

## ***Purpose***

One of the best ways to strengthen communities is to create opportunities for citizens to work collaboratively on the challenges that shape their community. Accomplishing this requires political leadership, citizen education, and active involvement. A successful comprehensive plan begins with a process of thinking about and visualizing the future. It is about carrying on a dialogue with the community concerning its vision for evolving and growing. This Community Participation Program was crafted with these principles in mind and establishes a two-way communication between local citizens and their government officials, with the overall goal of better decisions supported by the public.

## ***Scope***

Oglethorpe County and the cities of Arnoldsville, Crawford, Lexington, and Maxeys are required by state law to complete their Comprehensive Plan Update by October 31, 2006. The plan will be prepared in accordance with the Basic Planning Level Local Planning Requirements from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), effective May 1, 2005.

## ***Requirements for Success***

Experience in public involvement has shown that lasting solutions are best identified when all segments of a community – individuals, elected officials, educators, the business community, and civic organizations – are brought together in a spirit of cooperation. A collaborative approach to community engagement is not an opportunity, but a necessity. Community engagement and involvement is done for three reasons:

- To educate and increase public awareness
- To capture the knowledge and preferences of the people who live in and support the communities
- To mobilize support and acceptance of the plan

The measure of effectiveness of a public involvement program is not that the public has been informed, but that public input has contributed to making a decision that is feasible and is supported by a large segment of the community.

Public comment and sentiment are a rich source of information about peoples' values and philosophies. These values and philosophies must be interpreted into meaningful information to guide the project. It is essential to know the community's values to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts as well as narrow the field of alternative solutions. This process is designed to accomplish the following:

- Improve the quality of decisions
- Increase ease of implementation
- Provide greater public understanding of community goals and objectives
- Provide tangible evidence that the community created its own identity

## 2 Identification of Stakeholders

Coordination and oversight are very important parts of the overall work effort for this project. In addition, a network of community organizations and local companies will be identified early in the process for distribution of meeting notices and posters as part of a broad public outreach effort.

### Government

#### **Elected Officials of Oglethorpe County, Arnoldsville, Crawford, Lexington, and Maxeys (list them)**

Oglethorpe County Chamber of Commerce

Oglethorpe County Planning and Zoning

Oglethorpe County Road Superintendent

Development Authority

### Lexington Preservation Society

### Civic Organizations

Rotary Club

Optimist Club

Historic Oglethorpe

Saddle Club

Cattleman's Association

Poultry Producers

Swine Producers

## 3 Identification of Participation Techniques

### 3.1 *Initial Public Hearing*

An initial public hearing was held on July 19 at the Oglethorpe County Courthouse. The purpose of this hearing was to announce to the public that the planning process for updating the comprehensive plan was underway and to encourage community participation. A public hearing to present the draft Community Participation Program and draft Community Assessment to the public is scheduled for December 14, 2005.

### **3.2 Community Visioning Meeting**

Two Community Visioning Meetings were held from 6pm – 8pm on October 20 and November 29, 2005. The participants were led through a series of exercises that helped them create a vision for Oglethorpe County. Participants also will discuss the issues and opportunities facing the County.

The end product of the Community Visioning Meeting will be a narrative description for each plan area expressed in the following terms:

- Strengths and weakness of the quality of life for the County.
- The opportunities and threats that confront the quality of life in the County over the next 20 years.
- The quality of life that the stakeholders and participants in the workshop envision for the County 20 years from now.
- The factors of change and big decisions that will be required to move the County from where it is today to where participants want it to go.
- Benchmarks, or measurable indicators, or quality of life that will be used to indicate success in the future.

Meetings were held in the Farm Bureau Community Room.

### **3.3 Community Design Workshop**

The Community Design Workshop will focus on (1) how to realize the community's vision and (2) possible solutions to the community's issues and opportunities. The Workshop will give participants an opportunity to work with different land use, transportation, and design scenarios and identify actions needed to fulfill the vision established during the visioning meeting. Findings from the Community Assessment and the results from the visioning meeting will be presented. The workshop is anticipated to be a full day event and is scheduled for November 5, 2005 from 9am-6pm.

### **3.5 Adoption Process**

The Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center will present the draft Community Agenda at a public hearing before transmittal to the Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center (RDC) for regional and state review. After the RDC and DCA review the Community Agenda, the final draft will be presented to the Board of Commissioners and respective city councils and the public for adoption at a regular meeting of each local government. The tentative dates for these transmittal hearings are March and May of 2006.

### **3.6 Outreach**

Varieties of techniques will be used to get the information out to participants. Local commercial owners, civic leaders, and churches will be contacted to assist in getting the word out regarding public participation opportunities through press releases, posters, and other information pertaining to the project. Additionally, the RDC will work with the local newspaper, the Oglethorpe Echo, to see that articles on the planning process are periodically published as well as

a reminder that information concerning the plan and draft documents will be posted to the RDC web site.

## 4 Schedule for Completion of the Community Agenda

The graphic below shows the schedule for completion of the Comprehensive Plan Update. Major upcoming milestones in this schedule include:

- Initial Public Hearing City Council ..... August 15, 2005
- Community Visioning Meeting..... September 27, 2005
- Community Design Workshop..... November 5, 2006
- Open House ..... January 2006
- Public Hearing for Transmittal of the Community Agenda to RDC..... March 2006
- Adoption of the Community Agenda ..... May 2006

Task	2005							2006				
	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Initial Client Kick-off Meeting												
Community Assessment												
Community Participation Program												
Community Agenda												
Transmittal, Review, Adoption Processes												
<b>Public Meetings</b>												
Community Visioning Meeting												
Community Design Workshop												
Open House												
Public Hearing/Presentation												