understand our community and plan for the provision of services for all

Natural Resources

In identifying our natural resources, we can better understand how to conserve, protect, or improve upon them in the years to come

Economic Development

How do we encourage a diverse, resilient, and vibrant economy which attracts employers **and** employees?

Housing

What does our housing market look like, and where are the gaps? This element considers different sizes and types of rental and owned housing and how they are interwoven into the fabric of Saluda County

Transportation

Transportation is all about mobility and accessibility for all – not just cars, but pedestrians, bikes, transit, freight, and rail.

Land Use

How we look at density, scale, and context – what types of uses are appropriate, and where?

Community Facilities

We all rely on community facilities, from utilities and emergency services to parks and educational facilities. How we plan for these services over the next ten years is vital to the heartbeat of Saluda County

Cultural Resources

In identifying our cultural resources, we can better determine how to both protect and capitalize on the rich history of our community.

Resilience

How do we ensure that our community is ready to withstand disaster? This element addresses our communities ability to recover from disaster.

Priority Investment

A guide to how we can move forward and bring our shared vision for Saluda County to life. In a broad sense, this element represents the County's ten-year to-do list.

Population

Population trends shape the future of Saluda County. Shifts in age, race, income, and education influence the workforce, schools, housing needs, and healthcare services. Understanding who lives here—and how that is changing—helps the county plan for growth, provide essential services, and ensure a high quality of life for all residents.

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The population element examines where we came from, who we are now, and where we are going in the future. This element considers the demographics of our community, such as age, race, and income. It also compares the population of Saluda County to our surrounding communities. A better understanding of who lives, works, and plays in Saluda County helps prioritize investment, address specific needs, and inform development.

Who We Are

Total Population

Saluda County's long-term population trend shows slow growth through 2010 followed by a modest decline in the 2010s. After hovering near 16,000 in 1980 (16,150) and 1990 (16,357), the county grew to 19,181 in 2000 and 19,875 in 2010, before decreasing to 18,862 in 2020 (-5.1% for the decade). A 2024 Census-derived estimate places the population around 19,452, suggesting partial recovery since 2020 but still below the 2010 peak. These historical counts and recent estimates underscore a multi-decade incremental growth pattern interrupted by the 2010–2020 downturn.

Regional comparisons reinforce the picture of uneven growth across the area. Between 2010 and 2020, several rural neighbors also declined: Abbeville (-4.4%), Edgefield (-4.9%), and McCormick (-6.9%). In contrast, Newberry edged up slightly (+0.6%), while metropolitan-adjacent Lexington expanded strongly (+12.0%). Saluda's decline therefore aligns more closely with the rural Lakelands pattern than with the faster-growing suburban counties tied to the Columbia metro area.

Several forces likely contributed to Saluda's population dip. Consistent with national rural trends, natural decrease (more deaths than births) and youth out-migration reduced headcounts in many nonmetro counties during the 2010s, while pandemic-era gains from migration were uneven and favored metro-adjacent or amenity-rich places. Limited local access to hospital care—Saluda County has no hospital—can also weigh on household location decisions, particularly for older adults and families with health needs. Together with shifts in the rural economy and a smaller working-age labor pool, these dynamics help explain recent losses and point to the importance of strategies that shore up healthcare access, housing, and employment to stabilize population.

Demographics

Understanding the historical, current, and projected future demographics of Saluda County is essential for creating a comprehensive community development plan that meets the evolving needs of our residents. Changing demographics—such as shifts in age, race, ethnicity, income levels, and educational attainment—directly impact the demand for public services, housing, infrastructure, healthcare, and education. Historically, Saluda County has been shaped by our agricultural roots and a relatively stable population. Still, in recent decades, the county has experienced gradual increases in

Hispanic and Latino populations, aging residents, and economic diversification. Analyzing these trends allows us to anticipate future needs, address disparities, and plan for sustainable growth. A forward-looking approach ensures that policies, investments, and programs are equitable and responsive, fostering a resilient and inclusive community where all residents can thrive.

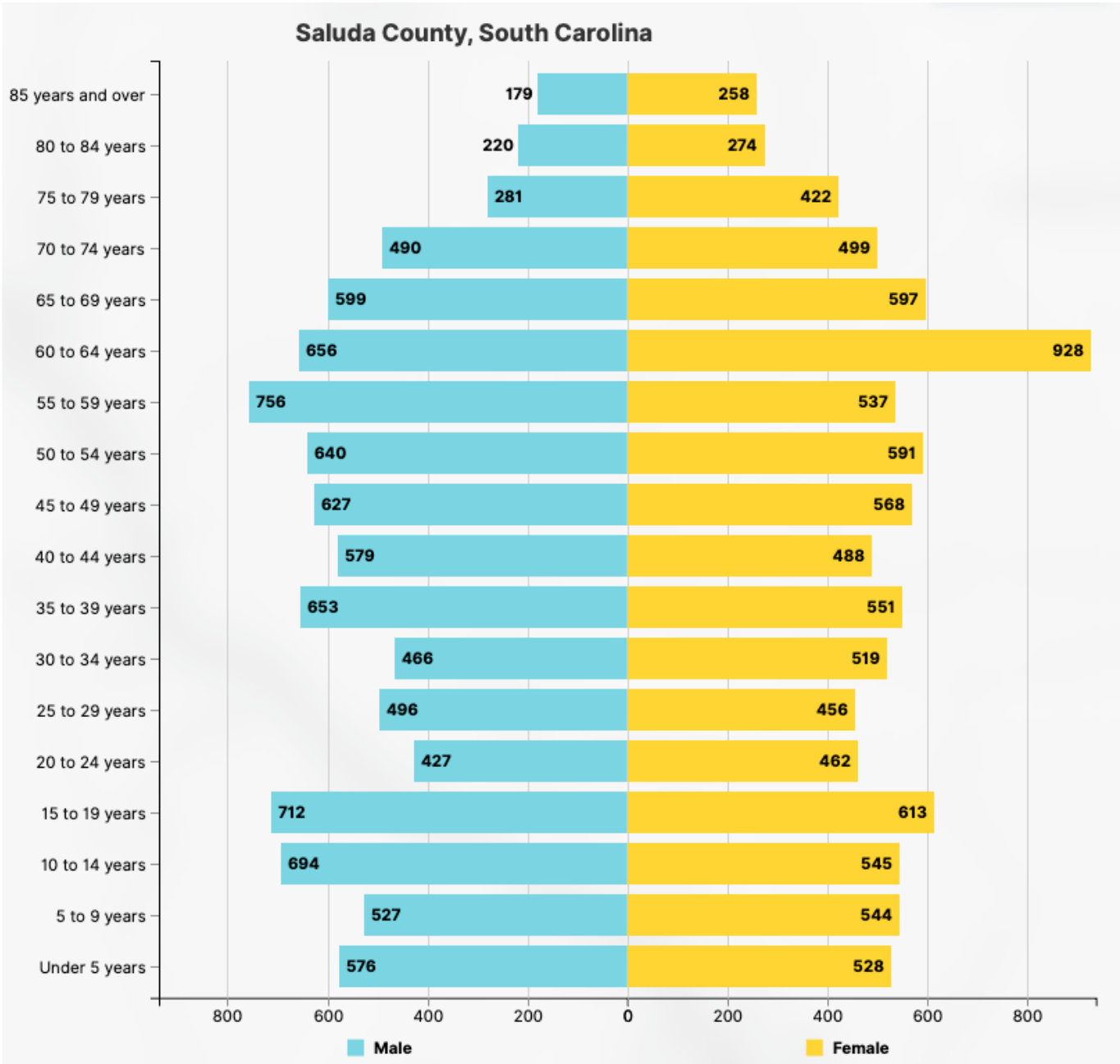


Figure 1 - Saluda County Age Demographics (2020 US Census)

Age

Saluda County’s age demographics show a clear upward trend in median age, with a growing share of residents aged 65 and older. Over the past several decades, the percentage of seniors has steadily increased, while the proportion of younger adults has declined. This shift is consistent with broader

rural patterns of outmigration among younger populations and aging-in-place among long-time residents. As a result, the county is experiencing the challenges of an older age structure, including a smaller working-age population relative to retirees.

The rising senior population has direct impacts on community services. With more residents requiring age-related care, the absence of a hospital in Saluda County presents a significant challenge. Older adults often need greater access to healthcare, rehabilitation, and emergency services, yet the lack of a local hospital means residents must travel to neighboring counties for these needs. This creates barriers for seniors who may face mobility limitations and can place additional strain on local emergency medical services, which must provide more frequent and longer transports.

These demographic changes also affect other aspects of community life. An older population means increased demand for accessible housing options, transportation services for medical and daily needs, and recreational opportunities suited to seniors. At the same time, with fewer younger families, school enrollment pressures may ease, but the community must ensure adequate resources are redirected to support the aging population. Civic organizations and volunteer services, which older residents often help sustain, may also need additional support as demands on their time and health increase.

Future planning should prioritize strategies that address the county's aging demographics in light of its limited healthcare infrastructure. This includes strengthening partnerships with regional hospitals, investing in local clinics and telehealth services, and expanding transportation options to medical facilities outside the county. Planning should also focus on developing senior-friendly housing, community programs that support aging in place, and intergenerational initiatives that retain and attract younger residents to balance the age profile. By aligning infrastructure, housing, and service delivery with these demographic realities, Saluda County can better meet the needs of its residents today and into the future.

Figure 1 displays Saluda County's age demographics, broken down by gender, as of the 2020 decennial census.¹

Race and Ethnicity

Saluda County's racial and ethnic composition reflects a diverse population that has shifted gradually over the last several decades. According to the 2020 Census, approximately **59.7%** of residents identify as White, **21.4%** as Black or African American, and **16.0%** as Hispanic or Latino. Smaller groups include Asian (0.2%), Native American (0.2%), and individuals identifying with two or more races or another category (about 2–2.5%). This represents a community that, while still majority White, is defined by significant racial and ethnic diversity relative to its size.

¹ Age demographic chart retrieved from <https://data.census.gov>

Over time, these proportions have shifted in meaningful ways. In 2010, about 61.1% of residents identified as White, 26.3% as Black or African American, and 14.4% as Hispanic or Latino. By 2020, the share of Black residents had declined slightly while the Hispanic or Latino share had increased, continuing a decades-long trend of growth within the Latino community. These shifts are especially evident among younger age cohorts, where Hispanic and multi-racial identities make up a larger share of school-aged children compared to the county's overall population.

These changes have important implications for the community. Growth in the Hispanic population has strengthened the agricultural workforce and contributed to local entrepreneurship, while also creating a need for bilingual services in schools, healthcare, and public safety. Meanwhile, the county's African American community continues to play a central role in civic, cultural, and religious life. Still, it faces some of the same economic and healthcare access challenges as other rural populations. As the county becomes more diverse, ensuring equitable access to housing, jobs, and health services will be essential to maintaining social and economic vitality.

Planning for the future should build on this diversity as a community strength. Priorities include expanding English Language Learner (ELL) school programs, improving language access for healthcare and emergency services, and fostering inclusive civic engagement across all groups. Economic development strategies should support minority-owned businesses, while cultural programming can celebrate and strengthen the county's growing diversity. By proactively planning for these demographic realities, Saluda County can create a more inclusive and resilient community that meets the needs of all residents.

Geographic Dispersal

Saluda County contains five census tracts: 9601, 9602.01, 9602.02, 9603, and 9604. Change over the decade was uneven but broadly negative. The tract containing the Town of Saluda (9601) was stable, with a minimal decline to roughly 2,777 residents (-1.4%). By contrast, the southeastern tract (9602.02) posted a double-digit decrease, falling to about 3,706 residents (-12.6%). Subcounty change-maps built from the redistricting file show the remaining tracts trending downward over the decade, reinforcing a countywide pattern of modest-to-moderate tract-level decline.

Geographically, relative stability is centered on the Saluda town core and immediate surroundings (tract 9601), where proximity to schools, county services, and the US-378/SC-121 corridor helps sustain population. Declines are more pronounced in the county's southern and western rural tracts (including 9602.02 and, per change-map patterns, 9603 and 9604), where distance from jobs and services, limited new housing, and an aging housing stock are consistent with the decade's losses—even along the county's eastern edge toward Lake Murray, population change within Saluda's tracts skewed negative across the 2010–2020 interval, suggesting that lake-adjacent growth pressures in neighboring counties did not translate into net gains on the Saluda side during this decade.

These internal shifts matter for service delivery and capital planning. Concentration of residents around the town core supports continued investment in in-town water/sewer rehabilitation, sidewalk and safety projects near schools, and small-lot infill. In tracts with sustained decline, the County should emphasize maintenance-first strategies (right-sizing road and water system replacements, targeting culvert/bridge work that supports farm-to-market routes) and programs that preserve existing housing (owner-occupied rehab, well/septic support) rather than greenfield expansion. Because declines are widespread, the County should also monitor school catchments, EMS response coverage, and volunteer fire capacity, adjusting facilities and staffing to match shifting call volumes and travel times across sparsely populated areas.

In the future, the County should track tract-level indicators after each new ACS 5-year release to see whether post-2020 permit activity near Lake Murray and along the US-378 corridor is reversing declines, and whether the town core is holding steady. Establishing a simple dashboard keyed to the five tracts—population, housing permits, occupancy, and median age—will help the Planning Commission target rezonings, infrastructure timing, and grant applications (CDBG, RIA) where the data show either resilience (to leverage) or persistent decline (to mitigate).

Educational Achievement

Saluda County's educational attainment has improved steadily over the past two decades. Current American Community Survey (ACS) estimates indicate that 84.0% of residents age 25+ hold a high school diploma or higher (2019–2023), up from 78.2% in 2019. Over the same period, the share with a bachelor's degree or higher rose from 16.8% (2019) to 19.8% (2023). Looking further back provides additional context: in 2000, 69.3% of adults had at least a high school credential and 11.9% held a bachelor's or higher—underscoring long-term gains across the attainment spectrum.

These changes mirror statewide patterns while highlighting local nuances. Saluda's 84.0% high-school-or-higher rate trails the South Carolina average, and its 19.8% bachelor's-or-higher share is also below the statewide figure, suggesting continued room for growth at the postsecondary level. Nonetheless, the county's pace of improvement in the 2019–2023 window—particularly the uptick in bachelor's attainment—signals gradual progress that can support workforce development and income growth if sustained.

The implications for the community are significant. Higher attainment levels are associated with stronger labor force participation, better earnings, and improved health and civic outcomes. For Saluda's employers—especially in agriculture, manufacturing, logistics, and small business—incremental gains in credentials (e.g., high-school completion, certificates, and associate degrees) can expand the pool of job-ready workers and support upskilling for advancement. At the same time, the county's comparatively low bachelor's degree share may limit access to certain professional occupations and could dampen entrepreneurial growth without targeted interventions.

Planning considerations should focus on continuing the upward trajectory. Priorities include: expanding adult basic education and GED pathways; strengthening dual-enrollment, career-and-technical education (CTE), and work-based learning aligned to regional employers; and improving postsecondary transition and completion through partnerships with nearby technical colleges and universities. Because the ACS measures reflect multiyear periods, the County should track progress using consistent five-year series (e.g., S1501) and monitor changes annually to gauge whether local initiatives are moving the bachelor's-or-higher share above 20% and pushing high-school-or-higher toward the state average.

Household Economics

Saluda County has experienced a gradual improvement in household income over the past several decades, although median income remains below state and national averages. According to the 2019–2023 American Community Survey, the county's median household income is \$52,957, from about \$39,570 in 2010 to roughly \$31,600 in 2000 (nominal dollars). This represents steady growth, though the pace has lagged behind fast-growing neighboring counties such as Lexington, where the 2023 median income is \$77,273. Other nearby counties fall closer to Saluda's range: Newberry reports a median of \$56,040, Edgefield \$55,352, Abbeville \$52,543, and McCormick \$54,438. Statewide, South Carolina's median household income is \$64,130, highlighting Saluda's relative gap.

Poverty rates in Saluda County remain higher than some regional peers. The county's poverty rate is 16.1%, compared to 14.0% statewide. Rates vary by household type: families with children experience higher levels of poverty than the county average. In comparison, senior households tend to report lower levels due to Social Security and retirement income stability. Single-parent households, particularly female-headed households, are the most likely to live below the poverty threshold, reflecting limited earning power and childcare constraints. Neighboring Newberry (15.4%) and Edgefield (14.8%) record slightly lower poverty rates, while Abbeville (18.1%) and McCormick (20.4%) are somewhat higher, placing Saluda in the middle of the regional spectrum.

These dynamics carry significant implications for community planning. Rising median incomes suggest gradual improvement in economic stability, but the persistence of elevated poverty points to structural challenges for many households. Higher poverty among families with children can strain schools and social service providers, while limited wage growth compared to Lexington and other suburban counties may hinder Saluda's ability to attract and retain younger households. Ensuring equitable economic development—through workforce training, small-business support, and targeted investments in childcare and transportation—will be essential to broadening opportunity.

Future planning should also account for Saluda's regional position. While incomes in nearby rural counties remain comparable, the contrast with rapidly growing Lexington underscores the importance of regional partnerships that link Saluda's workforce to expanding job centers. At the

same time, strengthening supports for vulnerable households—particularly single-parent families—can reduce poverty rates and improve community well-being. Together, these efforts can help ensure income gains are more widely shared across Saluda County’s diverse households.

Where We’re Going

Looking ahead, Saluda County’s population is expected to remain relatively stable, with only modest growth projected over the next two decades. State-level forecasts indicate that rural counties like Saluda are unlikely to see significant population increases, in contrast to more urban and suburban counties such as Lexington. The South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office estimates that Saluda’s population will hover around 19,000 to 20,000 through the 2030s, reflecting limited in-migration and natural decrease (more deaths than births) among an aging population. This stability suggests the county is unlikely to experience large swings in overall population, but subtle shifts in age and household structure will continue to reshape local needs.

Age demographics are expected to follow the broader state and national trend of continued aging. The share of residents over 65, now around one-fifth of the population, is projected to rise further as younger adults leave for education and employment opportunities in metropolitan areas. Without significant in-migration of younger families, the county may face continued pressures on its labor force, healthcare system, and housing stock. Planning for expanded healthcare access is especially critical given the absence of a hospital in Saluda County.

Racial and ethnic composition is likely to become increasingly diverse. The Hispanic and Latino community, which grew from 14.4% of the population in 2010 to 16.0% in 2020, is projected to continue rising, particularly among younger generations. This growth will reinforce the importance of bilingual education, workforce training, and culturally responsive services. The Black or African American population may remain stable or decline slightly in percentage terms, while the White population is expected to continue shrinking as a share of the total. These changes will contribute to a more diverse school-aged population, even if total enrollment numbers remain flat or decline.

Economic and educational attainment trends also point toward gradual improvement, though challenges remain. Median household income in Saluda is likely to rise incrementally. Still, the gap with suburban counties such as Lexington will persist unless job creation and workforce development keep pace with regional competitors. Poverty, particularly among single-parent households, may remain a significant challenge if structural barriers to employment and childcare are not addressed. At the same time, rising rates of high school and college attainment suggest that, with targeted investment in education and job training, Saluda could strengthen its workforce and reduce poverty over the long term.

Goals and Objectives

The following goals, objectives, and strategies are intended to guide actions over the next decade.

Goal 1: Support a sustainable population base that balances growth with preserving Saluda County's rural character.

- **Objective 1.1:** Stabilize population decline in rural areas while encouraging targeted growth in the town core and along key transportation corridors.
 - **Strategy 1.1.1:** Promote housing development in and near the Town of Saluda to leverage existing water, sewer, and public services.
 - **Strategy 1.1.2:** Identify and market residential opportunities near Lake Murray and major road corridors to attract new residents while protecting natural resources.
 - **Strategy 1.1.3:** Encourage adaptive reuse of older homes and infill development to reduce infrastructure costs and preserve farmland.

Goal 2: Plan for an aging population and address changing demographic needs.

- **Objective 2.1:** Ensure services, housing, and infrastructure accommodate the county's growing senior population.
 - **Strategy 2.1.1:** Support development of senior-friendly housing, including smaller units, assisted living, and aging-in-place retrofits.
 - **Strategy 2.1.2:** Expand access to healthcare services and transportation options, particularly given the county's lack of a hospital.
 - **Strategy 2.1.3:** Coordinate with regional agencies to strengthen home health, EMS, and volunteer fire capacity in sparsely populated areas.

Goal 3: Embrace growing racial and ethnic diversity as a community strength.

- **Objective 3.1:** Provide equitable access to education, services, and opportunities for all racial and ethnic groups.
 - **Strategy 3.1.1:** Strengthen bilingual education and outreach to meet the needs of a growing Hispanic and Latino population.
 - **Strategy 3.1.2:** Partner with nonprofits, schools, and workforce agencies to promote cultural inclusion and workforce readiness.
 - **Strategy 3.1.3:** Encourage civic engagement and representation from all demographic groups in county boards and planning efforts.

Goal 4: Strengthen economic and educational opportunities to retain and attract residents.

- **Objective 4.1:** Reduce poverty and improve economic resilience by investing in workforce skills and education.

- **Strategy 4.1.1:** Expand career and technical education, apprenticeships, and partnerships with nearby technical colleges.
- **Strategy 4.1.2:** Support entrepreneurship and small-business growth, especially in agriculture, tourism, and local services.
- **Strategy 4.1.3:** Develop targeted childcare and transportation initiatives to reduce barriers for low-income and single-parent households.

Goal 5: Monitor demographic change to inform long-range planning.

- **Objective 5.1:** Maintain current, accessible demographic data to guide policy decisions.
 - **Strategy 5.1.1:** Create a simple annual demographic dashboard tracking population, age cohorts, race/ethnicity, income, and poverty trends.
 - **Strategy 5.1.2:** Use tract-level census and ACS data to direct infrastructure investment and service delivery where population shifts are most significant.
 - **Strategy 5.1.3:** Coordinate with regional planning organizations to compare trends and align strategies with neighboring counties.

Natural Resources

Natural resources are the building blocks of Saluda County's economy and way of life. Our soils, forests, water, and wildlife not only support agriculture and forestry but also provide recreation, beauty, and resilience against natural hazards. Protecting these resources safeguards the county's rural character and ensures their benefits for future generations.

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Introduction

Saluda County's natural resources are central to its identity, economy, and quality of life. The county's rolling farmland, extensive timberlands, rivers, and access to Lake Murray provide a mix of agricultural productivity, recreational opportunities, and scenic beauty that define the area's rural character. These resources not only shape the county's landscape but also contribute directly to its economic base through farming, forestry, and tourism, while supporting residents' sense of place and connection to the land.

Over the past several decades, changes in land use, population patterns, and regional development pressures have influenced how Saluda's natural resources are managed and valued. While much of the county remains rural and agricultural, growth around Lake Murray and along key transportation corridors has increased demand for residential development. These pressures raise important questions about balancing growth with the protection of farmland, water quality, and forestland that support both local livelihoods and regional ecological health.

The county also faces challenges tied to environmental sustainability. Soil conservation, stormwater management, and water availability are critical issues for sustaining agricultural productivity. The absence of a local hospital further underscores the importance of environmental health and clean water in maintaining public well-being. Additionally, climate-related concerns—such as more frequent flooding events and extreme weather—may place new demands on infrastructure, emergency services, and natural systems.

Looking forward, Saluda County has an opportunity to leverage its natural assets in ways that both protect resources and support long-term economic development. By planning carefully, the county can preserve its farmland and forests, protect its watersheds, and enhance access to outdoor recreation, while guiding new development to areas best suited for growth. A strong natural resources strategy will help ensure that Saluda maintains its rural heritage while building resilience for the future.

Existing Conditions

Saluda County is situated in South Carolina's Midlands region and experiences a humid subtropical climate, characterized by hot summers, mild winters, and relatively abundant rainfall throughout the year. Average annual precipitation is around 46 inches, supporting a diverse agricultural and forestry base. Summer temperatures often reach the 90s, while winter temperatures are typically mild, with rare snowfall. The county's climate creates favorable conditions for crop production, livestock, and timber growth, but also requires attention to soil conservation and stormwater management due to the intensity of summer storms and occasional flooding.

The county's soils are a mix of sandy loams and clay loams, reflecting its location in the Piedmont and Upper Coastal Plain transition zone. These soils are generally well suited for agriculture and forestry, which remain cornerstones of the local economy. However, certain soil types present challenges, such as erosion on steeper slopes and limitations for septic systems in more clay-rich areas. Preserving prime farmland soils is a key planning consideration, especially as development pressure increases around Lake Murray and in proximity to major transportation corridors.

Topography in Saluda County is gently rolling, with elevations ranging from about 300 feet near the county's river valleys to over 600 feet in the northwestern areas. This rolling terrain creates a landscape of farmland, pasture, and forestland interspersed with creeks and tributaries. The county's scenic vistas and rural roadways benefit from this topography, but hilly areas can also complicate construction, road maintenance, and stormwater control. The mix of terrain is both an asset—providing varied land uses and natural beauty—and a planning challenge, requiring careful site selection for development to minimize environmental impacts.

Water resources are among the county's most valuable natural assets. Lake Murray, located along Saluda's eastern boundary, provides recreational opportunities, drinking water supply, and hydroelectric power for the region. Along with numerous creeks and streams, the Saluda River and Little Saluda River form a network of waterways supporting agriculture, wildlife habitat, and recreation. Protecting these watersheds is critical for maintaining water quality and safeguarding the county's role in regional resource systems. Maintaining clean and reliable water supplies is particularly important for public health.

Floodplains are present along the Saluda River, Little Saluda River, and other major waterways, and they play an essential ecological role while also presenting development constraints. FEMA floodplain maps identify areas at higher risk for flooding, particularly during periods of heavy rainfall or severe storms. While much of the county's development is situated outside flood-prone areas, continued monitoring and careful regulation of construction in floodplains are needed to reduce potential risks to property and life. Protecting natural floodplains also supports groundwater recharge, wildlife corridors, and water quality improvements.

Forestry is a defining land use in Saluda County, covering a significant share of the county's land area. Pine plantations, mixed hardwood forests, and bottomland hardwoods contribute to the county's rural landscape and provide economic benefits through timber harvest, hunting leases, and recreation. Forestry also plays a critical role in soil conservation, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration. While timber markets remain strong, forestland is vulnerable to fragmentation from residential development, particularly near Lake Murray. Long-term planning must balance the economic importance of forestry with pressures for growth and the ecological value of maintaining large, contiguous forest tracts.

Taken together, Saluda County's climate, soils, topography, water resources, floodplains, and forests form an interrelated system that supports both the economy and the quality of life of its residents. These resources provide opportunities for agriculture, recreation, and development, but also require careful stewardship to ensure long-term sustainability. Future planning must focus on protecting prime soils, managing flood risks, maintaining forestland, and safeguarding water resources while guiding growth to areas that can support it without degrading the county's natural systems.

Where We're Heading

A combination of longstanding land-based traditions and emerging development pressures will shape the future of Saluda County's natural resources. Agriculture and forestry will likely remain central to the county's identity. Still, both sectors face challenges from changing market dynamics, generational shifts in land ownership, and encroachment from residential growth near Lake Murray and along primary transportation corridors. Preserving farmland and timber tracts while accommodating new housing and economic opportunities will require deliberate land use planning and resource management policies.

Climate and weather patterns are expected to remain favorable for farming and forestry, though increased variability in rainfall and more intense storm events may create new stressors. Flood-prone areas along the Saluda and Little Saluda Rivers will remain sensitive to heavy rainfall events, making floodplain management and watershed protection increasingly important. Historical patterns show that while development has generally avoided the most extensive floodplains, incremental construction in sensitive areas can compound downstream impacts. Looking forward, Saluda County will need to strengthen stormwater regulations and conservation practices to safeguard water quality and reduce risk to property and infrastructure.

Water resources will continue to play a pivotal role in the county's future. Lake Murray and the Saluda River will likely attract sustained recreation, tourism, and residential development interest. As neighboring counties see increasing growth around Lake Murray's shoreline, Saluda may experience spillover demand for housing and recreation on its side of the lake. This presents both opportunities and risks: new investment could expand the tax base and recreational economy, but without careful oversight, it may also threaten water quality, natural habitats, and public access. Maintaining strong watershed protections and coordinating regionally with adjoining counties will be essential to balance these interests.

Forests will remain a key economic and ecological asset, but their long-term future will depend on the ability to manage fragmentation. Historical trends indicate steady timber production across the county. Still, as parcels are subdivided for residential development, particularly near lakefront and highway-accessible areas, the continuity of large forest tracts is at risk. The county's planning strategy must emphasize conservation easements, working lands programs, and landowner incentives to

maintain forest and agricultural uses. Protecting these resources is an economic necessity and vital to sustaining wildlife habitat, carbon storage, and the county's rural character.

Overall, the balance between growth and preservation will define the future of Saluda County's natural resources. Historical trends show resilience in agriculture and forestry, but also highlight growing pressures from population shifts and regional development. By adopting proactive strategies—such as farmland preservation, floodplain protection, forest management, and watershed conservation—the county can safeguard its natural resource base while supporting a sustainable future for its residents.

Goals and Objectives

The following goals, objectives, and strategies are intended to guide actions over the next decade.

Goal 1: Protect and enhance Saluda County's land and soil resources.

- **Objective 1.1:** Preserve prime farmland and working landscapes.
 - **Strategy 1.1.1:** Establish voluntary agricultural conservation easements to protect productive soils.
 - **Strategy 1.1.2:** Provide incentives for landowners to maintain agricultural and forestry uses.
 - **Strategy 1.1.3:** Direct new residential development to areas with existing infrastructure rather than prime farmland.
- **Objective 1.2:** Reduce soil erosion and degradation.
 - **Strategy 1.2.1:** Promote best management practices (BMPs) for row-crop and livestock farming.
 - **Strategy 1.2.2:** Incorporate erosion control standards into county development regulations.

Goal 2: Safeguard water resources for long-term community and ecological health.

- **Objective 2.1:** Protect surface water quality in rivers, streams, and Lake Murray.
 - **Strategy 2.1.1:** Strengthen stormwater management standards for new development.
 - **Strategy 2.1.2:** Collaborate with neighboring counties and watershed groups to coordinate water quality monitoring.
 - **Strategy 2.1.3:** Promote riparian buffer protection along creeks and river corridors.
- **Objective 2.2:** Ensure reliable groundwater and drinking water supplies.
 - **Strategy 2.2.1:** Support expansion of public water systems where feasible to reduce reliance on failing private wells.
 - **Strategy 2.2.2:** Monitor groundwater resources for long-term sustainability.

Goal 3: Manage floodplains and natural hazards to protect people, property, and ecosystems.

- **Objective 3.1:** Reduce risk of flood damage.

- **Strategy 3.1.1:** Maintain up-to-date FEMA flood maps and integrate them into development review.
- **Strategy 3.1.2:** Limit new construction in flood-prone areas and encourage open space use of floodplains.
- **Strategy 3.1.3:** Promote natural floodplain functions for stormwater storage and habitat protection.

Goal 4: Conserve and promote forestry resources as a cornerstone of the county's economy and landscape.

- **Objective 4.1:** Support sustainable forestry practices and market viability.
 - **Strategy 4.1.1:** Partner with state forestry agencies to promote sustainable timber harvesting and replanting.
 - **Strategy 4.1.2:** Encourage landowner participation in cost-share programs for forest management.
 - **Strategy 4.1.3:** Protect large forest tracts from fragmentation through conservation tools and land-use planning.

Goal 5: Strengthen resilience of natural systems in the face of climate and development pressures.

- **Objective 5.1:** Promote conservation planning to anticipate future growth and environmental changes.
 - **Strategy 5.1.1:** Incorporate climate resilience into infrastructure and land-use decisions (e.g., culvert design, green infrastructure).
 - **Strategy 5.1.2:** Encourage renewable energy projects that minimize impacts on prime farmland and forests.
 - **Strategy 5.1.3:** Expand outdoor recreation access (trails, lake access, hunting lands) in ways that also support conservation goals.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources are the stories, places, and traditions that give Saluda County its unique identity. From historic buildings and family farms to local festivals and community traditions, these resources connect residents to their past while enriching daily life. Protecting and celebrating cultural resources strengthens community pride and attracts visitors, ensuring that Saluda's heritage remains a vital part of its future.

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Cultural resources are the tangible and intangible expressions of a community's history, traditions, and identity. In Saluda County, cultural resources encompass historic buildings, rural landscapes, community institutions, and traditions that reflect the county's deep agricultural roots and rich heritage. These resources tell the story of the county's growth, from its early Native American settlements and Revolutionary War ties to its role as a farming and timber community. They also include the festivals, churches, and community events that continue to bring residents together and sustain a shared sense of place.

Saluda County's cultural identity is closely tied to its small towns, rural communities, and the natural landscapes that surround them. The courthouse square in the Town of Saluda, historic neighborhoods in Ridge Spring and Ward, and landmarks such as churches, cemeteries, and schools are central features of the county's cultural fabric. Beyond built structures, cultural resources include the county's strong agricultural traditions, music and folk arts, and long-standing community gatherings such as the Ridge Spring Harvest Festival. These resources foster pride among residents while also contributing to the county's attractiveness as a place to visit and live.

Preservation of cultural resources is increasingly important as the county faces pressures from growth and development. Without deliberate action, historic buildings may deteriorate, rural landscapes may be fragmented, and local traditions may fade. At the same time, cultural resources present significant opportunities. Historic preservation, heritage tourism, and community events can strengthen the local economy, while protecting and celebrating these resources ensures that Saluda's character and identity are maintained for future generations.

The Cultural Resources Element provides a framework for identifying, protecting, and promoting the county's historic, architectural, and cultural assets. By valuing both its physical heritage and its living traditions, Saluda County can ensure that growth and change enhance—rather than diminish—what makes the community unique.

Our History

Saluda County, originally part of the Cherokee Nation, was home to Cherokee settlements along the Savannah River, marking their southern territory by the mid-1700s. English settlers moving into the Midlands sparked disputes over land, leading to the 1755 Saluda Old Town Treaty, which recognized British sovereignty and initiated Cherokee land cessions, completed by 1816. A mural in downtown Saluda depicts this treaty signing between Governor James Glen and Cherokee Chief Conocartee.

By the late 1700s, Scots-Irish and English settlers populated the area, which became part of the Edgefield District in 1785, encompassing 1,702 square miles. The Mount Willing area, settled before the American Revolution, saw the 1781 Clouds Creek Massacre, where Loyalists killed 14 Patriots.

The Ninety-Six Township, including Saluda, attracted German and Swiss farmers with land grants. The Revolutionary War (1775–1783) brought skirmishes to the area, including the 1780 Mine Creek Ambush in present-day Saluda County, where Patriots attacked a British supply convoy

Two Alamo heroes, William Barrett Travis and James Butler Bonham, were born in what became Saluda County, as was Pierce Mason Butler, killed in the 1847 Mexican–American War. The Civil War (1861–1865) devastated Saluda’s cotton economy, with Union troops destroying homes and warehouses in 1865, though no major battles occurred locally.

Saluda County was formed in 1895 from Edgefield District. The towns of Ridge Spring (1882), Saluda (1897), and Ward (1897) were established, with the Northern Augusta Railway arriving in 1912 to transport cotton. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Great Depression and boll weevil devastated farming, but the Lake Murray hydroelectric dam brought electricity. Saluda County is part of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor, promoting its history, including European settlement and African-American culture.

Historical Sites

Saluda County has 11 sites on the National Register of Historic Places, including:

Flat Grove: Birthplace of Alamo hero James Butler Bonham, a late 1770s log house.

Saluda Theatre: A 1930s Art Deco theater, located beside the Saluda County Museum.

Marsh-Johnson House: A late 18th-century plantation house, built 1773–1815.

Saluda Old Town Site: Location of the 1755 treaty signing.

Ridge Spring Cemetery: A 200-year-old site with a mortarless stone wall.

The Saluda County Courthouse (1919) features monuments to Travis, Bonham, Butler, and the 1755 treaty.

Archaeological Finds

Significant archaeological sites include the Saluda Old Town Site, inhabited 5,000–2,000 years ago and the site of the 1755 treaty, and the Tree House Site along the Saluda River, yielding 37,000 artifacts (7,500–700 years old). Excavations near Lake Murray uncovered arrowheads, spear points, and pottery, indicating long-term Native American trade and settlement.

Existing Conditions

Saluda County’s cultural resources reflect its long history, diverse communities, and enduring traditions. These resources range from historic structures and sites to landscapes, institutions, and

events that have shaped the county's identity. Together, they create a cultural fabric that is both deeply rooted in the past and actively celebrated in the present.

Historic resources are a cornerstone of Saluda County's cultural identity. The Saluda County Courthouse, located on the Town of Saluda's square, is a prominent example of late 19th-century architecture and remains an iconic landmark. Historic districts and individual structures in towns such as Ridge Spring and Ward reflect the county's agricultural and commercial development during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Numerous churches, cemeteries, and schools are scattered throughout the county, many of which serve as both historic landmarks and active community gathering spaces. While some properties have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, many others remain locally significant but not formally designated, presenting opportunities for expanded recognition and preservation.

Cultural institutions and community traditions also play an essential role in shaping Saluda County's identity. Annual events such as the Ridge Spring Harvest Festival and community gatherings hosted by various groups bring residents together and celebrate local heritage. Saluda's agricultural traditions—including peach farming, livestock production, and timber management—are central to both the economy and the county's cultural expression. Folk arts, music, and storytelling further enrich community life, with many traditions passed down through families and local organizations.

Natural and rural landscapes are another vital aspect of cultural resources. Working farms, historic homesteads, and scenic byways reflect the county's agricultural roots and rural identity. The Lake Murray shoreline has also become a cultural and recreational focal point, drawing both residents and visitors while offering opportunities for outdoor traditions such as fishing, boating, camping, and community festivals. These landscapes not only provide economic value but also represent living cultural heritage that connects generations.

Despite their richness, Saluda County's cultural resources face challenges. Many historic buildings and rural landscapes are vulnerable to neglect, incompatible development, or loss due to economic pressures. Population decline in some rural areas also threatens the continuity of traditions and institutions that rely on strong community participation. At the same time, these challenges highlight opportunities to leverage cultural resources for heritage tourism, community revitalization, and education. Preservation efforts, local history programs, and partnerships with regional and state organizations can help protect and promote Saluda County's cultural assets.

Where We're Heading

The future of cultural resources in Saluda County will depend on the county's ability to preserve its historic assets, sustain its traditions, and adapt them to the opportunities of a changing economy and population. As growth pressures continue around Lake Murray and in areas connected to Lexington, Newberry, and Aiken Counties, land use changes may place additional stress on historic buildings,

rural landscapes, and long-standing community institutions. At the same time, these pressures create opportunities to showcase Saluda's cultural heritage as an asset that distinguishes the county from its neighbors. Protecting and promoting these resources will ensure that future development enhances, rather than erodes, the county's sense of place.

Historic preservation will play a central role in this effort. Many of Saluda's historic structures and districts remain underutilized or in need of investment. Future initiatives may include expanding National Register of Historic Places designations, creating local preservation programs, and offering incentives for adaptive reuse of historic buildings. Revitalizing downtown Saluda and the historic centers of Ridge Spring and Ward through preservation can stimulate economic activity, support small businesses, and strengthen community identity. These efforts, paired with education and outreach, will help residents understand the value of protecting their cultural heritage.

Cultural traditions and community events will also need support to remain vibrant in the coming decades. As rural populations decline and younger generations move toward urban areas, maintaining strong participation in festivals, civic clubs, and church-based activities will be essential. Investing in spaces and programming that bring residents together, while also highlighting Saluda's agricultural traditions and culture, can ensure that these practices endure. Schools, historical societies, and civic organizations will be critical partners in passing on traditions to future generations.

Looking ahead, heritage tourism represents a significant opportunity for Saluda County. Visitors are increasingly seeking authentic cultural experiences, and Saluda's historic towns, working farms, and recreational opportunities around Lake Murray can be leveraged to attract tourism. Agritourism, local festivals, and heritage trails could provide new economic opportunities while celebrating local traditions. Coordinated promotion with regional tourism organizations can extend Saluda's reach and help create a sustainable cultural tourism economy.

Resilience will also play a role in the future of cultural resources. Natural disasters such as Hurricane Helene in 2024 highlighted the vulnerability of historic buildings and community landmarks to severe weather. Planning for resilience—including protective measures for historic sites, disaster preparedness for cultural institutions, and incorporation of cultural priorities into emergency management—will help preserve these resources for future generations.

By combining preservation, celebration, and innovation, Saluda County can ensure that its cultural resources remain a living part of community life. These resources are more than relics of the past; they are active contributors to the county's identity, economy, and quality of life. Through careful planning and community engagement, Saluda's cultural heritage can continue to thrive while shaping the county's future.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Preserve and protect historic and cultural assets that define Saluda County's identity.

- **Objective 1.1:** Expand recognition and protection of historic sites and districts.
 - **Strategy 1.1.1:** Identify properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and pursue formal designation where appropriate.
 - **Strategy 1.1.2:** Encourage adaptive reuse of historic structures through technical assistance and incentives.
 - **Strategy 1.1.3:** Partner with the South Carolina Department of Archives and History to provide preservation guidance.
- **Objective 1.2:** Safeguard cultural landscapes and rural character.
 - **Strategy 1.2.1:** Develop design guidelines that encourage compatibility between new development and historic character.
 - **Strategy 1.2.2:** Consider overlay districts in areas of cultural or historic significance.

Goal 2: Celebrate and sustain the county's traditions and community events.

- **Objective 2.1:** Support festivals, gatherings, and traditions that bring residents together.
 - **Strategy 2.1.1:** Partner with local civic groups, schools, and churches to sustain cultural events such as the Ridge Spring Harvest Festival.
 - **Strategy 2.1.2:** Provide small grants or logistical support for community-based events that promote local heritage.
 - **Strategy 2.1.3:** Incorporate local history and traditions into school curricula and youth programs.
- **Objective 2.2:** Strengthen cultural programming and institutions.
 - **Strategy 2.2.1:** Expand the role of local museums and historical societies in documenting and interpreting county history.
 - **Strategy 2.2.2:** Support public art, music, and storytelling as living expressions of Saluda's cultural identity.
 - **Strategy 2.2.3:** Promote intergenerational cultural programs to engage both youth and elders.

Goal 3: Leverage cultural resources for economic development and tourism.

- **Objective 3.1:** Expand heritage and agritourism opportunities.
 - **Strategy 3.1.1:** Develop heritage trails and tours highlighting historic sites, scenic byways, and working farms.
 - **Strategy 3.1.2:** Partner with local farmers and businesses to expand agritourism experiences.
 - **Strategy 3.1.3:** Coordinate with regional tourism agencies to market Saluda's cultural and recreational assets.
- **Objective 3.2:** Revitalize historic downtowns and community centers.

- **Strategy 3.2.1:** Encourage reinvestment in historic town centers through façade improvements and reuse of vacant buildings.
- **Strategy 3.2.2:** Promote small business development in cultural and historic districts.
- **Strategy 3.2.3:** Integrate cultural programming into downtown revitalization initiatives.

Goal 4: Protect cultural resources from natural hazards and promote resilience.

- **Objective 4.1:** Reduce vulnerability of historic and cultural assets.
 - **Strategy 4.1.1:** Incorporate historic sites into county hazard mitigation and emergency management planning.
 - **Strategy 4.1.2:** Provide guidance to property owners on protecting historic structures from flooding and severe weather.
 - **Strategy 4.1.3:** Develop disaster recovery protocols for cultural institutions such as museums, churches, and archives.
- **Objective 4.2:** Use cultural resources to strengthen community resilience.
 - **Strategy 4.2.1:** Highlight lessons from **Hurricane Helene (2024)** in cultural programming to foster awareness of resilience.
 - **Strategy 4.2.2:** Encourage community spaces and cultural institutions to serve as hubs during emergencies.
 - **Strategy 4.2.3:** Integrate resilience themes into festivals, education, and public art projects.

Economic Development

Economic development is about creating opportunity. Businesses, industries, farms, and tourism ventures provide jobs, generate tax revenue, and strengthen community identity. By investing in workforce development, supporting local entrepreneurship, and attracting new industries, Saluda County can grow an economy that is resilient, diverse, and rooted in community values.

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Economic development is a cornerstone of Saluda County's long-term vitality. The county's economy has historically been rooted in agriculture, forestry, and manufacturing, supported by a strong tradition of entrepreneurship and small business activity. These sectors remain central to the county's identity and continue to provide jobs, tax revenue, and a foundation for community life. However, changes in regional and national markets, population shifts, and the county's rural geography pose challenges to sustaining growth and competitiveness in a rapidly evolving economy.

Over the past several decades, Saluda has experienced modest gains in median household income and educational attainment. Still, it lags behind the state and neighboring counties in key economic indicators. A higher-than-average poverty rate, limited access to healthcare, and outmigration of younger workers have created barriers to economic resilience. At the same time, proximity to major employment centers in Lexington, Aiken, and Newberry Counties provides opportunities for regional partnerships and workforce mobility. Saluda's location along U.S. 378 and other major corridors also positions the county to benefit from increased economic activity across the Midlands.

The county's economic future will depend on its ability to balance the preservation of rural character with the pursuit of new investment and job creation. Diversifying the local economy—by supporting value-added agriculture, small manufacturing, tourism, and service-oriented businesses—will be essential to creating opportunities for residents across income levels. Workforce development, particularly in career and technical education, will also be critical in ensuring that residents are prepared for jobs in emerging industries.

Looking forward, Saluda County has the opportunity to strengthen its economic base through strategic investments in infrastructure, workforce readiness, and regional collaboration. By building on its agricultural heritage, supporting small business growth, and positioning itself as a destination for recreation and tourism, the county can create a more diverse and sustainable economy. The Economic Development Element provides a framework for achieving these goals while ensuring that growth benefits all residents and aligns with the county's vision for its future.

Existing Conditions

Saluda County's economy remains anchored in its agricultural and forestry heritage. Cattle, poultry, row crops, and timber account for a significant portion of the county's employment and land use. Agriculture-related industries provide significant secondary economic benefits, including feed

production, processing, and equipment sales. Forestry contributes not only through timber harvesting but also through pulpwood, paper, and biomass markets. These traditional sectors are deeply tied to the county’s identity and remain essential for sustaining local jobs and income, even as they face challenges from market volatility, consolidation, and generational shifts in farm and forest ownership.

Manufacturing remains an important part of Saluda County’s economy, providing jobs for skilled workers and strengthening the tax base, through the sector faces challenges in attracting and retaining a trained workforce. Many residents commute outside the county for jobs in healthcare, education, retail, and advanced manufacturing, highlighting both the opportunities of Saluda’s regional position and limits of local job diversity. Within the county, several key employers anchor the economy. Amick Farms and Best Dressed Chicken together account for nearly a quarter of the civilian labor force, while the Saluda County School District and County Government employ about 500 people. Titan Farms, a major agricultural operation, employs more than 450 workers in Saluda County, many of them seasonal. SC Pet Foods and Darling Ingredients add another 270 jobs in the pet food supply chain. While manufacturing and agriculture face vulnerabilities, these employers provide a strong foundation on which to build a more diverse and resilient local economy.

Labor force characteristics highlight both opportunities and concerns. The county has experienced modest gains in educational attainment, with increasing shares of residents holding high school diplomas and some college or technical training. However, the percentage of residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher remains below state averages, creating constraints for higher-wage job attraction. Median household income has grown to \$52,957, but it lags behind neighboring Lexington County (\$77,273) and the statewide figure (\$64,130). The poverty rate remains elevated at 16.1%, with single-parent households disproportionately affected. These indicators point to persistent gaps in economic opportunity and the need for strategies that connect residents with training, education, and higher-paying employment.

Jun 2025 Labor Force Breakdown



Geography and infrastructure also shape Saluda's economic conditions. The county benefits from its location along U.S. 378 and state highways connecting Columbia, Aiken, Greenwood, and Augusta. However, the absence of an interstate highway, rail infrastructure, and a hospital limits Saluda's competitiveness for certain types of business investment. Broadband access has improved but remains inconsistent in some rural areas, creating challenges for remote work, education, and small business growth. At the same time, Saluda's proximity to Lake Murray, rural landscapes, and historic resources offers significant potential for tourism and recreation-based economic development.

Saluda County is part of the Western SC Economic Development Partnership, a regional alliance that includes Aiken, Edgefield, McCormick, and Saluda Counties. This partnership provides access to coordinated marketing, recruitment, and business support services that would be difficult for a small county to sustain independently. Through the partnership, Saluda benefits from regional site promotion, workforce recruitment initiatives, technical expertise in marketing to and attracting industrial and commercial investment, and access to research resources with customized reporting.

This partnership also allows the county to position itself within a larger regional economy, offering prospective businesses the combined assets of multiple counties—such as labor force, infrastructure, and industrial sites—while still highlighting Saluda's own competitive advantages. This collaborative approach strengthens Saluda's visibility in state and national economic development efforts and expands job creation and investment opportunities.

Overall, Saluda County's existing economic conditions reveal both strengths and vulnerabilities. Agriculture, forestry, and small manufacturing remain foundational but face long-term pressures, while the county's workforce and infrastructure limitations hinder job diversification. Regional linkages and natural resource amenities offer promising growth opportunities, but realizing them will require strategic investments in infrastructure, workforce development, and business support. These existing conditions provide the context for shaping goals and strategies to foster a stronger, more diverse, and resilient economy for Saluda County's future.

Where We're Heading

Saluda County is well-positioned to benefit from ongoing rural economic revitalization trends. Across South Carolina, rural counties have seen notable capital investment and job creation: in 2023 alone, rural areas received nearly one-third of the state's total capital investment—part of a record-breaking

\$9.22 billion—creating over 14,000 jobs statewide. For Saluda, this signals potential for economic growth if the county can align with these broader regional strategies, particularly in agribusiness, small-scale manufacturing, and service-sector development.

Since joining Western SC EDP in 2015, Saluda County has attracted over \$63 million in capital investment and 73 jobs. To continue to prepare for potential growth, Saluda County is taking concrete steps to attract investment and create jobs. A recent \$2.5 million expansion of the county's Commerce Park is deliberately designed to improve business-ready infrastructure and draw new employers to the area. This initiative reflects the county's proactive approach to leveraging its location, existing workforce, and infrastructure assets. Such investments could help reduce reliance on out-commuting, retain more taxable income locally, and improve job quality.

Recognizing that majority of economic investment tends to come from existing industries, or companies that are already established in a community, Saluda County and Western SC EDP conduct routine business retention meetings. From these meetings they then partner with local and state agencies such as Piedmont Technical College, ReadySC, Department of Employment and Workforce, and SC Department of Commerce as well as others to connect local industries and companies with the resources they need to succeed, from training employees to connecting with potential suppliers and customers across the state.

At the same time, future economic prospects must be balanced with preserving the county's rural character, resource base, and quality of life. Statewide, farmland is under pressure, with nearly 300,000 acres lost across South Carolina between 2001 and 2016, and development threats continue to grow as population increases. Without safeguards, Saluda risks losing critical agricultural and forestry assets that underpin both its economy and cultural identity. To avoid this, the county will need deliberate strategies such as zoning plans, land-use regulations, and conservation tools that guide growth to appropriate areas while protecting farmland, water resources, and forestland. By thoughtfully channeling rural development, Saluda can encourage investment and job creation without compromising the landscapes and natural assets that define its character and sustain its future.

Additionally, leveraging digital connectivity will be essential. Though rural broadband remains unevenly deployed across South Carolina, federal funding and emerging models (e.g., municipal broadband networks) present opportunities for rural counties to bridge the digital divide. For Saluda, expanding reliable broadband would open doors for workforce development, remote work, digital agriculture, and entrepreneurship—amplifying the impacts of physical infrastructure improvements and increasing access to job opportunities.

Finally, Saluda County's continued participation in the Western SC Economic Development Partnership will remain a vital strategy for broadening its economic prospects. As a small, rural county, Saluda may not always have the scale or resources to independently attract major employers; however, by aligning with neighboring counties, it gains visibility in statewide and national recruitment efforts. The partnership also positions Saluda to benefit from regional

investments in advanced manufacturing, logistics, and workforce development that may otherwise bypass smaller communities. Strengthening this collaboration, actively promoting the county's available sites, infrastructure upgrades such as the expanded the Commerce Park, and workforce initiatives with Piedmont Technical College, will ensure that Saluda remains competitive while preserving its rural strengths.

Goals and Objectives

The following goals, objectives, and strategies are intended to guide actions over the next decade:

Goal 1: Continue to diversify the economic base in Saluda County to improve resiliency.

- **Objective 1.1:** Actively promote economic development and market the community to strengthen and diversify the local tax base, increase community sustainability, and create jobs.
 - **Strategy 1.1.1:** Maintain state and local economic incentives for new and expanding industry.
 - **Strategy 1.1.2:** Maintain communication with existing businesses and industries to assess and receive input on the local business climate, public services, and potential areas for improvement.
 - **Strategy 1.1.3:** Strengthen economic and workforce development relationships and partnerships among the County, civic organizations, municipalities, educational institutions, service agencies, and the private sector.
 - **Strategy 1.1.4:** Encourage data sharing and the availability of a unified, up-to-date economic data and marketing source for the County.
 - **Strategy 1.1.5:** Continue to leverage State and regional efforts to attract target industries in advanced materials and manufacturing, agribusiness, forestry and wood products, and food processing.
 - **Strategy 1.1.6:** Pursue additional economic opportunities in health care, tourism, retail and cultural markets, and small business development.
 - **Strategy 1.1.7:** Encourage business continuity planning and disaster readiness across all sectors.
- **Objective 1.2:** Support small business development and success.
 - **Strategy 1.2.1:** Continue support of the local Small Business Development Center (Greenwood Area SBDC).
 - **Strategy 1.2.2:** Assist local and small businesses in identifying and establishing business relationships with larger companies that locate within the County.
 - **Strategy 1.2.3:** Assist small business start-up by streamlining local permitting and

licensing processes.

Goal 2: Strengthen Saluda County workforce to support a strong economy.

- **Objective 2.1:** Increase college and career readiness among Saluda County high school graduates
 - **Strategy 2.1.1:** Encourage employer participation in PK-12 career awareness and pathway initiatives and in expanding apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities.
 - **Strategy 2.1.2:** Foster communication on graduate knowledge and skills between school system and employers.
- **Objective 2.2:** Synchronize workforce investment strategies with economic recruitment activities
 - **Strategy 2.2.1:** Coordinate workforce development programs with economic development initiatives to support target industries and address both current and anticipated workforce needs.
 - **Strategy 2.2.2:** Maintain and improve the quality and availability of training and retraining opportunities for area residents, especially displaced workers, to help residents move up the economic ladder through advanced training and higher wages
 - **Strategy 2.2.3:** Maintain communication with existing business and industry through workforce committee to assess and receive input on workforce needs to include skill sets and availability.
- **Objective 2.3:** Increase local employment opportunities to enable more workers to live and work in the County
 - **Strategy 2.3.1:** Prepare Saluda County residents for the careers and occupations of the future, equipping them with the training and education to apply their skills in a broad and diverse economy.
 - **Strategy 2.3.2:** Recruit employers in high growth sectors that offer wages that are higher than the County average.

Goal 3: Provide the physical infrastructure and regulations to support quality economic growth in Saluda County.

- **Objective 3.1:** Ensure and plan for adequate services and capacities at existing industrial parks and potential sites identified with high growth and development probability
 - **Strategy 3.1.1:** Expand Water and sewer service to enable and support future residential, commercial and industrial development

- **Strategy 3.1.2:** Support commercial and industrial employment growth in the municipalities by promoting infill and redevelopment in existing commercial areas to take advantage of existing infrastructure and services that reduce development costs.
- **Strategy 3.1.3:** Ensure the adequacy and completeness of transportation planning and capacities for economic development in the County and the Upper Savannah region.
- **Objective 3.2:** Increase the availability of quality buildings and sites in the County to meet the needs of prospective industries.
 - **Strategy 3.2.1:** Create and implement land use regulations to ensure adequate land and infrastructure is available for industrial and commercial use.
 - **Strategy 3.2.2:** Protect agricultural uses and productive agricultural and forest lands to maintain profitable farms and protect agribusinesses from encroachment through creation of land use regulations.
 - **Strategy 3.2.3:** Create and implement land use plans and regulations with respect to economic growth and employment opportunities.
 - **Strategy 3.2.4:** Work with municipalities to identify and inventory vacant, underutilized, and available commercial and industrial properties throughout the County and prioritize them for redevelopment.

Housing

Housing is more than shelter—it is the foundation of community stability and growth. From single-family homes and apartments to rural homesteads and senior living, the availability and condition of housing directly affect economic development, family well-being, and the county’s attractiveness to new residents. Planning for housing ensures that every household can find a safe and affordable place to call home.

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Housing is a critical component of community well-being and a key factor in Saluda County's long-term growth and sustainability. Housing quality, affordability, and availability directly affect the county's ability to attract and retain residents, support a stable workforce, and provide equitable opportunities for families across income levels. In recent years, housing dynamics have become an increasingly important issue as rural counties across South Carolina experience shifting demographics, rising construction costs, and heightened demand for various housing types.

Saluda County's housing stock reflects its rural character, with a predominance of single-family homes on large lots and a smaller share of multifamily and rental units than urbanized areas. While this traditional pattern supports the county's identity, it also presents challenges in meeting the diverse needs of current and future residents. Affordability is a concern for lower-income households, particularly those affected by higher-than-average poverty rates. At the same time, younger workers and retirees relocating from more urban areas often seek housing options that are not widely available in the county, such as smaller homes, senior-friendly designs, or rental opportunities.

The county's proximity to Lexington, Newberry, and Aiken Counties further shapes its housing market. Some areas, particularly near Lake Murray and along key transportation corridors, have seen increasing residential demand as people seek affordable alternatives to neighboring metropolitan housing markets. This presents both opportunities and challenges: new housing development can expand the tax base and bring investment, but if not carefully planned, it may also strain infrastructure, alter rural landscapes, and impact natural resources.

The Housing Element of this plan provides a framework for understanding Saluda County's current housing conditions, identifying future needs, and setting strategies to ensure that housing supports community goals. By addressing affordability, diversity of housing options, quality standards, and location considerations, the county can create a balanced approach that accommodates growth while maintaining its rural character and quality of life.

Existing Conditions

Saluda County's housing stock reflects its rural character and steady, but limited, residential growth over the past several decades. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the county had approximately 8,900 housing units, most of which are single-family detached homes. Manufactured housing also accounts for a significant share of the stock, particularly in rural areas. Multifamily units remain limited, with very few apartment complexes or townhome developments compared to more urbanized neighboring counties. This composition has provided affordable housing options for some residents but has also limited diversity in the types of housing available.

Homeownership is the predominant form of tenure in Saluda County, with roughly three-quarters of households owning their homes. Rental housing, while making up a smaller share of the market, is concentrated in the Town of Saluda and a few unincorporated communities. Limited rental availability has led to affordability pressures for lower-income households, especially as median rents have increased in recent years. Vacancy rates are somewhat higher than the state average, reflecting both the presence of seasonal or recreational homes around Lake Murray and the challenges of reinvesting in older housing stock in rural areas.

Another important factor is the age of housing in Saluda County. A significant portion of the housing stock was built before 1980, and many homes now need repair or modernization. Older homes may present challenges such as energy inefficiency, outdated plumbing or electrical systems, and inadequate accessibility for seniors or persons with disabilities. While newer construction has occurred in some parts of the county, particularly near Lake Murray, overall housing development has lagged behind regional growth trends.

Affordability remains a concern for many households. Median home values and rents in Saluda County are lower than statewide averages, but so are incomes, leaving a notable share of households cost-burdened. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, more than one-quarter of renters spend over 30% of their income on housing costs. These pressures are especially acute for single-parent households, seniors on fixed incomes, and lower-wage workers. At the same time, new housing demand from commuters and retirees has begun to place upward pressure on land and housing prices in some areas of the county.

These conditions highlight both strengths and challenges in Saluda County's housing market. The county benefits from affordability relative to urbanized neighbors and retains the rural housing character many residents value. However, the limited diversity of housing options, aging housing stock, and affordability pressures for lower-income residents underscore the need for proactive housing strategies to ensure that the county's housing supply meets the needs of all households in the future.

Where We're Headed

The future of housing in Saluda County will be shaped by the interplay between regional growth pressures and the county's own demographic and economic trends. Historical patterns show that while housing development in Saluda has been modest compared to surrounding counties, demand is increasing in certain parts of the county, particularly around Lake Murray and along U.S. 378. These areas are expected to see continued interest from retirees, commuters seeking more affordable housing outside metropolitan areas, and families attracted to rural living with access to nearby job centers. This trend suggests that Saluda may experience a gradual shift from a predominantly agricultural housing landscape toward a more mixed pattern, with suburban-style development emerging in targeted growth areas.

At the same time, much of the county's existing housing stock is aging and in need of reinvestment. Homes built in the 1960s, 1970s, and earlier will continue to require upgrades to remain safe, energy efficient, and accessible. Without reinvestment, portions of the housing stock may decline in quality, leading to increased vacancy or blight in certain areas. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity: by promoting housing rehabilitation programs, energy-efficiency upgrades, and accessibility improvements, Saluda can extend the life of its existing housing while improving affordability and quality of life for residents.

Affordability will remain a central concern for the county's housing future. While Saluda's home prices and rents are lower than many neighboring counties, stagnant wages and higher-than-average poverty levels mean that many residents are still cost-burdened. If regional growth continues to push demand for homes in Saluda, land and housing prices may rise more rapidly, creating additional pressures for lower-income households. Future housing strategies will need to balance the desire to attract new residents with the need to preserve affordability for existing households, particularly through policies that support a wider range of housing types—including smaller single-family homes, rental units, and senior-friendly housing.

Looking ahead, Saluda County's housing future will likely depend on a diversified approach that addresses both growth and preservation. Targeted new development near infrastructure corridors and Lake Murray can help attract new residents and expand the tax base, while reinvestment in existing neighborhoods can improve conditions for long-term residents. Partnerships with state and regional organizations, along with expanded access to funding for housing rehabilitation, workforce housing, and infrastructure improvements, will be essential tools for achieving these goals. By planning proactively, Saluda can ensure that its housing market evolves in a way that supports economic development, protects rural character, and meets the needs of both current and future residents.

Goals and Objectives

The following goals, objectives, and strategies are intended to guide actions over the next decade:

Goal 1: Ensure a safe, adequate, and diverse housing supply to meet the needs of all residents.

- **Objective 1.1:** Increase the diversity of housing types available in Saluda County.
 - **Strategy 1.1.1:** Encourage the development of smaller single-family homes, townhomes, and multifamily units in appropriate areas.
 - **Strategy 1.1.2:** Support the development of senior-friendly and accessible housing to meet the needs of an aging population.
 - **Strategy 1.1.3:** Review zoning and development codes to allow for a broader range of housing options, including accessory dwelling units.

Goal 2: Improve the quality and condition of existing housing.

- **Objective 2.1:** Promote rehabilitation and modernization of aging homes.
 - **Strategy 2.1.1:** Seek state and federal funding to support housing rehabilitation programs for low- and moderate-income households.
 - **Strategy 2.1.2:** Encourage energy-efficiency retrofits to reduce long-term housing costs for residents.
 - **Strategy 2.1.3:** Develop partnerships with nonprofit organizations to provide assistance with home repairs and weatherization.
- **Objective 2.2:** Reduce substandard housing and vacancy rates.
 - **Strategy 2.2.1:** Identify and prioritize reinvestment in areas with clusters of older or vacant homes.
 - **Strategy 2.2.2:** Establish code enforcement and incentive programs to encourage reinvestment and prevent blight.

Goal 3: Preserve housing affordability for current and future residents.

- **Objective 3.1:** Expand opportunities for affordable homeownership and rental housing.
 - **Strategy 3.1.1:** Partner with housing authorities and nonprofits to increase the supply of affordable rental units.
 - **Strategy 3.1.2:** Support first-time homebuyer assistance programs to help residents build wealth through homeownership.
 - **Strategy 3.1.3:** Explore land banking or public-private partnerships to reserve sites for affordable housing development.
- **Objective 3.2:** Protect vulnerable populations from displacement.
 - **Strategy 3.2.1:** Monitor housing costs in growth areas near Lake Murray and major corridors to identify affordability risks.
 - **Strategy 3.2.2:** Encourage mixed-income housing developments that include affordable units.

Goal 4: Guide future housing growth to align with infrastructure and community goals.

- **Objective 4.1:** Focus new housing development in areas with existing infrastructure.
 - **Strategy 4.1.1:** Direct residential growth toward areas served by public water and sewer.
 - **Strategy 4.1.2:** Limit housing development in flood-prone areas and other environmentally sensitive locations.
 - **Strategy 4.1.3:** Promote cluster development that preserves open space while accommodating new housing demand.
- **Objective 4.2:** Balance housing growth with rural character and natural resources.
 - **Strategy 4.2.1:** Encourage conservation subdivisions and rural design standards that protect farmland and forests.
 - **Strategy 4.2.2:** Coordinate housing and land use planning to maintain Saluda County's rural identity.

Transportation

Transportation connects people, places, and opportunities. Roads, bridges, sidewalks, and transit options make it possible to get to work, school, healthcare, and recreation. A safe, reliable, and efficient transportation system is essential for residents, businesses, and visitors alike, supporting both economic growth and daily life in Saluda County.

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Transportation infrastructure is fundamental to the daily life of Saluda County residents and the overall functioning of the local economy. Roads, bridges, and associated facilities provide essential connections between homes, schools, businesses, farms, and neighboring counties. In a largely rural county such as Saluda, where public transit options are limited, residents rely heavily on personal vehicles and a well-maintained roadway system to access jobs, education, healthcare, and other services. Transportation also plays a central role in supporting the county's agricultural economy and growing tourism opportunities, particularly around Lake Murray.

Saluda County's transportation system reflects both its rural character and its regional interdependence. The county is served primarily by state-maintained highways and secondary roads, which link local communities to larger employment and service centers in Lexington, Aiken, Greenwood, and Newberry Counties. While this system provides broad connectivity, challenges remain with road maintenance, bridge conditions, and the ability to accommodate heavier truck traffic associated with agriculture, forestry, and emerging industries. Limited options for alternative modes of transportation—such as public transit, bike lanes, and pedestrian facilities—further reinforce dependence on the automobile.

Looking ahead, transportation planning in Saluda County must balance the preservation of rural character with the need to accommodate targeted growth and economic development. Investments in roadway improvements, safety enhancements, and regional connectivity will be necessary to ensure efficient movement of people and goods. At the same time, opportunities exist to explore multimodal solutions, improve access for underserved populations, and integrate transportation planning with land use, housing, and economic strategies.

The Transportation Element provides an assessment of existing conditions, identifies current and future needs, and outlines strategies to guide investments that will sustain mobility, safety, and economic vitality in Saluda County.

Existing Conditions

Saluda County's transportation system is defined by its rural character and reliance on an extensive network of state-maintained roads. The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) maintains the majority of the county's roadway mileage, while the county itself oversees local roads and bridges. Major transportation corridors, including U.S. Highway 378, U.S. Highway 178, and S.C. Highways 39, 121, and 194, provide critical east–west and north–south connections. These routes link Saluda to Lexington, Greenwood, Newberry, and Aiken Counties, as well as to larger urban centers such as Columbia and Augusta. The condition of these highways is generally adequate, though ongoing maintenance needs are evident, particularly along rural secondary roads and bridges.

Traffic volumes in Saluda County remain relatively low compared to urban counties, reflecting its modest population size. However, certain corridors—particularly U.S. Highway 378 and U.S. Highway 178—experience higher levels of traffic, including heavy trucks moving agricultural and forestry products. This truck traffic places additional strain on roads and bridges not originally designed to carry such loads, leading to ongoing concerns about pavement wear and structural safety. Limited passing opportunities, narrow shoulders, and intersections with limited sight distances also present safety challenges in parts of the county.

Public transportation options are virtually nonexistent within Saluda County. Residents rely almost exclusively on personal vehicles for commuting, shopping, and accessing healthcare and other services. This reliance can create barriers for elderly residents, individuals with disabilities, and low-income households without reliable vehicle access. Regional paratransit and human service transportation providers offer limited services, but they are not sufficient to meet the broader mobility needs of the community. Sidewalks, bike lanes, and pedestrian facilities are also scarce, further limiting alternatives to automobile travel.

Air and rail services are not located within the county but are available regionally. The nearest commercial airports are Columbia Metropolitan Airport and Augusta Regional Airport, both within a one-hour drive. Rail freight access is limited to neighboring counties, with no active freight rail service currently operating in Saluda. While this limits large-scale industrial shipping opportunities, Saluda's location within short driving distance of regional interstates—Interstate 20, Interstate 26, and Interstate 77—provides access to broader markets.

Overall, Saluda County's existing transportation system functions adequately for a rural county but faces ongoing challenges related to road maintenance, freight traffic, limited multimodal options, and accessibility for vulnerable populations. These issues highlight the importance of targeted investment and regional coordination to ensure that transportation continues to meet both current and future needs.

Where We're Heading

The future of transportation in Saluda County will be shaped by both regional growth pressures and the county's commitment to preserving its rural character. While overall population growth is expected to remain modest, targeted areas such as Lake Murray and corridors connecting to Lexington and Newberry Counties will likely see increases in residential and commuter traffic. As these areas develop, roadway improvements will be needed to accommodate higher volumes, reduce congestion at key intersections, and improve safety. Investment in infrastructure that supports these growth nodes will be critical to guiding development in a sustainable and coordinated manner.

Freight movement will continue to play a significant role in Saluda's transportation needs.

Agriculture, forestry, and manufacturing rely heavily on truck traffic, which is expected to increase as

economic development initiatives attract new industry. This will place added strain on rural highways and bridges, many of which were not designed for modern freight loads. Future planning should emphasize strengthening pavement conditions, expanding truck routes, and improving bridge capacity to ensure safe and efficient freight movement. Strategic improvements along U.S. Highway 378 and U.S. Highway 178 will be particularly important for supporting economic growth and regional connectivity.

Expanding transportation options beyond personal vehicles will also become increasingly important. While traditional public transit may not be feasible in a low-density rural county, partnerships with regional transit providers, human service agencies, and nonprofit organizations could help expand paratransit and demand-response services for elderly residents, people with disabilities, and those without access to reliable vehicles. Additionally, investment in sidewalks, trails, and bike lanes in select areas—particularly around schools, parks, and town centers—can improve safety, promote healthy lifestyles, and provide alternative transportation choices.

Technology and resilience will also shape the future of Saluda’s transportation system. As more services, jobs, and educational opportunities depend on reliable internet access, broadband expansion will reduce some travel demand while creating new opportunities for remote work. At the same time, planning for resilience will be essential. Lessons from Hurricane Helene in 2024 highlight the need for redundancy in the transportation network, including safe evacuation routes, reliable bridges, and improved drainage to prevent roadway flooding. Future investments should integrate resilience planning to reduce risks from severe weather and protect critical connections.

Over the next two decades, Saluda County’s transportation priorities will include maintaining and modernizing existing roads, improving freight routes, enhancing safety, and supporting limited multimodal options where feasible. By coordinating with SCDOT, regional planning organizations, and neighboring counties, Saluda can ensure that transportation investments align with broader economic, housing, and community development goals.

Goals and Objectives

The following goals, objectives, and strategies are intended to guide actions over the next decade:

Goal 1: Maintain and improve the county’s roadway system to ensure safe and efficient travel.

- **Objective 1.1:** Prioritize roadway and bridge maintenance.
 - **Strategy 1.1.1:** Work with SCDOT to identify and fund improvements for structurally deficient bridges and aging rural roads.
 - **Strategy 1.1.2:** Develop a local road maintenance plan focused on resurfacing, safety signage, and shoulder improvements.

- **Strategy 1.1.3:** Use traffic and crash data to target high-risk intersections and corridors for safety upgrades.
- **Objective 1.2:** Improve traffic safety across the county.
 - **Strategy 1.2.1:** Add turn lanes, widen shoulders, and improve sight distances where feasible.
 - **Strategy 1.2.2:** Support public education campaigns on rural road safety.
 - **Strategy 1.2.3:** Explore traffic-calming measures in town centers and near schools.

Goal 2: Strengthen regional connectivity to support economic development.

- **Objective 2.1:** Enhance freight mobility and truck routes.
 - **Strategy 2.1.1:** Prioritize upgrades along U.S. 378, U.S. 178, and other major freight corridors.
 - **Strategy 2.1.2:** Coordinate with the Western SC Economic Development Partnership to identify transportation improvements needed for industrial site development.
 - **Strategy 2.1.3:** Pursue state and federal funding to improve freight infrastructure and bridge load capacities.
- **Objective 2.2:** Improve access to regional job centers and markets.
 - **Strategy 2.2.1:** Advocate for improvements to interchanges and connections linking Saluda to I-20 and I-26.
 - **Strategy 2.2.2:** Support regional transportation studies that identify priority corridors for long-term investment.
 - **Strategy 2.2.3:** Promote tourism-related transportation improvements, particularly around Lake Murray.

Goal 3: Expand transportation options to serve vulnerable populations and improve quality of life.

- **Objective 3.1:** Increase mobility for seniors, people with disabilities, and households without reliable vehicles.
 - **Strategy 3.1.1:** Partner with regional paratransit and human service providers to expand demand-response service in Saluda County.
 - **Strategy 3.1.2:** Explore partnerships with nonprofits, churches, and civic organizations to support local transportation needs.
 - **Strategy 3.1.3:** Seek funding for pilot programs connecting rural residents to essential services such as healthcare and education.
- **Objective 3.2:** Promote pedestrian, bicycle, and trail development in appropriate areas.
 - **Strategy 3.2.1:** Develop sidewalks and bike lanes in town centers, near schools, and around parks.
 - **Strategy 3.2.2:** Support multiuse trail development through partnerships with state agencies and private landowners.
 - **Strategy 3.2.3:** Incorporate pedestrian and bicycle facilities into new development planning where feasible.

Goal 4: Build resilience into the county's transportation network.

- **Objective 4.1:** Reduce risks from severe weather and natural disasters.
 - **Strategy 4.1.1:** Identify and improve critical evacuation routes in coordination with regional emergency management agencies.
 - **Strategy 4.1.2:** Prioritize drainage improvements and culvert replacements in flood-prone areas.
 - **Strategy 4.1.3:** Incorporate redundancy into transportation planning to ensure alternative routes are available during emergencies.
- **Objective 4.2:** Integrate resilience into long-term infrastructure investments.
 - **Strategy 4.2.1:** Advocate for state and federal hazard mitigation funding to support resilient road and bridge design.
 - **Strategy 4.2.2:** Include resilience criteria in project evaluation for the county's Capital Improvements Plan.
 - **Strategy 4.2.3:** Leverage lessons learned from **Hurricane Helene (2024)** to strengthen future preparedness.

Land Use

Land use planning shapes how communities grow. It balances development with conservation, ensures compatible uses of property, and supports infrastructure investment. In Saluda County, thoughtful land use planning protects rural landscapes, revitalizes towns, and positions the county for sustainable, long-term growth.

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Land use is the foundation of comprehensive planning, shaping how communities grow, develop, and preserve their unique identity. In Saluda County, land use patterns reflect its strong agricultural heritage, rural character, and small-town community centers. Large areas of farmland, timberland, and open space define much of the county's landscape, while the Town of Saluda and smaller communities serve as focal points for residential, commercial, and civic activities. The county's land use decisions play a critical role in balancing the preservation of its rural economy and natural resources with the need to accommodate future growth and development.

The rural nature of Saluda County presents both opportunities and challenges for land use planning. Agricultural and forestry activities remain the dominant land uses, supporting the local economy and cultural heritage. At the same time, growth pressures—particularly around Lake Murray and along major highway corridors—are creating demand for residential development, recreational facilities, and supporting infrastructure. Without careful planning, this growth could fragment farmland, strain limited infrastructure, and alter the county's traditional rural landscape.

Regional connectivity further influences land use patterns. Proximity to Lexington, Newberry, Aiken, and Greenwood Counties positions Saluda as both a residential alternative to larger urban centers and an area of increasing recreational demand. As nearby counties grow, spillover effects may bring increased residential development, commercial activity, and land conversion pressures to Saluda. Managing these dynamics requires a forward-looking approach that guides growth to appropriate areas while safeguarding the county's agricultural and natural resource base.

The Land Use Element provides the framework for evaluating current land use patterns, identifying areas of opportunity and concern, and establishing policies to guide future development. Through this element, Saluda County seeks to protect its agricultural and rural character, support economic vitality, and ensure that land use decisions align with community values and long-term goals.

Maps are a key component of the Land Use Element, providing a visual framework for understanding current development patterns and guiding future growth. The Existing Land Use Map illustrates how land is used today, while the Future Land Use Map reflects the county's long-term vision for development, conservation, and economic opportunity. Together, these maps support informed decision-making and help ensure that land use changes align with Saluda County's goals and community values.

Land Use Definitions

Forestry/Wildlife Management

Areas primarily used for timber production, conservation, and habitat protection. These lands support sustainable forestry practices, natural resource preservation, and wildlife management, with limited, low-impact development.

Churches/Schools

Properties used for institutional and community purposes, including places of worship, public and private schools, and associated facilities. These uses often serve as community anchors and may include supporting structures such as parking and recreational spaces.

Commercial/Industrial

Areas designated for business, service, and employment-generating uses, including retail, offices, manufacturing, warehousing, and distribution. These uses are typically located along major transportation corridors or within existing community centers to support access and minimize conflicts with residential areas.

Agricultural (AG)

Land used for farming, livestock production, and related agricultural activities. This category also includes associated structures and supports the preservation of large, contiguous tracts of farmland that are vital to the county's economy and rural character.

Residential (RES) – Mixed Density

Areas intended for a variety of housing types, including single-family homes, duplexes, and potentially smaller multi-family developments. These areas are typically located near towns, community hubs, or Lake Murray where infrastructure and services can support higher concentrations of housing.

Residential (RES) – Low Density

Areas characterized by single-family homes on larger lots, often located in rural parts of the county. Development in these areas is generally more dispersed and designed to maintain the county's rural character while accommodating limited residential growth.

Existing Conditions

Saluda County's land use patterns are dominated by agriculture, forestry, and open space, reflecting the county's rural character and longstanding reliance on natural resource-based industries.

According to land cover data and local assessments, the majority of the county's acreage remains in farmland and timber production. These uses not only sustain the local economy but also define the county's cultural identity and landscape. Agricultural operations, ranging from row crops to livestock production, are widely dispersed, while large tracts of managed timberland occupy significant

portions of the county. Together, these uses account for the majority of land cover and continue to anchor Saluda's rural economy.

Residential development in Saluda County is concentrated in and around the Town of Saluda, smaller incorporated communities such as Ridge Spring and Ward, and along major transportation corridors. Growth pressures are most evident near Lake Murray, where lakefront and near-lake residential development has steadily increased over the past several decades. This area has attracted both permanent residents and seasonal homeowners, creating unique land use demands compared to more traditional rural areas of the county. Scattered rural residences are also common outside of municipal limits, but overall residential densities remain low.

Commercial and industrial land uses are relatively limited in Saluda County. The Town of Saluda serves as the primary commercial center, providing retail, services, and civic uses to county residents. Smaller concentrations of commercial activity are located in Ridge Spring, Ward, and Monetta, serving as local hubs for surrounding rural areas. Industrial development is more dispersed, with sites generally located along major highways to accommodate freight access. While Saluda has available industrial land, much of the county remains rural in character with limited large-scale commercial or industrial presence.

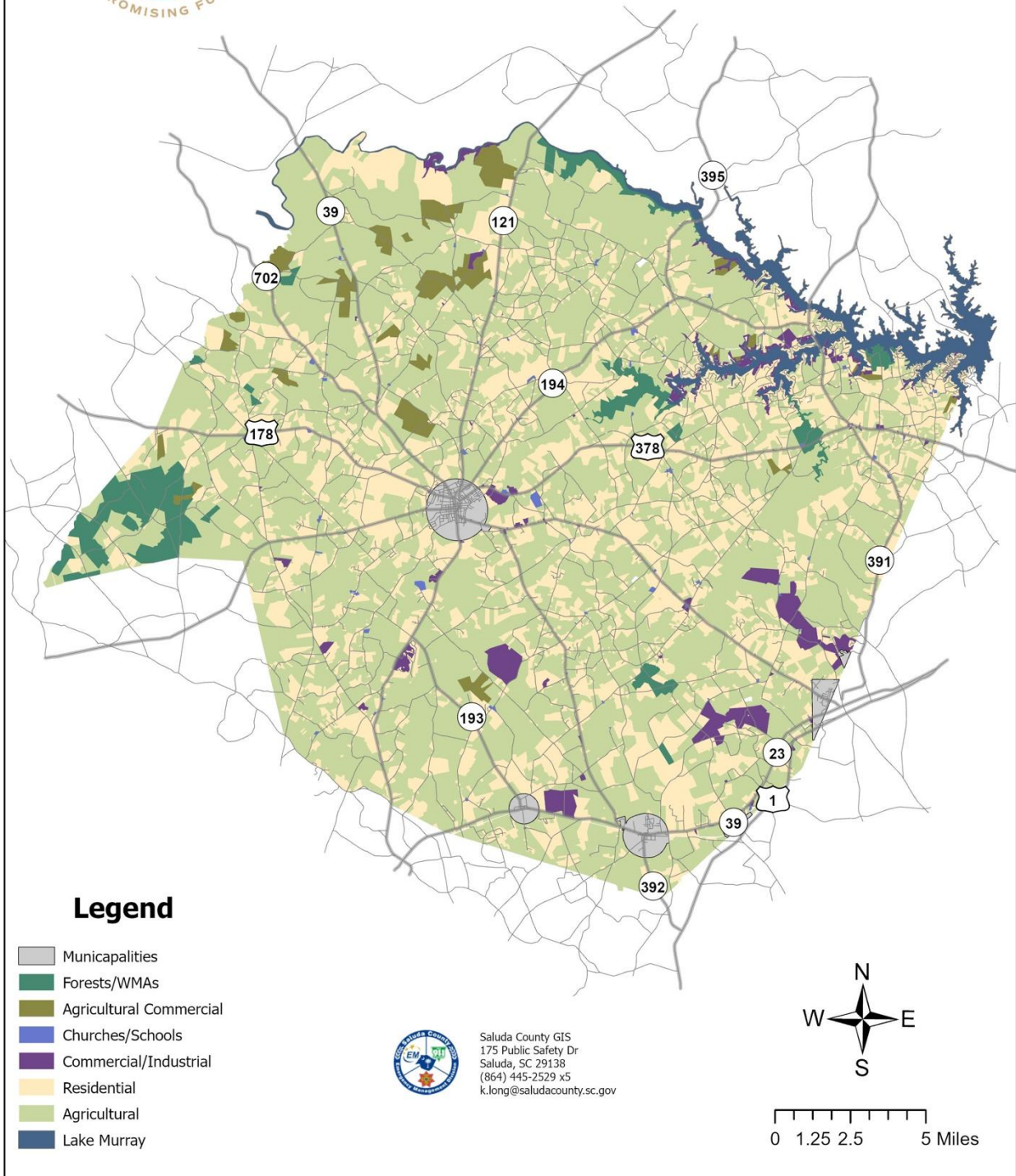
Community facilities, including schools, parks, and government services, are distributed throughout the county to serve its residents. These facilities play a stabilizing role in shaping land use patterns by anchoring development in and around towns and villages. Transportation corridors such as U.S. Highway 378, U.S. Highway 178, and State Highway 121 further influence land use by connecting rural communities to regional centers.

Overall, Saluda County's land use patterns remain heavily shaped by its agricultural and forestry base, its small-town centers, and the growing influence of Lake Murray as a development driver. These existing conditions provide both opportunities and challenges for the future, particularly in balancing growth demands with preservation of the county's rural and agricultural heritage.



SALUDA COUNTY

CURRENT LAND USE



Where We're Heading

The future of land use in Saluda County will be shaped by the county's commitment to preserving its agricultural and rural character while accommodating modest but steady growth. Agriculture and forestry will continue to define much of the county's landscape, providing both economic stability and cultural identity. Protecting these resources from fragmentation is central to the county's long-term vision. At the same time, growth pressures—particularly around Lake Murray, within town limits, and along major highway corridors—will require careful planning to ensure new development is directed to appropriate areas where infrastructure can support it.

Residential development is expected to concentrate in and around the Town of Saluda, Ridge Spring, Ward, and the Lake Murray shoreline. These areas already provide access to community facilities, utilities, and transportation corridors, making them best suited to absorb future growth. In rural parts of the county, scattered residential development will continue, though future policies should encourage clustering and compatibility with surrounding farmland and forests. Lake Murray in particular will remain an area of demand for both permanent and seasonal housing, requiring a balance between development, natural resource protection, and water quality.

Commercial and industrial development opportunities will continue to be closely tied to major transportation routes, including U.S. 378, U.S. 178, and State Highway 121. Directing economic activity to these corridors and to existing towns will support freight access, reinforce community hubs, and reduce land use conflicts. Future commercial activity should strengthen the vitality of small-town centers, while industrial development should focus on strategically located sites with good regional connectivity. Tourism-related opportunities, especially around Lake Murray and in agritourism, are expected to play a larger role in Saluda's economic landscape and should be supported with compatible land use policies.

To better manage these dynamics, Saluda County is considering the adoption of zoning as a planning tool. While the county has historically not had zoning regulations, such measures could provide a framework to guide growth into appropriate areas, protect working lands, and ensure compatible land uses. Any zoning system should reflect the county's rural values and allow flexibility while establishing a stronger foundation for managing growth pressures in the decades ahead.

Resilience and sustainability will remain essential considerations in future land use planning. The impacts of **Hurricane Helene in 2024** underscored the importance of avoiding development in flood-prone areas, protecting natural buffers, and ensuring redundancy in transportation and utility networks. Future policies will emphasize land use strategies that strengthen the county's ability to withstand severe weather while safeguarding water resources, farmland, and community assets.

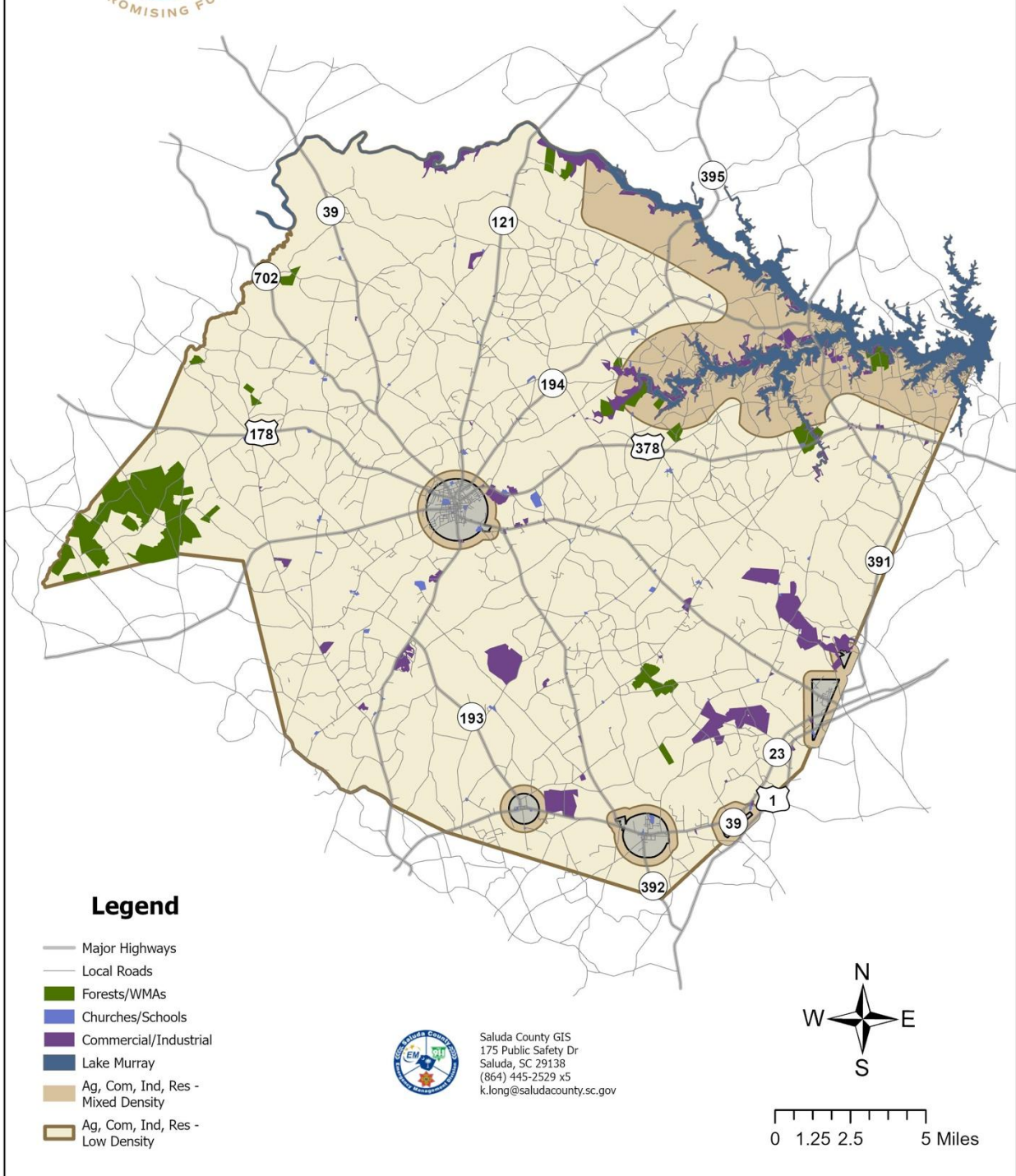
Looking ahead, Saluda County's land use strategy will focus on preserving agriculture and forestry, guiding growth toward areas with existing infrastructure, supporting economic development in

strategic locations, and considering the adoption of land use tools such as zoning where appropriate. By balancing growth with preservation, the county can protect its rural character while preparing for the opportunities and challenges of the future.



SALUDA COUNTY

FUTURE LAND USE



Goals and Objectives

The following goals, objectives, and strategies are intended to guide actions over the next decade:

Goal 1: Preserve and strengthen the county's agricultural and forestry base.

- **Objective 1.1:** Protect prime farmland and timberland from fragmentation and incompatible uses.
 - **Strategy 1.1.1:** Encourage voluntary conservation easements and agricultural preservation programs.
 - **Strategy 1.1.2:** Support clustering of rural residential development to maintain large, contiguous tracts of farmland.
 - **Strategy 1.1.3:** Promote agritourism and value-added agricultural businesses to support farm viability.

Goal 2: Guide residential growth to areas with existing infrastructure and services.

- **Objective 2.1:** Concentrate new housing in and around towns, community hubs, and Lake Murray.
 - **Strategy 2.1.1:** Encourage compact development patterns that strengthen the role of towns as community centers.
 - **Strategy 2.1.2:** Promote policies that protect water quality and recreational access in lakefront areas.
 - **Strategy 2.1.3:** Explore design standards for cluster subdivisions in rural areas to reduce land consumption.

Goal 3: Support economic development through compatible land use planning.

- **Objective 3.1:** Direct commercial and industrial growth to appropriate corridors and sites.
 - **Strategy 3.1.1:** Identify priority industrial and commercial areas along U.S. 378, U.S. 178, and State Highway 121.
 - **Strategy 3.1.2:** Reinforce small-town centers as the primary location for local commercial activity.
 - **Strategy 3.1.3:** Encourage tourism-related land uses, such as agritourism and recreation facilities, in appropriate areas.

Goal 4: Promote resilience and sustainability in land use decisions.

- **Objective 4.1:** Reduce risks from flooding and severe weather.
 - **Strategy 4.1.1:** Limit development in flood-prone areas through planning policies and voluntary agreements.
 - **Strategy 4.1.2:** Protect riparian buffers, wetlands, and natural floodplains as part of the development review process.

- **Strategy 4.1.3:** Incorporate lessons from **Hurricane Helene (2024)** into land use planning for emergency access and infrastructure redundancy.

Goal 5: Strengthen the county's ability to manage land use effectively.

- **Objective 5.1:** Provide clear and consistent policies to guide future growth.
 - **Strategy 5.1.1:** Consider adopting zoning regulations to ensure compatible land uses and provide predictability for property owners and developers.
 - **Strategy 5.1.2:** Explore overlay districts for special areas such as Lake Murray, town centers, or economic development corridors.
 - **Strategy 5.1.3:** Develop a future land use map that reflects community values and provides a basis for decision-making.

Community Facilities

Whether through the courthouse, library, parks, or schools, or through essential services like water and sewer systems, police, fire protection, and solid waste management, these facilities touch every resident. Even if you haven't visited one today, you benefit from the infrastructure and services that keep Saluda County safe, healthy, and connected. Well-planned and well-maintained community facilities are central to supporting growth, enhancing quality of life, and ensuring equitable access for all residents.

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Community facilities are the backbone of local government services, providing the essential infrastructure and public resources that support quality of life, economic development, and long-term sustainability. These facilities include government offices, schools, libraries, emergency services, parks, water and sewer systems, and other public amenities that serve residents on a daily basis. For rural counties like Saluda, the provision and maintenance of community facilities are especially important, as residents often rely on a smaller number of facilities that must serve a wide geographic area. Ensuring that these facilities are efficient, accessible, and adaptable is central to meeting the needs of current and future populations.

Saluda County's community facilities reflect both its rural identity and its regional interdependence. While the county provides a range of local services, such as schools, public safety, and government administration, residents also depend on facilities in neighboring counties for specialized healthcare, higher education, and expanded recreation. This interconnectedness highlights the importance of regional collaboration in maintaining and expanding services while also strengthening Saluda's own community infrastructure.

The county faces both opportunities and challenges in addressing future facility needs. Population stability, limited fiscal resources, and an aging infrastructure system present constraints on expansion, while emerging demands—such as improved broadband, modernized schools, and expanded emergency response capacity—highlight the need for proactive planning. At the same time, growth in areas such as Lake Murray and key highway corridors presents opportunities for targeted facility improvements that can enhance livability and attract new residents and businesses.

The Community Facilities Element of this plan establishes a framework for evaluating the county's existing services and infrastructure, identifying gaps and future needs, and setting strategies to ensure that community facilities continue to support the health, safety, and prosperity of Saluda County.

Existing Conditions

Saluda County provides a range of public facilities and services that support daily life for residents while also serving as the foundation for future growth and development. These facilities include schools, emergency services, water and sewer systems, libraries, parks, and government offices. While the county has made investments in maintaining these services, its rural character, small population base, and limited tax revenue create ongoing challenges for facility expansion and modernization.

Education facilities are among the most important community assets. The Saluda County School District operates several schools, including Saluda Primary School, Saluda Elementary School, Saluda Middle School, and Saluda High School. These facilities provide education to the county's youth and serve as community hubs for activities and events. While school facilities have been maintained,

some buildings are aging and will require reinvestment in the coming years. The county does not have a higher education institution, but residents have access to Piedmont Technical College campuses in nearby counties and universities in Columbia, Greenwood, and Newberry.

Public safety facilities include the Saluda County Sheriff's Office, municipal police services in the Town of Saluda, and seven volunteer fire departments distributed across the county (Mayson, Saluda, Ridge Spring, Old Town, Hollywood, Circle, and Midland). Fire protection relies heavily on volunteers, a strength in terms of community engagement, but also a challenge in sustaining adequate staffing levels. Saluda County EMS is an excellent local resource for emergency medical response, but the absence of a hospital requires residents to travel to neighboring counties for most advanced medical care. This limitation was especially evident during Hurricane Helene in 2024, when medical transport and access to regional facilities became critical components of the county's emergency response.

Water and sewer services are limited in Saluda County. Public water systems serve the Town of Saluda, smaller municipalities, and select rural areas, but many households still rely on private wells and septic systems, particularly in the western half of Saluda County. Public sewer service is similarly concentrated, with most of the county outside municipal boundaries dependent on septic. This lack of widespread utility infrastructure presents challenges for accommodating new growth, particularly near Lake Murray and along major transportation corridors. Expansion of public utilities will be a key factor in determining where future residential and commercial development can be supported, and will be vital for future economic development opportunities.

Other facilities that contribute to quality of life include the Saluda County Library, Saluda County Airport, recreational fields, and community parks. These resources provide important cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities but remain limited in number and scale compared to more urbanized counties. County government offices, located primarily in and around the Town of Saluda, provide administrative and judicial services for residents. Many of these facilities are older and will require modernization or expansion to meet future needs.

Taken together, Saluda County's community facilities provide essential services but also highlight gaps that will need to be addressed in the coming decades. Aging infrastructure, limited healthcare access, and restricted water and sewer coverage remain key challenges. However, strong schools, engaged volunteer emergency services, and regional partnerships provide a foundation for building more resilient and responsive community facilities in the future.

Where We're Headed

The future of community facilities in Saluda County will be shaped by a combination of demographic trends, growth pressures, and the county's fiscal capacity. While the overall population has declined slightly over past decades, targeted areas such as Lake Murray and corridors connecting to Lexington

and Newberry Counties are expected to see continued residential demand. This growth will create localized pressure for expanded water, sewer, public safety, and recreational facilities, even as other parts of the county experience minimal change. Strategic investment in these growth areas will be essential to ensure that facilities can meet demand without placing undue strain on limited county resources.

Education facilities will remain central to the county's future. Maintaining quality schools is vital to retaining young families and supporting workforce development. As school buildings age, reinvestment will be needed to modernize classrooms, expand technology access, and improve safety features. Partnerships with regional higher education institutions, such as Piedmont Technical College and universities in nearby counties, will be increasingly important for expanding post-secondary opportunities without requiring large-scale new facilities within Saluda.

Public safety services will continue to face challenges in staffing and coverage. Volunteer fire departments are expected to experience recruitment and retention pressures as populations age and fewer younger residents are available to serve. Investments in equipment, training, and regional coordination will be critical to sustaining adequate coverage. The lack of a hospital within Saluda County will remain a major limitation, making it imperative to strengthen regional agreements for medical transport, emergency preparedness, and coordination with healthcare providers in neighboring counties. Lessons learned from **Hurricane Helene in 2024** demonstrate the importance of redundancy and collaboration in building resilience for future disasters.

Utility infrastructure will likely become one of the most pressing facility needs. Expansion of public water and sewer will be necessary to accommodate growth near Lake Murray and along major transportation corridors, where private systems are not sufficient to support higher-density development. Without investment in utilities, the county may struggle to guide growth to appropriate areas, risking environmental impacts from over-reliance on septic systems. Similarly, investment in broadband infrastructure will be increasingly important to ensure equitable access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities across the county.

Other community facilities, including parks, libraries, and county government buildings, will also require attention. As growth occurs in certain parts of the county, demand for new recreational spaces and cultural facilities is expected to increase. County offices and service buildings will need modernization to keep pace with technology and service delivery needs. Expanding and upgrading these facilities will provide not only essential services but also enhance the county's attractiveness to new residents and businesses.

Overall, the future of community facilities in Saluda County will depend on careful prioritization of resources and strong regional collaboration. By strategically investing in areas of growth, modernizing aging infrastructure, and building partnerships with neighboring counties and state

agencies, Saluda can ensure that its facilities remain responsive, resilient, and aligned with the county's long-term vision.

Goals and Objectives

The following goals, objectives, and strategies are intended to guide actions over the next decade:

Goal 1: Provide safe, efficient, and accessible community facilities to meet the needs of all residents.

- **Objective 1.1:** Ensure that county facilities remain modern, functional, and well-maintained.
 - **Strategy 1.1.1:** Conduct regular facility assessments to identify maintenance and modernization needs.
 - **Strategy 1.1.2:** Upgrade county offices, courts, and service buildings to support technology use and accessibility.
 - **Strategy 1.1.3:** Explore opportunities for multi-use facilities that serve both government functions and community needs.

Goal 2: Strengthen educational and workforce development facilities.

- **Objective 2.1:** Maintain and enhance the quality of K–12 schools.
 - **Strategy 2.1.1:** Invest in the modernization of school buildings, technology infrastructure, and safety systems.
 - **Strategy 2.1.2:** Partner with regional higher education institutions to expand dual-enrollment and technical training opportunities.
 - **Strategy 2.1.3:** Encourage shared use of school facilities for community events and programs.

Goal 3: Improve public safety and emergency response capacity.

- **Objective 3.1:** Strengthen law enforcement, fire protection, and EMS coverage.
 - **Strategy 3.1.1:** Support recruitment and retention initiatives for volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel.
 - **Strategy 3.1.2:** Expand training and equipment resources for fire and emergency services.
 - **Strategy 3.1.3:** Formalize regional agreements for medical transport and emergency preparedness, given the absence of a local hospital.
- **Objective 3.2:** Enhance resilience to natural disasters and severe weather.
 - **Strategy 3.2.1:** Designate community shelters in schools, churches, and civic facilities.
 - **Strategy 3.2.2:** Ensure that emergency communications systems are reliable and accessible across the county.
 - **Strategy 3.2.3:** Incorporate resilience planning into facility upgrades and new construction.

Goal 4: Expand and modernize utility infrastructure.

- **Objective 4.1:** Improve water and sewer service in targeted growth areas.
 - **Strategy 4.1.1:** Expand public water and sewer systems to support growth near Lake Murray and along key transportation corridors.
 - **Strategy 4.1.2:** Coordinate with municipalities to extend infrastructure where feasible.
 - **Strategy 4.1.3:** Encourage cluster development to maximize utility efficiency and reduce environmental impacts.
- **Objective 4.2:** Strengthen broadband and technology access.
 - **Strategy 4.2.1:** Partner with state and regional broadband initiatives to expand service to underserved rural areas.
 - **Strategy 4.2.2:** Incentivize providers to improve coverage in areas with limited access.
 - **Strategy 4.2.3:** Integrate broadband expansion into economic development and workforce strategies.

Goal 5: Enhance parks, recreation, and cultural facilities.

- **Objective 5.1:** Expand recreational opportunities for residents of all ages.
 - **Strategy 5.1.1:** Invest in new parks, playgrounds, and athletic fields in growth areas.
 - **Strategy 5.1.2:** Improve accessibility and amenities at existing recreational facilities.
 - **Strategy 5.1.3:** Explore partnerships with nonprofits and civic organizations for expanded recreation programming.
- **Objective 5.2:** Strengthen library and cultural services.
 - **Strategy 5.2.1:** Modernize the Saluda County Library to improve technology access and community programming.
 - **Strategy 5.2.2:** Support mobile library and outreach services to rural communities.
 - **Strategy 5.2.3:** Promote cultural facilities and events as part of community identity and quality of life.

Resilience

Resilience means preparing for and adapting to challenges. In Saluda County, resilience is demonstrated in how the community responds to storms, economic shifts, and long-term change. From Hurricane Helene to daily rural problem-solving, resilience is part of our culture. Planning for resilience ensures that the county can withstand hardships and emerge stronger, preserving safety, prosperity, and quality of life.

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Resilience is the capacity of a community to prepare for, withstand, and recover from disruptions while maintaining its essential functions and long-term vitality. In Saluda County, resilience is shaped not only by natural hazards and infrastructure capacity but also by the inherent strengths of a rural community. Rural counties often face disadvantages compared to urban areas, such as limited healthcare facilities, smaller emergency management resources, and fewer redundancies in infrastructure. Yet they also possess forms of resilience less common in urban settings—stronger neighbor-to-neighbor support networks, traditions of self-sufficiency, and an economy closely tied to natural systems. These rural characteristics, combined with regional partnerships, form an important foundation for Saluda County’s resilience planning.

The county’s resilience was tested most recently during Hurricane Helene in 2024, which brought widespread rainfall, flooding, and infrastructure impacts across South Carolina. Severe wind damage, localized flooding, infrastructure damage, and prolonged power outages placed significant strain on residents and emergency services. Community organizations, churches, and neighbors quickly mobilized to provide support, highlighting the county’s ability to respond collectively in times of crisis. Lessons from this event underscored both the vulnerabilities of a rural county with limited facilities and the strengths of a population accustomed to working together in emergencies.

Natural systems remain central to Saluda County’s future resilience. The Saluda River, Little Saluda River, and Lake Murray provide essential water resources and recreation opportunities, but also create vulnerabilities to flooding during extreme weather. Climate variability—especially heavier rainfall events and more frequent severe storms—may increase these risks over time. Because the local economy is closely tied to agriculture and forestry, Saluda’s resilience also depends on the health of its land, soils, and markets. Diversification of economic activity and continued investment in land stewardship will be critical to reducing risk.

The Resilience Element integrates these considerations—natural hazards, infrastructure, economy, housing, and social well-being—into a holistic framework for the future. By building on the strengths of its rural character, strengthening infrastructure, and applying lessons from events like Hurricane Helene, Saluda County can position itself to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of both sudden shocks and long-term changes.

Existing Conditions

Saluda County’s resilience is shaped by the intersection of natural systems, infrastructure capacity, and social and economic conditions. The county is not located along the coast, but it remains vulnerable to several natural hazards, including flooding, severe storms, tornadoes, drought, and wildfires. Floodplains are concentrated along the Saluda River, Little Saluda River, Indian Creek, and

portions of the Lake Murray shoreline, creating localized risks for housing, roads, and agricultural lands. Climate variability has contributed to heavier rainfall events in recent decades, heightening the potential for flash flooding in low-lying and poorly drained areas.

Infrastructure presents both strengths and challenges for resilience in Saluda County. The county does not have a hospital, requiring residents to travel to neighboring counties for critical medical care, which can delay emergency response during major events. Power outages are a recurring issue during severe storms, as demonstrated during **Hurricane Helene in 2024**, when portions of the county experienced extended disruptions in electricity and communication systems. Transportation networks are limited, with only a few major highways and no interstate access, making evacuation and disaster logistics more difficult than in better-connected counties. Broadband and cellular coverage remain inconsistent in some rural areas, limiting communication capacity during emergencies.

Social and economic factors also influence resilience. Higher-than-average poverty rates and lower household incomes make some residents more vulnerable to disaster impacts, particularly when it comes to housing repairs, emergency supplies, and access to transportation. A significant portion of the housing stock is aging, with many homes requiring upgrades to withstand extreme weather events or to improve energy efficiency. At the same time, the county's rural character provides unique resilience assets: strong community ties, reliance on local institutions such as churches and civic groups, and a tradition of self-reliance. During Hurricane Helene, these assets were visible as neighbors shared resources and community groups coordinated food, shelter, and assistance for impacted households.

The Western SC Economic Development Partnership and other regional collaborations also support resilience by linking Saluda County to broader networks of resources and expertise. However, limited local staffing and funding for emergency management present ongoing challenges for preparedness and recovery capacity. Building resilience in Saluda will require a combination of infrastructure investment, social support systems, and hazard mitigation planning that draws both on external partnerships and the strengths of its rural identity.

Where We're Headed

Looking ahead, Saluda County's resilience will be increasingly influenced by changes in climate, demographics, and development pressures. Historical patterns suggest that severe weather events will continue to pose risks, with projections indicating heavier rainfall, more frequent flooding, and periods of drought that threaten both infrastructure and agriculture. As the county's population ages, new challenges will emerge in ensuring that seniors—many of whom live in older homes or rural areas with limited access to services—can safely withstand and recover from disasters. The county's reliance on agriculture and forestry will also remain a source of both strength and vulnerability, as shifts in weather patterns, markets, and land use could disrupt these traditional economic anchors.

Infrastructure resilience will be a critical priority for the future. Without a hospital in the county, access to emergency medical care will continue to rely on regional providers, making transportation networks and coordination with neighboring counties essential during crises. Investment in energy systems, including stronger electrical infrastructure and alternative power sources, will help mitigate extended outages such as those seen during **Hurricane Helene in 2024**. Similarly, improving broadband and cellular coverage in rural areas will enhance communication capacity during emergencies and support long-term community resilience by strengthening connections to education, employment, and healthcare.

The social dimensions of resilience will also shape Saluda's future. High poverty rates and limited household resources mean that a portion of the population will remain particularly vulnerable to disaster impacts unless proactive measures are taken. Expanding access to housing rehabilitation, weatherization, and energy-efficiency programs can help reduce these risks while also lowering long-term costs for residents. At the same time, the county can build upon the inherent resilience of its rural communities—strong social ties, civic institutions, and traditions of self-reliance—by formalizing local networks for disaster preparedness and recovery.

Finally, regional partnerships will continue to play a vital role. By working through the Western SC Economic Development Partnership, neighboring counties, and state and federal agencies, Saluda can access resources, technical assistance, and funding streams that would otherwise be out of reach. These partnerships will be essential for long-term hazard mitigation planning, infrastructure investment, and coordinated emergency response. With careful planning and strategic investments, Saluda County can strengthen its ability to adapt to future risks while preserving the rural character and community values that are central to its resilience.

Goals and Objectives

The following goals, objectives, and strategies are intended to guide actions over the next decade:

Goal 1: Reduce risks from natural hazards and strengthen hazard preparedness.

- **Objective 1.1:** Identify and mitigate flood-prone and hazard-vulnerable areas.
 - **Strategy 1.1.1:** Update and maintain countywide hazard maps and floodplain data.
 - **Strategy 1.1.2:** Limit development in high-risk floodplains and environmentally sensitive areas.
 - **Strategy 1.1.3:** Promote flood-resistant building standards and retrofitting of vulnerable homes.
- **Objective 1.2:** Strengthen community-wide emergency preparedness.
 - **Strategy 1.2.1:** Develop and distribute clear disaster preparedness materials to residents.
 - **Strategy 1.2.2:** Partner with schools, churches, and civic organizations to establish local emergency shelters and support networks.

- **Strategy 1.2.3:** Conduct regular hazard response drills in coordination with state and regional agencies.

Goal 2: Strengthen infrastructure systems to support resilience.

- **Objective 2.1:** Improve energy reliability and emergency response capacity.
 - **Strategy 2.1.1:** Partner with utility providers to harden electrical infrastructure against storm damage.
 - **Strategy 2.1.2:** Encourage the use of backup power systems for critical facilities, schools, and community shelters.
 - **Strategy 2.1.3:** Explore opportunities for renewable energy or microgrid projects that increase local energy independence.
- **Objective 2.2:** Enhance communication and transportation networks.
 - **Strategy 2.2.1:** Expand broadband and cellular coverage, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
 - **Strategy 2.2.2:** Maintain and upgrade roads and bridges critical for emergency access and evacuation routes.
 - **Strategy 2.2.3:** Strengthen partnerships with neighboring counties to ensure medical and emergency transport during disasters.

Goal 3: Reduce social and economic vulnerabilities to disasters.

- **Objective 3.1:** Support vulnerable populations in disaster preparedness and recovery.
 - **Strategy 3.1.1:** Create targeted outreach programs for seniors, low-income households, and residents with disabilities.
 - **Strategy 3.1.2:** Expand access to home rehabilitation, weatherization, and energy-efficiency upgrades.
 - **Strategy 3.1.3:** Develop a countywide volunteer network to provide post-disaster support for at-risk households.
- **Objective 3.2:** Build economic resilience by diversifying industries and supporting local businesses.
 - **Strategy 3.2.1:** Encourage agricultural diversification and sustainable land management practices.
 - **Strategy 3.2.2:** Provide resources and training for small businesses to improve continuity planning.
 - **Strategy 3.2.3:** Leverage regional partnerships to attract resilient industries less vulnerable to market disruptions.

Goal 4: Build on the strengths of Saluda's rural character to enhance long-term resilience.

- **Objective 4.1:** Leverage community networks and civic institutions as resilience assets.
 - **Strategy 4.1.1:** Formalize partnerships with churches, civic clubs, and nonprofits to serve as hubs for disaster response.

- **Strategy 4.1.2:** Promote local food systems and farmers' markets as both economic and resilience strategies.
- **Strategy 4.1.3:** Support community-based training in first aid, emergency response, and resource sharing.
- **Objective 4.2:** Integrate resilience into countywide planning and development decisions.
 - **Strategy 4.2.1:** Incorporate resilience criteria into land use, housing, and infrastructure planning.
 - **Strategy 4.2.2:** Establish a county resilience task force to monitor risks and coordinate cross-sector initiatives.
 - **Strategy 4.2.3:** Regularly update the county's hazard mitigation plan in alignment with state and federal guidance.

Priority Investment

Priority investments are about putting resources where they matter most. By aligning public dollars with community needs—whether in infrastructure, schools, housing, or economic development—the county ensures that limited resources are used wisely. Strategic investment supports long-term growth, improves quality of life, and builds confidence in the future of Saluda County.

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The Priority Investment Element serves as a bridge between Saluda County’s vision for the future and the financial resources required to achieve it. While the comprehensive plan identifies goals and strategies across housing, economic development, natural resources, resilience, and community facilities, the Priority Investment Element provides a framework for directing limited public funds toward the most critical needs. By establishing priorities, the county can ensure that investments in infrastructure, facilities, and services are aligned with long-term growth patterns, community goals, and fiscal realities.

For rural counties such as Saluda, the efficient use of financial resources is especially important. A limited tax base and slower population growth constrain the ability to expand services or undertake large capital projects. At the same time, growth in targeted areas—such as Lake Murray, major transportation corridors, and the Town of Saluda—creates opportunities for strategic investments that can leverage private development, enhance quality of life, and strengthen resilience. Prioritizing investments in these areas ensures that the county maximizes return on public spending while maintaining its rural character and protecting natural resources.

The Priority Investment Element also emphasizes coordination with regional, state, and federal partners. Many of Saluda County’s most significant challenges, such as water and sewer expansion, transportation improvements, broadband access, and healthcare, extend beyond local jurisdictional boundaries. By working collaboratively with municipalities, neighboring counties, and agencies such as SCDOT, SCDHEC, and the Western SC Economic Development Partnership, Saluda can align local priorities with larger funding opportunities. This approach ensures that investments are not only financially feasible but also sustainable and impactful over the long term.

Ultimately, the Priority Investment Element establishes a roadmap for funding and implementation. By aligning financial decisions with the county’s comprehensive planning goals, Saluda County can ensure that its limited resources are used strategically, supporting both immediate needs and long-term community aspirations.

Where We’re Heading

Over the next decade, Saluda County’s approach to investment will focus on making every dollar count, prioritizing projects that deliver the greatest long-term value for residents while reinforcing the county’s rural character and quality of life. Strategic coordination among local, regional, and state partners will ensure that investments in infrastructure, public facilities, and community services are both efficient and impactful.

The county will continue to focus its limited resources in areas where public spending can catalyze broader benefits. Investments in water and sewer expansion, broadband access, and transportation

corridors will be essential to support targeted growth near Lake Murray, the Town of Saluda, and key highway corridors. At the same time, maintaining and upgrading existing infrastructure will remain a top priority to protect public safety, sustain economic activity, and preserve community assets.

Regional collaboration will play an increasingly important role in shaping Saluda's future. By working closely with the Western South Carolina Economic Development Partnership, SCDOT, SCDPH, SCDES, and neighboring counties, Saluda can align its investments with broader funding opportunities and regional priorities. This coordinated approach will help the county secure outside resources, avoid duplication of effort, and strengthen resilience across multiple sectors, from transportation and utilities to emergency preparedness.

Fiscal responsibility will continue to guide all investment decisions. The county will evaluate proposed projects not only for their immediate needs but also for their long-term return on investment, operational sustainability, and alignment with comprehensive plan goals. As opportunities arise through grants, state funding, or public and private partnerships, Saluda County will position itself to leverage these resources toward projects that enhance economic competitiveness, improve quality of life, and safeguard natural and cultural assets.

Ultimately, Saluda's priority investments will be about building confidence in the future, focusing on smart growth, fiscal stewardship, and collaboration. By targeting funds where they will have the most enduring impact, the county can ensure that every investment strengthens the foundation for a resilient, prosperous, and well-connected community.

Goals and Objectives

The following goals, objectives, and strategies are intended to guide actions over the next decade:

Goal 1: Strengthen public safety and emergency response capabilities in Saluda County.

- **Objective 1.1:** Expand law enforcement and fire services to meet growing community needs.
 - **Strategy 1.1.1:** Support the expansion of the Saluda County Sheriff's Office facilities.
 - **Strategy 1.1.2:** Provide an updated facility for the fire department in the Town of Saluda.
 - **Strategy 2.1.3:** Acquire new fire trucks, including two tanker trucks as recommended by the Fire Board.
- **Objective 1.2:** Improve emergency medical services coverage throughout the county.
 - **Strategy 1.2.1:** Provide new EMS substations at the Traffic Circle and in Ridge Spring.

Goal 2: Maintain and improve county infrastructure to enhance service delivery and public safety.

- **Objective 2.1:** Upgrade public facilities to improve accessibility, safety, and functionality.

- **Strategy 2.1.1:** Repave the parking lot at the Department of Social Services/Health Department.
- **Strategy 2.1.2:** Reconfigure the County Recreational Complex on Highway 178 to better serve the community.
- **Strategy 2.1.3:** Demolish the old detention center to allow for future development opportunities.

Goal 3: Expand utility services and support local development projects.

- **Objective 3.1:** Extend essential services to meet current and future community needs.
 - **Strategy 3.1.1:** Support the expansion of SCWSA water and sewer services to the Traffic Circle area.
- **Objective 3.2:** Assist municipalities with priority projects to foster local development.
 - **Strategy 3.2.1:** Work with the Town of Ridge Spring on a locally-identified project that supports community growth and services.