

**THE BLECKLEY COUNTY –
COCHRAN COMPREHENSIVE
PLAN**

**COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION
PROGRAM**

MARCH, 2011

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

Introduction

The *Community Participation Program* component of The Bleckley County – Cochran Comprehensive Plan is an important part of the prescribed planning process required in the “Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning” as established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. It is required to ensure that the resulting comprehensive plan reflects the full range of community values and desires by involving a diverse spectrum of local stakeholders in the development of the *Community Agenda*. Broad-based participation will likely lead to better understanding, more effective and more committed implementation of the resulting comprehensive plan.

The *Community Participation Program* is intended to supplement, not replace, the two public hearings required by the Local Planning Requirements. The *Community Participation Program* must include three parts: a) the identification of stakeholders; b) the identification of participation techniques; and c) a schedule for completion of the *Community Agenda*.

As noted in the “Introduction,” Bleckley County and the City of Cochran are striving to comply with and exceed these requirements, and have included only local government officials’ input in the preparation of the *Community Assessment* through the Joint Plan Executive Committee (local government appointed and elected officials). Community involvement in the *Community Assessment* development has been limited to the Mayor, Commissioner, and the two respective clerks, as assisted by Regional Commission staff, but now will expand. Extensive community and stakeholder involvement will take place in the preparation of the *Community Agenda*, with the involvement and liaison of a much broader Local Plan Coordination Committee from many important public and private community agencies, leaders, and representatives.

Identification of Stakeholders

Stakeholders are those agencies, entities, and persons that have a stake in the successful outcome and implementation of the Bleckley County – Cochran Comprehensive Plan. It is important that the entire community is involved and working toward the common strategies for making Bleckley County and the City of Cochran a better place to live and work.

The process for identification of stakeholders for the Bleckley County – Cochran Comprehensive Plan has been discussed early in the plan preparation process, although the final identification has not been completed. Representatives of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission have met with the Executive Committee representatives of the local governments and discussed the importance of community involvement and broad, diverse representation in the preparation of the most important part of the local comprehensive plan, the *Community Agenda*. The “List of Suggested Stakeholders” from DCA’s State Planning Recommendations has been provided. The suggested make-up of the Local Plan Coordination Committee as an inclusive list of broad community involvement has also been discussed. This Local Plan Coordination Committee will be appointed by the local governments before the community involvement and detailed preparation of the *Community Agenda* is initiated. As a result of these discussions, some suggested and desired Local Plan Coordination Committee members have been preliminarily identified on a general entity basis, although specific members have not been chosen.

The preliminary make-up and desired representation of public and private community stakeholders on the Local Plan Coordination Committee, which will be a community-wide steering committee in the development of the *Community Agenda*, is described below. The identified entities, and others that may be identified, will be asked to have representatives participate on the Local Plan Coordination Committee and be a liaison between those entities and the plan’s preparation.

Planned Local Plan Coordination Committee Representation

Bleckley County- Cochran Comprehensive Plan Executive Committee Members

Bleckley County Sole Commissioner

City of Cochran

Other Local Government Elected or Appointed Officials

Bleckley County Board of Education/School System

Middle Georgia College

Cochran-Bleckley Industrial Development Authority

Cochran Downtown Development Authority

Cochran Better Hometown

Cochran-Bleckley Chamber of Commerce

Bleckley Memorial Hospital

Heartland EMS

City of Cochran Housing Authority

Bleckley County Health Department

Bleckley County Department of Family and Children Services

Bleckley County Family Connection

Ocmulgee REMC

Georgia Power Company

Cochran Journal

Bleckley County UGA Extension Service

Acuity Brands Lighting

Cochran-Bleckley Arts Alliance

Pulaski-Bleckley Baptist Association, Inc.

Cochran-Bleckley Recreation Commission

Georgia Forestry Commission

Bleckley County Farm Bureau

Bleckley County Young Farmers

NAACP Local Chapter

Regional Library Board

Civic Clubs

Community Advisory Members (Public)

Further citizen involvement. This preliminary identification of committee make-up, while believed comprehensive and inclusive, is not closed. If the public involvement process identifies another person or entity who or which needs to be included, the local governments will add the needed representative, as warranted, to the planned Local Plan Coordination Committee for additional involvement in the *Community Agenda* preparation. The local governments have already recognized this through the Committee listing of “Citizen Advisory Members.” They expect and want general public participation. The general public will also be advised in the published notice of *Community Assessment* availability after approval by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs of an opportunity to advise the local governments of a desire to participate. If you are reading this as a member of the general public and wish to participate in developing the *Community Agenda*, or what implementation strategies should the community pursue to make itself a better place to live and work, please contact either local government administrative office.

Community Participation Techniques

State planning recommendations for possible community participation techniques have been jointly reviewed by the RC and the involved local governments. Based on RC staff experience, Dooly County and other training, and local government confirmation, the primary means of community participation chosen were the Technical Advisory Committee (Executive Committee), the Steering Committee (Local Plan Coordination Committee), and follow-up public validation through various means.

As noted earlier, the Local Plan Coordination Committee will be designed to provide a broad-based, diverse, and inclusive involvement from a wide-ranging spectrum of stakeholders and interested citizenry. This Local Plan Coordination Committee has not yet been established, although the framework for representation has been identified, including the addition of general citizenry members. The Local Plan Coordination Committee will be formed and extensively involved in the preparation of the *Community Agenda* from community visioning, to prioritizing issues/opportunities, to evaluating and selecting alternatives for implementation. Hands-on interactive techniques for involvement of committee members will be employed. These will include a modified TOPS (Treasures/Opportunities) exercise, additional issue/opportunities exercises at subsequent meetings, input on character areas and development of an appropriate implementation strategy. Members will also be encouraged to be liaisons and seek further input from their represented constituencies. The Local Plan Coordination Committee will meet as needed, but likely at least bi-weekly for a period of about three to four months, to visit the issues and design the community vision and implementation strategy in a detailed and thorough manner. The meetings will be well publicized, with the next follow-up meeting schedule definitively set at each meeting, and with members reminded electronically prior to the next meeting. The public will also be informed.

Public validation of committee results and solicitation of further input will be sought through stakeholder interviews, public hearings, other public meetings, and publication of draft

results. Local government officials have already been interviewed in one-on-one meetings to solicit data, ideas, and opinions on the *Community Assessment*. Follow-up contacts and wider stakeholder contacts and interviews for the *Community Agenda* will be employed. This will allow for even broader community input free of immediate committee and peer scrutiny or damper. Only the one required public hearing on completion of the draft *Community Assessment* has been held thus far, but it confirmed and validated the process as no new ideas resulted, and the scope and depth of identification of issues/opportunities was complimented.

At least one public meeting on community visioning and finalization of issues/opportunities identification in addition to the required public hearing on the draft *Community Agenda* is planned. This meeting will be advertised in the local press, and mentioned in the general news release planned. Printed copies of the draft *Community Assessment* were made available through the local governments. Internet publication, at least on the regional RC website, will be utilized during review and after approval.

The public will be informed of the Local Plan Coordination Committee meetings, including date, time, and place. The draft Community Vision and List of Potential Issues and Opportunities will also be placed on the local community website with provision and encouragement of feedback. As noted earlier under “Further Citizen Involvement,” the general public, or a stakeholder somehow overlooked in the formation of the Local Plan Coordination Committee, will be invited to participate as part of the required public notice to be published. Local press will be included on the Committee invitation list, and a general news release concerning the *Community Agenda* and its development process will be sent to the local press to accompany the public notice publication. The planned participation techniques are not exclusive, and additional techniques could be employed if the planning process develops and reveals a beneficial need.

The required public hearing on the draft *Community Assessment* and *Community Participation Program* was properly advertised and was held March 10, 2011. A required public notice on the availability of the approved *Community Assessment* and *Community Participation Program* will be published in *The Cochran Journal* after DCA approval. Other legal

requirements to be met will be an advertised formal public hearing on the draft *Community Agenda* anticipated in mid-summer, and the public notice on the availability of the adopted plan (including the *Community Agenda*) after the *Community Agenda* is approved by DCA and it is formally adopted by the local governments (Fall, 2011).

Schedule for Completion of the *Community Agenda*

The following timeline depicts The Bleckley County – Cochran Comprehensive Plan preparation process, including the preparation and adoption of the *Community Agenda* component.

Task	2010				2011								
	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Staff <i>Community Assessment</i> Preparation/ Finalization	■	■	■	■	■								
Executive Comm. Meetings on <i>Community Assessment</i>		■			■								
Public Hearing on <i>Community Assessment/Community Participation Program</i>					■								
Local Government Approval of <i>Community Assessment/Community Participation Program</i> Submittal					■								
<i>Community Assessment/Community Participation Program</i> Review						■							
Public Notice of <i>Community Assessment/Community Participation Program</i>						■							
Local Plan Coordination Committee Formation						■	■						
Local Plan Coord. Comm. Meetings on <i>Community Agenda/Agenda</i> Preparation							■	■	■	■			
Community Visioning Public Meeting							■						
Public Hearing on <i>Community Agenda</i>									■				
Local Government Approval of <i>Community Agenda</i> Submittal										■			
<i>Community Agenda</i> Review										■	■	■	
Local Government Adoption												■	
Public Notice of <i>Community Agenda</i> Availability													■