

Project A-380

An Analysis of Industrial Sites
in the Columbus, Georgia Area

Prepared for the
Columbus Chamber of Commerce
Columbus, Georgia



by
George I. Whitlatch
Project Director



Engineering Experiment Station
Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta, Georgia

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George I. Whitlatch
Senior Research Scientist

Industrial Development Branch
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Summary

The present lack of available good industrial sites is a serious weakness which requires early and vigorous action. Every effort should be made to purchase option, zone, or otherwise hold for industrial use certain key tracts of land which offer industrial potentials. Unless such action is taken it will be increasingly difficult--and eventually even impossible--to acquire new industry.

The following specific steps are recommended:

(1) The several hundred acres still available in the industrial section east and southeast of the downtown business district should be acquired and developed for both manufacturing and warehousing.

(2) To insure the future economic growth of Columbus, joint action should be taken by the city and county to acquire from the Federal government some 700 acres in the northwest part of the Ft. Benning Reservation, to be held for sale and development into a heavy industry district.

(3) Study should be undertaken of the possibility for joint development of the Ft. Benning property and adjacent land lying southwest along Bull Creek between Schatulga and Forrest roads.

(4) To insure the availability of several potentially excellent "prestige" sites of 100 acres or more, long-range plans should be initiated for the eventual acquisition of (and extension of utilities into) the area along the Macon Road, between Bull Creek and Pope Road.

(5) Study should be made as soon as possible of the feasibility of extending utilities to a 50-acre site about 2 1/2 miles north of Nankipoo.

A vigorous program for informing local citizens of the serious site situation and of the need for protecting all potential industrial land should be initiated without delay. Every effort should be made by the Chamber of Commerce to persuade uncooperative land owners to reserve areas suitable for industrial use. Support of stricter zoning regulations to prevent encroachment of industrial land by residential housing may well be essential to the city's future industrial growth.

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AN ANALYSIS OF INDUSTRIAL SITES
IN THE COLUMBUS, GEORGIA AREA

The present limited industrial site situation in the Columbus area, as shown by our preliminary survey, is "probably one of the most serious weaknesses in the city's plans for future industrial growth."^{1/} The city actually has the minimum to offer. Of the 18 sites in the area listed by the Chamber of Commerce, three--including the largest--are on the Alabama side of the Chattahoochee River and, of the remaining 15, only nine contain from 21 to 96 acres. The majority of this land is not sufficiently controlled to insure its reservation for future industrial use. As noted in our earlier report:

Already land originally zoned industrial has been re-zoned for residential use, and Columbus cannot afford to thus jeopardize its future. Business interests of the community must not only resist further re-zoning of these sites but also should recognize that their purchase is a good investment, as well as a guarantee of future availability for industrial development.

Since our preliminary survey, the Columbus area has been carefully studied, both by map and field investigations, as to areas suitable for industrial development. It has been our purpose to identify potential site areas in and near the city to meet the relatively short-term future needs and other areas up to 10 miles or more from the city limits that may be needed within the next decade or so. Most of the latter areas are still fairly distant from water, gas and sewer lines, and their identification now will be helpful to the planning of ultimate extension of those services to these areas. The various utilities assure that such extensions of lines will be made as soon as they become economically feasible.

The present report describes not only a number of new site areas but also reviews briefly those covered in our preliminary survey. Recommended actions for the acquisition or protection and/or development are given for various areas. These include (1) acquisition by Columbus business interests, preferably by the Chamber of Commerce or the Columbus Industrial Development Corporation, of several hundred acres still available in the industrial section east and southeast of the downtown business district and the development

^{1/} "An Evaluation of the Assets and Liabilities of the Columbus Area," (1959), pp. 65-70.

in this section of one or more industrial districts to accommodate both manufacturing and warehousing; (2) joint efforts by the city and county governments to acquire from the Federal government an area of some 700 acres in the northwest part of the Ft. Benning Reservation to be held for sale and development into a heavy industry district, such action being deemed essential to the future economic growth of Columbus; (3) study of the possibilities for unified development of the foregoing Ft. Benning property with adjacent lands lying southwest along Bull Creek between Schatulga and Forrest roads; (4) initiation of long-range plans by the Columbus Chamber of Commerce for the eventual acquisition of and extension of utility services into the area along the Macon Road between Bull Creek and Pope Road where there exists the opportunity for creation of a number of true prestige sites ranging to 100 acres or more; and (5) early study of the feasibility of extending utilities to a 50-acre site about 2 1/2 miles north of Nankipooch.

In view of the very "tight" industrial site situation in the Columbus area, it is essential that the above-recommended actions be taken as quickly as practicable. Only by early and vigorous efforts can sufficient lands be reserved to insure the future industrial development and attendant economic growth of Columbus. Outright purchase or long-term optioning of certain of the identified site areas probably cannot be effected now. To uncooperative land owners appeal should be made to their civic consciousness in getting them to reserve and protect such areas for future industrial development. The Chamber of Commerce can contribute much to this effort by fully informing the citizenry of Columbus about the limited site situation and the need for protecting all potential industrial land. Support of stricter zoning regulations to prevent encroachment of industrial land by residential housing also can be a major feature of this Chamber educational effort.

City Industrial District

Much of Columbus' recent industrial expansion has been along the railroads east and southeast of the downtown business district. This trend can be expected to continue within the foreseeable future, provided sufficient land is available at reasonable prices. To insure this, it is necessary that Columbus business interests acquire and hold for development such sizeable acreages as can be purchased. It is especially recommended that one or more industrial districts be established, such as has been successfully done by the Central of Georgia Railway with its 97-acre district at Cusseta Road and

city limits. Taken as a whole, there are several hundred acres of land available in this general area and, if properly protected and priced, this should meet most of Columbus' industrial site needs over about the next five years. However, viewed in the perspective of the next decade or so, the lands here offer the minimum, especially when trying to meet the needs and preferences of various industries. Moreover, there is the continuing encroachment by residential housing.

An Urban Renewal project currently underway will recover part of this land in the "Bottoms Area." Here, a strip 300 feet wide and extending 3,200 feet from the junction of 10th Avenue and 10th Street southeasterly along the Central of Georgia and Seaboard railroads has been cleared of houses and the land classified M1 (manufacturing). This tract will accommodate small industrial plants and warehousing. (See map, No. 1.)

Some of the largest remaining tracts for development in this part of the city are within that area bounded by St. Marys, Brennan, Farr and Cusseta roads. (See map, No. 2.) This includes the above-mentioned Central of Georgia's 97-acre industrial district, now largely occupied. However, in this general area there remain some of the largest individual tracts, up to 96 acres. These properties, individually discussed in our initial report,^{1/} constitute some 350 acres of useable industrial acreage. We repeat our recommendation that early and vigorous efforts be made to acquire all of these properties, preferably by the Chamber of Commerce or the Columbus Industrial Development Corporation. Already residential housing has made minor encroachments into this area. The 45-acre E. L. Brennan tract lying north of Cusseta Road, between Bull Creek and Brennan Road, also should be acquired, if available. (See map, No. 3.)

The somewhat elevated lands on the east side of Farr Road also are recommended for acquisition. (See map, No. 4.) Since the elevation probably is too great to permit extension of rail spurs into this area, use of this land would be limited to industrial plants and warehouses needing only truck service. Since there is some low-cost residential housing already started nearby, it is essential that efforts to acquire this land start immediately.

Another area recommended for acquisition is the land bounded on the west by Brown Avenue, on the east by Andrews Road, on the north by Brookhaven Road,

^{1/} Op. cit., p. 65.

and on the south by the Central of Georgia Railway. (See map, No. 5.) Present use of the land is for stack space by lumbering operations. Its probable best use would be for light industry and warehousing.

Another area suitable for warehousing that should be investigated at an early date is the land east of Morris Road to Bull Creek, between Buena Vista Road (Tillinghurst School) and the point where the Central of Georgia Railway crosses Morris Road. (See map, No. 6.) Check should be made of the flood history of this land and, if favorable, efforts should be made to acquire the entire area. The shallow depth makes the land best suited for warehousing operations; trucking into and out of the area will be greatly facilitated by the eventual construction of the Lindsey Creek Bypass which will pass through the north end of this area.

River Sites

The present survey has not changed our earlier opinion that, for industrial projects requiring large acreages, access to river transportation and/or large volumes of water, Columbus will have to depend on Alabama sites south of Phenix City, where more than 1,700 acres are available (see map, No. 7) within two to three miles of the Columbus business district.^{1/}

On the Georgia side of the river, the only riverfront land near downtown Columbus is the area north of Bull Creek, now partly occupied by the Lions Club golf course and the Columbus Municipal Airport north across Victory Drive. (See map, No. 8.) This is the general area considered for a port terminal development,^{2/} but if the airport is thus utilized, Victory Drive would have to be shifted to the north of that property, probably along a route to connect with the proposed 4th Street bridge.^{3/} Unless Victory Drive is so rerouted, the costs would be prohibitive for an overpass or other facilities for moving freight across Victory Drive between the port terminal and an industrial district that might be developed on the present airport land. Regardless of the feasibility of such developments, we seriously question whether the recreational value of the golf course and adjacent lands along the river and the attractiveness of Victory Drive should be sacrificed for these industrial purposes.

^{1/} Op. cit., p. 69.

^{2/} Op. cit., pp. 63-68.

^{3/} Op. cit., p. 55.

Nevertheless, there is a major river-site possibility around the village of Omaha about 25 miles southeast of Columbus in Stewart County. Here, where the Seaboard Railroad crosses the Chattahoochee River, are several thousands of acres of relatively flat to gently rolling land, above flood level. On completion of the nine-foot navigation channel on the river in 1962, this area will offer an excellent location for any industry needing river transportation and/or large volumes of water. It has been considered favorably by local development engineers for a paper mill and would accommodate various kinds of large chemical and other process plants. Omaha can now be reached over a good county road from Lumpkin.

Northeast Areas

The Ft. Benning Military Reservation has prevented expansion of Columbus to the east and, as a consequence, growth has been into the areas north and northeast of the city. Unfortunately, much of this development, mainly of better-quality residences, has been along the lines of the Central of Georgia and Southern railroads, frequently using lands best suited to industrial purposes. However, our survey of these areas has identified substantial acreages along both of these railroads; some of the lands are quite close to the city limits, affording opportunity for early development, provided nearby residential areas are properly protected by strict zoning as to permitted industries. Other of the areas are quite distant from the city, up to 15 miles, and constitute long-range industrial land reserves.

The Macon branch of the Central of Georgia Railway and the Southern Railway serve the areas northeast of Columbus and the following potential site areas have been noted along those railroads.

Ft. Benning Reservation Property. In the extreme northwest corner of the Ft. Benning Military Reservation is an area of some 600 to 700 acres that could provide Columbus with a sizeable heavy industry district. (See map, No. 9.)

The area lies generally east and south of the Central of Georgia Railway and the old Macon Road which here forms part of the reservation boundary. Schatulga Road, from its crossing of the railroad southward across Bull Creek forms part of the western boundary of this reservation area, while the line of hills and swamp bordering Bull Creek mark the general eastern limits.

An industrial district of about 325 acres could be developed in the northern part of this area, along the railroad and old Macon Road, embracing land

mainly above the 300-foot contour. Maximum relief would not exceed 50 feet.

Much of the south half of this area is the bottomlands of Bull Creek which appear to drain very well, but they may be subject to flood and would have limited useage, possibly only for storage or parking facilities.

This reservation area not only offers direct access to downtown Columbus over Macon and Wynnton roads but also is relatively close to residential areas that can supply suitable labor. Extension of utilities into the area would involve minimum difficulties.

In our opinion, this Ft. Benning property is essential to the future economic development of Columbus. It is strongly recommended, therefore, that the city and county governments jointly make every effort to acquire these lands from the Federal government and to hold them for sale and development as the future industrial growth of Columbus demands.

Forrest-Schatulga Roads. The industrial possibilities of some 300 acres along the east side of Bull Creek, north of Forrest Road, were pointed out in our preliminary site report.^{1/} Further inspection reveals that northeasterly up this valley, on the north side of Bull Creek, are substantial acreages lying between U. S. Highway 80 and the Central of Georgia Railway and extending to Schatulga Road. (See map, No. 10.) In the vicinity of Crystal Valley, for example, there are 75 to 100 acres or more that have a maximum elevation difference of no more than 40 feet. Gas, water, and sewer lines now extend almost to Crystal Valley.

This part of Bull Creek Valley is a continuation of that described under "Ft. Benning Property" (see above). We recommend that serious study be given to unified development of these two areas, with this Forrest-Schatulga roads section being limited to light or medium industries due to the proximity of residential areas.

Some additional possible small sites along or near Schatulga Road are (1) the gently rolling farmland south of the main building at the County Farm, on the east side of the road; (2) south slope of Bull Creek Valley, east side of the road, just north of the Muscogee County Public Works Camp (see map, No. 11); and (3) on the north side of Forrest Road, about one-half mile west of the junction of that road with Schatulga Road. (See map, No. 12.) Substantial new Negro housing here would tend to limit this site to light manufactures.

1/ Op. cit., p. 70.

Gentian Site. This site, known also as the "Lester" property, consists of some 150 acres, between the Southern Railway and Alternate U. S. 27 immediately north of the Gentian community, some five miles from downtown Columbus. (See map, No. 13.) This site was described in our earlier report^{1/} and our present investigation would indicate that this is probably the best industrial site of size along the Southern's line in the Columbus area.

Another site of about 90 acres might be developed along the south side of the Southern's line approximately two and one-half miles northeast of Gentian and one mile north of Crystal Valley. (See map, No. 14.) The land here within the 400-foot contour does not generally exceed 20-foot difference in elevation. Present access is over an unpaved road that connects with Miller Road which, in turn, leads south to the Macon Road (U. S. 80).

Macon Road (U. S. 80). A number of industrial sites, up to as much as 50 acres in extent, could be developed between the old and new Macon roads from the point of their junction just west of the above-described "Ft. Benning" property eastward to the vicinity of Dozier Creek. (See map, No. 15.) This area, bordered on the north by the Central of Georgia Railway and the new Macon Road (U. S. 80), varies in width from 400 to 500 feet up to nearly one-half mile, with maximum relief generally not exceeding 40 feet. Much of the land is still in trees. Along the old Macon Road in the extreme western part of this area, the highway frontage is good but depth is so limited that only warehousing could be built there.

The most promising area for large-scale industrial developments seen in the entire Columbus area lies north of the new Macon Road and extends from Bull Creek eastward to Pope Road. Over this distance of three miles, extensive tracts of rolling farmlands front on Macon Road and would permit site developments to depths of 2,000 feet or more with elevation differences ranging from 30 to 40 feet. Substantial acreages could be assembled where little or no site preparation would be required, and even if grading were necessary, the fairly deep sand to sandy clay overburden could be moved economically. In short, this area offers the opportunity for creating a number of true "prestige" sites of 50 to 100 acres or more. The best of these would be (1) the land between Pope Road and an unnamed dirt road one-half mile to the west, allowing some 1,400-foot average depth or about 130 acres, with maximum relief of about 20 feet (see map, No. 16); (2) on both sides of the Midland Road where it joins the

^{1/} Op. cit., pp. 69-70.

Macon Road--60 to 75 acres or more in each tract with about 30-foot maximum relief (see map, No. 17); and (3) on the east side of the first road west of the Midland Road--at least 50 acres with maximum relief of 30 feet. (See map, No. 18.)

This Bull Creek-Pope Road area is about five to eight miles from the Columbus city limits and some two to six miles from established utilities. It would have good access to the Lindsey Creek Bypass over Macon Road and to the Warm Springs Road (State 85) over the Midland Road. Rail spurs to any of the area, however, would have to be by grade crossings of the Macon Road. Admittedly, this area constitutes a long-range situation that will require a number of years for full development. Yet, even assuming no need for these lands within the next 10 years, it is not too early for the Chamber of Commerce and other Columbus business interests to start planning for their eventual utilization. It is first necessary, through purchase, option, zoning, or even public education, that these lands be reserved for industrial purposes. Then, the planning for extension of needed utility services into the area can go forward.

Midland-Flat Rock Area. Inspection of the territory between Flat Rock and Midland revealed only limited industrially useable areas along State Road 85 and/or near the Southern Railway.

Site areas of a few acres were noted immediately north of Midland along both sides of the railroad. About one-half mile south of that village, on the east side of the Midland Road, is a site area of 25 or more acres (see map, No. 19), but a railroad spur could not be economically extended to it.

Immediately north of State Road 85 at Flat Rock and eastward for about three-quarters of a mile along the highway is an area 1,000 feet or more in depth that does not generally exceed 40-foot elevation differences and, over some 40 acres, not over 20-foot differences. (See map, No. 20.) Other more steeply sloping land lies to the south, between the highway and Southern Railway lines. Limited sites acreages could be developed here, but it is doubtful that rail spurs could be extended to them.

Northern Areas

Survey of the area north of the Columbus city limits has revealed a very limited site situation. Here the Atlanta branch of the Central of Georgia Railway roughly parallels Hamilton Road to Nankipooch and thence generally northward to the county line more or less paralleling Fortson Road. Between

Nankipooch and the city the growth of residential housing and commercial establishments, in combination with the relatively hilly terrain, has served to reduce industrial site possibilities to a minimum. In the Nankipooch area, for example, new housing developments are rapidly absorbing an area west of the highway and railroad that could have been made into a large industrial district.

With the exception of a long-range situation noted on Fortson Road, north of Nankipooch, the best site possibilities in this area are around Glenns, a suburban community immediately north of Columbus city limits on Hamilton Road (U. S. 27).

Hamilton-Whitesville Road. An off-rail site of 20 to 25 acres on the east side of Hamilton Road, at its junction with the Whitesville Road, offers a suitable location for light or medium industry or for truck warehousing. (See map, No. 21.) The site is only one-fourth mile south of Glenns, from which there is direct access over Britt David Road to Muscogee County Airport (1 1/2 mile east). If this site is to be preserved for industrial use, quick action seems imperative as its location is quite suitable for commercial development.

Glenns Site. This site, a part of the "Bradley Farm" owned by Mr. William B. Turner of Columbus, lies mainly west of the crossing of the Whitesville Road and Central of Georgia Railway line, less than one-half mile west of Glenns. (See map, No. 22.) Since description of this site in our original report,^{1/} Mr. Turner has obtained re-zoning of some 400 acres from agricultural to industrial classification and is currently planning an industrial district there. Other nearby parts of this extensive property reportedly are to be developed for residential subdivisions, a shopping center, and related commercial operations.

North of Glenns. Immediately north of Glenns, the area west of Hamilton Road to the Central of Georgia Railway reaches a maximum width of 2,000 feet within a distance of one-half mile northward. (See map, No. 23) The immediate relief is 40-feet or less over most of this 60- to 75-acre tract, and a sizeable plant site could be created with minimum grading. Because of the proximity to Glenns, only light to medium industry should be permitted.

Fortson Road. The only other sizeable railroad site noted in this northern area is about 2 1/2 miles north of Nankipooch, on the west side of Fortson

1/ Op. cit., p. 70.

Road and south of Smith Road. (See map, No. 24.) Here the north-south tracks of the Central of Georgia Railway split more than 50 acres nearly in half. The west half of this tract is quite flat, with no more than 20-foot elevation difference. The east half is somewhat rougher, but since weathering here is to a depth of three to five feet, grading would be relatively easy with minimum possibility of encountering rock.

Since this site area is only about five miles north of Columbus' city limits, it is one of the closer sites available for heavy industry. Early study of the feasibility of extending utilities to this area is recommended and, if favorable, the land should be purchased or reserved through long-term option.