

City of Suwanee 2030 Comprehensive Plan: Community Participation Program

March 16, 2007 - Final



City of Suwanee
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I. Introduction

Pursuant to the Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Chapter 110-12-01 (Local Planning Requirements) under the Rules and Regulations of the State of Georgia, the City of Suwanee must update its Comprehensive Plan by February 28, 2009 in order to maintain its Qualified Local Government (QLG) Status. As prescribed by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the CPP will be created following the intent of the Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning effective May 1, 2005.

The Comprehensive Plan consists of three basic components – a Community Assessment, a Community Participation Program, and a Community Agenda.

The Community Participation Program is prepared early in the process to outline the specific steps that the community will take to engage the public and gain stakeholder involvement in the planning process. It allows for refinement of the Community Assessment and directs the Community Agenda.

The purpose of the Community Participation Program is to ensure that Suwanee's Comprehensive Plan reflects the full range of community values and desires, by involving a diverse spectrum of stakeholders.

II. Identification of Stakeholders

Below summarized a potential list of stakeholders. This list will be refined and updated during development and implementation of the Plan.

Project Management Team

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Individual/ Organization/ Group	Interviews	Public Meetings	Task Force Invitation
Mayor and Council	X	X	X
Suwanee Citizens	X	X	X
Suwanee Business Owners and Operators	X	X	X
Development Community	X	X	X
Planning Commission	X	X	X
Zoning Board of Appeals	X	X	X
Downtown Development Authority		X	X
Open Space Citizens Advisory Committee		X	X
Local Schools	X	X	X

Individual/ Organization/ Group	Interviews	Public Meetings	Task Force Invitation
City of Suwanee Staff:			
City Manager	X	X	X
Suwanee Police Department	X	X	X
Public Works Department	X	X	X
City Clerk	X	X	X
Administration Department	X	X	X
City of Sugar Hill		X	
City of Duluth		X	
Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners		X	
Gwinnett County Board of Education	X	X	
Gwinnett County Department of Transportation	X	X	
Gwinnett County Department of Planning and Development	X	X	
Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation Department	X	X	
Others:	X	X	X
Churches		X	X
Neighborhood Associations (PACT Groups)		X	X
Suwanee Sports Academy		X	X
Others: To be Determined	X	X	X

III. Participation Techniques

The City of Suwanee Community Participation Program will include, at a minimum, 1) Public Meetings, 2) Open House Meeting(s), 3) Stakeholder Interviews, 4) Citizen Updates via Newsletter and Website, and 5) Citizen Task Force/Working Group.

A. Public Meetings

There will be a minimum of four (4) organized public meetings as outlined below. In terms of the process and schedule, we propose four (4) distinct phases, each with a key public workshop as illustrated in the accompanying graphic schedule.

- a. The first public workshop would be an initial kick-off workshop. The goal of this first meeting would be to introduce the public to the team and process, and revisit the goals

and objectives of the previous Comprehensive Plan as a way of framing the changes that have occurred over the intervening years and the challenges that stakeholders will face in this new environment. The workshop will include some interactive exercise that allows stakeholders to objectively comment on the city's progress since the previous Plan

- b. The second public meeting would be the forum to bring participants up to speed on baseline data for the city and its relation to emerging trends in the county. This data would be provided from the results of the reviews of the Joint Community Assessment, as well as from other recent planning studies that the city has conducted. The results of these city studies would be summarized and broken down into the DCA planning element categories to capture any overlap, as part of the initial project mobilization.
- c. The second phase would be centered on citywide community visioning and issues definition. Stakeholder identification and interviews would remain as proposed. The team would conduct a review of preliminary issues and opportunities based on interview results and initial community input from the kick-off. These issues and opportunities would be the point of departure for the third public workshop, which would engage the community in a broad visioning process using the Compass, and image-based survey that can include brief questions and be customized to audience and subject. The goal of this workshop would be to endorse or adjust the citywide growth vision from the 2000 plan, brainstorm on responses to emerging challenges, and define character areas for more focused study.
- d. The fourth public workshop (and third phase) would zoom in on these character areas and, like the shaping of the Town Center plan, use additional visioning tools to build consensus on the specifics of form and program. The workshop would likely revolve around table exercises where participants are immersed in designing the elements of the character areas, such as streets, open space and community facilities, and desired building density. The exercises would touch on aspects of the DCA planning elements to not only satisfy state requirements, but to begin a dialogue on implementation priorities. As in the previous phases, input from the workshop would be an important part of the draft Community Agenda, with the goal to inform the creation of a comprehensive vision at several different scales, and coordinate this vision with community-identified issues and opportunities.
- e. The final phase and workshop would close the process with a presentation of the draft Community Agenda highlights and an implementation/project prioritization survey. The Community Agenda would be finalized after input from this fifth public meeting. Consistent with the structure described in the draft CPP, monthly client team review of progress toward milestones – analysis of previous goals and objectives, citywide visioning and character area selection, definition of character area issues, character area vision plans, identification of potential implementation projects, and plan finalization – and meetings with the Task Force and Working Group would provide an essential reality check and contribute to the preparation for each workshop.

The four-phase five-workshop process, in concert with the other recommendations outlined above, would help to insure that the citizens of the City of Suwanee have appropriate and ample opportunities to participate in the comprehensive planning process.

B. Interviews

A series of interviews will be conducted with selected stakeholders to help assess and refine the list of issues and opportunities identified in the Community Assessment portion of the plan and assist with identification of goals and priorities.

C. Citizen Task Force

A Citizen Task Force will be established early in the planning process, consisting of a diverse group of individuals from the identified stakeholder list. The Task Force will meet regularly throughout the process. The Task Force will participate in development of a Community Vision and Community Agenda.

The process will also benefit from a strong Task Force, and to that end the inclusive structure proposed in the draft CPP is adopted for this effort. However, the team also recognizes that the time commitment for an eight-month project may be difficult for some Task Force members; and that at various points in the process the input of the entire Task Force is not essential. Therefore, in addition to the Task Force, the planning team recommends that the City of Suwanee consider the appointment of a smaller subcommittee or “Working Group” of between ten (10) and twenty (20) members. This Working Group may include a member of the Planning Commission, member(s) of City Council, member(s) of City Authorities, as well as representatives of key stakeholder and constituent groups. Ideally, the Task Force and the Working Group would alternate meetings on a monthly basis, with the Working Group participating in larger Task Force meetings as well as their own. Both groups would serve an important role as our “reality check” for reviewing ideas prior to each public meeting. The Task Force meetings would certainly be open to the public, but not necessarily widely advertised as public meetings, per se. The planning team therefore proposes that the Task Force hold four (4) meetings approximately one week prior to each public workshop, with another four (4) meetings of the Working Group in alternate months as a mid-phase progress check.

D. Visioning Workshop

One or more Visioning Workshop(s) will be held. The Workshop will both educate citizens about planning and prompt discussions on the future of the City by addressing issues and opportunities that have potential to impact the quality of life. The workshop will incorporate a variety of interactive activities in an effort to identify:

- Issues and opportunities facing the community.
- Community goals and values.
- Strengths and weaknesses of the community.
- Stakeholder/Public preferences for community character, aesthetics and design.
- The factors of change and big decisions that will be required to move the City from where it is today to where participants want it to go.

E. Open House

Once a draft Community Agenda has been completed, an Open House will be held to present the recommendations and implementation program for the future of the City. The public will have an opportunity to review and comment on the recommendations and implementation strategies.

F. Additional Participation Tools

Involving the community is a many-faceted process. A wide array of strategies must be employed to reach as broad an “audience” as possible. Not everyone will commit to attending public meetings – other avenues must be available for capturing valuable input from citizens and allowing them to participate in the way that is most meaningful to them. Furthermore, people who attend public meetings interact most effectively in different ways. The following outlines some additional approaches, tools and techniques that the city will consider and use as appropriate:

1. Image Preference Survey

During visioning efforts, the use of a photography-based community preference survey may be utilized. These types of surveys are good tools to educate the public and gather local design preferences.

2. Photographic Journal

A tool where pictures are provided by participants to demonstrate pleasing and unpleasing elements within a community.

3. Website

A website will be established that will be a platform for citizen involvement and will include information on the planning process, meeting schedules and locations (including maps), project calendars, draft and final documents, surveys or questionnaires, and contact information.

4. Survey/Questionnaires

Surveys and Questionnaires are important tools used to reach additional citizens to ask specific questions and to gather opinions on the future direction of the City. Surveys can be as short as one or two questions on the website, or can be lengthy and ask a variety of questions.

5. Flyers

Flyers will be created prior to public meetings and workshops to advertise meeting dates and locations. They will be created in simple formats that can be printed or distributed electronically format through a variety of contact lists.

6. Press Releases

Press releases will be drafted prior to public meetings or milestones and will be posted on the project website and will be sent to the local media. The press releases would contain a description of the progress of the Comprehensive Plan Update, meeting locations and times, or other important information.

7. Newsletter

The City uses Crossroads, the official City of Suwanee newsletter, to update citizens about important or upcoming events. This award-winning bi-monthly newsletter is an important tool for providing information to those citizens that do not tend to attend community meeting.

IV. Schedule for Completion of the Community Agenda

Attached is a proposed schedule for completing the citizen participation program and Community Agenda.