

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

Introduction

The *Community Participation Program* component of The Laurens County Joint 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,” Laurens County and its municipalities are striving to comply with and exceed these requirements, and have included community and stakeholder input in the preparation of the *Community Assessment* from the Joint Plan Executive Committee. Extensive community and stakeholder involvement will continue and expand 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 Laurens County Joint Comprehensive Plan. It is important that the entire community is involved and working toward the common strategies for making Laurens County and its municipalities a better place to live and work.

The process for identification of stakeholders for the Laurens County Joint Comprehensive Plan have been discussed early in the plan preparation process, although the final identification has not been completed. Representatives of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Development Center 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 local comprehensive plan, particularly 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* will be 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. 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 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.

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

Laurens County Joint Comprehensive Plan Executive Committee Members

Laurens County Board of Commissioners

Town of Cadwell

Town of Dexter

City of Dublin

City of Dudley

City of East Dublin

Town of Montrose

Town of Rentz

Other Local Government Elected or Appointed Officials

Laurens County and Dublin Boards of Education/School Systems

Heart of Georgia Technical College

Dublin Center (GSU)

Dublin/Laurens County Industrial Authority

Dublin/Laurens County Chamber of Commerce

Fairview Park Hospital

City of Dublin Housing Authority

Laurens County Health Department

Laurens County Department of Family and Children Services

Laurens County Family Connection

Laurens County Airport Board

Oconee, Little Ocmulgee, Altamaha, and Washington Electric Membership Cooperatives

Georgia Power Company
Progressive Rural Telephone Company
Main Street Dublin-The Downtown Development Authority
Dublin Courier-Herald
Laurens County UGA Extension Service
YKK
SP Newsprint
Mohawk
Best Buy
Fred's
Cattlemen Association
Georgia Forestry Commission
Laurens County Historical Society
Altamaha Riverkeeper
Dublin/Laurens Black Festival Committee
NAACP Local Chapter
Realty Association
Clark Construction
Southside Revitalization
Veterans Administration – Carl Vinson Hospital
Laurens County Solid Waste Authority
Dublin/Laurens Recreation Authority
Oconee Regional Library Board
Laurens EMA

Community Participation Techniques

State planning recommendations for possible community participation techniques have been jointly reviewed by the RDC and the involved local governments. Based on RDC staff experience, Dooly County 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. This Local Plan Coordination Committee has not yet been established, although the framework for representation has been identified. 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 four months, to visit the issues and design the community vision and implementation strategy in a detailed and thorough manner.

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. Key stakeholders, particularly local government, but others also, have already been interviewed in one-on-one meetings to solicit data, ideas, and opinions on the *Community Assessment*. Follow-up contacts and wider contacts for the *Community Agenda* will be employed.

This will allow for even wider 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 in addition to the required public hearing on the draft *Community Agenda* may be planned. A community survey may also be attempted. Printed copies of the draft *Community Assessment* were made available through the local governments. Internet publication, at least on the regional RDC website, will be utilized during review and after approval. 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 October 9, 2008. A required public notice on the availability of the approved *Community Assessment* and *Community Participation Program* will be published in *The Dublin Courier-Herald* after DCA approval. Other legal requirements to be met will be an advertised formal public hearing on the draft *Community Agenda* anticipated in early spring, 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 (Early Summer, 2008).

Schedule for Completion of the *Community Agenda*

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

	2008							2009							
Task	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Staff <i>Community Assessment</i> Preparation/ Finalization															
Executive Comm. Meetings on <i>Community Assessment</i>															
Public Hearing on Comm. Assessment/Comm. Participation Program															
Local Government Approval of Comm. Assessment/Comm. Participation Program Submittal															
Comm. Assessment/Comm. Part. Program Review															
Public Notice of Comm. Assessment/Comm. Part. Program															
Local Plan Coordination Committee Formation															
Local Plan Coord. Comm. Meetings on <i>Community Agenda</i> /Agenda Preparation															
Community Visioning Public Meeting															
Public Hearing on <i>Community Agenda</i>															
Local Government Approval of Comm. Agenda Submittal															
Comm. Agenda Review															
Local Government Adoption															
Public Notice of Comm. Agenda Availability															