

INTRODUCTION

1.1 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.

1.2 Scope

Walton County and the cities of Between, Good Hope, Jersey, Loganville, Monroe, Social Circle, and Walnut Grove are required by state law to complete their Comprehensive Plan Update by June 30, 2007. The plan will be prepared in accordance with the Advanced Planning Level Local Planning Requirements from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), effective May 1, 2005.

1.3 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:

- o To educate and increase public awareness
- o To capture the knowledge and preferences of the people who live in and support the communities
- o 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:

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

2.0 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.

2.1 Government

Elected Officials of Walton County, Between, Good Hope, Jersey, Loganville, Monroe, Social Circle, and Walnut Grove
Walton County Chamber of Commerce
Walton County Planning and Development
Loganville Planning and Development

2.2 Development Authorities of Walton County, Social Circle, and Loganville

2.3 Walton County Advisory Committee. Citizen members are appointed by the cities and county.

2.4 Citizens for Responsible Growth. A cross-section of residents of Walton County pursuing sensible growth in the county.

3.0 IDENTIFICATION OF PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

3.1 Initial Public Hearing

A public hearing to present the draft Community Participation Program and draft Community Assessment to the public is scheduled for March 12, 2007.

3.2 Community Visioning Meeting

Community Visioning Meetings will be held for Walton County and with each city during April and May. Participants will be led through a series of exercises to create a vision for Walton County and each of its cities. 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:

- o Strengths and weakness of the quality of life for the County.
- o The opportunities and threats that confront the quality of life in the County over the next 20 years.
- o The quality of life that the stakeholders and participants in the workshop envision for the County 20 years from now.
- o 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.
- o Benchmarks, or measurable indicators, or quality of life that will be used to indicate success in the future.

3.4 Adoption Process

The Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center (RDC) will present the draft Community Agenda at a public hearing before transmittal to the Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center 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 date for these transmittal hearings is June 2007 with final adoption in late July.

3.5 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 Walton Tribune, 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 Northeast Georgia Planning web site (www.negplanning.org).

4.0 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:

- Community Visioning Meetings - March - May 2007
- Public Hearing for Transmittal of the Community Agenda to RDC - June 2007
- Adoption of the Community Agenda - July 2007

