



May 26, 2005

Camden County: Ready for Growth

Recent questions have been raised concerning Camden County's ability to handle the anticipated growth associated with the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) recommendations made by the Department of Defense (DoD) to the BRAC Commission. In addressing the community's capability to accommodate growth, there are several critical factors that should be considered:

- With the establishment of Naval Submarine Base, Kings Bay (NSBKB), the population of Camden County grew from about 10,000 in 1978; to 30,000 in 1990; and over 43,000 in 2000. Most growth is attributable to the arrival of ten Trident submarines (twenty associated crews); two submarine squadron and one submarine group headquarters and support staffs; Trident Refit Facility; Trident Training Facility; Strategic Weapons Facility, Atlantic; a submarine tender; and various supporting commands and detachments.
- Peak manning at NSBKB was in 1995 when a total of 11,692 personnel were assigned. Trident submarine force restructuring resulted in 3 of 10 submarines (six associated crews) being transferred from Kings Bay, GA to Bangor, WA. As a result of this restructuring, the submarine tender departure and other manpower efficiencies, current manning at the Base is less than 8,100. Two other Tridents (four crews) are scheduled to transfer to Bangor by the end of this year. Recommended BRAC actions will not exceed the peak manning of 1995. Base and community capacity can once again support this level of personnel manning.
- Community leaders managed this initial growth, providing a welcoming, safe environment for service members and their families, while maintaining a high quality-of-life and a low cost-of-living for all residents in the County.
- Camden County, developing the necessary infrastructure to support this growth, built a top-notch, award-winning public education system; the Coastal Georgia Community College - Camden Center; and a modern health care facility with inpatient and outpatient services.
- As part of Georgia's coastal zone region, Camden County continues to experience growth and the community has continued the planning and management necessary to ensure quality growth.
- Camden County's proximity and close ties with Nassau and Duval Counties in North Florida (Greater Jacksonville area), and Charlton and Glynn Counties in

*Camden
County:*

*Experienced
in Quality
Growth...*

*Excess
Capacity
Exists...*

*Strong
Community
Leadership...*

*High Quality
of Life...*

*Strong
Military-
Community
Partnership...*

*Planning for
the Future...*

*Ready to
Grow!!*

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Georgia create additional, ample choices for new arrivals at NSBKB desiring to reside outside Camden County.

- DoD BRAC recommendations concerning relocation of activities to NSBKB will give Camden County the opportunity to integrate the Navy's growth at Kings Bay with our own community planning for growth, continuing and expanding the strong partnership that exists between the community and the Naval Base.

Here is a quick glimpse at Camden County's ability and capacity to accommodate growth at NSBKB. Five key community support areas will be assessed for capacity, quality, and near-term planning efforts. The five areas are:

1. Education: Public School System;
2. Education: Post Secondary
3. Housing: Availability and Affordability;
4. Health Services: Hospital and Physician Access; and
5. Transportation.

1. Education: Public School System

Residents of Camden County and NSBKB enjoy high quality educational opportunities. The Public School system consists of nine elementary schools, three of which have received recognition as schools of excellence and one has received the President's National Blue Ribbon Award for Excellence. Additionally there are two middle schools serving grades 6 through 8, a separate ninth grade center, one high school serving grades 10-12, an alternative school, and Coastal Academy, a separate but integrated program addressing mental health needs of students. Instructional facilities are in outstanding condition, with most being built in the last ten years.

Experienced in Quality Growth. The Camden County School System effectively managed a significant expansion during the past 20 years. With the arrival of the Navy in 1978 the student population grew from 2,840 students to 9,667 in 2002, a 240% increase. Anticipated growth associated with the BRAC recommendations will not cause as significant an impact on the school system as this initial expansion.

Strong Leadership. The school system's ability to adapt, change and flourish during times of expansion is evident based on past performance, the extraordinary support of the community and the testimony of Navy personnel. The Board of Education and school leaders met the challenges of rapid growth and developed a system to enrich the lives of both military and civilian families through a robust, comprehensive educational system.

Three of the five Board of Education members who provided direction and leadership throughout this period of unprecedented growth remain in office. Numerous senior school administrators were also in key positions during this transition. The Board of Education and school leadership in Camden County embraced the expansion of Kings Bay in the past and have the experience, insight, acumen and support to do so again.

Quality Educational Experience. While developing a school system to accommodate this dramatic growth, the Board of Education; school administrators, teachers and staff; and the community remained committed to educational excellence.

Each spring every student enrolled in first through eighth grades in Georgia public schools takes the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). The CRCT is based on the state's Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) and designed to assess the knowledge and skills of Georgia's students. Test results are used to diagnose individual strengths and weaknesses and measure the quality of education in school systems. 2004 CRCT results show a third straight year of distinction for Camden County. At every grade level and subject Camden County student scores exceeded the state average, four points higher in social studies, five points higher in science, six points higher in reading and language arts, and eight points higher in mathematics. Preliminary results for the 2005 school year indicate the performance of Camden County students has exceeded previous years.

Planning for the Future. Camden County's elementary capacity totals 5,125 students; middle grades capacity is 2,500; and capacity for students in grades 9-12 is 2,975. Facilities to support these numbers were built to accommodate a strong military presence. Current enrollment data reveals a student population of 9,502 students suggesting a current excess capacity of 1,098. Additionally, there are 28 portable classrooms owned by Camden County Schools that can accommodate between 588 and 784 additional students. New missions for Kings Bay will fill the void left by departing submarines and fully utilize the abundance of quality educational resources provided for students and families.

Planning for military expansion beyond this excess capacity will include dialog with all stakeholders. Additional missions, if reflective of past expansion and current populations, will not present a significant burden to the school system.

An increase of up to 1,000 students of varying ages can be assimilated into the system without incident and still ensure maximum class size requirements are met. Growth between 1,000 and 1,500 students will require use of portable classrooms the school system currently owns. Growth beyond 1,500 students will require expansion of existing facilities or construction of new buildings to meet demand. There are 636 instructional spaces in Camden County Schools; the addition of 1,500 students would increase average class size by 2.3 students.

The school system establishes close and symbiotic relationships with developers as residential communities are planned. In all but a few instances, land donations are the primary source of property for school buildings. Working with community planners and municipalities early to identify areas for potential growth is key to resolving land acquisition issues and focusing on school facility planning. Capital projects and debt borne by the citizens of Camden County to support education during the initial military expansion totaled \$30,651,298. The entire debt has been retired and the property tax assessment to citizens in Camden County for education is less now than in 1995. Students and families in

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Camden County enjoy the many benefits of having every educational dollar spent to support quality instruction rather than debt.

2. Education: Post Secondary

In addition to the on-base Navy College programs offered by Valdosta State University and Brenau University, Coastal Georgia Community College (CGCC) operates a new facility in Kingsland, GA, which offers academic and vocational/technical programs. CGCC is part of the University System of Georgia and is affiliated with the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education.

Students who successfully complete the pre-baccalaureate college transfer program earn Associate of Arts or Science degrees. There is also a career program for students desiring to earn associate degrees or certificates in a technical field.

Partnerships. Additional degree opportunities are provided through a consortium arrangement with Georgia Southern University and Armstrong Atlantic State University which deliver upper division courses leading to baccalaureate degrees and masters degrees in selected programs offered on the Coastal Georgia Community College campus.

The college also offers courses at NSBKB in co-operation with Valdosta State University and offers a Computer Information Technology certificate program at the Camden Center for Kings Bay personnel and dependents. The Camden Center houses an Adult Literacy Program and GED testing site.

CGCC supports “seamless” educational opportunities by collaborating with public school systems in support of the “Tech Prep” and “ACCEL” (formerly Post Secondary Options) programs for area high schools. Tech Prep gives students an opportunity to receive college credit for certain evaluated courses upon enrollment in appropriate post-secondary technical degree and certificate programs. The ACCEL program allows advanced high school students to earn college credits while still enrolled in high school. These credits are held in escrow until the student completes high school and then they may be applied toward a college degree.

Advanced Placement program is also offered at the high school which provides additional opportunities for successful students to earn college credits. Tech Prep, ACCEL and Advanced Placement programs enable students to get a head start on college credits and reduce the total cost of completing a degree or certificate program.

3. Housing: Availability and Affordability

The availability of housing in Camden County is an area that receives much consideration and attention from community leaders. Camden County’s attractiveness has made it a growing community. However, the recent population growth has been accompanied by an

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even larger surge in new housing, with a large number and variety of housing construction initiatives. To ensure an adequate number and balance of housing options the community is beginning a partnership with the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing. This Community Housing Team will work to ensure the strategic plan for affordable housing matches current needs and meets future population trends.

Current Housing Assessment:

- New housing construction over the past several years has averaged 3.75% growth. Compared with a 1.7% population growth, the new housing market is exceeding demand.
- The number of housing units in Camden County was 18,168 in 2002, an increase of 7.1% over the 2000 census.
- Building permit analysis indicates new unit construction continues to grow in excess of 3% per year and the number of new or expanding developments within the county will most likely accelerate the availability of a wide variety of housing.
- The ability of the housing market to absorb new residents is highlighted by an occupancy rate of 86.7%. Housing is available in the community.
- The 2000 census shows the median cost of homeownership is \$872 per month, and rental costs average \$552 per month.

An informal survey of local builders focused on new construction plans for the next two years. At least 164 homes in the price ranges of \$90K to \$120K, and 361 homes in the range of \$121K to \$185K are being planned. In all cases the builders indicated they were ready to double or triple build rates in response to market demands.

Camden County residents live in an area that has developable land, and provides affordable housing for purchase or rent. Housing construction exceeds population growth and thus will ensure a continued surplus of housing for current and prospective residents. Supporting this is a current vacancy rate in excess of 10%.

In 2002 the median sale price home buyers paid in Camden County was \$92,984. This compares with a Georgia average price of \$127,820, and is well within guidelines for affordability. While several new residential developments in the county are raising the median sale price, the broad housing mix ensures homes for all income levels are available.

4. Health Services: Hospital and Physician Access

The local hospital, Southeast Georgia Health System (SGHS) – Camden Campus, is a forty bed hospital that offers inpatient, outpatient, and 24-hour emergency services. An integral part of these services is an impressive scope of diagnostic imaging equipment, a state-of-the-art critical care unit, and expanded Labor, Delivery, Recovery and Postpartum (LDRP) suites. Camden Campus also offers occupational, physical, cardiopulmonary and cardiac

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rehabilitation therapy services. The quality of care is exceptional, as evidenced by a score of 87.39 for overall patient satisfaction, which is above the 84.9 average for all hospitals participating in the Avitar International, patient satisfaction database.

Camden County's proximity to Jacksonville, FL and Brunswick, GA provides additional access to medical services, including a university research hospital, a Mayo clinic, a naval hospital and an outstanding children's hospital. This allows greater selectivity for medical care choices, as well as greater access to specialty care such as psychiatry, orthopedics and neurology.

Hospital Expansion and Renovation. SGHS Camden Campus is expanding and improving services through a new construction and renovation project. The project also upgrades facility infrastructure, including a new central energy plant, and mechanical and electrical service building. The new hospital will be more than twice the current size.

The following departments or services will be expanded:

- Emergency Department
- Surgery Department: Expansion to 4 operating rooms
- Radiology Department: Nuclear Medicine, Ultrasound, Bone Densitometry, MRI (new full-time service), CT Scanning, and Radiography/Fluoroscopy
- Cardiopulmonary Department
- Outpatient Services Department
- 23-Bed Medical-Surgical Unit
- 5-Bed Intensive Care Unit
- Laboratory (relocated from out buildings on campus)
- Pharmacy
- Dietary (expansion of food preparation, serving area and dining area)
- Outpatient Rehabilitative Services: Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy
- Maternity Center with two c-section rooms
- Sleep Management Center (relocated from another site)

The total project is estimated at \$29,415,517, and will be funded by SGHS as part of a \$94,000,000 tax-exempt bond issue. Construction is expected to begin in August 2005 and scheduled to complete in March 2006.

Medical Staff Recruitment. The SGHS – Camden Campus has an ongoing physician recruiting program that covers a variety of specialties, and targets the current and future medical needs in the community. The physician recruitment plan analyzes population growth, demographic changes and physician demand by specialty. This plan is updated annually to reflect medical staff changes and community needs for medical services.

Recruiting efforts have recently focused on primary care including pediatrics, internal medicine, and family practice. In addition, specialty recruitment focused on orthopedics, general surgery, endocrinology and otolaryngology (ear-nose-throat). Current efforts

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include the recruitment of an additional OB/GYN physician. In the past 18 months recruiting efforts have brought numerous physicians to Camden County: Family Practice (3), Internal Medicine & Endocrinology (2), Internal Medicine/Pediatrics (1), Pediatrics (2), General Surgery (1), and ENT (1).

The hospital has also developed a multi-specialty primary care group practice, Southeast Georgia Physician Associates, with three internal medicine physicians and two pediatricians. This group provides an excellent recruitment tool for physicians looking for a group practice opportunity. The health system also works with physicians to ensure recruitment efforts anticipate retirement decisions to facilitate continuity of care.

These efforts help to maintain a vital and growing medical staff in the community.

Military-Community Partnerships. Naval Ambulatory Care Clinic (NACC) is the healthcare facility at NSBKB and is a full-scope outpatient clinic. To provide the best possible health care to members of the Naval Service and other beneficiaries NACC relies on Memorandums of Understanding with the community to provide services outside the clinic's scope. Cases that cannot be treated at NACC are transported to SGHS - Camden Campus or to other hospitals in Jacksonville, FL or Brunswick, GA. Agreements are in place to allow patient transfer, patient education programs, and services. For example, Camden Campus' laboratory provides urgent and time-sensitive services for NACC.

In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding is in place between the Camden Campus and the Trident Refit Facility (TRF) for training hospital staff on handling TRF workers who are injured or have been exposed to radioactive or other hazardous materials.

These agreements demonstrate the excellent working relationship between NSBKB and local healthcare providers.

Planning for the Future. The SGHS prepares an annual Strategic Plan that defines the community need for healthcare services and lists goals and objectives that commit resources to establishing or expanding medical services to meet these needs. Examples of expanding services in the last year include:

- Construction of a full-time MRI facility on the Camden Campus. A new .35 Tesla Open MRI will be available in the summer of 2005.
- Installation of an 8-Slice General Electric CT (Computerized Tomography) Scanner, a significant improvement in diagnostic capabilities.
- Purchase of over \$300,000 of new orthopedic equipment for the operating rooms to support the arrival of the new orthopedic surgeon.
- New echo-cardiology equipment was purchased in 2004.
- A two-bed Sleep Diagnostic Facility was opened in 2004 to meet the growing need for the diagnosis and treatment of sleep disorders.

SGHS continues to meet the growing needs for healthcare services in Camden County by devoting the resources necessary to provide quality health service within our community.

5. Transportation

Camden County and NSBKB are served by an excellent transportation system, with no current capacity problems. Existing infrastructure is capable of handling any foreseeable near-term growth. Community leaders recognize the importance of NSBKB and stand ready to assist the Navy with any transportation improvements necessary to provide safe, adequate, and efficient access to/from the base.

Five roadways serve as primary access routes to/from NSBKB:

- **St. Marys Road** is a four-lane limited access roadway providing access to I-95 south of NSBKB.
- **Kings Bay Road and State Route 40 (SR 40)** provide access to I-95 directly west of NSBKB. This is a four-lane roadway designated as a hurricane evacuation route.
- **Colerain/Laurel Island Parkway**, a two-lane roadway, provides access to I-95 north of NSBKB.
- **SR 40 Spur** is located along NSBKB's western boundary. The roadway is four-lanes from SR 40 to the main gate and two-lanes north of the main gate.
- **Point Peter Road** provides access to the rear gate of NSBKB. It is a local two-lane roadway.

In August, 2004 Camden County implemented a GDOT 5311 funded public transit service through an innovative public-private partnership. Public transit services are available to any Camden resident. Services are also provided outside the county for critical medical treatments such as radiation and chemo-therapy.

Planning for the Future. During the construction of NSBKB in the early 1980's, extensive upgrades to the surface transportation system were completed to accommodate the Base. However, transportation planning is a dynamic, continuous process. To ensure the transportation system continues to meet community needs, a recently approved countywide Comprehensive Transportation Plan identifies additional local operational projects to eliminate congestion and delays at specific locations, and provides a strategic plan to support anticipated growth and development.

Examples of projects to meet future needs include:

- Widening Colerain Road to four lanes.
- Preliminary engineering for a Kingsland by-pass to eliminate the bottleneck at the intersection of SR40 and US 17 in Kingsland. This intersection is in the heart of Kingsland and cannot be improved to provide a 4-lane facility with adequate turn lanes.

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- I-95 is the major north-south transportation corridor running through Camden County. The County has recently received approval of a new \$12 million I-95 interchange at Horse Stamp Church Road to improve access in the Northern part of the County. Many NSBKB personnel reside in this area.
- A proposed \$1.5 million local road improvement program to improve efficiencies in the County's transportation system.

Military-Community Partnerships. With the recent announcement from the BRAC Study recommending additional functions at NSBKB, it is apparent a new major entrance to NSBKB will be necessary. The City of St. Marys and the County stand ready to make any roadway improvements "outside the gate" that may be necessary to accommodate the proposed new entrance and improve existing entrances.

The Navy has often raised safety and security concerns with St. Marys Airport operations adjacent to NSBKB. This is a small airport serving local pilots and small business jets. To resolve this issue, the city of St. Marys conducted an airport relocation study and is now preparing a master plan for a new airport. This new airport represents a \$10-15 million effort, spearheaded by the community, to eliminate the safety and security concerns of the Navy.

The County recognizes the necessity of safe and reliable rail access to NSBKB. The St. Marys Railroad, a short line railroad that ties into the national CSX rail system in Woodbine, GA, currently provides service to the Base. With the recent judicial decision to include the railroad in the bankruptcy proceedings of the Durango paper mill, the County immediately met with the Bankruptcy Referee and GDOT Officials to impress on them the importance of maintaining rail access to NSBKB. To ensure continuity of operations, the County has agreed to take over operations of this railroad if necessary.

6. Additional Information

This report looked at only five areas of community support. Selection of areas discussed was based on their significance during family discussions when considering relocation to an area. They also reflect a community's ability to accommodate growth without detracting from the quality of life enjoyed by all residents or placing an excessive burden on current residents through funding of projects to meet new infrastructure demands.

A Community Resource Study for Camden County, Kingsland, St. Marys and Woodbine, GA was prepared by The Camden Partnership, Inc. this past year. It provides a more detailed study of the community by reviewing a more complete list of community services and resources in much greater detail.

If additional information is desired, please contact The Camden Partnership, Inc.

7. Points of Contact

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