

Athens-Clarke County and The City of Winterville

Community Assessment and Appendixes

July 12, 2006

Revised July 1, 2008

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Supplemental Plans and Background documents:

- *Athens-Clarke County Economic Development Plan: A Strategy for a Strong Economy*
- *Athens-Clarke County Economic Development Plan: Economic and Demographic Analysis*
- *Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Master Plan*
- *Athens-Clarke County Solid Waste Plan*
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Background Documents

- *Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville Comprehensive Plan 1999 – 2009*

**Athens-Clarke County and
The City of Winterville**

Community Assessment

July 12, 2006

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

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A IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A.1 List of Potential Issues and Opportunities

A.1.1 Population

1. The population projections prepared for the Comprehensive Plan for Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville have been prepared with informed assumptions regarding the conditions that will affect growth in the future.

The data provided in the Population chapter serves as the statistical basis for all of the other Community Assessment chapters within the Comprehensive Plan. The interpretation of this data is a complex undertaking given the atypical composition of the population within Athens-Clarke County, which is due in part to the high percentage of residents in the 15-24 age group (34% of the 2005 population estimate for Athens-Clarke County), and the somewhat uncertain future of local housing and employment trends. Misinterpretation of population data can have a significant impact on the accuracy of current condition assessments and the preparation of projections for the future, particularly with regard to land use, housing, economic development, and social service planning. The assumptions used as a basis for much of the population projections for both Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville rely heavily on data prepared by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Other primary data sources, including building permit data and license plate data, have been used as well to verify census data, assist in identifying trends, and ultimately have been used to prepare projections. Comparisons of these various data sources with Census data have revealed possible statistical inconsistencies that, if improperly interpreted, may result in erroneous projections and estimates. In order to assist in evaluating the full scope of this data more thoroughly, it is recommended that a professional demographer be retained.

2. Athens-Clarke County is the central place of a larger metropolitan area that since 1980 is the second fastest growing area in the state behind the Atlanta region.

The Athens MSA which includes Oconee County and Madison County, has experienced 46.6% population growth between 1980-2000. This rapid regional growth is creating many growth pressures in the community including increased social service and civil infrastructure needs, increased traffic congestion, and other land use management issues.

3. In comparison to other metropolitan central city counties in the state of Georgia outside of Atlanta, Athens-Clarke County has experienced a remarkable rate of growth since 1980.

This growth rate of 54.3% for Athens-Clarke County is an increase over the 46.4% growth rate experiences from 1970-1990. Athens-Clarke County continues to function as the “port of entry” for population growth for the Athens MSA, and its overall rate of growth from 1980 to 2000 is the second highest of the MSAs outside of the metro Atlanta region.

4. Athens-Clarke County has a relatively young population.

By 1990 the median age for Athens-Clarke County was 25.6 years and 31.6 years for the state of Georgia. By 2020, it is projected that the median age for Athens-Clarke County will be 24.6 years and 33.9 years for the state of Georgia. While it is expected that the community’s median age will continue to decrease, but this decrease will occur at a slower rate than that of the past 20 years. Among the major factors impacting the average age of the population is the location of the University of Georgia in the community. With over 30,000 college students, Athens will likely continue to have a median age that is lower than the state as a whole.

5. Athens-Clarke County is projected to have significant growth in the population age groups 15-24 and 55+ years.

The growth of these two age categories may disproportionately impact demand for certain community services and resources. Between 2005-2030, it is expected that these categories combined will increase from 51,952 to 67,426 people.

6. Between 1980-2000, Athens-Clarke County experienced white population growth that was lower than the state increase, while African-American and Other racial and ethnic populations increased at a modest rate similar to the rates and actual growth seen in surrounding counties and at the state level.

The growth of the African-American and Other racial and ethnic populations is consistent with similar trends witnessed around the state, the southeastern United States, and the nation as a whole. The greatest single issue that this trend identifies is the need for Spanish-language services and support for the considerable growth witnessed among the Hispanic population.

7. The residents of Athens-Clarke County exceed the state average in education attainment levels, both in terms of high school completion and four or more years of college education.

This has resulted in a highly educated workforce. This is an important consideration in Athens-Clarke County's ongoing economic development efforts to attract and retain employers and moderate to high-paying jobs.

8. For Athens-Clarke County, both per capita income and household income growth has been below state increases since 1980. This income growth also lags behind Madison County and Oconee County.

It should be noted that the very low annual and per capita income of the University of Georgia's student body artificially lowers the income statistics for the community. The per capita income figures for Athens-Clarke County are also lowered by the fact that 50% of the workforce in 1998 held lower-paying jobs in the Wholesale, Retail, and Services employment sectors.

As a percentage of total employment, employment in these sectors is likely to remain at this level as Athens-Clarke County serves as a regional retail and service hub, and supports a university student population that is both the market and labor force for many of these retail outlets and service providers.

9. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 25.8% of Athens-Clarke County residents are shown to earn incomes below the poverty level.

This percentage represents a total population with incomes below the poverty level of 26,260 people. The 2000 Census also notes that 15,683 of these people (approximately 60% of those with incomes below the poverty level) are essentially single individuals that are not a part of a household with a spouse or children. In addition, the 2000 Census also indicates that 20,844 (79.4%) of the individuals with incomes below poverty level are between the ages of 18 and 64. The 18 – 64 age grouping is typically also used to identify those individuals within the workforce. Further analysis of this data is needed to reach any definitive conclusions.

10. The City of Winterville has had a slightly older population than the state of Georgia and Athens-Clarke County.

To a large extent, Winterville has remained unaffected by the presence and growth of the University of Georgia. As a result, this small community has historically attracted and retained a relatively older and more heterogeneous population. While it is expected that the community's median age will continue to increase, it is projected that it will increase at a much faster rate than that of the past 20 years for the City of Winterville.

11. Winterville's per capita income and household income figures have been higher on average than those of Athens-Clarke County and the state of Georgia.

Per capita income has increased in Winterville by a figure of \$7,404, or 113%, between 1979-1989 to \$13,958. This percentage increase is nearly identical to the figure for the state over the same period.

A.1.2 Economic Development

1. Our community's dependency on a small number of governmental (University of Georgia) and institutional provides a stable economic base. However, Expansion into additional economic sectors is needed to provide more balance in the future distribution of economic resources and employment opportunities.

The Athens-Clarke County economy is concentrated in the Government and the Retail employment sectors. The community's primary economic base is employment provided by the 8,900 jobs at the University of Georgia. These 8,900 jobs and 30,000 students provide the support for a thriving retail economy in the community. It is anticipated that growth in these two sectors will remain constant through 2020.

2. Our community would benefit from a more active business recruitment effort.

Athens-Clarke County has a very diverse manufacturing base that has experienced stable employment growth since the early 1980's. Area manufacturers range from overhead transformer production to poultry processing establishments. Growth in manufacturing has been incremental yet steady, and has resulted primarily from the expansion of established industries already located in Athens-Clarke County. This pattern of steady manufacturing sector growth is anticipated to continue through 2020.

3. Our community would benefit from creation of jobs with higher-end wages.

Wages in the Clarke County area are below state averages and have failed to keep pace with state average increases. More high-wage employment opportunities are needed in the community, particularly in the Retail and Service sectors. While this is a potential area of concern from an employee standpoint, the relatively low wages may provide an opportunity in industrial recruitment.

4. Educational and workforce training opportunities should be improved and increased.

One of the historical strengths of the Athens-Clarke County economy is the low unemployment rate of the community. The presence of the University of Georgia helps to create a stable economic environment for the community. However, this equilibrium between employment opportunities and potential employees is somewhat deceiving. Training of the local workforce will need to continue in order to maintain these low unemployment levels over the life of this plan.

5. The City of Winterville's economy is dependent upon Clarke County.

The economy of Winterville is largely dependent upon the economic conditions found in Athens-Clarke County. Many residents of Winterville are employed at jobs located in Athens-Clarke County. Additionally, Winterville benefits from receiving water, sewer service provided by Athens-Clarke County in portions of the city, as well as from Clarke County schools and Sheriff services.

6. Clarke County would benefit from a comprehensive economic development strategy.

Tremendous opportunity exists for economic development activities in the community. With a highly educated workforce, below average wage rates, and the presence of ample infrastructure to support development, Athens-Clarke County appears to be strategically positioned to compete for economic development. The results of a Unified Government's comprehensive economic development strategy are needed in order to focus community efforts and activities to capitalize on these and other strengths in guiding the community's future economic development. In the 1990's Athens-Clarke County Economic Development: A Strategy Plan was produced; as such, an update and rededication to a comprehensive strategy seem appropriate.

A.1.3 Natural And Cultural Resources

1. The community could benefit from a more regional approach to the protection of our natural resources.

Many of the counties surrounding Clarke do not have the same extended riparian buffers over the states requirements or more stringent flood plain protection standards that Clarke County does. The only regional effort to protect natural resources that has involved Clarke County is the construction of the Bear Creek reservoir. There should be an effort to work with the surrounding counties on water quality.

2. Clarke County would benefit from measures to decrease air pollution levels.

Clarke County currently meets attainment standards, but some measures indicate that the county may be approaching non-attainment.

3. Athens-Clarke County should continue and, as appropriate, expand efforts to address erosion, sedimentation, and stormwater issues.

As with any community facing development pressure, there are still violations to the County's soil and erosion standards and the protected environmental areas standards. More education may work toward efforts to stop these violations before they happen. Clarke County has the measures in place to enforce these standards and attempt to correct them, but more needs to be done before it occurs.

4. Local Designation of the Athens Downtown Historic District should be explored.

The Athens Downtown Historic is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is one of the most historically and architecturally important resources within Athens-Clarke County. The downtown, to a great extent, defines our communities character and is significant as the center of town, both literally and symbolically, as the location of City Hall, the Clarke County Courthouse as well as significant, turn of the century commercial and office buildings and historic churches.

A.1.4 Facilities And Services

1. Solid Waste: Current policies may strain the existing fiscal capacity of the Solid Waste system to meet future needs.

Athens-Clarke County's solid waste operations are exemplary. The landfill has substantial amount of capacity remaining and ways are being investigated to increase its life expectancy. The recycling efforts have seen a 68% increase in recyclables recovered and diverted from the landfill in 2005, and a 42% decrease in residential waste disposed per household of customers per month between July 1992 - June 2005 in the Urban Service District.

There are additional improvements, however, that the County would like to see. One of the biggest cost is the staff intensive backyard pickup service provided in the urban service district. Curbside collection was made optional beginning in 2005 and is currently used by 20% of the customer base. The Solid Waste Department is constantly looking for ways to improve recycling tonnage and has worked closely with the Clarke County School District and University of Georgia.

Another major issue facing Athens-Clarke County is the rapidly decreasing capacity for waste disposal in the area, we are currently investigating various options for the future and will be seeking Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission direction in the next year.

A.1.5 Housing

1. Clarke County would benefit from an inventory and assessment of the condition of housing.

Some information is readily available from the Census and other, cursory survey work. A detailed analysis of the existing housing stock, including vacancy rates would be beneficial. For instance, according to the projected housing needs and the actual housing units constructed, Athens-Clarke County has built sufficient housing to date to meet the needs of the community into 2013. This data, based on Census and information from the Building Inspection Department, should be verified by identifying vacant housing in Clarke County.

2. Clarke County would benefit from a strategy to address student housing within the community.

It is unclear exactly how many students reside "off-campus" within Clarke County. A clear analysis of the affect of the student population on housing and a means to incorporate this data into the County's plans would be valuable.

A.1.6 Land Use

1. Athens-Clarke County zoning and development regulations encourage mixed-use, neo-traditional development patterns; however, new construction and redevelopment projects often fail to fully meet these standards for a variety of reasons. Conventional commercial and residential markets still pursue single-use land uses. Other local codes and regulations affecting new development also present challenges or obstacles to the attainment of mixed-use, neo-traditional developments.
2. Land uses and development regulations are often inconsistent or incompatible with natural environmental features like topography. These should be better integrated in both land use planning and review of new development.
3. With widely varying permitted densities between urban and rural residential areas, Athens-Clarke County should investigate the viability of a TDR (Transferable Development Rights) program in order to preserve rural lands while promoting density in urban nodes and redevelopment opportunity areas.

A.1.7 Transportation

1. Coordination between future land uses and our transportation system will benefit our community.

While there are segments of roadway in Athens-Clarke County that operate at or above capacity during peak hour, most of these capacity problems are addressed by projects in the current 2030 MACORTS Transportation Plan. The socioeconomic data used to generate the projects included in the 2030 MACORTS Transportation Plan was coordinated with the approved Future Land Use Plan valid at that time. Therefore, the upcoming MACORTS projects should show better coordination than projects of the recent past.

2. Flexibility in design and operation of roadways is encouraged in order to face future changing conditions.

It is projected that several capacity problems will exist in the future on major routes inside of the Athens Perimeter. These routes include Milledge Avenue, Prince Avenue, and Lumpkin Street. It will be very difficult to add capacity to these roadways in the future due to the historic character of the properties along these corridors, as well as community opinion that these routes are important in shaping the community's image. Therefore, measures to

decrease automobile traffic demand should be further explored such as constructing bicycle facilities and expanding mass transit usage.

3. Congestion of our community's major corridors should be addressed.

A potentially serious problem facing the community is the continued expansion of high-density land uses beyond traditional areas. Continued growth of high density land uses could exert additional pressure to widen two lane roadways such as Mitchell Bridge Road and Tallassee Road. One focus of the 2030 MACORTS Transportation Plan is to widen roadways only to the extent absolutely necessary and to concentrate on developing a better road network to offer ample alternatives.

4. The Transit System and routes should continue to be evaluated and revised in order to provide the most relevant and efficient service to our community.

To meet the continued needs and demands generated by development, it will become necessary for the transit system to expand and modify its existing routes. Continued effective and efficient management of the transit system will ensure that revenues received along with federal and state assistance will allow the transit system to fully utilize its resources. As environmental and road capacity issues become more of a regional issue, transit's role will increase as people become more aware of their role in reducing these regional concerns.

In late 2005, a Transit Development Plan (TDP) was completed for the Athens Transit System. This Plan evaluated the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the transit system and made recommendations regarding the future operation of the system. Recommendations included route modifications, extended service hours, use of 'superstops', and the possible inclusion of Park and Ride lots.

5. Expansion of Transit Services will benefit Athens-Clarke County

The Athens Transit System is unable, at this time, to serve all of Athens-Clarke County predominantly due to budget constraints. The TDP addresses expansion of services into more of Athens-Clarke County. As these improvements are made to ATS service, this issue will lessen. The Athens Transit System has been filling some of the gaps in service using the 5311 funding to provide "The Link" service – county wide demand response. As this service is new, the effectiveness of this program is still under consideration.

6. Availability to transit, both at the time of construction and accommodations for transit access in the future, should continue to be a factor in new development.

Transit is now included in the Plans Review process to ensure that developments integrate transit amenities into their design where feasible. This ensures that present development is transit-friendly if not transit oriented. Recently, the Athens Transit System and MACORTS developed the Transit Development Plan as a foundation for improvement to the Transit System and to encourage looking at transit as part of the 'bigger picture' of development in Athens-Clarke County.

7. Athens-Clarke County should continue to support alternate modes of transportation.

Athens-Clarke County continues to seek funding for alternative transportation projects, including those eligible for Transportation Enhancement (TE) funding. This program provides federal transportation dollars for alternative transportation projects and other uses. MACORTS and GDOT have made considerable progress in funding alternative transportation projects. During the update of the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), projects from the Athens-Clarke County Bicycle Master Plan were integrated into the Plan.

8. Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville could benefit from an expansion of the sidewalk system and the bike routes and linkage to other transportation systems.

Athens-Clarke County development regulations require all new commercial and residential developments to provide sidewalks that provide internal and external access. Existing development is required to adhere to the sidewalk requirement when the development is modified. Over time, a complete network will be achieved.

Federal funds are pursued to complete bicycle projects, whenever possible. Local funds, especially Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds, are used to fill in gaps in the network of bicycle facilities. Those projects that are most 'in demand' by the public are typically completed first; therefore, the initial impression is one of an incomplete network. As funds become available, current gaps in the network will be filled

A.1.8 Intergovernmental Coordination

1. Efforts and programs to build and strengthen relations with the University of Georgia and Athens-Clarke County should be undertaken.

Because of the prominence of the University of Georgia and its influence upon Clarke County's population, housing situations, the local economy and transportation, it is vital that relations between the Unified Government and the University of Georgia be strengthened and improved over time.

B ANALYSIS OF EXISTING DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

B.1 Existing Land Use Maps

- Athens-Clarke County is utilizing the LBCS (Land-Based Classification Standards) model developed by the American Planning Association to classify land uses based on a variety of characteristics. The model extends the notion of classifying land uses by refining traditional categories into multiple dimensions, such as activities, functions, building types, site development character, and ownership characteristics. Each dimension has its own set of categories and subcategories.
- Multiple sources have been incorporated into the analysis of Athens-Clarke County land uses to compile the LBCS database. These include zoning and building permit data, business tax certificates, tax assessor information, aerial photography, and windshield surveys of properties throughout the county.
- Athens-Clarke County's LBCS database is the most comprehensive assessment of the area's more than 38,000 land parcels. It identifies the multiple activities, functions, and structure types of complex, mixed-use parcels. The maps of each dimension described below provide a simplified graphic illustration of how land uses are distributed across Athens-Clarke County.

B.1.1 Activity

- Activity refers to the actual use of land based on its observable characteristics. It describes what actually takes place in physical or observable terms. An office activity, for example, refers only to the physical activity on the premises, which could apply equally to a law firm, a court house, a non-profit institution, or any other office use. Similarly, residential uses in single-family dwellings, multi-family

structures, manufactured homes, lofts, or any other type of building would all be classified as residential activity.

B.1.2 Function

- Function refers to the economic function or type of establishment using the land. Every land use can be characterized by the type of establishment it serves. Function is independent of actual activity on the land. Establishments can have a variety of activities on their premises, yet serve a single function. For example, two parcels are said to be in the same functional category if they belong to the same establishment, even if one is an office and the other is a manufacturing plant.

B.1.3 Site Development Character

- Site development character refers to the overall physical development character of the land. It describes what is on the land in general physical terms. For most land uses, it is simply expressed in terms of whether the site is developed or not. But not all sites without observable development can be treated as undeveloped. Roads, bike paths, storage tanks, and graded landscape features all alter and contribute to a site's development characteristics.

B.1.4 Structure Type

- Structure refers to the type of structure or building on the land. Although many activities and functions are closely associated with certain structures, it is not always so. Many buildings are adapted for uses other than those for which they were originally built. A single-family residential structure, for instance, may serve an office activity and a dentistry function.

B.2 Areas Requiring Special Attention

- Areas of significant natural or cultural resources
- Areas where rapid development or change of land uses is likely to occur
- Areas where the pace of development has outpaced, or may soon outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation
- Areas in need of redevelopment and/or significant improvements to aesthetics or attractiveness
- Large abandoned structures or sites, including those that may be environmentally contaminated
- Areas with significant infill development opportunities
- Areas of significant disinvestment, levels of poverty, and/or unemployment

B.3 Recommended Character Areas

- Uses separate map or overlay of Existing Land Use Map
- Covers Entire jurisdiction
- Uses appropriate types of character areas

C ANALYSIS OF CONSISTENCY WITH QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (QCOS)

C.1 Assessment of Consistency with QCO's

- (a) **Regional Identity Objective:** Regions should promote and preserve an “identity,” defined in terms of traditional regional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (b) **Growth Preparedness Objective:** Each community should identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These may include housing and infrastructure (roads, water, sewer and telecommunications) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances to direct growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (c) **Appropriate Businesses Objective:** The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms

of job skills required, linkages to other economic activities in the region, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher-skill job opportunities.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (d) **Educational Opportunities Objective:** Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community – to permit community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (e) **Employment Options Objective:** A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective

- (f) **Heritage Preservation Objective:** The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural features that are important to defining the community's character.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (g) **Open Space Preservation Objective:** New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (h) **Environmental Protection Objective:** Air quality and environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development. Environmentally sensitive areas deserve special protection, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or quality of life of the community or region. Whenever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area should be preserved.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (i) **Regional Cooperation Objective:** Regional cooperation should be encouraged in setting priorities, identifying shared needs, and finding collaborative solutions, particularly where it is critical to success of a venture, such as protection of shared natural resources.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (j) **Transportation Alternatives Objective:** Alternatives to transportation by automobile, including mass transit, bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities, should be made available in each community. Greater use of alternate transportation should be encouraged.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (k) **Regional Solutions Objective:** Regional solutions to needs shared by more than one local jurisdiction are preferable to separate local approaches, particularly where this will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (l) **Housing Opportunities Objective:** Quality housing and a range of housing size, cost, and density should be provided in each community, to make it possible for all who work in the community to also live in the community.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (m) **Traditional Neighborhood Objective:** Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged, including use of more human scale development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (n) **Infill Development Objective:** Communities should maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the conversion of undeveloped land at the urban periphery by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the downtown or traditional urban core of the community.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

- (o) **Sense of Place Objective:** Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment.

Athens-Clarke County and the City of Winterville meet or exceed this objective.

D SUPPORTING ANALYSIS OF DATA AND INFORMATION

D.1 Analysis

- Data and information that is relevant to the community's list of issues and opportunities and employs 20-year planning time frame
- Data and information that identifies significant trends in the community

D.2 Compliance with Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria

- State whether or not "Part V" ordinances have been adopted

D.3 Analysis of Consistency with Service Delivery Strategy

- State whether action has been taken or is underway or not to verify SDS in conjunction with plan update.