

## Rural Alabama County Tackles Twenty-Five Years of Deferred Maintenance Without Raising Taxes

### *Chambers County official says project a “game changer” for the community*

Chambers County, an idyllic rural area in eastern Alabama with just under 35,000 residents, was once a commercial and industrial powerhouse known for its textile manufacturing. While the mills have long since closed, Chambers County remains a retail and industrial center with many manufacturers expanding into the county over the last five years.



“We have a proud tradition of manufacturing in our area,” says Chambers County Commission Chairman Charlie Williams. “It started with our textile mills. We may have a more varied economy and population today, but our roots still go back to those mills. That’s why we like to say our strength is woven in.”

To bolster its reputation, county administrators were faced with a dilemma when it came to its iconic facilities and visible age-related challenges.

The county had years of deferred maintenance rapidly compounding in eight facilities, from the jail to the courthouse. Each project had a different scope and updating everything on the list would be at too-high a price tag for this mid-sized municipality.

The updates needed to address:

- HVAC equipment that was 25 years past its shelf life and starting to fail, leaving county workers in potentially emergency situations
- Fifty percent of all lightbulbs in municipal buildings were burnt out or failing
- Building envelope updates in the historic part of the courthouse to eliminate drafty windows and doors
- A system in the county jail to stop inmates from repeatedly flushing toilets and contraband, creating astronomical water bills, flooding and security issues
- The lack of centralized systems to automate operations and provide valuable insights into County infrastructure

## **A million-dollar project with even more potential savings**

Administrators implemented a \$1.7 million countywide infrastructure improvement project that will be paid for with total savings of \$2.59 million over 20 years. The improvements will save the county about 27 percent in energy and operational costs annually. For the citizens of Chambers County, the benefits span far beyond better infrastructure without a tax hike.

“It’s like all of these buildings have been given a new life,” says Douglas Jones, Facilities and Public Infrastructure Committee Chair.

“Residents have particularly appreciated the brighter lighting on the walking trail. It was popular before, but now it’s really getting a lot more use.”

Taken together, Williams and others says the overall improvements will help the county live up to its new slogan of having “strength woven in” while maintaining the historic charm that continues to delight long-time residents and draw new citizens.

So how did they do it?

## **Energy savings instead of tax increases**

County officials sat down with Schneider Electric to talk about a [capital recovery and reinvestment partnership](#) that could address all its infrastructure needs — without raising taxes. Instead, the program uses future guaranteed energy savings to pay for infrastructure upgrades today, giving smaller, rural municipalities a powerful funding tool that can modernize infrastructure across all facilities in a county.

This means one project, one partner, and a host of possibilities for the residents and employees of Chambers County.

“When we learned what was possible through our partnership with Schneider Electric, it was a total no-brainer,” says Williams.

“We’re getting all our upgrades done at all our major facilities without having to go to taxpayers — and we’re making our facilities more efficient at the same time, so our operational expenses will be less. It’s a game changer.”

## **Far-reaching improvements and modernizations**

The improvements and [modernizations](#) the county is able to make with its guaranteed savings are far-reaching, touching most of the county’s building stock.

<https://www.canva.com/design/DADILr8Pm14/view>

“We’re still amazed at how much we were able to accomplish through our partnership with Schneider Electric,” says Williams. “We never thought we could improve and modernize so many of our public buildings at one time.”

**To read more about state-of-the-art technological improvements for communities of all shapes and sizes, click [here](#).**