



**Newton County 2006-2028 Comprehensive Plan Update:
Community Participation Program**

February 20, 2006



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1 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 established a two-way communication between local citizens and their government officials, with the overall goal of better decisions supported by the public. This document was prepared as part of the update of the Newton County Comprehensive Plan. This plan is solely for Newton County, and is not intended to satisfy the Local Planning Requirements for any of the Newton County municipalities.

1.2 Scope

Newton County (County) is required by state law to complete its Comprehensive Plan (CP) Update by February 28, 2008. As prescribed by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the CP will be created following the intent of the Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning 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:

- 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

Communities that prosper do so because people work together to improve the quality of life that they want to sustain. 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. This approach, to ensure proper management of the process, includes oversight by the Newton County Commissioners, Planning Commission, a Project Management Team, Newton County Municipalities, and Newton County Organizations. In addition, a network of community organizations and local companies was identified early in the process for distribution of meeting notices and posters as part of a broad public outreach effort.

Newton County Commissioners

Chairman - Aaron Varner
District 1 - T.M. "Mort" Ewing
District 2 - Ronnie Dimsdale
District 3 - Ester Fleming
District 4 - J.C. Henderson
District 5 - Monty Laster

Newton County Planning Commission

Chairman - Mr. Richard Coleman
District 1 - Mr. Troy Bledsoe
District 2 - Mr. John Head
District 3 - Robert Kitchens
District 4 - Mr. Kenneth Hardeman
District 5 - Mr. Jody Smith

Project Management Team

Marian Eisenberg – Planning/Zoning Director
Pamela Maxwell – Planning & Zoning Administrative Coordinator
Scott Sirotkin- Zoning Administrator
Jenny Carter – County Attorney's Office
Josh Knight – GIS
Jim Summerbell – JJG Project Manager
Charlotte Weber – JJG
Karen Dick – Ackerman & Co.
Jennifer Hunter – Kimley-Horn
Ed Ellis – Kimley-Horn

Department Representatives

- Fire Services
- Georgia Forestry Commission
- Information Systems
- Keep Covington/Newton Beautiful (KCNB)
- Landfill

- Parks and Attractions
- Planning and Development
- Public Buildings
- Public Works
- Recreation
- Sheriff
- Stormwater Management
- Newton County School System
- Newton County Water and Sewer Authority

Newton Municipalities

- City of Covington
- City of Mansfield
- City of Newborn
- City of Oxford
- City of Porterdale

Newton County Organizations

- The Center: Facilitating Community Preservation and Planning
- The Newton County Chamber of Commerce
- Arnold Fund
- Smart Growth Newton County
- The Newton County Historical Society
- Newton County Land Trust Alliance
- Jackson Lake Homeowners Assoc.
- GA Wildlife Federation
- Developers
 - Bob Rutland
 - R.J. Fields
 - John Penland
 - Hubert White
 - Phil Johnson
 - Pierce Cline

3 Identification of Participation Techniques

3.1 Initial Public Hearings

As required under the state Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning, public hearings before the Newton County Planning Commission and the Newton County Board of Commissioners will be held to announce to the public that the planning process for updating the comprehensive plan was underway. These meetings are scheduled tentatively for October 25, 2005, before the Planning Commission, and for November 15, 2005, before the Board of Commissioners. The public will be informed of the plan's project schedule and how they can get involved as outlined in this document. The public also will be given an opportunity to comment on the draft Community Assessment which highlights the issues and opportunities that will be taken into consideration in developing the plan. Following the public hearings, and based on input from the public and county officials, this document and the Community Assessment will be transmitted to the Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center (Northeast Georgia RDC) for their review and comment.

3.2 Visioning Workshops

A total of six Visioning Workshops will be held throughout the County from February through April 2006. Each workshop will have three goals for that plan area:

1. Identify what the community wants to Preserve, Change, Create, or Connect
2. Establish a vision
3. Outline two or three alternative scenarios for future development

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

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

The meetings are anticipated to be held at schools and community centers around the County. A list of potential sites follows:

- Palmer Stone Elementary School

- Wildlife Federation
- East Newton Elementary School
- Heard Mixon Elementary School
- Veterans Memorial Middle School
- Turner Lake Complex

The various locations and dates will give residents several opportunities to give their input on the future of Newton County. The number of meetings scheduled was for the convenience of the citizens.

3.3 Citizen Roundtable

A Citizen Roundtable Committee (CRC) will be comprised of no more than 12 members, total, not including County staff. The CRC will convene 6 times throughout the life of the project. The CRC will participate in the development of the plan and will serve as a key player in the public participation effort.

The CRC will meet prior to the first visioning workshop to review project goals and objectives, project schedule, and participant expectations about the project. This will provide an opportunity for the panel to meet the consultant team and express their individual interests in the project and for the community. The additional meetings will review feedback received from public outreach efforts, and will focus on creating a countywide vision for the community, based on the interests of each planning area. One of the meetings will focus on transportation issues in the County and the relationship between land use and transportation.

3.4 Strategic Framework Workshop

The Strategic Framework Workshop is scheduled for April 2006, after the six Visioning Workshops, to create goals, objectives, and policies in keeping with the county vision statement. This will establish the framework for the recommendations and implementation strategies, work programs, and action plans. At the Strategic Framework Workshop, participants will assist in the creation of a Strategic Framework Plan that:

- Reviews the implications of possible growth scenarios in terms of quality of life defined in the County Vision Statement.
- Refines the growth projections and identifies the preferred options for each issue area that was discussed in the workshop into a Preferred Growth Scenario.
- Create and prioritize a set of goals, objectives, and policies to achieve the Vision and desired growth scenario.

The end product of this meeting will be a Preferred Growth Scenario and a Strategic Framework Plan consisting of a first draft of goals, objectives, and policies for the Comprehensive Plan. The Strategic Framework Plan is structured to address each issue raised in the Vision and sets forth a set of strategy options that can be developed with the statements of needs, goals, objectives, and policies for the Comprehensive Plan.

3.5 Public Hearing for Plan Transmittal

The consultant will present the 2028 Comprehensive Plan at a public hearing before the Planning Commission and then the Board of Commissioners. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the plan before the plan is transmitted to the Northeast Georgia RDC for review. The tentative date of these transmittal hearings are in June and July of 2006.

3.6 Project Webpage

On a regular basis, JJG will produce materials in a format suitable for posting on the County website and work with the Information Services Director, Tim McCart, to maintain a webpage that addresses the County's needs and furthers public education regarding the project. The webpage address is through the Newton County website at www.co.newton.ga.us. The webpage also will have contact information for the consultant team.

3.7 Outreach

Varieties of techniques will be used to get the information out to participants. Space on the County website will be used to display press releases, posters, and other information pertaining to the project. The Center, the Chamber of Commerce, and Smart Growth Newton have contact lists that will be utilized to supply a network of outlets for distribution of meeting notices and posters. The Center submits articles on a bi-weekly basis to the local newspaper and will assist in outreach efforts for public participation.

3.8 Standard Procedures

3.8.1 Media Relations

If the media approaches a member of the consultant team and requests an interview or has questions, the consultant will take the name of the media representative, publication they represent, when the article or TV spot will run, and what was talked about. The information will then be passed along to Marian Eisenberg and Tim McCart.

3.8.2 Special Interest Groups

There are several special interest groups within Newton County. A major part of the Comprehensive Plan comes from public input and the consultants understand that the special interest groups are an important part of Newton's future. However, the Comprehensive Plan is a work in progress, and the citizen input must come from the public at large. Therefore, it is the policy of the consultant team to refer all inquiries from special interest groups and the public about our planning efforts, outside of scheduled public forums, to the County Planning staff. In particular, we will inform Marian Eisenberg of any inquiries made and will not volunteer any information about our analysis or recommendations without their expressed written consent.

4 Schedule for Completion of the Community Agenda

On the following page is a graphic that shows the schedule for completion of the Comprehensive Plan Update. Major upcoming milestones in this schedule include:

Initial Public Hearing - Planning Commission	October 25, 2005
Initial Public Hearing - Board of Commissioners.....	November 15, 2005
Six Visioning Workshops	February - April 2006
Visioning Workshop @ Veteran's Memorial	February 16, 2006
Visioning Workshop @ Heard Mixon.....	March 2, 2006
Visioning Workshop @ East Newton Elementary	March 9, 2006
Visioning Workshop @ Palmer Stone Elementary.....	March 16, 2006
Visioning Workshop @ Wildlife Federation.....	March 30, 2006
Visioning Workshop @ Turner Lake Complex.....	April 20, 2006
Strategic Framework Workshop @ Historic Courthouse	May 12, 2006
Public Hearing for Transmittal of the Community Agenda - Planning Commission.....	July 2006
Public Hearing for Transmittal of the Community Agenda - Board of Commissioners.....	August 2006
Adoption of the Community Agenda.....	December 2006

Newton County Comprehensive Plan Update Schedule

Ref. #	Task	Month																				
		Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05	Dec-05	Jan-06	Feb-06	Mar-06	Apr-06	May-06	Jun-06	Jul-06	Aug-06	Sep-06	Oct-06	Nov-06	Dec-06	Jan-07	
	Contract Signed - Notice to proceed 6-21-05	☺																				
	Community Assessment																					
1.1	Data Gathering Meeting																					
1.2	Build GIS Foundations (TAZ and Plan Areas)		△																			
1.3	Real Estate and Market Trends Analysis																					
1.4	Fiscal Impact Assessment																					
1.5	Buildout Analysis and Plan Area Summaries																					
1.6	Draft Community Assessment (CA)																					
1.7	Staff review of the CA and revisions																					
	Public Involvement																					
2.1	Draft Community Participation Program (CPP)					update																
2.2	Staff review of CPP																					
2.3	Initial Public Hearings to transmit CA and CPP							PC ☆ BOC ☆														
2.4	RDC and DCA review of CA and CPP																					
2.5	Citizen Roundtable (CR) Meetings (x 6)																					
2.6	Visioning Workshop Preparation																					
2.7	Visioning Workshops (x 6)																					
2.8	Scenario Development																					
2.9	Strategic Framework Workshop																					
	Community Agenda																					
3.1	Crafting of the Community Vision (FLU Map)																					
3.2	Issues and Opportunities Analysis																					
3.3	Preparation of Short Term Work Program																					
3.4	Draft Community Agenda																					
3.5	Staff and CR Review of Community Agenda																					
3.6	Public Hearings for Transmittal of the Plan																					
	Adoption																					
4.1	RDC and DCA review of the Plan																					
4.2	Plan Adoption																					
4.3	Final printing and delivery																					

Contract Signed - Notice to Proceed
 Public Meetings
 Transportation Plan Coordination

