



**Columbia County**  
**Growth Management Plan Update**  
**Community Participation Plan**

**June 29, 2005**



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# 1.0 Community Participation Plan Overview

## *Introduction*

Public involvement is an essential element to the successful development and implementation of every major planning effort. The Community Participation Plan for Columbia County recognizes the need to clearly communicate with community leaders, citizens, neighborhoods, business and property owners as well as elected and appointed officials in order to identify issues, goals and objectives for managing future growth. This plan establishes several communication outlets to inform citizens of the process and solicit participation. Designed as a dynamic plan, the program presented provides the opportunity for the community to address concerns that emerge during the plan update and build consensus throughout the planning process.

The primary objective of the Community Participation Plan is to obtain broad community input and to involve community stakeholders to the greatest extent possible in planning, decision making and implementation processes. This approach provides clarity in regards to the needs and priorities of a broad range of residents, stakeholders and property owners, as well as the expectations and requirements of future investors and government agencies that regulate and fund public services. Equally important, this plan seeks to obtain input from other less obvious community stakeholders such as the local faith community, minority and elderly citizens.

The public involvement process for Columbia County incorporates several methods of public engagement to ensure that the final goals and implementation strategies of the plan are derived from local perspectives. The overall community participation program will involve a comprehensive effort including a 30 member appointed steering committee, stakeholder interviews, community visioning workshops, and open house sessions. This program will determine key issues and opportunities, formulate and refine ideas and goals and garner community support for implementation policies. A summary of these key components for the Community Participation Plan is presented below.

## *Public Participation Techniques*

- **Steering Committee**
  - Thirty-member committee appointed by the County Commission that will serve as the champions of the plan update. This group will discuss and provide input on the planning issues.
  - This committee will meet on a monthly basis throughout the planning process.



- **Stakeholder Interviews**
  - Interviews will be conducted with representatives from all major stakeholder groups within the County.
- **Community Workshops**
  - As part of building the Community Agenda, community workshops will be held throughout Columbia County where broader community input will be solicited.
  - These workshops will include a review of the Community Assessment prior to submittal to the Department of Community Affairs (DCA).
- **Open House**
  - Two Open Houses will be conducted where the draft plan will be reviewed by the community prior to submittal to County Commission and the Department of Community Affairs.
- **Public Hearing**
  - The final plan will be presented to the County Commission for certification and transmittal to DCA.
- **Public Notices and Updates**
  - Each of the public workshops and public hearings will be properly advertised in the local Columbia County newspaper the Columbia County News-Times.
  - Information updates will also be posted on the County website: <http://www.columbiacountyga.gov/home/index.asp?page=2976>
  - Email subscribers will receive email updates of the planning process and public participation opportunities in the Growth Management Plan Update<sup>2</sup> Newsletter.

### ***Steering Committee***

A steering committee has been established to help guide the planning process for the Growth Management Plan Update. The steering committee will play an important role in obtaining insight to current community issues and will serve as a sounding board as proposals for the plan are advanced. The selection of a diverse group of stakeholders representing different community perspectives was an important factor in establishing the steering committee.

Stakeholder groups represented on the Steering Committee were identified by County planning staff and the County Commission. Because Columbia County has historically been a bedroom community, homeowners and neighborhood representatives are essential members of the Steering Committee. Forestry and the timber industry are equally valuable to the community and are represented on the Steering Committee. As the County strives to balance residential development with commercial and industrial development, these development interests are represented on the Steering Committee by members of the Manufacturers Council, Development

Authority representatives, business owners, Chamber of Commerce members, and other commercial builders and developers. To assure intergovernmental communication, representatives from the Board of Education, the Sheriffs' Department, Planning Commission, City of Harlem, and the City of Grovetown are also appointed to the Steering Committee.

Table 1 presents the steering committee members appointed by the Columbia County Commission for this planning effort.

**Table 1**  
**Columbia County Growth Management Plan Steering Committee Members**

Name	Stakeholder Group
Julie Batchelor	Homeowner/Neighborhood Representative
Gary Best	Homeowner/Neighborhood Representative
Regina Buccafusco	Board of Education
Ed Cavaleri	Retirement community
Bobby Culpepper	City of Harlem; Business owner
Zack Daffin	Development Authority
Ed Dickerson	Engineer/Planner; Development Interests
Mike Evitts	Manufacturers Council
Jean Garniewicz	Homeowner/Neighborhood Representative
Pat Goodwin	Business representative
Louanne Grove	Board of Education
Jake Ivey	Home builder
Greg Kernaghan	Business representative
Sandra Lewis	Board of Education
Steve Morris	Sheriffs Department
Bob Newkirk	Planning Commission, retired
Oliver Owens	Developer, residential and industrial
Mike Popplewell	Agriculture and forestry
Tommy Price	Board of Education
Gordon Renshaw	Chamber of Commerce
Mike Rorick	Engineer, solid waste
Mark Senn	Commercial builder/developer
Charles Sharpe	Business owner
Tom Sprague	Planning Commissioner
Joe Tankersley	Engineer, planner; private engineering firm
Pam Tankersley	Banking industry
Ron Thigpen	Planning Commission Chair, banking industry
Don Thornhill	City of Grovetown
Denis Vining	Homeowner/Neighborhood Representative
Jeri Whitworth	Homeowner/Neighborhood Representative
Ye Sun Wiltse	Homeowner/Neighborhood Representative
Dennis Ziegler	Industry; Business Owner

## *Stakeholder Interviews*

All community stakeholders will be encouraged to actively participate in all of the planning processes and activities. However, it is recognized that it is not always practical for interested citizens to attend scheduled community meetings and workshops due to their work schedules, business operation hours, and other various reasons. Stakeholder interviews will be conducted as a means of capturing additional community input from key individuals without these time constraints.

The interviews will be conducted in an atmosphere conducive to the open discussion of sensitive issues. The one on one interviews provide an opportunity for those stakeholders that are reluctant to speak in public forums to voice their opinions in a less intimidating atmosphere than formal community meetings. The information obtained in the interviews provides anecdotal, yet relevant information related to community livability conditions and stakeholder priorities. The interviews also provide invaluable background information related to cultural, economic, social, and political factors that might impact current and future planning efforts in Columbia County.

The interviews will be conducted during the Community Assessment phase of the planning effort. Input obtained during the interviews will be used as part of the identification of Issues and Opportunities and will be factored into the final conclusions and recommendations along with other stakeholder input obtained during community works shops and the independent research and analysis conducted by the consultant team. Additional interviews will also likely occur informally during public presentations throughout the planning process.

## *Stakeholder Identification*

Key individuals and county staff were selected for one on one stakeholder interviews by the County planning staff, the consultant, and the Steering Committee. Directors and heads of County Divisions were identified as stakeholders to gather technical expertise as well as potential and planned improvement programs that may impact current and future planning for the County. Elected officials were recognized as stakeholders because of knowledge and requests gathered from daily contact with their constituents.

Leaders of surrounding local governing and planning authorities are important stakeholders to the planning process as well. Local hospitals were identified as important contributors to the economic base of the area as are the Development Authority and other organizations that labor to build and support the local economy.

After the planning team compiled the stakeholder list, the Steering Committee was asked to contribute additional names of individuals who have unique and vital insight into areas effecting or affected by the planning



process. They were asked to specifically contribute names of people representing faith-based and non-profit organizations as well as the elderly and minority communities.

Table 2 catalogs all the stakeholders identified for one on one interviews.

Table 2  
Stakeholder Interviews

Name	Department or Organization
Leanne DeLoach	Finance
Todd Glover	Management Services
Bill Clayton	Water and Sewerage Services
Kevin Lear	Construction and Maintenance
Jim Leiper	Engineering and Environmental
Barry Smith	Community and Leisure
Pam Tucker	Emergency Services
Zack Daffin	Development Authority
Ron Cross	County Commissioner
Diane Ford	County Commissioner
Stephen Brown	County Commissioner
Thomas Mercer	County Commissioner
Lee I. Anderson	County Commissioner
Steve Szablewski	County Administrator
Scott Dean (Jean Dove)	Mayor of Harlem
Dennis Trudeau	Mayor of Grovetown
Dr. Larry Read	President of University Hospital
Shane George	Doctors Hospital - President and Chief Executive Officer
Mike Evitts	Manufacturers' Council
Mark Senn	Developer
Gordon Renshaw	Chamber of Commerce
Paul DeCamp	Richmond County Planning and the local Metropolitan Planning Organization

### ***Focus Groups***

Focus group meetings may be conducted if issues emerge that require more in-depth community input. Focus group meetings will be conducted with constituency groups that would be potentially impacted by changes in the area. The meetings will provide an opportunity for each of the groups to provide extensive input based upon their unique perspectives. The plan

provides for up to two focus group meetings that would be conducted in lieu of a steering committee meeting.

### ***Community Workshops***

Given the size of Columbia County and the diverse issues the plan provides for three Community Workshops conducted in different geographic areas of the County. These evening sessions will occur in the following areas. Specific locations will be announced at a later date.

1. Evans and Martinez area
2. Appling Area – the historic County seat
3. City of Grovetown and City of Harlem area, south of Interstate 20

Steering Committee members will take an active role in leading the community work shops. The workshops are designed to: 1) present findings from the community assessment; 2) assess current impressions of the County; 3) identify issues and opportunities.

These workshops will engage the citizens in a series of exercises and dialogue designed to identify what they consider to be the key issues and opportunities facing Columbia County. In addition, educational information designed to increase the stakeholders' understanding of community planning process will be presented.

The workshop activities will include:

1. A presentation of highlights from the Community Assessment to set the stage for further discussion and vision building.
2. Breakout sessions where small groups of citizens participate in brainstorming and identifying Issues and Opportunities that exist in the County.
3. Open group discussions where the citizens are encouraged to ask questions and offer comments related to both the planning process and issues related to improving quality of life conditions in the area.

These sessions are designed to obtain more focused and specific stakeholder input regarding issues and opportunities and how they will influence the livability conditions throughout the County. All of these activities will be centered on the later development of community goals and implementation strategies.

## **2.0 Documentation of the Vision and Planning Principles**

Based upon the results from the Community Work Shops, Focus Groups and the Steering Committee, the planning team will begin to document and summarize the potential character areas and development principles for each area. The results of the community participation input and analysis will provide direction for each character area identified during the analysis.



The draft design and development principles for each character area will address issues including land use, circulation, physical constraints, infrastructure, public services and open space. These principles will serve to establish a direction of the implementation strategies for the plan. A draft report documenting and illustrating the diverse community vision and goals will be prepared and presented to the community during two open houses.

### ***Open Houses***

Open Houses will be conducted as public forums for citizens to provide comments on the draft plan update. The Open Houses are informal settings where the public can move about various stations to gain information regarding the community's input to date. The Planning team will coordinate with the County to determine the ideal locations to rotate the Open Houses. We propose a total of two concurrent Open Houses where the draft plan will be presented for public comment.

### ***Planning Team Coordination***

The team will organize and schedule the meetings with consultation from the Steering Committee, arrange for the meeting sites, prepare and distribute notification letters, provide an agenda and sign-in sheets, and present materials at the meeting. Response cards will be made available at all public meetings. The team will respond to public comments and questions, and will prepare and distribute meeting minutes, keeping accurate records of all proceedings. In addition, meeting and plan updates will be posted to the County website.

The public involvement program will be continuous so that the public can stay involved, provide input at key milestones and monitor the progress of the project. The proposed schedule for community participation is presented below.

## Proposed Schedule

### Community Participation Schedule

Task	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
<b>Involvement/Coordination</b>								
Planning Team Coordination								
Steering Committee								
Stakeholder Interviews								
<b>Public Work Sessions (3)</b>								
Evans/ Martinez Session								
Appling Session								
Grovetown/Harlem Session								
Optional Focus Groups								
Open Houses								
Website Updates								
County Commission Hearing								
<b>State Review &amp; Plan Adoption</b>								

