

McDuffie County Joint Comprehensive Plan Community Participation Program 2009-2029



McDuffie County

City of Thomson

Town of Dearing

Prepared by the CSRA Regional Development Center



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

PURPOSE

As a document that reflects the shared vision, goals and objectives of an entire community, a comprehensive plan must be based on extensive public involvement. Only through the input of local leaders and the general public can any comprehensive plan be embraced as the community's guide to long-term health and sustainability. The level of community ownership of a comprehensive plan is tied directly to the degree of public input that is incorporated into the planning effort. Only by conducting a comprehensive planning process that creates this public sense of ownership will the community make a conscious decision to work toward its implementation. Without active citizen involvement, it is unlikely that a comprehensive plan will do more than sit forgotten on a shelf. A comprehensive plan that is based on public input, however, will continue to serve as a dynamic policy guide that benefits the community well into the future.

The *Community Participation Program* ensures that public input is incorporated into the comprehensive planning process for Dearing, Thomson, and McDuffie County. To obtain this input, stakeholders are targeted to focus attention to key issues and opportunities that must be addressed through the creation of McDuffie County's joint *Community Agenda*; and, to provide an understanding of priorities in advance of the *Agenda* preparation. Through workshops, the general public will refine and revise community issues and opportunities. The general public will also generate the ideas that will ultimately form the implementation policies of the *McDuffie County Joint Comprehensive Plan*.

STAKEHOLDERS

Planning/Advisory Committee

The *Community Participation Program* proposes the continued use of a planning/advisory committee appointed by local officials. The McDuffie County Joint Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee will meet intermittently to provide direction to *Community Agenda* preparation based on input received through public workshops and surveys.

The McDuffie County Joint Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee was actually formed soon after *Community Assessment* data collection was initiated. The Advisory Committee is composed of a broad cross-section of community leaders including citizens and local officials. As with any data collection effort, a plan preparer must take

into account quantitative and qualitative information. The support of the Advisory Committee during the data collection effort was essential – both in fulfilling many primary data requests; and, in providing the necessary feedback to better understand statistical information.

McDuffie County Joint Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee	
Name	Organization/ Area of interest
Sean Kelley	Mayor, Town of Dearing
Don Powers	Administrator, City of Thomson
Don Norton	Administrator, McDuffie County
Georgia Hobbs	McDuffie County Planning Commission
Fred Guerrant	Director, McDuffie County Planning
David Wells	Thomson Planning Commission
Doug Kier	McDuffie County Reg. Medical Center
Chris Pelly	McDuffie County Public Works
Logan Marshall	Sherriff, McDuffie County
Mark Peterson	McDuffie County Board of Education
Peter Ruddick	McDuffie County Utilities
Donald Greene	Land and Subdivision Development Rep.
Andy Knox	Real Estate and Development
George Lokey	Financial Services
Tony Burnley	Home Builders
Lee Anne Cowart	Historic Preservation Commission
Bob Wilson, Jr.	Real Estate and Development
Jim Alfriend	Real Estate and Development
Riley Stamey	Home Builders

Additional Stakeholder Identification

With the assistance of the Advisory Committee during the *Community Assessment* process, additional stakeholders have been identified. During preparation of the *Community Agenda*, it will be important to offer stakeholder organizations and individuals the opportunity to provide feedback and direction through a variety of options. In addition to the principal public participation techniques proposed in this document, many community stakeholders will have the opportunity to participate in future Advisory Committee discussions. Stakeholder groups and organizations include the following:

McDuffie County Joint Comprehensive Plan Stakeholders	
Augusta Regional Transportation Study	CSRA Business Lending Corporation
Augusta Technical College	Development Authority of McDuffie County
Georgia Department of Natural Resources	Fort Gordon
Georgia Department of Transportation	Forward McDuffie
The Clark's Hill Partnership	McDuffie County Historic Preservation Commission
McDuffie County Sherriff's Office	McDuffie County Board of Education
McDuffie County Water & Sewer Commission	City of Thomson Police Department
Major Employers (Thomson Plastics, HP Pelzer, etc.)	McDuffie County Regional Medical Center
McDuffie County Department of Public Works	Georgia Power
McDuffie County Department of Solid Waste	Thomson Department of Streets and Sanitation
City of Thomson Historic Preservation Commission	Faith based organizations
Bartram Trail Library Board	Community Service Organizations (Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.)
Agricultural and forestry interests (Co-op Extension, GFC, etc.)	CSRA Land Trust
Trade Associations (Homebuilders, etc.)	Thomson-McDuffie County Planning Commission

PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

Planning/Advisory Committee Meetings

Community Assessment

Meetings of the Advisory Committee began in April of 2007. The initial committee meeting focused on a description of the comprehensive planning process and the importance of a comprehensive plan in establishing long-term community policy. Committee members also provided initial input on issues and opportunities facing Dearing, Thomson, and McDuffie County. Subsequent committee meetings focused on presentations and discussions that revolved around data sets and information that are required in order to adhere to the "Supporting Analysis of Data and Information" section of the "Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning."

Community Agenda

Advisory Committee meetings will continue during the preparation of the *Community Agenda* portion of the *McDuffie County Joint Comprehensive Plan*. The committee will retain their role as a focus group – helping to translate community input into measurable goals and priorities. The

committee will also assist in the initial development of *Plan* implementation strategies. Finally, the committee will serve as the primary vehicle for soliciting public participation in the *Community Agenda* process. It will be the Advisory Committee's responsibility to educate residents on the need to participate in the planning process; and, to inform the community of upcoming opportunities to participate. The number and frequency of Advisory Committee meetings during the *Community Agenda* process is illustrated in the comprehensive plan schedule within this document; but, is subject to change based on public input.

Public Workshops

Community Assessment

The initial public workshops for the *McDuffie County Joint Comprehensive Plan* were held on Monday October 29th, 2007 in Dearing, and Tuesday October 30th, 2007 in Thomson. Through the initiative of Advisory Committee members, Dearing, Thomson, and McDuffie County residents and property owners were invited to participate in the workshop through the distribution of flyers, and public hearing notices posted in the *McDuffie County Mirror*. Newspaper postings advertising the workshop were prepared in large block format so that they would be conspicuous to readers.

The agenda at both public workshops was identical-residents were simply given two attendance choices in order to accommodate potential conflicts with their personal schedules. Attendees listened to a presentation explaining the comprehensive planning process and detailing how they would be able to participate in *Plan* preparation during the *Community Agenda* portion of the planning effort. After questions and answers, an attendee information/survey card was distributed that included basic questions soliciting citizens' opinions on positive and negative attributes of their communities. These responses supplemented information received from prior Advisory Committee meetings and augmented recommendations contained in the *Community Assessment* document.

Community Agenda

At least 3 sets of additional public workshops will be held for the general public during preparation of the *Community Agenda*. As with the initial public workshops held during the community assessment process, each "set" of community agenda workshops will be held at two locations to offer a scheduling option to potential attendees. Unlike the formal presentation format of the initial *Community Assessment* workshop, some *Community Agenda* workshops may be held in a "drop-in" format. As with an open house, drop-in workshops allow members of the public to attend at any point during an identified block of time and stay for the period of time they feel comfortable with. Drop-in workshops also will provide individual staff members with the opportunity to speak one-on-one with attendees.

At the first workshop, attendees will be able to walk among displays that highlight issues and opportunities related to all topics addressed in the *Community Assessment*. For each topic, attendees may complete a survey form that allows them to rank the information presented in order of priority. The surveys will also allow attendees to suggest revisions and options to the preliminary recommendations that are being presented. Project staff will be available throughout to answer questions and provide clarification. All information will be compiled and utilized to revise community goals and objectives.

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At the second workshop there will be a focus on the transportation and land use elements of the *Plan*. An explanation of the concept of “character areas” and their role in the comprehensive planning process will be given along with an explanation of all elements of the transportation plan including the Major Thoroughfare Plan.

The third workshop will be conducted in the same format as the first; except, participants will focus on suggesting and prioritizing implementation policies. An additional workshop may be scheduled at any time during the Community Agenda process if planners determine that more focus needs to be given to a particular topic. This is the reason that a fourth workshop is included on the schedule found on page 197.

In an effort to elicit the maximum amount of community involvement and input during the development of the *Community Agenda* the Advisory Committee members will serve as a link between the *Plan’s* preparers and the various groups that they represent. They will be the public face of the plan that they have coordinated to create. Additionally, the use of mass emails in order to get the word out about the open houses or other potential events relating to the *Plan* should be used. Finally, a web page on the City-County website should be created so that people that have not had the opportunity to attend in person an open house, but still wish to participate in the planning process may read the draft document and provide their input via web survey or direct email.

Stakeholder Coordination

Many of the stakeholder groups identified herein were contacted for input during preparation of the *Community Assessment*. As previously suggested, stakeholder groups will have the opportunity to provide input on the draft *Community Assessment* document. Stakeholder groups expressing interest will have the opportunity to attend *Community Agenda* public workshops.

Public Hearings

Public hearings will be held in accordance with the “Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning.”

COMMUNITY AGENDA SCHEDULE

The remainder of the *Joint McDuffie County Comprehensive Plan* is being prepared according to the schedule located on page 197. The number of Advisory Committee meetings and public workshops illustrated on the schedule is a minimum and may increase.

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McDuffie County, Darling and Thomson Joint Comprehensive Plan Project Schedule

Task	<i>Community Agenda*</i>											
	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan. 2009	Feb.	March	April	May	June		
Planning/ Advisory Committee meetings.	X					X						
Public/Private Stakeholder Committee Meetings.												
Community Assessment/ Participation Plan draft.												
Community Assessment/ Participation Plan												
Community Assessment/Agency public workshops (2 Locations)			X	X	X							
Community Assessment/ Participation Plan	X	X	X	X								
Community Agenda draft report presentation by RDC							X					
Community Agenda transmitted by local government.								X				
Community Agenda DCA/FDC review period.									X	X	X	X

For information about specific topics intended to be discussed at each public workshop, please refer to the *Community Agenda* sections on pages 195 and 196.





CENTRAL SAVANNAH RIVER AREA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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August 22, 2008

Counties Served:

Mr. Jim Frederick, Director
Office of Planning and Quality Growth
Georgia Department of Community Affairs
60 Executive Park South, NE
Atlanta, GA 30329

Burke

Columbia

RE: McDuffie County Community Participation Program – Resubmittal

Dear Jim:

Glascoc

A revised Community Participation Program component of the draft McDuffie County Joint Comprehensive Plan has been resubmitted via the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' (DCA) ftp site. CSRA Regional Development Center (RDC) Planning Department staff have incorporated many of DCA's suggestions into the revised document. I have been advised that some of DCA's suggestions will aid in promoting greater public involvement in the upcoming preparation of the Community Agenda document. As with the original submittal, we believe the resubmittal adheres to the Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs: Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning.

Hancock

Jefferson

Jenkins

DCA's Community Participation Program recommendations are drawn directly from the Department's "State Planning Recommendations" – which my staff has consulted since the beginning of McDuffie County's planning process. I interpret the use of the various suggestions contained in the "State Planning Recommendations" to be encouraged but not required. As a result, while my staff has indicated that some of DCA's recommendations suggested in your August 22nd letter are theoretically sound and will be addressed in McDuffie County's planning effort, I do not see that the recommendations are a valid basis for disapproval of our original submittal. My position is based on the following concerns:

Lincoln

McDuffie

Richmond

- Omission of some – or all – of DCA's recommendations from the text of a submitted planning document does not necessarily mean that the issues were not considered. Within McDuffie County, many advisory committee members wear multiple hats and have been continually encouraged to communicate with the various business, educational, community service and other organizations of which they are members about the comprehensive planning process. In addition, some of the stakeholders you have listed have been invited to participate in the Community Assessment preparation and have not consistently attended. Other groups – such as neighborhood organizations, biking/hiking clubs – do not exist within Thomson/McDuffie County (Although, as a result of the RDC's planning process, we have been asked – and have provided - the city of Thomson with assistance that is resulting in the creation of two (2) neighborhood groups.)
• Suggested stakeholder lists include vaguely defined groups. The RDC's and local community's interpretation of who should represent such groups as "entrepreneurs," "low-income groups," etc. in the planning process may significantly differ from DCA's.

Taliaferro

Warren

Washington

Wilkes



We can specifically list such groups in the *Community Participation Program* document, but ultimately measuring whether such groups were able and/or chose to participate in the planning process is subjective. Furthermore, the specific list of stakeholders suggested in DCA's August 22nd letter to be included in the planning process seem to be randomly selected from the "State Planning Recommendations" from which they were derived.

- **The suggested community participation techniques and stakeholder lists provided as a result of DCA review – even if based on the "State Planning Recommendations" – is arbitrary depending on who at DCA conducts the review.** DCA's comments tend to be highly variable depending on the preferences of individual reviewers. Denying approval of a comprehensive plan document based on checklists of suggested techniques does not illustrate knowledge of local conditions within the submitting community. The CSRA RDC's Planning Department staff has the experience to measure the degree of community enthusiasm that can be generated for a particular community planning effort, how engaged community leadership wants to be, who and how to involve citizens in the effort, and the amount of time and resources that should be spent promoting the planning process.

As I previously suggested, the CSRA RDC's Planning Department staff appreciates DCA's recommendations for illustrating how a fully representative public planning process should be conducted. Some of DCA's suggestions will be revisited and incorporated into the public participation process. Regardless, my hope is that DCA will trust the professional and ethical obligations of my staff to make a good faith effort to properly involve the public in McDuffie County's joint *Community Agenda* process, rather than having them explain why a particular suggested public participation technique was not utilized (as referenced in your August 22nd letter).

It is extremely surprising to me that the RDC's *Community Participation Program* component submitted on behalf of McDuffie County, Dearing and Thomson has not been approved by DCA although clearly outlining a much more thorough public participation process than was recently included in partial comprehensive plan submittals prepared by other consultants. The sole public involvement referenced in the prior two (2) separate submittals prepared by private consultants was a single required public hearing - yet both were approved by DCA on July 25th without a single comment. Such inconsistency is disconcerting.

In future plan reviews it is my hope that DCA's comments based on the State Planning Recommendations are provided as suggestions – as opposed to a basis for plan denial. Please contact me at (706) 210-2007 if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



Andy Crosson
Executive Director