

FINAL DRAFT

**Whitfield County
Comprehensive Plan 2008-2018**

*Joint Comprehensive Plan Update for
Whitfield County and the
municipalities of Dalton, Tunnel Hill and Varnell*

**COMMUNITY
PARTICIPATION
PROGRAM**

Prepared for:
Whitfield County
Dalton, Georgia

By:



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February 28, 2008

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Introduction

Introduction to the Community Participation Program for Whitfield County and the municipalities of Dalton, Tunnel Hill and Varnell

Purpose

The purpose of the Community Participation Program is to ensure that the Whitfield County Comprehensive Plan 2008-2018, the Joint Comprehensive Plan Update for Whitfield County and municipalities of Dalton, Tunnel Hill and Varnell, reflects the full range of the community's values and desires, by involving a diverse spectrum of stakeholders in development of the plan. This broad-based participation will help ensure that the plan is implemented because many are involved in its development and thereby become committed to seeing it through. The Community Participation Program provides a concise schedule to guide the development of the Community Agenda, including planned community participation events or meetings at key points during the process. This document includes three required steps described in the sections below:

- Identification of Stakeholders
- Identification of Participation Techniques
- Schedule for Completion of the Final Plan

Scope

State law requires Whitfield County to update its Comprehensive Plan by October 31, 2008. As prescribed by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the update of the Comprehensive Plan follows the Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning effective May 1, 2005. Whitfield County adopted its current Comprehensive Plan on October 8, 2001.

Identification of Stakeholders

Outline of the Joint Comprehensive Plan's diverse group of community stakeholders set to be involved in the development of the Community Agenda

Coordination and oversight are very important parts of the overall work effort for this project. A joint comprehensive planning process This approach, to ensure proper management of the process, includes oversight by the Board of Commissioners (BOC), the mayors and city councils in Dalton, Tunnel Hill and Varnell, the Planning Commission, Technical Advisory Committee, Steering Committee and city and county staff.

Whitfield County BOC

- Brian Anderson, Chairman
- Mike Cowan
- Randy Waskul
- Greg Jones
- Leo Whaley

City of Dalton City Council

- Mayor David Pennington
- Charlie Bethel
- Dick Lowery
- Denise Wood
- George Satosuk

City of Tunnel Hill City Council

- Mayor Kenny Gowin
- Jim Griffin
- Gene Adamson
- Hub Griffin
- Ray Anderson

City of Varnell City Council

- Mayor Lindsey Metcalf
- David Owens
- Susan Hamlin
- Mark Fiddler
- Carlus Mosier
- Thomas Burnett

Project Management Team

- Bob McLeod – Whitfield County Administrator
- Butch Sanders – Dalton City Administrator
- Blake Griffin – Tunnel Hill City Administrator
- Jestin Johnson – Varnell City Administrator
- Lee Walton- AICP – MACTEC Project Manager
- Marty Sewell – AICP-MACTEC Project Coordinator
- Paige Hatley – MACTEC
- Brooke Bennett – City of Dalton/Whitfield County Public Relations
- Kent Benson – Whitfield County Engineer
- Jean Garland – Building, Zoning and Development
- Jess Hansen – GIS Coordinator

Technical Advisory Committee

- Matt Tucker – North Georgia RDC/Dalton-Whitfield MPO
- Amanda Walker – City of Varnell
- Scott Casey – City of Varnell
- Greg Jones – Mohawk
- Jeffrey Putnam – Whitfield Emergency Management Director
- Laverne Damron – Tunnel Hill Planning Committee
- Benny Dunn – City of Dalton Public Works
- Doyle Dobson – Whitfield County Public Works
- Roger Crossen – Whitfield County Parks and Rec
- Ronnie Nix – City of Dalton Parks and Rec
- Heath Harrison – Dalton Utilities
- Chief Jason Parker – City of Dalton Police Department
- Chief Roy Brunson – Tunnel Hill Police
- Carl Collins – Whitfield County Fire Department
- Barry Gober – City of Dalton Fire Department
- Rich Chitwood – North Georgia RDC/Dalton-Whitfield MPO
- Randy Selby – Georgia Power
- Jeff Brown – North Georgia EMC

Steering Committee

- Joe Kauffman – Tunnel Hill Citizen
- Melanie Suggs – Dalton-Whitfield Economic Development Authority
- Phyllis Stephens – Dalton Whitfield Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Katie Brochu – Whitfield County Schools
- Dr. Orville Porter – Dalton City Schools
- Cathy Snyder – Dalton Historic Preservation Commission
- Chris Gregg – Willis Funeral Home
- Katie Owens – Nature Conservancy
- Todd Gavin – Dalton Homebuilders
- Holly Rice – Non-profit representative
- Harland Godfrey – Dalton Citizen
- Paul Buchanan – Dalton Tree Board
- Stephen Thomas – Fellowship Community Church/Recreation Commission
- Kris Thomas – Dalton Public Works, Landscape Foreman
- Sandra Hewitt – Varnell Citizen
- Dean Taylor – Rev.-St. Marks Episcopal Church
- Mike Maret – Coldwell Banker Kinard Realty
- Judy Alderman – Prater's Mill Organization
- Margaret Thigpen – Convention & Visitors Bureau/Leadership Dalton Whitfield
- Pam Partain – Dalton State College
- Myra Baker – Dalton Citizen

Additional Stakeholders

- Community service organizations
- Immigrant groups
- Under-represented, marginalized groups

Participation Techniques

Identification of the specific techniques the Joint Comprehensive Plan Update planning process will use to develop the Community Agenda

Whitfield County will rely heavily on public input during the preparation of the Community Agenda. Techniques described below will include advisory committee meetings, stakeholder committee meetings, presentations to elected officials, interviews, workshops, web site, press releases, an open house, and public hearings.

Working Committees and Key Stakeholder Input

Technical Advisory Committee

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is a working committee of Whitfield County, Dalton, Tunnel Hill and Varnell staff. The staff members are an important source of information and coordination during the planning process. As primary “users” of the plan, they have a stake in the outcome of the comprehensive plan. The TAC’s role will include providing the MACTEC Team with information on future plans, existing conditions and major concerns in the County that provide insight in developing the Community Assessment and Analysis of Supporting Data.. In addition, the committee will receive drafts of the major plan components at various points during the process and are responsible for reviewing the documents and providing feedback to ensure accuracy. Another important role of the TAC is to serve as a liaison between the planning team and the agencies they represent. Members of the TAC are important sources of data crucial to the planning process.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is charged with providing feedback, advising the MACTEC Team, and providing assistance in shaping the overall planning process. The Steering Committee will be selected by the Technical Advisory Committee with assistance from elected officials in each jurisdiction. Members may include a mix of elected or appointed County officials, key property owners, neighborhood leaders, Chamber of Commerce and other economic development professionals, community service providers, areas residents, and others with some stake in the future development of the County and region (see list on page 2-1). The committee should hold regularly scheduled meetings, perhaps every other month or quarterly. Commonly meeting in advance of major public meetings, the Steering Committee has the ability to assist with keeping the project on schedule, review the preliminary data and findings, provide a “reality check” to the staff and planning team, and to serve as a political barometer for plan recommendations.

General Public Meetings

Kickoff Meeting

The purpose of the Kickoff Meeting is to announce the beginning of the planning process to the citizens and other stakeholders and provide opportunity to view a presentation covering the project purpose and general plan approach. Initial opinion surveys and volunteer sign up forms are available at this meeting.

Community Workshops

Whitfield County will conduct two phases of community workshops during the development of the plan. Visioning workshops will make up phase one. A Framework workshop makes up phase two. Each phase is briefly described below.

Visioning Workshops

The visioning workshops are facilitated meetings designed to discover the community vision and address the three key planning questions – “What do you have?” “What do you want?” and “How will you get it?” These are highly interactive meetings where attendees work in groups to draw maps, develop goals and policies, and design their community. The MACTEC Team will use the input from the workshops to finalize the issues and opportunities, character areas and to define a community vision. An evaluation of a series of visual images categorized by housing types and styles, streetscape appearance, open space, commercial areas, and other design or use types. Participants are asked to state a preference as images showing alternative designs are displayed side by side. Results are tabulated by the planning team for presentation in later meetings.

Framework Workshop

A framework workshop will take place following the visioning workshop. The workshop will include a presentation of the information gathered during the visioning workshop, including recommendations for addressing the issues and opportunities. The MACTEC Team will facilitate exercises with the participants intended to fine tune the community vision, including a discussion of the draft Future Development Map. The framework workshop provides the opportunity to specifically discuss key areas of Whitfield County where more specific implementation plans are warranted to ensure implementation of the community vision. The MACTEC Team will use the input from the workshop to prepare a final draft of the issues and opportunities, character areas and community vision and to begin exploring specific strategies designed to implement the community vision.

Open House

The open house will take place following the framework workshop in advance of the Transmittal Public Hearings for the Community Agenda. Participants will view the Community Agenda, including the Future Development Map and implementation plan, and will also have the opportunity to offer comments that may result in changes to the plan. The open house format allows participants to drop in at their convenience and stay as little or as long as they wish.

Public Hearing

Public hearings will be held in two rounds during the planning process at the Whitfield County BOC and at city council of the municipalities of Dalton, Tunnel Hill and Varnell. The first round of public hearings, the Transmittal Resolution for the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program, will announce to the public that the planning process for updating the comprehensive plan is underway. The

second round of public hearings, the Transmittal Resolution for the Community Agenda, will brief the community on the contents of the Community Agenda. The following paragraphs describe the two public meetings in greater detail.

Public Hearing 1: Transmittal of Community Assessment/Community Participation Program

Public hearings will take place at regularly scheduled meetings of the BOC and at the city councils for each municipality. The public hearings will inform the public of the Community Participation Program, including the project schedule and how the community can get involved as outlined in this document. The public hearing also provides the community an opportunity to comment on the draft Community Assessment. The Community Assessment highlights the issues and opportunities that will be taken into consideration in developing the Community Agenda. Following the public hearings, and based on input from the public and city and County officials, the Community Assessment, Analysis of Supporting Data, and Community Participation Program documents will be transmitted to the RDC for review and comment.

Public Hearing 2: Transmittal of the Community Agenda

Public hearings will take place at regularly scheduled meetings of the BOC and at the city councils for each municipality. The MACTEC team will present the Community Agenda before the BOC following an Open House. The hearings provide an opportunity for residents to make final suggestions, additions, or revisions and to be informed of when the Community Agenda will be submitted to the RDC for review. Following the public hearings, and based on input from the public and County officials, the Community Agenda will be transmitted to the RDC for review and comment.

Additional Information Gathering Techniques

Stakeholder Interviews

During the development of the plan, the MACTEC Team will conduct one-on-one interviews with key community leaders using a standardized series of questions designed to gather detailed information about the County's future. Interviews will take place in person and by telephone. The interviews, usually between 30 minutes to an hour in duration, are designed to gather more detailed information about a particular area of expertise. The stakeholders are representatives of the various organizations, such as representatives from fire and police departments, neighborhood homeowners' associations, faith-based organizations, civic associations, advocacy groups, realtors, conservationists, housing, hospital and transportation authorities and others. The information collected during the stakeholder interview assists in the development of the goals, objectives, and strategies for the comprehensive planning process.

Issues/Opportunities Questionnaire

An Issues/Opportunities questionnaire will be distributed to those who attended the Kickoff meeting in order to solicit comments, seek opinions, and begin to identify community goals. The MACTEC Team and County and city staff will meet with the local newspaper and request that each include in multiple editions a copy of a printed the questionnaire that residents can clip, complete and submit to the County for consideration in the planning process. The survey provides an opportunity for stakeholders to provide the MACTEC Team input related to the issues and opportunities facing Whitfield County. Questionnaires will also be made available for distribution at key area properties.

In addition, questionnaires can be printed and mailed to a representative sample of residents in the community or sent with a regular mailing by the County and/or city and other utilities (such as a water

bill). Questionnaires may be made available at an information table in County Courthouse/Administration Building, city halls and at other locations. Digital copies can be made available to the public on the County website as well.

Public Relations Strategies

Press Releases

Press releases will be prepared and distributed to the newspaper and radio stations that serve the Whitfield County area. The press releases will be used to announce public meetings and the posting of documents for public review. Press releases will include contact information for Whitfield County Administration office.

Cable TV Information

Whitfield County will work with the local cable television provider, to include on the government information channels announcements of the public meetings and locations to view posted documents for public review.

Web Site

The Whitfield County Administration Office will post the various parts of the plan as it progresses on the Whitfield County website for public review at appropriate points throughout the planning process. Browsers will be able to download the documents in PDF format and will be provided with contact information in order to submit comments by traditional mail, by e-mail, or by telephone. The Whitfield County website address is as follows:

<http://www.whitfieldcountyga.com/>

E-mail “blast” Database

Periodic mass mailings by email to provide important notices and other information are also a tool for distributing information. At public meetings, attendees can provide their e-mail addresses on the sign in sheet. Periodic progress e-mails and future meeting announcements can then be sent to the distribution list.

Other Methods

Beyond the use of newspapers and the Internet for notification, there are many other alternatives for getting the word out.

Newsletters

Newsletters of community groups and neighborhood associations are a great way to target information of interest in a particular geographic area or to specific interest groups.

Flyers

Announcement flyers could be printed and then posted – with permission – in high traffic areas such as libraries, shopping areas, schools, and colleges.

Information Display

Information Display can be set up in the lobby of Courthouse/Administration Building that includes a display of photographs, maps, and planning features for all visitors to the building to visit.

Speakers Bureau

A speaker's bureau comprised of the planning team – government staff, consultants, and volunteers – offers introductory presentations on the planning process to civic clubs, business groups, neighborhood associations, and schools. These presentations should be about 15 to 20 minutes in length. Advance preparation and a good script will ensure that speakers focus on points of interest to the group.

Schedule for Completion of the Plan (tentative)

Outline of the schedule proposed for preparation, review and adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan Community Agenda

The full proposed schedule for completion of the Plan is shown below.

3/10 to 3/17 – Community Assessment (CA)/Community Participation Program (CPP) Transmittal Resolution Public Hearings

- Whitfield County Board of Commissioners (BOC) – 3/10
- Tunnel Hill City Council – 3/11
- Varnell City Council– 3/11
- Dalton City Council– 4/7

3/18 – Public Countywide Kickoff Meeting

4/3 to 4/24 – Visioning Workshops

- Tunnel Hill – 4/3
- Dawnville – 4/8
- Varnell – 4/10
- Dalton – 4/22
- Westside – 4/24

5/20 – Countywide Framework Workshop

6/3 – PM/TAC/SC Meetings

6/24 – PM/TAC/SC Meetings

7/17 – Countywide Open House and Final Plan Draft Review

8/11 to 8/18 – Community Agenda Transmittal Resolution Public Hearings

- Whitfield County BOC – 8/11
- Tunnel Hill City Council – 8/10

- Varnell City Council – 8/10
- Dalton City Council – 8/18

11/3 to 11/11 – Public Hearing for Adoption

- Dalton City Council – 11/3
- Whitfield County BOC – 11/10
- Tunnel Hill City Council – 11/11
- Varnell City Council – 11/11