

Thomas County/City of Thomasville Joint Comprehensive Plan

Community Participation Plan

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	1
Scope.....	1
Requirements and Goals.....	1
IDENTIFICATION OF STAKEHOLDERS	3
Project Administration Committee (AC)	3
Citizen Advisory Panels (CAP)	4
IDENTIFICATION OF PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES	7
Plan Element Work Groups	7
Public Presentations / Kick-off Meetings	7
Visioning Workshops	7
Community Design Workshops	8
Community Summits	8
Stakeholder Interviews	8
Citizen Advisory Panel Meetings	8
Elected Official Roundtables.....	9
Open Houses.....	9
Public Hearings for Plan Transmittal	9
Public Hearing(s) Round 1	9
Public Hearing(s) Round 2	9
Outreach Efforts.....	10
Internet Postings	10
Surveys and Questionnaires	10
Information Brochures	10
Standard Procedures.....	10
Media Relations.....	10
SCHEDULE FOR COMPLETION OF THE COMPREHENISVE PLAN UPDATE	11

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

As stated in the Community Assessment, the purpose of a Comprehensive Plan is to provide a community with documentation of its vision for the future and a guide for achieving that vision. The purpose of the Community Participation Program (CPP) is to ensure that community vision developed through the Thomas County/Thomasville Joint Comprehensive Plan Update (CP) process reflects the full range of community values and desires. A multi-faceted participation process can strengthen the Thomas community by providing a venue for citizens to work side by side with local leaders and government staff to collaboratively address the issues and opportunities that will shape their future.

Scope

Thomas County and the City of Thomasville are required by state law to complete an updated Comprehensive Plan by June 30, 2008. The Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning effective May 1, 2005 provide the state mandated process for creation of the CP. As proscribed by these procedures, work on the CP began with the development of the Community Assessment document by the local governments' selected team of planning consultants led by Robert and Company. This document will form the base line of understanding from which community leaders and citizens will work to develop the 20-year vision for the community and implementation plan for achieving the vision which will be included in a document called the Community Agenda. Together, these two documents, the Community Assessment and Community Agenda are the Comprehensive Plan.

Thomas County and the City of Thomasville have undertaken a joint planning process that recognizes the many common goals and concerns the two communities have for the future and the need for shared solutions. However, the city and county are two distinct communities with their own priorities and issues. For these reasons, the leaders of the two governments are pursuing a dual planning process that accommodates the distinct unique needs of each jurisdiction but culminates in a vision and plan, which is collaborative, cooperative and coordinated. The dual planning model will result in planning documents and participation endeavors that combine joint discussion and efforts as well as individualized texts and community involvement opportunities.

Requirements and Goals

Public involvement is essential to the success of any planning effort. Plans have a greater likelihood of implementation if they provide solutions that have been developed through the cooperative efforts of all segments of the community – citizens, elected officials, the business community and civic organizations. Community involvement creates benefits for the community through education, as well as through the formation of a product that includes local knowledge and preferences. These important steps in the planning process ensure support and acceptance of the vision and the supporting plan document.

Community participation in the *Thomas County/Thomasville Joint Comprehensive Plan Update* seeks to accomplish the following goals:

- ❑ Raise the level of awareness and understanding of planning in the Thomas County/Thomasville community.
- ❑ Provide a process for community input that allows members of the city and county communities to voice their concerns and aspirations in individualized settings and also provide chances for these citizens to come together and collaboratively address growth and development issues that cross municipal boundaries.
- ❑ Engage traditionally underserved communities (minority, low-income, elderly, etc.) in the planning process.
- ❑ Improve the quality of the decisions that are made during the planning process.
- ❑ Provide opportunities for stakeholders to make decisions and create the identity they envision for the Thomas community.
- ❑ Increase interest and facilitate ease in the implementation of solutions.
- ❑ Provide tangible evidence that the community created its own vision for the future.

IDENTIFICATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

Coordination and oversight are important parts of the comprehensive planning process. To ensure that the comprehensive plan is truly inclusive of the vision, needs, and desires of all community members, and that the plan adequately addresses the challenges and opportunities that are most important to the community, the involvement of a wide network of individuals is essential. Specifically, Thomas County Commissioners, Thomasville City Council members, planning staff and other key department staff from both the city and county must be engaged and provide oversight throughout the planning process. Additionally, the wide network of civic organizations and local businesses in the Thomas Community must be engaged in the process. Large-scale efforts should be made to distribute meeting notices and information about the plan to the entire community.

Project Administration Committee (AC)

The consultant team will work closely with an Administrative Committee throughout the duration of the project. This small committee is comprised of the key staff and council/commission representatives from Thomas County and the City of Thomasville, and representatives from key agencies and civic organizations. Representation from the SWGRDC (for planning coordination) has also been requested. The major administrative tasks of this committee are: to review and provide comments on consultant work products, recommend members for other supporting committees, provide guidance for addressing political issues and promote the planning process to the citizens of the city and county. The committee will meet at critical times during the project process as noted in the schedule included in section four of this document.

The members of the Administrative Committee are listed below:

Mike Stephenson	Thomas County	Thomas County Manager
Johnny L. Reichert	Thomas County	Chief Inspector
Donna McKinney	Thomas County	Assistant Zoning Administrator/Office Manager
Elaine Mayes	Thomas County	Thomas County Commissioner
Neil Fleckenstein	Thomas County	Red Hills Planner Tall Timbers Research Station
Sharlene Celaya	Thomas County	Executive Director Thomasville Main Street
Kha Thomas	City of Thomasville	Sr. Asst. City Manager - Employee & Community Services
Duane Treadon	City of Thomasville	Neighborhood/Housing Development Administrator

Citizen Advisory Panels (CAP)

As stated previously, the city and county are pursuing a dual planning process so that the individual needs of each jurisdiction can be met. Due to this, two advisory panels, one for the City of Thomasville and one for Thomas County will be formed to provide project leadership and guide the planning process.

These groups are intended to be working groups, with assistance provided by County/City staffs. The major tasks of the committees are to analyze, prioritize and balance community issues. The committees will react to concepts and draft documents from the consultant, assist in developing the future land use plans for the city and county, act as sounding board(s) for the consultant, and propose balanced positions to resolve conflicting points of view. It is anticipated that these committees will meet once a month or as needed during Phases 4 – 6 of the planning process (see project schedule in section four). Meeting for each committee shall be scheduled on the same or consecutive days and joint meetings may be called as necessary for plan coordination.

The following list provides the consultant team's preliminary suggestions for organizations and groups that could be asked to provide representatives to serve on the Citizen Advisory Panels. In addition to the groups and organizations listed here, county commissioners and city council members may also wish to nominate individuals to served on the committees. It is recommended that each commissioner/council member provide the names of two individuals to be asked to serve on the jurisdiction's CAP. It is anticipated that the consultants will discuss the proper make up of these committees with the Administrative Committee during upcoming project coordination meetings. Ideally, each CAP will contain a group of 15 – 20 individuals who are able and committed to attending monthly meetings from March to December 2006. Once final lists of CAP members are agreed upon and invitations to serve on the committees are extended, this section will be updated.

Thomas County Citizen Advisory Panel

American Legion
Commissioner Appointed Representatives
Development Community - local builders / land developers / realtors
Hands on Thomas County
Local Churches
Melhana Plantation
Metcalf Lumber
Myrtlewood Plantation
Neighborhood Associations
Oil Dry Corporation
Pebble Hill Plantation
PLUS Commission Representative
Recreation Board
Shallowbrook Farms Property Owners Association
Thomas County Democratic Party
Thomas County Farm Bureau
Thomas County Historical Society
Thomas County NAACP
Thomas County Public Library
Thomas County Public Schools
Thomas County Red Cross
Thomas County Republican Party
Thomas County Veteran's Council
Thomasville - Thomas County Chamber of Commerce
United Way of Thomas County
Women's Forum of Thomas County

Thomasville Citizen Advisory Panel

American Legion Posts
Archbold Hospital
Clay Street Area Neighborhood Watch
Council Member Appointed Representatives
Flowers Bakery
Heritage Foundation
Jack Hadley Black History Memorabilia, Inc.
Kiwanis Club
Lake Riverside Subdivision
Local Churches
Masonic Lodges
Ministerial Association
Minority Business and Professional Association
Neighborhood Associations
Recreation Board
Rotary Club
Southwest GA Technical College
Thomas University
Thomasville - Thomas County Chamber of Commerce
Thomasville City Schools
Thomasville Housing Authority
Thomasville Businesses and Merchants
Thomasville Welcome Center

In addition to attending monthly meetings, the members of the Citizen Advisory Panels will receive notice of all public meetings and presentations during the planning process and will be invited to attend and help promote the planning process with the citizens of the county and city.

IDENTIFICATION OF PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

The community participation plan for the Thomas County/City of Thomasville Joint Comprehensive Plan incorporates several methods of public engagement to ensure that the final goals and implementation strategies of the plan are derived from local perspectives. A brief description of the engagement technique recommended by the consultant team is provided in the following section. It is anticipated that these recommendations will be discussed with the Administrative Committee and a mutually agreed upon menu of participation methods will result.

Plan Element Work Groups

These focus groups may be convened if issues emerge that require more in-depth community input. Plan Element Work Groups may be specific to Thomas County or City of Thomasville issues or address joint challenges. These group meetings will be conducted with constituency groups that will be directly impacted by land use plans or policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan. The meetings will provide an opportunity for each of the groups to provide extensive input based upon their unique perspectives. (The plan contract does not specifically include these meetings, however they may be conducted in lieu of CAP meetings or as additional contracted work items.)

Public Presentations / Kick-off Meetings

Public presentations will be held to introduce the planning process to the public and present the findings of the Community Assessment and Community Participation Plan and gather input regarding the issues and opportunities facing the Thomasville and Thomas County communities. The consultant will conduct three (3) meetings at various locations in the city and county. The meetings will be held on consecutive days. The time and locations of the meetings will be decided upon with the input of the Administrative Committee. The meetings will include:

- ❑ Overview of the Comprehensive Planning Process
- ❑ Presentation of key points from the Assessment Report
- ❑ Review of preliminary list of Opportunities and Challenges
- ❑ Review of preliminary identified Character Areas
- ❑ Presentation of Community Participation Program

Visioning Workshops

Community visioning meetings will be held to allow the county and city communities to articulate their opinions and concerns about the future. The meetings will include facilitated activities that are undertaken specifically to determine:

- ❑ The perceived strengths and weaknesses of the quality of life in the city and county
- ❑ The opportunities and threats that will confront the quality of life in the Thomas community over the next twenty years
- ❑ The quality of life that the workshop participants envision for their community twenty years from now
- ❑ The factors of change and big decisions that will be required to move the community from where it is today to where the workshop participants want it to go

The consultant will conduct three (3) visioning meetings at various locations in the county and city. These meetings will take place over consecutive days and should be located at convenient public gathering places such as schools, community centers, churches, etc.

Community Design Workshops

The Community Design Workshops will focus on how to achieve the community's vision for the future. Three (3) workshops will be held. These workshops are comprised of two key components: Community Summits and Stakeholder Interviews.

Community Summits

The Summit format will be repeated three times in a two-day period of time. The Summits will be conducted in the first two days with two evening meetings and one day meeting. A Summit will be held in two locations in the county and one in the city. At this meeting, goals and a summary of the existing conditions and trends affecting the community will be presented along with preliminary future development scenario(s) for the city and county. The consultant team and appropriate members of the Administrative Committee, who may be present, will answer questions posed by workshop participants.

The attendees may also participate in a short design charette to create alternatives or revisions to the preliminary scenarios. These charettes will give citizens the opportunity to work with different land use, transportation and design scenarios to identify development patterns that will fulfill the community's stated vision for the future.

Stakeholder Interviews

During the same time frame (week) that the consultant team is leading the Community Summits, they will also conduct one-on-one or small group interviews with key stakeholder groups. During these interviews, the consultants will present the preliminary future development scenario(s) to groups and elicit input and feedback. The Administrative Committee will assist the consultant in identifying stakeholders to be interviewed; potential stakeholders include developers/builders, businesses, neighborhood associations, major landowners, special interest groups and major local employers.

Citizen Advisory Panel Meetings

As discussed in the Stakeholder Identification section, one of the primary methods of obtaining community input will be through regular meetings of the county and city Citizen Advisory Panels. These groups will meet monthly from March to December 2006 to discuss and provide feedback on issues related to the comprehensive plan. It is anticipated that the panels will meet individually; however, when/if issues arise that would be best addressed in a coordinated manner, joint meetings will be convened. It is anticipated that fourteen (14) Citizen Advisory Panel meetings will be held, seven (7) county panel meetings and seven (7) city panel meetings.

Elected Official Roundtables

The elected officials for the city and county will be convened at critical times in the process for the purpose of participating in a series of two roundtable discussions. The first roundtable will include an introduction to the planning process and a general discussion of plan goals and policies. At the second roundtable the consultant team will present the preliminary future development scenarios for the county and city. This is an opportunity to coordinate the efforts and ensure the land use direction of the Community Agenda has the support of the community's leadership during the initial phase of development.

Open Houses

A series of three open houses will be held once the Community Agenda document has been entirely drafted. At these meetings the consultant team will provide a short presentation using PowerPoint and display boards summarizing the key recommendations of the document. The purpose of the open houses is to ensure that all development and land use issues have been identified and input received during the planning process is adequately reflected in the draft Community Agenda. Staff and consultants will be present to answer questions on a one-on-one basis. If appropriate, a questionnaire can be distributed to participants asking key questions about the draft plan. Any formal written comments collected at the end of the open house meetings will be summarized and responded to by the consultant team prior to presentation of the plan to elected officials for transmittal to the SWGRDC and DCA for review.

Public Hearings for Plan Transmittal

As required by state planning standards, formal public hearings will be held at two (2) times during the planning process. The first hearings will be held once the Community Assessment and Community Participation Plan have been drafted and made available for public review, but prior to their transmittal to the SWGRDC. The second hearings will be held once the Community Agenda has been drafted and made available for public review, but prior to its transmittal to the SWGRDC for review.

Public Hearing(s) Round 1

Formal public hearings will be held in conjunction with the Thomas County Commission and Thomasville City Council to submit the document to these adopting bodies and allow for formal public comments. The Commission and Council will vote to forward the Community Assessment and Participation Program to the SWGRDC and DCA for review at this hearing.

Public Hearing(s) Round 2

Formal public hearings will be held in conjunction with the Thomas County Commission and Thomasville City Council to submit the document to these adopting bodies and allow for formal public comments. The Commission and Council will vote to forward the Community Agenda to the SWGRDC and DCA for review at this hearing.

If appropriate these hearing will be held jointly. If this is not possible, the hearings will be held on consecutive evenings.

Outreach Efforts

It is anticipated that a wide variety of techniques will be used to disseminate information about the Thomas County / City of Thomasville Comprehensive Plan Update to project participants and the citizens of the Thomas community.

Internet Postings

Websites are a powerful tool for getting planning information out to the community. If possible, the community's website rose.net will be used to display information about the Comprehensive Plan. The website may include information about the planning process, meeting notices, press releases, contact information and links to email any questions or concerns to appropriate consultants or local project managers. The website may also provide a place to post draft plan documents for public review made available for download in PDF file format.

Surveys and Questionnaires

Surveys or questionnaires may also be employed in the planning process as a means of soliciting feedback from the silent majority and traditionally overlooked groups (minorities, elderly, disabled) who may be reluctant or unable to speak up in open public forums.

Information Brochures

The consultant team will prepare brochures and/or fact sheets in simple, straightforward terms to explain the Comprehensive Planning process. The brochures will provide answers to frequently asked questions about what the plan is meant to accomplish. Brochures will be made available to the county and city to copy and disseminate as they feel appropriate. Possible distribution methods include at public buildings, through the school systems, and through civic organizations.

Standard Procedures

Public meetings, including workshops and open houses, will be held in locations in the city and county which are conducive to encourage meaningful community input. In addition to use of government facilities, local cultural facilities and public schools will be used for public meetings when possible.

The planning team will consult with the Administrative Committee and Citizen Advisory Panels in order to organize and schedule all public meetings and disseminate meeting notification to the widest audience possible.

Media Relations

If the media approaches a member of the consultant team and requests an interview or has questions about the plan, the consultant will take the name of the media representative, publication they represent, when the article, radio or TV spot will run and what was talked about. This information will be passed along to the appropriate county and city project managers in a timely manner.

SCHEDULE FOR COMPLETION OF THE COMPREHENISVE PLAN UPDATE

The table contains a graphic representation of the schedule for completing the Thomas County/City of Thomasville Joint Comprehensive Plan Update.

PHASE	TASK	2005					2006										Milestone Dates			
		AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT		NOV	DEC	
Phase 1: Project Set Up	Confirm Schedule	█																		by August 31
	Project Kick-Off Meeting	█																		week of August 22
Phase 2: Community Assessment	Inventory Information for Community Assessment		█	█	█															September - November
	Draft Community Assessment				█	█	█													November - January 31, 2006
Phase 3: Community Participation Plan	Develop Community Participation Program						█													January
	Submit Working Draft of Community Assessment and Participation Program to County and City						█													by January 31, 2006
	Form Citizen Advisory Panel(s)							█												February
	Administrative Committee Meeting - this joint county/city staff level committee will meet regularly during the planning process								█											
Phase 4: Public Presentations and Submittals	Citizen Advisory Panel Kick-Off Meeting - County and City advisory panels will meet regularly during the planning process								█	█										early March
	Public Presentation(s) of Community Assessment and Participation Program									█	█									early April
	Public Review Period for Community Assessment and Participation Program									█	█	█								mid April - mid May
	Confirm Community Assessment Assumptions									█	█	█								April - May
	Public Hearing #1 for Community Assessment and Participation Program										█	█								week of May 15
	Submit Community Assessment and Participation Program to SWGRDC										█	█								by May 31, 2006
	Community Assessment and Participation Program SWGRDC Completeness Check											█	█							by mid June
	Community Assessment and Public Participation Plan SWGRDC/DCA Review Period												█	█						by mid July

PHASE	TASK	2006												2007							Milestone Dates				
		JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY					
Phase 5: Visioning and Goal Setting	Public Visioning Workshops																							Summer 2006 - Schedule dependent upon RDC Review	
	Refine Community Opportunities and Issues																								July - August
	Refine Character Areas for Further Study																								July - August
	Draft Goals and Policies																								July - August
	Elected Officials Roundtable (optional)																								late August
Phase 6: Community Agenda	Develop Future Development Map and Supporting Narrative																								September - October
	Community Design Workshops																								mid October
	Elected Officials Roundtable (optional)																								early November
	Refine Future Development Map and Supporting Narrative																								November
	Draft Community Agenda																								November - January 2007
	Submit Working Draft of Community Agenda to County and City																								early January
	Open Houses																								late January
	Revisions to Community Agenda																								January - February
	Submit Revised Community Agenda to County and City																								late February
Phase 7: Plan Review and Adoption	Public Hearing # 2 for Community Agenda																								early March
	Final Revisions to Community Agenda																								March
	Submit Community Agenda to SWGRDC for Review																								by April 2, 2007
	Community Agenda SWGRDC Completeness Check																								by mid April
	Community Agenda SWGRDC/DCA Review Period																								April - July
	Adoption of Comprehensive Plan																								anticipated late summer 2007, dependent upon SWGRDC/DCA approval
	DCA Deadline for Comprehensive Plan Adoption																								by June 30, 2008