



2023 Community Needs Assessment

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Dorchester County COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2023

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Community Needs Assessment (CNA) is to identify the community development and housing needs of the community, particularly the needs of low- and moderate-income (LMI) persons and the activities that may be undertaken with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, through the adopted citizen participation plan process. The Community Needs Assessment provides a summary overview of community development and housing needs in the locality and examines the special needs of LMI persons.

Parts of Dorchester County are incorporated within the Town of Summerville or the City of North Charleston. Each of those municipalities is an “Entitlement” community, receiving CDBG funding directly from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Projects within those municipalities are not subject to or eligible for consideration under the County’s regional planning grant or state CDBG programs.

I. OUTREACH

This needs assessment was created based on information contained within the Dorchester County Comprehensive Plan, the Dorchester County Economic Development Strategic Plan, existing sources of data, previously held community needs assessment public hearings, residents, and community organizations. As required, a Community Needs Assessment Public Hearing was advertised and held to present the initial CNA draft document. At this hearing, information was presented concerning the CDBG program, including the amount of funds available, funding guidelines, and the range of activities that may be undertaken with CDBG funds. Residents and community organizations were given the opportunity to participate in the process at the Community Needs Assessment Public Hearing held on **April 17, 2023**, and to provide comments via the County website. Comments and suggestions obtained from the public hearing were incorporated into the final community needs assessment document.

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II. COUNTY-WIDE DEMOGRAPHICS

A. Population (2021 Census ACS 5-Year Estimates)

Total Population	160,180	Vulnerable Populations	
White	104,774	Persons Below the Poverty Level	18,880
African American	39,796	Elderly > 62	28,676
Asian	3,134	Female Head of Household	7,628
American Indian/Alaska Native	420	Female Head of Household – Owner	54.8%
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	988	Female Head of Household - Renter	45.2%
Other	3,721	Disabled Persons	20,719
Identified as two or more	7,347		
Hispanic or Latino	9,411		

B. Housing Data (2021 Census ACS 5-Year Estimates)

Total Housing Units – 63,884			
Owner Occupied	42,726	Renter Occupied	15,556
Median Mortgage Payment	\$1,557	Median Rent Payment	\$1,187
Owners paying > 30% of HH Income for Housing	26.4%	Renters paying > 30% of HH Income for Housing *	51.5%
Vacant Units	5,602	* Households considered to be cost burdened	
Substandard Units - # Units Lacking		Households Internet Access	
Complete Plumbing Facilities	65	Some internet **	49,806
Complete Kitchen Facilities	166	No internet	8,476
Telephone Service	510	** majority broadband of any kind	

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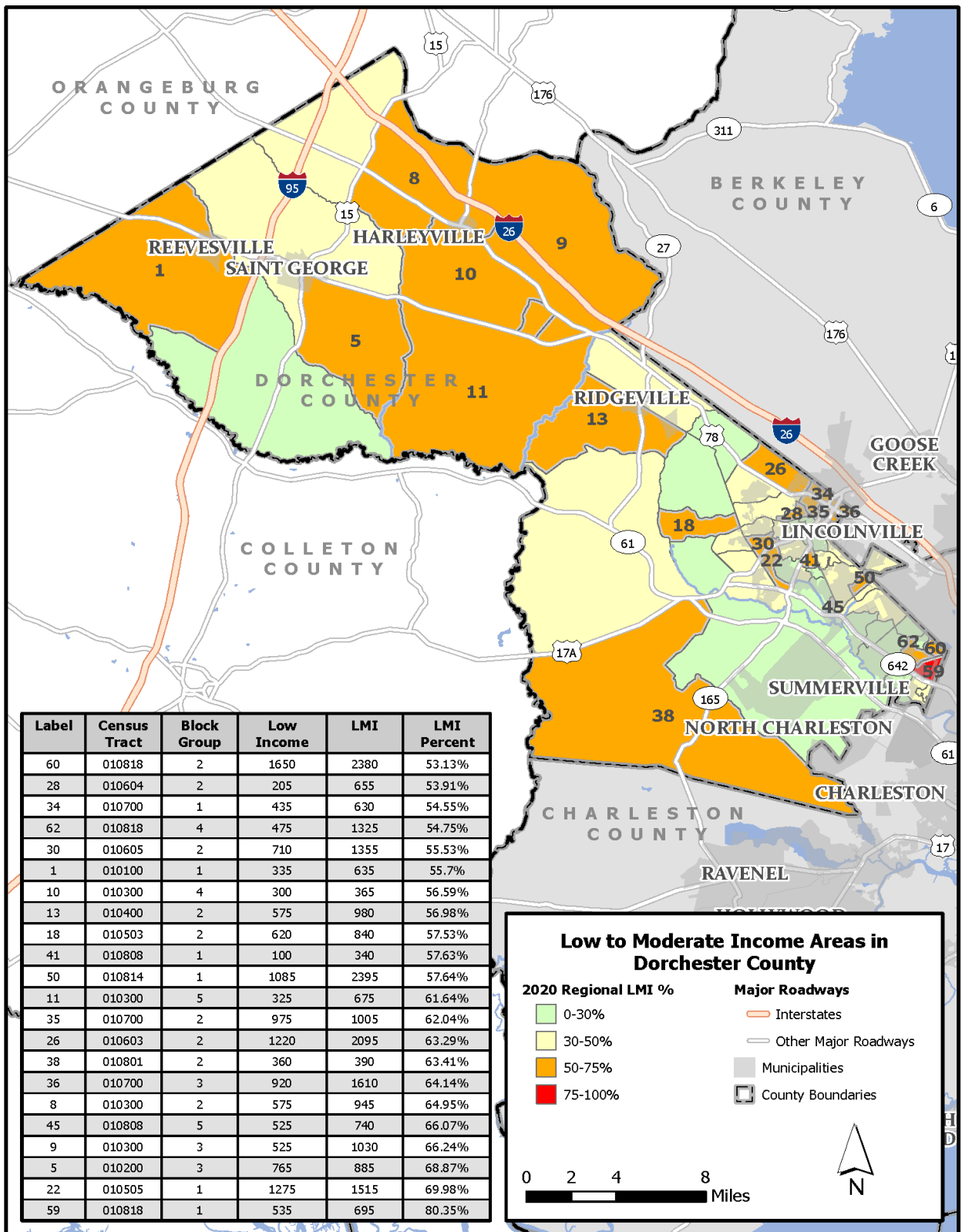
C. Income Data: The following census block groups have been identified as LMI based on 2019 United States Department of Housing and Urban Development Low- to Moderate-Income data for Use in CDBG Grants.

Dorchester County contains urban, suburban as well as rural areas. Parts of Dorchester County are located contiguous to major urban centers such as the City of North Charleston and the Town of Summerville. Conversely, there are areas of upper Dorchester County that are extremely rural and lack the most basic infrastructure and job opportunities. In addition, there are parts of Dorchester County located near the intersection of Dorchester Road and Ashley Phosphate that are more urban in nature and exhibit many of the qualities commonly associated with urban decay. These confluences of conditions result in a broad range of needs for Dorchester County.

While Dorchester County is listed as a “developed county” by the SC Department of Commerce, there are many pockets of poverty within the County as is demonstrated by the Block Group Census Data. Lower-income Census Tract Block Groups are geographically dispersed around the county as shown in the map on the following page.

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IV. COMMUNITY NEEDS

The following are the identified Community Needs related to low and moderate-income families and individuals in Dorchester County.

A. Housing

Community input has indicated there is a growing need for affordable housing in the County. Citizens have voiced their concern for the need for decent affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families, especially in rural areas. Residents at previously held public hearings have specifically expressed concerns regarding the lack of affordable housing for seniors and young adult (first-time) homebuyers. Housing prices in Dorchester County have escalated over the past several years and homeownership is beyond the financial means of not only low- and moderate-income families, but also of those who would normally qualify as having adequate income to achieve homeownership. The following strategies have been defined to promote the development of affordable housing for county residents.

Need: Provide opportunities for all residents to live in quality, affordable housing.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Design progressive financing partnerships and development programs that include an affordable housing component.
2. Promote housing developments that provide safe and decent living environments for low to moderate-income residents.
3. Support developers' proposals to take advantage of affordable housing subsidies including Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and HOME.
4. Coordinate with SC Housing, SC Regional Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, and other service delivery agencies, to identify existing programs or establish new programs that counsel residents on issues limiting homeownership opportunities, such as personal finance, home maintenance, foreclosure prevention, and coordination of resources.
5. Promote affordability through zoning flexibility, technical assistance, and expediting the permit process.
6. Ensure regulations do not preclude or impose burdens on the development of housing for special needs groups.
7. Work with developers to review regulations for flexibility, innovation, and cost burdens.
8. Investigate creating incentives in the Zoning Ordinances to provide a portion of each subdivision as affordable housing.

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9. Ensure all Dorchester County residents have access to information regarding their rights to housing opportunities under the Fair Housing laws of SC.
10. Support the development of affordable housing and diverse housing types.
11. Support the development of affordable housing through the improvement and expansion of infrastructure and facilities.
12. Promote "affordability by design" principles through zoning flexibility, technical assistance, fast-tracking permits, etc.

Need: Ensure that all current and future residents have the opportunity to live in sound, healthy and safe housing.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Require all homes to be built to standard building codes, including requirements for indoor plumbing facilities, and to meet required FEMA regulations.
2. Reduce slum and blight in residential neighborhoods through the demolition of vacant/abandoned buildings and neighborhood cleanups thus encouraging redevelopment in newly available space.
3. Consider providing incentives to provide affordable housing to reduce overcrowding.
4. Evaluate programs administered by housing service providers and needs for the County to work more closely with them to:
 - a. Identify older, "under-plumbed" units needing renovations;
 - b. Develop a central location that people who need help can contact;
 - c. Develop a central location to locate and apply for grants to pay for renovation projects; and
 - d. Provide assistance in the rehabilitation of properties following natural disasters.

B. Infrastructure

Rural locations within Dorchester County, located in the general vicinity of the I-95 corridor and I-26/I-95 interchange, could potentially support growth and development, but these areas do not necessarily have access to either public water or sewer. At previous public meetings, concern was voiced regarding the lack of public water and sewer in rural areas, and the health problems this presents to the citizens. Additionally, US HUD Data indicates that these areas are home to predominately low- and moderate-income residents.

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For these areas to become economically competitive as well as to improve the quality of life for their residents, basic infrastructure is a critical necessity. This need has been recognized by the South Carolina Congressional Delegation which has sought to highlight the potential of the area. Dorchester County participates in the Lake Marion Regional Water System and has secured the funding to extend potable water to rural areas of the county surrounding the towns of St. George, Harleyville, and Ridgeville.

Many sewer lines in urbanized low-income areas of the County have deteriorated and pose a health hazard to the citizens they serve. Broken or deteriorated lines are causing sewage back-ups in certain communities and infestation by vermin. Many of these sewer lines were originally installed by developers of subdivisions and later deeded over to the County by the developers. Over time the County has determined some of these sewer systems were of substandard construction.

Citizens have expressed concerns regarding the need for reliable broadband access throughout the County. Council has indicated that securing access to broadband internet service is a high priority.

Need: The citizens of Dorchester County should have access to clean water for drinking and other household needs.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Support the expansion of existing public water systems to serve rural areas designated for growth, especially those areas that are immediately adjacent to existing systems.
2. Develop and expand water systems in conjunction with other governmental facilities to maximize the efficiency of resources.
3. Seek resources to support and continue the provision of public potable water sources in St. George, Harleyville, and Ridgeville communities.

Need: To provide adequate waste disposal systems in the county to protect the health of its citizens.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Provide assistance upgrading existing malfunctioning wastewater systems to designated areas with imminent health threats.
2. Develop and expand sewer systems in conjunction with other governmental facilities to maximize the efficiency of resources.
3. Coordinate with various agencies working to reduce and eliminate the number of households without complete plumbing and/or appropriate wastewater disposal systems.

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Need: The citizens of Dorchester County will have access to reliable broadband internet services.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Identify areas in the county where high-speed internet access is currently unavailable and/or existing service is unreliable.
2. Identify opportunities to expand and improve internet access to those communities where access is lacking.
3. Coordinate with state and local agencies and broadband providers to develop a plan for providing access to rural areas and seek resources, including CDBG funding, to implement and expand services and/or upgrade existing networks.

C. Public Facilities

The Dorchester County Capital Improvements Program (CIP) currently identifies public facilities such as libraries, emergency medical services (EMS) stations, fire and sheriff stations, jails, and water and sewer projects scheduled to be undertaken within the next five to ten years. Also included in the CIP are the expense timelines and funding sources for these improvements.

Dorchester County has considered the establishment, expansion, or location of community facilities consistent with its land use implementation strategies and objectives and provides for the equitable distribution of community facilities throughout the county.

Dorchester County has considered a variety of recreational activities and facilities that attract new residents and economic development while maintaining compatibility with the county's existing character and environment. This ensures that a variety of recreational activities and facilities are provided to meet the needs of the county's population mix while placing priority on maintaining and upgrading existing facilities and providing new facilities where needed.

Dorchester County's Library system is one of the most active library systems within the state of South Carolina. The library in St. George completed a renovation in 2012 using CDBG funds. The County's library in Summerville needs upgrading to accommodate the number of users and the latest technology.

Need: Adopt policies regarding the establishment, expansion, or location of public community facilities that are consistent with the County's land use policies.

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Implementation Strategies:

1. Continuing to upgrade and expand library facilities per the Library Facilities Master Plan.
2. Create partnerships between the county and the school districts to provide students and area residents with access to more cultural and recreational facilities.
3. Increase online availability of county public services to remove transportation as an obstacle to access.
4. Ensure that essential public services are accessible via transit.
5. Provide for equitable distribution of community facilities throughout the county.
6. Develop community facilities in conjunction with other governmental facilities to maximize the efficiency of resources.
7. Identify sources of funding for the development of each facility.

Need: Provide a variety of recreational activities and facilities that attract new residents and economic development while being compatible with the county's existing character and environment.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Ensure that a variety of recreational activities and facilities are provided to meet the needs of the county's population mix.
2. Place priority on maintaining and upgrading existing facilities and providing new facilities where they are non-existent, particularly in income-disadvantaged communities.
3. Address the need for multi-purpose community centers to serve neighborhoods throughout the County.
4. Continue implementing the 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan, including the completion of construction of current park projects (Davis-Bailey Park in St. George and Ashley River Park in Summerville) and other identified community recreation projects.

D. Public Safety

It is the mission of the Dorchester County Sheriff's Office to improve the quality of life by providing a safe environment for all people within the county. This is done through the collaborative efforts of the Sheriff's office and the community. The Sheriff's Office will maintain a high standard of professional accountability to its

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citizens, always being mindful to be fiscally responsible. The Sheriff's Office will serve all people of Dorchester County with dignity, respect, fairness, and compassion.

Need: The Dorchester County Sheriff's Office will continue to work to improve the quality of life by providing a safe environment for all people within the county.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Ensure the personal and property safety of the residents of Dorchester County.
2. Address the need for additional deputies to better serve and protect residents of the County.
3. Increase law enforcement visibility.
4. Increase citizen participation and neighborhood crime watch in the County to allow residents to learn more about law enforcement and the workings of the Sheriff's Department.
5. Maintain a two-way dialogue between citizens and law enforcement to deter crime and make communities safer.
6. Continue expansion of the water system so that citizens are afforded enhanced fire protection.

E. Public Health

Citizens have previously commented that rural areas of the County need a health facility that is easily accessible to residents. Multiple urgent care centers and one hospital/emergency department are located in the southern end of the county and citizens in rural areas must travel to receive after-hours or emergent care. Reasonable access to quality healthcare at all times of day, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, could certainly benefit the low- to moderate-income residents in rural areas who may not have the means to access care after regular business operating hours.

Need: Provide the citizens of Dorchester County with convenient and timely access to urgent and emergent healthcare options.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Identify areas in the county where there is limited access to urgent care centers and hospital emergency rooms within a reasonable travel distance.
2. Identify opportunities for public/private partnerships to locate and operate an urgent care medical center or similar in a locality that is easily accessible to low- and moderate-income persons and those citizens living in rural areas.
3. Coordinate with local municipalities to identify existing, unused buildings that could be retrofitted to house a medical care facility.

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4. Seek resources, including or leveraging CDBG funding, to help facilitate increasing the availability of health services, including testing, diagnostic, and other medical services at a fixed location.

F. Food Access

Residents in multiple rural towns in the upper ends of Dorchester County (Ridgeville, Harleyville) and the far southwestern end of the County do not have access to grocery stores in their respective communities. For some residents, seasonal roadside stands and convenience stores may be the only accessible means of obtaining fresh food and produce within a several-mile radius. Many of these same locations are also home to predominantly low-to moderate-income persons.

Need: Ensure that the citizens of Dorchester County have access to quality, healthy food.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Identify food deserts – areas with limited access to buy affordable, quality fresh food – within the County. Factors contributing to those areas being designated as food deserts (low- to moderate-income, access to transportation, lack of grocery stores providing fresh produce at reasonable prices, etc.)
2. Partner with existing agencies that operate food pantries and food delivery services to provide new or additional services, and/or expand their distribution area.
3. Establish a regularly occurring food market/farmers market in an area that is currently underserved by large grocery retailers.
4. Incentivize the development of grocery stores in or near underserved neighborhoods where the distance or barriers to healthy food choices is a problem.
5. Ensure that codes and regulations allow for the growing of all kinds of food and promote/require “edible landscaping” and community gardens to serve residents within new master-planned communities and within the County’s parks and open spaces.

G. Economic and Workforce Development

There is a lack of jobs available to people in the western part of the county, largely because of the lack of and/or accessibility of transportation to industry, as well as training, to prepare people for these jobs in this area. This is evidenced by the large percentage of persons in Dorchester County that commute out of the County for

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employment. Increasing the number of jobs would also have a positive effect on mitigating the effects of commuter traffic.

Need: Promote opportunities for labor force training and job creation for LMI persons by ensuring adequate education and training opportunities are provided for the unemployed and underemployed; targeting recruitment and support development of existing industries requiring the occupational skills and education of the existing labor force base; and promoting opportunities to maintain low levels of unemployment and reduce underemployment of County labor force.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Promote opportunities to maintain low levels of unemployment and reduce underemployment of the County's labor force.
2. Target recruitment and support development of existing industries requiring the occupational skills and education of the existing labor force base.
3. Provide adequate education and training opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed.
4. Encourage relationships between employers and post-secondary institutions to connect recent graduates to available jobs.
5. Continue coordination with Trident Technical College on increasing accessibility to programs for residents of Dorchester County.
6. Promote workforce training, mentorships, and apprenticeship programs.
7. Support programs for adult education and job training at all skill levels.
8. Coordinate economic development activities between the towns and cities that make up the region so that there is balance and equity shared between them and so that each city can express its unique attributes and assets.
9. Explore development tax incentives to promote regional competitiveness.
10. Lead or participate in regional economic development planning that creates clarity and reduces duplication and allows the region's strengths to be leveraged.

H. Downtown and Neighborhood Revitalization

In order to encourage and create economic opportunities through job creation and downtown revitalization, Dorchester County needs to promote new or improved availability of infrastructure and services to businesses, and accessibility to jobs for low- and moderate-income persons. In addition, Dorchester County needs to encourage the redevelopment of downtown and neighborhood areas.

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Need: Encourage and create economic opportunities through job creation and downtown revitalization in the County's small towns.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Support complete streets and multimodal public transportation.
2. Promote smart planning initiatives that integrate affordability and accessibility.
3. Create more comprehensive land use and zoning categories that fit the surrounding communities.
4. Address multi-family zoning issues to promote more mixed-use development creating walkable, connected neighborhoods.
5. Promote economic opportunity through new or improved availability of infrastructure and services to small businesses and ensure accessibility thereto for low- and moderate-income persons.
6. Encourage the redevelopment of downtown and neighborhood areas.
7. Reduce slum and blight in residential neighborhoods through the demolition of vacant/abandoned buildings and neighborhood cleanups thus encouraging redevelopment in newly available space.
8. Create specific downtown form-based zoning that is unique to each downtown in the area.

I. Obstacles to Economic Competitiveness

Need: Promote community sustainability by providing new or improved opportunities for economic development and job creation for LMI persons in the County.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Provide the necessary infrastructure to support economic or redevelopment, building on community assets and resources.

V. PRIORITIES AND PLANNED ACTIONS

A. Priority Needs

1. Rural Economic and Workforce Development Opportunities
2. Infrastructure, including Broadband
3. Safe and Affordable Housing
4. Access to Healthcare

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B. Planned Actions to be taken to meet the Priority Needs

1. Focus on Economic Development initiatives that result in increased employment opportunities and job training opportunities for low- and moderate-income residents, particularly those concentrated in upper Dorchester County:
 - a. Recruit and locate industries to create employment opportunities;
 - b. Improve infrastructure (water, sewer, broadband, etc.) to facilitate economic development;
 - c. Improve access to employment training; and
 - d. Continue upgrading and expanding library facilities, community computer access, energy improvements, etc. to offer better services to the residents that are predominately low and moderate-income.
2. Enhance the availability of adequate infrastructure, including broadband, water, and sewer service in low- and moderate-income areas. The specific areas identified for water and sewer service upgrades are as follows:
 - a. Establish water service to the Winding Woods Industrial Park using Lake Marion Water through a connection from Harleyville to the Industrial Park
 - b. Establish water and sewer service for all Interstate Interchanges in Dorchester County
 - c. Establish water and sewer service to Coburn Town Road and Campbell Thicket Road
 - d. Establish water and sewer service to the Givhans Community
 - e. Upgrade the Lower Dorchester WWTP from 8 mgd to 16 mgd
 - f. Establish a Central WWTP with a capacity of 4 mgd
3. Conduct housing-related activities that provide a safe and affordable living environment for low- and moderate-income families. The following areas have been identified as having concentrations of substandard housing:
 - a. The Stratton Community;
 - b. Hudson Town community;
 - c. Clemson Terrace;
 - d. Azalea Community; and
 - e. Pockets within the Knightsville community.

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4. Consider options for the construction and funding of a healthcare facility to serve the County's rural residents, particularly those located in low- to moderate-income areas.

C. Activities for CDBG Funding Consideration and Rationale

The upper portions and far southwestern parts of Dorchester County are predominately LMI and it is hoped that upgrading the water and sewer facilities, as well as broadband access, will increase the chances for expanded economic development activity to serve and support quality of life enhancements for the low- and moderate-income residents. Expanded broadband access will also be a beneficial service to those who find themselves working and schooling from home as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Additionally, the rural areas of Dorchester County have limited to no access to after-hours healthcare. The closest hospital/emergency department/urgent care is located in the southern end of the County, in the Summerville area. Reasonable access to quality healthcare at all times of day, particularly during the pandemic, could certainly benefit the low- to moderate-income residents who may not have the means to access care after regular business operating hours.

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