

II. INVENTORY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

The inventory of existing conditions included a compilation and analysis of existing land use data for the County, an inventory and analysis of community facilities and an examination of existing transportation facilities, utilities and drainage improvements. Previous plans and studies for the County were also reviewed.

A. Existing Land Use Inventory and Analysis

Information on the existing land use in Tunica County was obtained through a land use survey that took place in July 2001. The land use survey was a parcel by parcel examination of the unincorporated portions of the County to determine what land use was taking place on each property. This information was collected and mapped to determine current conditions and development trends and to serve as a basis for establishing the Future Land Use, Community Facilities and Transportation Plans (See Exhibit 2). The area within the corporate boundaries of the Town of Tunica was excluded from the land use survey but was included in the inventory of community facilities because of the number of County buildings and services that were located there.

1. Existing Land Use Inventory

Land uses in Tunica County were divided into the following categories for the land use survey: Agricultural, Residential (single-family, multi-family and manufactured housing), Casino, Office, Commercial, Industrial, Pub-

lic/Semi-Public, Utilities, Parks and Recreation, Vacant and Floodplain. The information gathered in the land use survey is described in the paragraphs below.

a. *Agricultural*

The land uses included in the agricultural classification were crop production, livestock, dairy farms, forestry, catfish farms and undeveloped land under private ownership. Even with the significant commercial investments in the last ten (10) years, agricultural uses still dominate the County. A total of 288,718 acres or 98% of Tunica County was classified as agricultural land. Most of the farmed area is located on ancient Mississippi River floodplain that consists of fine alluvial soils that are highly susceptible to erosion but very fertile.



b. *Residential (Single-family, Multi-family and Manufactured Housing)*

Existing residential development in unincorporated Tunica County consisted mostly of single family detached dwellings. There was a total of 981 acres of single-family residential land use. Multifamily residential development (142 acres), mostly apartment complexes,

was concentrated around the casino area and near the Town of Tunica. Manufactured housing consisted of 464 acres (.15% of the total area), located in trailer parks and on scattered sites throughout the County on one half (.5) acre to one (1) acre lots. A large portion of the manufactured housing in the County was found in the vicinity of Tunica Lake.



c. *Casino*

Casino land use totaled approximately 1,537 acres or 0.5% of the total area. Casino uses were all located within floodplain areas in the northern part of the County. At the present time, there are nine (9) casinos in Tunica County: The Grand Casino, Bally's, Sheraton, Horseshoe, Gold Strike, Fitzgeralds, Sam's Town, Harrah's, and Hollywood. Included in this land use category were the non-gaming facilities associated with each casino, such as restaurants, theaters, hotels and golf courses.

d. *Office*

Office land use in the County was very limited with only 2.8 acres located near the Tunica Arena and Exposition Center.

e. *Commercial*

Commercial use of land other than the casino operations was minimal. It consisted of approximately 300 acres, which was less than .12% of the total land in the County. The commercial areas were primarily located near major intersections in the casino area and along Highway 61 south of the casino area. Most of the existing businesses around the casinos consisted of gas stations, lodging facilities, fast food restaurants and retail outlet shopping. Other businesses such as used car dealerships and specialty shops were found in small sections along Highway 61 near the Town of Tunica. A handful of neighborhood commercial uses were located near existing residential areas.



f. *Industrial*

Industrial land use was limited to thirty-five (35) acres in the County. One (1) site was located in the northern part of the County, one (1) in the southern part of the County and the remainder in the central portion of the County near the Town of Tunica.

g. *Public/Semi-Public*

Land uses in this classification included churches, cemeteries, schools, librar-

ies, fire stations, public parks, Airport property, museums and government facilities. These uses consisted of approximately 1,254 acres or .42% of the total land in the County. They will be described in more detail in the inventory of community facilities.

h. *Utilities*

Land uses in this classification included wireless communication towers, wastewater treatment plants, electric substations, landfills, and water towers. Utilities comprised 742 acres or .25% of the total area.

i. *Vacant*

Vacant land in the County encompassed approximately 494 acres or .16% of the total area. This classification included undeveloped non-agricultural land, vacant lots in subdivisions or land with an unoccupied structure.

j. *Parks*

This classification includes public or private parks and outdoor recreation areas. Park lands consisted of 44.6 acres of land within the County. There are currently eleven (11) parks or recreation areas including Dubbs, Sledge, Austin, White Oak, McConnell, Beatline, Mhoon Landing and Hambrick parks. They will be described in more detail in the inventory of community facilities.

2. Analysis of Existing Land Use

It was important to evaluate the findings of the land use survey to identify imbalances or inefficiencies that ex-

isted under current conditions. Agricultural activity accounted for ninety-eight (98) percent of the land use in the County. The remaining two (2) percent was distributed almost evenly among the remaining land uses.

Residential development was sparse through most of the County with some clustering in unincorporated communities. Most of the single-family residential development was located in agricultural districts. Multi-family residential uses were located in the northern portion of the County or near the Town of Tunica where sewer service was available.

A full range of commercial services is not currently available in Tunica County. Residents must travel to DeSoto County or Memphis to obtain many products and services. Most of the commercial uses were found in the northern portion of the County with the exception of a small number of neighborhood stores in outlying areas.

Land availability in Tunica County is plentiful, but it lends itself somewhat to scattered development that may impact the growth of the County in the future if the same patterns continue.

Recommendations for Development of the Future Land Use Plan

- Residential growth should be steered to areas where the logical extension of utilities can be provided

- Additional neighborhood commercial development should be encouraged
- Strip commercial development should be discouraged
- Casino facilities and uses catering to tourists should be protected from incompatible land uses
- The compatibility of land uses with existing agricultural operations should be considered
- The area east of the Airport is a logical choice for future industrial development
- Additional residential development in the Airport area should be discouraged because of the noise and potential for land use conflicts
- Existing residential uses in the Airport area should be buffered as much as possible from the airfield noise and industrial uses
- Residential development should be kept out of flood-prone areas; encourage low-impact development in these areas

Tunica County has an abundance of land to maintain existing land uses and accommodate future development. The purpose of the Future Land Use Plan (presented in Chapter V) will be to guide this development to the most appropriate areas of the County.

B. Existing Zoning

Zoning is a tool that is used by most communities in the United States to control land use. The existing Zoning Map for Tunica County was examined to gain insight on existing land use patterns. It also served as an indicator of current land use policy in the County. Exhibit 3 (Existing Zoning Map) shows the location and distribution of zoning classifications in the County. The following table lists the acreage of each zoning district in the County.

<u>Existing Zoning</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
A-1 Agricultural	239,871	81.36
R-1 Single Family Residential	934	0.32
R-2 Family Residential	1,688	0.57
R-3 Multifamily Residential	1,604	0.54
M-H Manufactured Housing	160	0.05
C-1 Commerical	178	0.06
C-2 Highway Commercial	4,688	1.59
I-L Light Industrial	205	0.07
PD Planned Development	4,254	1.44
PR Preservation Recreation	41,255	13.99
TOTAL	294,837	100.00

Not surprisingly, the majority of the County (81.4%) is zoned for agricultural use. The Tunica County Zoning Ordinance allows a wide range of uses in its Agricultural zone. As a result, residential and some commercial development has occurred in agricultural areas, as can be seen on the land use survey map. The land use survey map also shows that 98% of the land in Tunica County is used for agricultural purposes. This indicates that agricultural uses are taking place in other zoning districts. The second highest percentage was for Preservation Recreation zoning (14.0%). Unlike the

name suggests, casino uses are allowed within these zoning districts. Highway Commercial and Planned Development zoning districts each make up approximately 1.5% of the total. The remaining zoning classifications each comprise less than one (1) percent of the total.

C. Inventory and Analysis of Existing Community Facilities

The inventory of existing community facilities was compiled with information from the land use survey, the use of maps and other records and conversations with community service providers.

1. Inventory of Existing Community Facilities

Community facilities included in the survey were educational facilities, libraries, tourism-related facilities, public parks and recreational facilities, public safety facilities, government services and health services. The locations of community facilities in Tunica County are shown in Exhibit 4.

a. Educational Facilities

Six (6) public schools and one (1) private school are located in Tunica County. The schools have a total of 2,057 students and 110 faculty members. Primary and secondary schools in Tunica County offer everything from traditional curriculum to vocational-technical classes. According to the Convention and Visitors Bureau, Tunica County invests more money per pupil than any other school district in the State of Mississippi.

Preschools

- Tunica County Elementary
- ICS Head Start

Elementary Schools

- Dundee Elementary
- Hambrick Elementary
- Tunica County Elementary
- Tunica Institute of Learning (private school)

Secondary Schools

- Rosa Fort Middle School
- Rosa Fort High School
- Tunica Institute of Learning
- Tunica County Vo-Tech



b. Tourism-related facilities

A substantial amount of County resources have been invested over the last ten (10) years on facilities to promote tourism and cater to the non-resident visitor base.

Tunica County Visitors Center

The Tunica County Visitors Center is located on Highway 61 in the northern portion of the County near the casinos. This relatively new facility houses the Convention and Visitors Bureau staff and offers a wide variety of materials on lodging, gaming, special events and attractions to the traveling public.

Paul Battle Jr. Arena and Exposition Center

The Arena and Exposition Center is a multi-purpose facility on a 204-acre site on Highway 61 just north of the Town of Tunica. It is designed for a wide range of events such as rodeos, concerts, banquets and horse shows. It is touted as "Mississippi's largest indoor arena" with a 48,000 square foot arena floor and a total area of 100,000 square feet. The arena has a seating capacity of 6,608. A 100,000 square foot pavilion adjoins the arena by covered walkway, containing 366 portable stalls, livestock washing areas and an outdoor riding area. The arena grounds contain sixty-six (66) RV parking spaces.



Tunica County Museum

Construction of the Tunica County Museum was completed in the Summer of 2001. It is located on the same site as the Battle Arena and is visible from Highway 61. The museum offers a variety of local artifacts with special emphasis on the history and agriculture of Tunica County.

River Front Park (under construction)

The River Front Park will offer a unique location for visitors and residents to enjoy the Mississippi River. The 168-acre site is located adjacent to Fitzgerald's Casino in the Robinsonville area. It will include a climate-controlled observation deck, marina,

nature trails, visitor center, aquarium, gift shop and river museum. There will also be docking facilities to accommodate large excursion boats.

Tunica County Airport Expansion (under construction)

The Tunica County Airport is located on Beatline Road, approximately one mile east of Highway 61, approximately ten (10) miles from the casino area. Funding for the \$40 million expansion project was provided by the Tunica County Government, Federal Aviation Administration, Mississippi Department of Transportation and other grants.



The runway at the new facility will be expanded to 5,500 feet by 2003 and to 7,000 feet by 2005, making it capable of landing 727s and 737s. After the airfield is completed, a passenger terminal will be built so that the Airport can accommodate (and attract) regularly scheduled commercial passenger flights. According to the Environmental Assessment and FONSI (Finding of no Significant Impact) for the Tunica Airport (prepared by Neel-Schaffer, Inc. with PBS&J, 2000), the Airport expansion will require the closure of Beat Line Road. Traffic in the area will be diverted to Josephine Road.

c. Public Safety Facilities

Included in this classification are facilities that are used for fire or police protection.

- There is one (1) County fire station in Tunica County located on Casino Strip Boulevard.
- The Tunica County Sheriff's Department is located in the Town of Tunica and supplies police protection for the County. (The Town has its own Police Department).
- The Mississippi Highway Patrol monitors activity on U.S. Highway 61 and State Routes 3 and 4 but does not have a station in Tunica County.
- The Emergency Management Office is located in the County Building on School Street in the Town of Tunica. The Emergency Management team responds to flood events, earthquakes and other natural or manmade disasters. The Emergency Management Office also conducts education and awareness programs to prepare citizens for emergency situations.

d. Parks and Recreational Facilities

There are currently eleven (11) park facilities maintained by Tunica County. Each park offers different opportunities for recreational activity. Also located in the County is Tunica Lake, which is

maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Austin Park

Location: east of the levee at the end of Austin Road

Facilities: basketball court, picnic area, playground area

Beatline Park

Location: north side of Beatline Road, east of Highway 61

Facilities: lighted ballfield with covered dugouts, basketball court, picnic area, playground area

Dubbs Park

Location: south side of 400 Road, east of Dubbs Road

Facilities: single-goal basketball court with bleachers, picnic area, playground area

Hambrick Park

Location: south side of Hambrick Road, east of Highway 61

Facilities: single-goal basketball court, walking track, picnic area, playground area

McConnell Park (also called Sunrise Park)

Location: East of Highway 61 and south of Beatline Road at the end of Cotton Road

Facilities: single-goal basketball court, picnic area, playground area

Mhoon Landing Park

Location: west of the levee at the end of Mhoon Landing Parkway

Facilities: picnic shelters, walking track with benches, restrooms, view of the Mississippi River

North Park

Location: within the North Subdivision, west of Highway 61

Facilities: Olympic size swimming pool, single-goal basketball court, walking track, playground, rest area

Old Sub Park

Location: Union Street east of Old Highway 61

Facilities: playground, rest area

Sledge Park

Location: southeast corner of Old Highway 61 South and Crenshaw Road

Facilities: single-goal basketball court, playground, picnic area with shelter, rest area

Verner Park

Location: Verner Road east of Highway 61

Facilities: Picnic pavilion with tables and grills, playground areas, walking track, basketball court and parking area

White Oak Park

Location: east of White Oak Road and north of Highway 4 in the White Oak Subdivision

Facilities: lighted ballfield, single-goal basketball court, walking track, playground, rest area

Newly constructed: A 16,000 square foot community center with a basketball court, kitchen area, multi-purpose rooms, reception area and a small library.

G.W. Henderson Recreation Complex

The G.W. Henderson Senior Recreation Center and Sports Complex was constructed in 2000 on a 33-acre site in conjunction with the Battle Arena

and Exposition Center. The recreation center includes a full-sized gymnasium with meeting rooms and provides offices for the Tunica County Parks and Recreation Department. Adjacent to the recreation center, a Health and Wellness Pavilion was constructed in 2001 to serve the exercise and physical training needs of the community.



It contains 28,000 square feet of floor area and includes two racquetball courts, a 1/8th mile walking track and a fitness area with various types of aerobic and exercise equipment. Physical assessment counseling is provided by certified fitness trainers through Methodist LeBonheur Healthcare. A four (4) field ball park and two tennis courts are also part of the recreation complex.

Tunica Lake

Tunica Lake (also known as “the Cut-off”) is located approximately five (5) miles west of downtown Tunica. It is a 2,500-acre oxbow lake formed in 1942 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for flood control and navigation. The lake reportedly has some of the best fishing in the area with two (2) bait shops, three (3) fishing camps and a good variety of species for pleasure or sport fishing. Tunica Lake also provides access to the Mississippi River.



In the Fall of 2001, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) completed a project to restore the water level of Tunica Lake. According to information from the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee (LMRCC), the problem with the lake stemmed from the degradation of a chute at the downstream end that drained to the Mississippi River. Over time, the elevation of the bottom of the chute dropped eleven (11) feet, which caused more water to drain into the river. The solution involved the construction of a double-notched weir across the chute to control the flow of water and to maintain optimum levels for fishing and access to the River.

e. *Court House*

The Tunica County Courthouse is located at 1300 School Street within the Town of Tunica. The offices of the Chancery Clerk, Circuit Clerk, Tax Assessor, Court Clerk and Court Judges are located in this facility.

f. *Health Services*

- Methodist Care Health Center Highway 61 N
- Tunica County Health Dept Highway 61 S

g. *Libraries*

Robert C. Irwin Library
1285 Kenny Hill Dr

h. *Wastewater Treatment Plants and Pumping Stations*

- Station #1 – Fitzgerald’s Blvd.
- Station #2 – Casino Strip Resort Blvd.
- Levee Board Pumping Station – Saunder’s Drive

i. *Water Service*

Exhibits 5 and 6 show the location of water lines and the water service areas in Tunica County. Available water service is distributed throughout the County, with some pockets in the central portion and a few small areas south of Highway 304 without service.

2. Analysis of Existing Community Facilities

According to information from Tunica County, the additional funding provided by the casino operations over the last ten (10) years led to “an abundance of enhancements,” including highway construction and road improvements throughout the County, two (2) new utility districts, increased law enforcement and fire protection budgets, new school construction and improvements to existing schools and construction of a variety of other public facilities. It has been the goal of Tunica County to “invest the . . . tax revenues in improving the quality of life of our citizens and to build public facilities which generate revenue and stimulate economic growth.” Exhibit 7

shows the allocation of gaming tax revenue by the County from 1992-2001.

Exhibit 7. County Allocation of Gaming Revenue 1992-2001	
Allocation Area	Funding
Education	\$30,000,000
Water & Sewer Improvements	\$16,500,000
Youth & Family Recreation	\$7,000,000
Law Enforcement & Fire Protection	\$6,000,000
Housing Rehabilitation & Support Services	\$3,000,000
New Arena & Exposition Center	\$29,000,000
History Museum	\$2,000,000
Library Expansion	\$1,500,000
Tunica Lake Restoration	\$1,600,000
River Park Landing & Museum	\$20,000,000
Roadway Improvements	\$50,000,000
Public Golf & Tennis Facility	\$12,000,000
Airport Expansion	\$12,000,000

Prior to the existence of the casinos, the tax base in Tunica County consisted almost entirely of agricultural properties that generated limited amounts of revenue for the County to use to provide services to its citizens. Gaming revenue has greatly enhanced the ability of the County to provide the necessary public facilities and services. However, the distribution of the population in the County makes the siting of these facilities a difficult task.

D. Inventory and Analysis of Existing Transportation Facilities

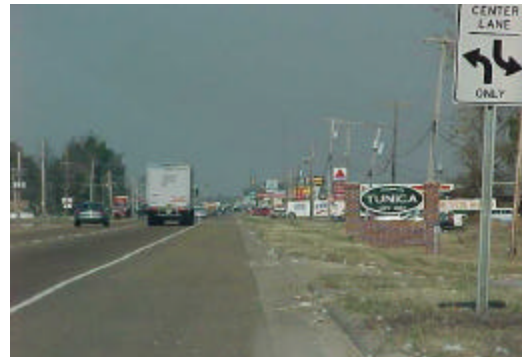
The inventory and analysis of existing transportation facilities focused on public roadways in the County. Other transportation facilities such as railways, sidewalks and bicycle trails are discussed with the Future Transportation Plan in Chapter V.

1. Inventory of Existing Transportation Facilities

The inventory of existing transportation facilities included an examination of existing roadways and traffic counts.

a. Roadways

U.S. Highway 61 is a four (4) lane divided highway. It runs the length of Tunica County in a north-south direction, dividing the County almost evenly in half. The only signalized intersections along Highway 61 are in the northern section of the County at the access roads to the casinos and in or near the Town of Tunica (See Exhibit 8).



Old Highway 61, a two (2) lane roadway running parallel to U.S. Highway 61 provides an alternate north-south route through the County and is used mainly by local traffic. Perry Road in the northwestern portion of the County is also used a local route to the casino area.



State Highway 3, a two (2) lane highway in the northeastern portion of the County also runs in a north-south direction. It intersects with State Highway 304 from DeSoto County (the Hernando exit from Interstate 55) and eventually merges with State Highway 4 as it continues eastward into Tate County.

State Highway 4 is a two (2) lane highway than runs in an east-west direction from Tate County to Highway 61. The roadway continues west of Highway 61 without a highway designation.



Mhoon Landing Parkway extends westward from Highway 61 to Mhoon Landing (location of the first Tunica casinos). It was completed not long before casino operations shifted to the Robinsonville area. It is a four (4) lane road in excellent condition that enhances the potential for redevelopment of the Mhoon Landing area.

Interstate 69 has not yet been constructed in Tunica County but was included in the inventory of facilities because of its potential significance to the roadway system in the County. According to information from the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT), Interstate 69, when completed, will be a 1,600 mile continuous national highway from the Michigan/Canada border to the Texas/Mexico border. It is being built to support the movement of goods and materials between Canada, Mexico and the United States. It will run through Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas. Exhibit 9 shows the currently proposed Interstate 69 corridors through Tunica County.

In the last ten (10) years, a substantial amount of money (\$50 million) from casino tax revenue has been dedicated to road improvements. The result is that there are very few unpaved or unmarked roads left in the County, even in the most remote areas.

b. Traffic Counts

Information on traffic counts in Tunica County was obtained from MDOT, Southern Traffic Services and from a traffic study conducted by Reaves Sweeney Marcom in 2001.

Exhibits 10a and 10b provide average daily traffic count data for Tunica County in map and table form. As expected, the highest average daily counts were on U.S. Highway 61 in the northern portion of the County. The highest numbers were recorded in the segment of Highway 61 between

the County line and Arkabutla Dam Road (29,000 ADT). The next highest (17,000 ADT) was recorded between Prichard Road and Beat Line Road. The numbers drop significantly on Highway 61 south of the casino access points.

Average daily trips on roads outside of the casino area ranged from less than one hundred (100) trips per day to around 2,500 trips per day.

Traffic counts for the casino area were provided by Southern Traffic Services, Inc., for the week of September 20, 2000. The data provides a "snapshot" of the travel patterns in northern Tunica County.

c. Railway System

Tunica County is not currently served by Amtrak service. Railways in Tunica County are used only for the transportation of freight.

2. Analysis of Existing Transportation Facilities

At the present time, the transportation network in Tunica County consists mainly of the roadway system. This is expected to expand over the next twenty (20) years after the Airport and other proposed improvements are completed.

Access, circulation, visibility and road conditions are good throughout most of the County. Better circulation between the casinos would be beneficial, as would improving the transportation linkages between the casinos and other tourist activity centers. Except for Highway 61, very low volumes of

traffic travel on Tunica County streets. Posted speed limits are generally appropriate for the width of the roadway and the volume of traffic on them. There were some safety concerns associated with the timing of the traffic signals and the high speed limit (65 m.p.h.) on Highway 61 in the casino area in the northern portion of the County. In the Summer of 2002, the speed limit on Highway 61 was reduced to 60 m.p.h. at the approaches to the intersections in the casino area.

Road circulation in the Airport area will be significant for future development. Long and short-range road and rail improvements are proposed on the Transportation Plan near the Airport to attract industry and commercial uses.

E. Environmental Conditions

Existing environmental conditions in Tunica County are shown in Exhibit 11. The primary environmental concerns are floodplain and low-lying areas. Already in the County there are problems with existing development in flood-prone areas, particularly at the Cutoff and the Vernor Road area.



The identification of flood hazard areas will be important for the development of the Future Land Use Plan. It is hoped that lives and property can

be protected by controlling future development in those areas.

Also shown on the Environmental Conditions Map are the projected noise contours for the airfield of the Tunica Airport. The noise contours were included as a part of the inventory of existing conditions because they are significant in relation to future development plans for the Airport area. The level of noise will have an impact on the land uses that are selected for that area.

F. Review of Previous Plans and Studies

Numerous planning documents and feasibility studies have been generated for Tunica County. It was useful during the process of the Comprehensive Plan to examine these documents for context, previous goals and objectives and to determine what activities or projects had taken place or were underway.

1. North Tunica County Plan (Prepared by Mauldin Parnell, Inc., 1995)

The purpose of the North Tunica County Plan was to “better adapt the existing land use controls to the incredible gaming impact that Tunica has experienced” and to provide landowners, developers and County officials “a vehicle by which to better promote and coordinate development.”

The North Tunica County Plan recommended areas for commercial use in a wide corridor along Highway 61 from the northern county line to

Hambrick Road, with extensions along Commerce Landing Drive and Fitzgerald’s Boulevard west of Highway 61 and along Highway 304 east of Highway 61. Low-density residential uses were planned for the area east of Highway 61 between Highway 304, Highway 3 and Arkabutla Dam Road. Areas for multi-family residential and mixed use were proposed along the Highway 61 corridor south of the proposed commercial area. An oval motor sports track complex was proposed in the area east of Highway 61 and north of Vernor Road. Proposed locations for a welcome center, two golf courses, public facilities and a family entertainment center were also shown on the Plan.

The 1995 Plan for North Tunica County is relevant to the 2002 Comprehensive Plan because it introduced the idea of treating the northern portion of the County as a distinct area with different needs. It identified projects and initiatives related to the promotion of gaming activities and tourism. In many ways it laid the groundwork for the development of the Resort Area that will be described in a later chapter of the Comprehensive Plan.

2. Housing Development Strategy for Tunica County (Prepared by Henry T. Lawson & Associates, November 15, 1996)

The purpose of the housing study was to determine the potential for housing opportunities in Tunica County, to identify and examine some of the barriers to housing production and to make recommendations to overcome

the identified barriers. It was intended to promote a better living environment for the existing County residents and to actively pursue housing opportunities for future residents. An important component of the study was the series of public meetings with Tunica residents and other “stakeholders” in the local housing market. The key findings and recommendations of the study are listed below.

- Water and sewer capacity within the County needs to be expanded to promote residential, commercial and industrial growth *[Most of the County has access to water service; funds have been allocated in the County budget for sewer improvements to 4 areas of the County]*
- The quality of the street system in existing subdivisions should be evaluated. Sidewalks and drainage improvements are needed in many locations *[Funds for sidewalk improvements are also in the budget; a drainage ordinance was recently passed and is being implemented by the County]*
- The school system in Tunica County, described as segregated in the housing study, was viewed as a major barrier to attracting new households. The public school system has a poor achievement record on standardized tests. The private schools perform better on tests but are economically out of reach for many of the casino employees with families *[Recent reports indicate improvements in the Tunica County public schools]*
- Other perceived barriers to residential growth included the lack of shopping opportunities for everyday items and the lack of leisure, recreational and entertainment opportunities *[These conditions still exist in the County]*
- Lack of diversity in the housing stock was partially attributed to the relatively low median incomes of County residents *[The median income in Tunica County increased from 1990-2000]*
- Residents cited a shortage of housing units available for rent or sale in the County and almost no housing production taking place to alleviate the shortage *[Over 1,000 multifamily units have been built in the last 7 years; production is still slow on single-family detached units]*
- The study recommended the development of a plan of action to address substandard housing, particularly older trailer homes, housing for tenant farm workers and dilapidated or abandoned housing units
- Any housing plans should be linked to plans for tourism, gaming, highway expansion, recreation and economic development *[One of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan is to coordinate the numerous County initiatives]*
- Retirement housing and resort housing were viewed as areas of the market that could develop in the County *[The County is still in-*

terested in exploring these opportunities]

- The study recommended County-sponsored incentive programs such as capital infrastructure cost participation, zoning changes, tax abatement and development fee rebates.
- Pursue State and Federal funding sources for housing rehabilitation and new construction
- Research and more accurately determine the demand for market-rate housing in Tunica County.
- Encourage homeownership through first time homebuyer programs, assistance to CHDO's and incentives to residential developers *[The Board of Supervisors recently approved the use of down payment assistance for 100 housing units in the County]*
- Work to attract employment opportunities other than the casinos.
- Large landowners in the County have a role in housing development. They have the ability to make land available (or not available) for development and have influence on how, when and where the County will grow.

Some of the recommendations in this study have already been addressed (as noted in italics). Housing and residential development issues are important to the future of the County and the effort to solve housing problems in the County will continue in the Comprehensive Plan.

3. Tunica County Airport Feasibility Study (prepared by PBS&J in association with Neel-Schaffer, Inc., 1996)

The Tunica County Airport Feasibility Study was prepared for the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT). The purpose of the study was to identify the potential aviation demand in the Tunica area, identify the level of air service to meet that need, identify the facility requirements for the aircraft that would support the local need and to determine the criteria for financial feasibility of the future Airport expansion project.

The study provided high and low forecasts of aviation demand for 5, 10 and 20-year planning periods, analysis of financial flows for the high and low aviation forecasts, a benefit-cost analysis for the economic impact of the proposed Airport and facility requirements to meet projected aviation demand. Most of the feasibility study contained information specific to future Airport operations that did not apply to the Comprehensive Plan.

The significance of the Airport to the Comprehensive Plan has to do with its location, implications for existing and future land uses and the potential opportunities that it creates for commerce, industry and tourism. The stated primary purpose of the Airport will be to service the travel demands of the gaming industry and to one day accommodate commercial passenger traffic. According to the study, it is also possible for the Tunica Airport to serve as a reliever Airport for Memphis International Airport. If that be-

came a reality it could have additional implications for economic development efforts in the County.

4. *Memphis Regional Transit Plan (prepared by ICF Kaiser Engineers, Inc. for the Memphis Area Transit Authority, 1997)*

The "Detailed Reports" section of the 1997 Memphis Regional Transit Plan provides a Commuter Rail Feasibility Analysis for the Tunica and West Memphis, Arkansas corridors. The purpose of the analysis was to assess the potential to provide commuter rail service to and from Memphis to serve the Tunica and West Memphis corridors, respectively. The study served as a preliminary assessment of the feasibility and cost of these two (2) projects. The analysis only examined the possibility of providing commuter rail service, not light rail or monorail service. Commuter rail transit uses existing rail tracks and typically shares track rights with freight operations. Commuter rail service is designed for long distance trips to and from a major activity center (in this case, downtown Memphis) with very few, if any, stops along the way.

The proposed corridor for the Memphis-Tunica commuter rail service was the Illinois Central Railroad line that roughly parallels U.S. Highway 61. Part of the corridor consisted of abandoned single-track right-of-way. It was determined that new tracks would have to be constructed in the abandoned segment. The remaining distance could be shared with Illinois Central Railroad on existing tracks. It was also determined that a "flyover"

would be needed over the Johnson Yards to avoid interference with their activities.

The study proposed that the terminal point in Memphis would be Central Station in the southern part of the downtown area. Three (3) stations were proposed for Tunica County—one at each of the casino centers. Two (2) trains would be needed to provide hourly service between Tunica and Memphis.

The estimated cost of the proposed commuter rail service was \$84,700,000 to \$169,400,000 (depending on the contingency). This estimate included the cost of vehicles, station construction, the flyover, right-of-way acquisition, new tracks, roadbeds and associated drainage, new interlockings and crossing protection devices. The estimated annual operating cost was \$12,247,200 or \$36 per train mile. Based on the estimated ridership, the service would operate at a deficit and would require annual subsidy from additional sources.

The conclusion of the study did not completely rule out the possibility of providing commuter rail service from Memphis to Tunica. However, given the many obstacles and unknown factors (e.g. ability to negotiate with Illinois Central), the estimated cost (construction and operating) and higher priority projects, it was not recommended for the Memphis Area Transit Authority to pursue at that time. The study did recommend that other types of transit (e.g. bus service) should be proven successful before considering commuter rail service to Tunica County.

5. ***Strategic Action Plan for Tourism in Tunica County, Mississippi (prepared by Williamson Pounders Architects with Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 1999)***

The objective of the Strategic Action Plan was to analyze the Tunica market and make recommendations to enhance tourism and the visitor experience in the County.

The study recognized the need for Tunica to diversify its tourist experience and compete more effectively with other gaming destinations. Target areas of the study included transportation, convention facilities, golf, retail and riverfront development to outline and prioritize recommendations for projects. The study included an analysis of comparable destinations (Las Vegas, Atlantic City, Detroit, Gulfport and Connecticut) to evaluate the strengths and weakness in comparison to Tunica County.

A summary of the recommendations outlined in the study are listed below.

- Locate and design tourism-related uses in a way that is “synergistic to the existing visitor activity.”
- Create an Economic Development Board with a specific mission to “enhance the region through planned growth and economic expansion.”
- Better transportation links are needed between Memphis International Airport and Tunica County casinos

- Explore opportunities to reestablish passenger rail service
- Improve transportation access within Tunica County (e.g. between casinos or other tourist attractions) with a surface trolley system.
- Explore opportunities to develop a monorail/light rail system between casinos and other tourist attractions
- Development of daily fee, public golf courses might enhance the marketability of Tunica to the general public
- The County should undertake a detailed market and economic analysis for the development of a convention center to determine the appropriate building size, location and potential demand
- Tunica County should encourage the development of additional outlet retail in the area, continue support of existing developers, provide necessary infrastructure improvements, provide marketing support and ensure that transportation is available between the casinos and the outlet centers
- If downtown Tunica could develop a critical mass of retailers, the area could become a visitor destination within itself. The success of the downtown revitalization is dependent on the proper mix of tenants and con-

venient access from the casino area.

- Tunica County should evaluate potential sites along the Mississippi River for park development
- Tunica County should consider participating in the development of a "Delta Blues Train" to link the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, MS and Beale Street in Memphis, TN. The train trip could include day-trip or overnight visits to Tunica.
- Consideration should be given to commencing discussions among Tunica County officials, casino owners, NASCAR and potential speedway developers to gauge the interest in developing a motor sports park in Tunica. If such interest does exist, a detailed economic analysis should be conducted to evaluate demand, costs and benefits to Tunica County.

6. Sewer Report for Dundee, Hollywood, White Oak and the Cutoff (prepared by Allen & Hoshall, 2001)

The sewer report was prepared for the County to use in future grant applications to fund sewer improvements. The report focused on the Dundee, Hollywood, Cutoff (Tunica Lake fishing camps) and White Oak areas to evaluate existing conditions and make recommendations for providing or improving sewer service. The Dundee, Hollywood and Cutoff areas (except for the Dundee Elementary School) do

not have sanitary sewer service. The White Oak subdivision has sewer service but the collection system is in disrepair.

The Dundee area is generally located in the vicinity of Bear Lake, between Highway 61 and Old Highway 61 in the southern portion of the County. It contains approximately 135 people, fifty (50) residences and an elementary school. The school is served by a package wastewater plant that discharges into an unnamed body of water to the west of the school site. Most of the houses are on half-acre lots and are served by individual septic tanks. The recommendation for sewer service to the area includes a conventional gravity sewer system in conjunction with conventional pump stations and force mains. The report states that if a collector system were constructed in the Dundee area, the wastewater could be pumped into a new treatment facility adjacent to Dundee Road.

The Hollywood area is approximately four (4) miles north of the Town of Tunica. It contains approximately 129 residents and fifty (50) houses on half-acre lots. Hollywood is not connected to any central sewer system and few of the houses have septic tanks or other treatment systems. The recommendation for this area is a conventional gravity sewer system with conventional pump stations and force mains. The wastewater from the collection system could be pumped into an existing treatment facility in the Robinsonville area that is owned by the Tunica County Utility District.

The Cutoff area has a mixture of approximately 350 trailers, cabins, houses and hunting camps and is located adjacent to Tunica Lake west of the Town of Tunica. The existing residences are on half-acre lots with individual septic tanks. The recommendation for this area is a grinder pump/pressure system to pump the wastewater to an existing treatment facility at Mhoon Landing.

A different solution is recommended for the White Oak subdivision, located approximately three (3) miles southeast of the Town of Tunica. The area contains approximately 200 houses with 600 residents and is currently served by a conventional gravity sewer system in conjunction with conventional pump stations and force mains. The system, installed in 1972, is reaching the end of its useful life. The existing gravity sewers, manholes and other parts of the collection system are all in need of major repairs.

The sewer analysis is valuable to the Comprehensive Plan because it identifies areas that will be viable and appropriate for future residential development because of the availability of sanitary sewer. The amount of land designated for residential development on the Land Use Plan should correspond with the projected capacity of the sewer collection systems designed for these areas. The system in Dundee will be designed to accommodate about 400 people (approximately 145 housing units). In the Hollywood area the system will be designed for a projected population of 1,000 (approximately 360 units). The system at the Cutoff area will have a capacity to accommodate a popula-

tion of 1,400 (approximately 500 units). Lastly, the rehabilitated system in White Oak will be designed for a future population of 1,050 (approximately 375 units). Major commercial or industrial users are not projected for any of these areas during the planning period.

G. Identification of Issues and Opportunities

Part of the inventory and analysis of existing conditions included the identification of issues and opportunities. Identifying the strengths, weaknesses and future opportunities or threats for the community was useful in the development of goals and objectives and the prioritization of projects. It was useful in identifying the worst issues to address and to determine what existing strengths or resources could be used as a foundation for implementation of the Plan. The list was developed by the Project Team using input received at various meetings, interviews during the planning process and from the inventory and analysis of existing conditions.

1. Strengths or Assets

- Abundance of land available for development
- Gaming industry; tourism
- 10 million annual visitors
- Agricultural production
- Funds available to implement projects
- Aggressive infrastructure improvements by the County
- Numerous agencies working together to promote and improve the County
- Desire to improve conditions in the County

- Tunica Lake fishing area
- Cultural & historic resources (Blues music heritage, Indian Mounds)
- Mississippi River
- Hunting and fishing opportunities

2. Weaknesses

- Negative perception of public school system
- Slow reversal of population decline
- Difficulty in attracting commercial development
- Lack of basic goods & services for people living and working in the County
- Limited housing choices and limited amounts of new construction taking place
- Most casino employees living outside of Tunica County
- High turnover of casino employees
- Limited employment opportunities other than casinos
- Residential development on unsuitable soils or in the floodplain
- Permissive development regulations in the past

3. Opportunities

- 10 million annual visitors
- I-69 route through the County
- Airport expansion
- Expansion of tourism experience to extend the stay of visitors
- Development of the golf course, tennis complex and convention center
- Continued improvements in casino area

- Development of a defined district in the casino area
- Light rail transit to connect the Town, Airport and casino area
- Certified Retirement Community designation
- Opportunity to take a proactive instead of reactive role in guiding future development
- Possible “spillover” growth from DeSoto County/Memphis area
- Redevelopment of Mhoon Landing
- Proposed sewer improvements

4. Threats

- Incompatible development in casino area
- Erratic development in other areas of County—short term decisions negatively affecting long-term progress; unplanned development leading to future land use conflicts
- Continuation of certain development patterns—e.g. 1-acre lots along road frontages with no new roads; small lots without sanitary sewer service
- Large amounts of strip commercial development
- Lack of communication and coordination between the Town and the County
- Potential for conflict between lifelong residents and “new-comers”; failure to balance needs of existing residents with attempts to attract new residents
- Loss of prime agricultural land for residential development
- Proliferation of billboards along major highways
- Decline of local gaming market

F. Public Hearings

Two (2) public hearings on the Tunica County Comprehensive Plan were held on May 1, 2002. The first meeting was held at 2:00 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Express in Robinsonville.



The second meeting was held at 5:30 p.m. at the Economic Development Complex in the central portion of the County. The meetings were advertised in *The Tunica Times*, which also ran a separate article about the hearings and the proposed Future Land Use Plan in its April 18, 2002 issue.

Both meetings were conducted with the same format—the project team made a structured presentation on the Comprehensive Plan (approximately 45 minutes) that was followed by an informal question and answer period where attendees had an opportunity to talk to project team members on an individual basis. The citizens that attended the meeting were very responsive to the presentations and participated fully in the discussions that followed.

The project team placed comment sheets with the mailing addresses, fax numbers and email addresses of the project team for people to fill out at

the meeting or to take with them in case they thought of additional comments or questions.



The project team received several comment sheets in the mail and a number of email and fax responses. Comments were collected for about a two (2) week period after the public meetings. The project team then examined the responses and met with County personnel to determine which items could be addressed in the Plan.



Most of the comments were related to the proposed Future Land Use Plan. Some examples are as follows:

- Look at the placement of agricultural areas relative to rural residential designations in terms of manufactured housing (under the proposed plan, manufactured housing would

be allowed in agricultural areas but not in rural residential)

- If Interstate 69 uses the Highway 61 corridor, maybe the point at which it merges with Highway 61 can be moved further south than currently proposed or even outside of Tunica County
- Take another look at the Cutoff area and consider doing more than just designating it for manufactured housing and preservation recreation
- Allow for the possibility to re-establish casino uses at Mhoon Landing
- Consider expanding the list of allowed uses in the Preservation Recreation areas

The project team and County personnel considered all of the comments and were able to incorporate most of them into the Plan. Later in the planning process, on August 29, 2002, an additional public meeting was held at the Hollywood Café in Robinsonville to discuss the proposed Resort Area Concept Plan that had been developed since the time of the first public hearings. The proposed Land Use and Transportation Plans presented at the public meetings and the Resort Area Concept Plan are discussed in greater detail in Chapter V.