THE TOOMBS COUNTY JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

December, 2008

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Introduction

The *Community Participation Program* component of The Toombs County Joint Comprehensive Plan is an important part of the prescribed planning process required in the "Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning" as established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. It is required to ensure that the resulting comprehensive plan reflects the full range of community values and desires by involving a diverse spectrum of local stakeholders in the development of the *Community Agenda*. Broad-based participation will likely lead to better understanding, more effective and more committed implementation of the resulting comprehensive plan.

The *Community Participation Program* is intended to supplement, not replace, the two public hearings required by the Local Planning Requirements. The *Community Participation Program* must include three parts: a) the identification of stakeholders; b) the identification of participation techniques; and c) a schedule for completion of the *Community Agenda*.

As noted in the "Introduction," Toombs County and its municipalities are striving to comply with and exceed these requirements, and have included community and stakeholder input in the preparation of the *Community Assessment* from the Joint Plan Executive Committee. Extensive community and stakeholder involvement will continue and expand in the preparation of the *Community Agenda*, with the involvement and liaison of a much broader Local Plan Coordination Committee from many important public and private community agencies, leaders, and representatives.

Identification of Stakeholders

Stakeholders are those agencies, entities, and persons that have a stake in the successful outcome and implementation of the Toombs County Joint Comprehensive Plan. It is important that the entire community is involved and working toward the common strategies for making Toombs County and its municipalities a better place to live and work.

The process for identification of stakeholders for the Toombs County Joint Comprehensive Plan have been discussed early in the plan preparation process, although the final identification has not been completed. Representatives of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Development Center have met with the Executive Committee representatives of the local governments and discussed the importance of community involvement and broad, diverse representation in the preparation of the local comprehensive plan, particularly the *Community Agenda*. The "List of Suggested Stakeholders" from DCA's State Planning Recommendations has been provided. The suggested make-up of the Local Plan Coordination Committee as an inclusive list of broad community involvement has also been discussed. This Local Plan Coordination Committee will be appointed by the local governments before the community involvement and detailed preparation of the *Community Agenda* will be initiated. As a result of these discussions, some suggested and desired Local Plan Coordination Committee members have been preliminarily identified on a general entity basis, although specific members have not been chosen.

The preliminary make-up and desired representation of public and private community stakeholders on the Local Plan Coordination Committee, which will be a community-wide steering committee in the development of the *Community Agenda*, is described below. The identified entities, and others that may be identified, will be asked to have representatives participate on the Local Plan Coordination Committee and be a liaison between those entities and the plan's preparation.

Planned Local Plan Coordination Committee Representation

Toombs County Joint Comprehensive Plan Executive Committee Members

- Toombs County Board of Commissioners
- City of Lyons
- City of Santa Claus
- City of Vidalia

Other Local Government Elected or Appointed Officials

Southeastern Technical College

City of Vidalia Board of Education/School System

Toombs County Board of Education/School System

Toombs County Development Authority

Toombs-Montgomery Chamber of Commerce

Downtown Vidalia Association

Lyons Merchants Association

Vidalia Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

Meadows Regional Hospital

City of Vidalia Housing Authority

City of Lyons Housing Authority

Toombs County Health Department

Toombs County Department of Family and Children Services

Toombs County Family Connection

Vidalia Regional Airport Committee

Altamaha Electric Membership Cooperative

Georgia Power Company

Local Banking Community

The Vidalia Advance

Toombs County UGA Extension Service

Vidalia Onion Committee

USDA Farm Service Agency

Georgia Forestry Commission
Weyerhaeuser
Appalaphian Veneer Mill
Trane
DOT Foods
Oxford Industries
Lark Industries
Robin Builders
Toombs County Historical Society
Altama Museum of Art and History
Ohoopee Regional Council for the Arts (ORCA)
Altamaha Riverkeeper
Concerned Citizens Coalition
Telamon Corporation
Concerted Services, Inc.
Lyons Recreation Department
Vidalia Recreation Department
South Toombs Recreation Department
Local Real Estate Interests
Local Small Business Owners
Community Advisory Members (Public)

Further citizen involvement. This preliminary identification of committee make-up, while believed comprehensive and inclusive, is not closed. If the public involvement process identifies another person or entity who or which needs to be included, the local governments will add the needed representative, as warranted, to the planned Local Plan Coordination Committee for additional involvement in the *Community Agenda* preparation. The local governments have already recognized this through the Committee listing of "Citizen Advisory Members." They expect and want general public participation. The general public will also be advised in the published notice of *Community Assessment* availability after approval by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs of an opportunity to advise the local governments of a desire

to participate. If you are reading this as a member of the general public and wish to participate in developing the *Community Agenda*, or what implementation strategies should the community pursue to make itself a better place to live and work, please contact your local government administrative office.

Community Participation Techniques

State planning recommendations for possible community participation techniques have been jointly reviewed by the RDC and the involved local governments. Based on RDC staff experience, Dooly County training, and local government confirmation, the primary means of community participation chosen were the Technical Advisory Committee (Executive Committee), the Steering Committee (Local Plan Coordination Committee), and follow-up public validation through various means.

As noted earlier, the Local Plan Coordination Committee will be designed to provide a broad-based, diverse, and inclusive involvement from a wide-ranging spectrum of stakeholders and interested citizenry. This Local Plan Coordination Committee has not yet been established, although the framework for representation has been identified, including the addition of general citizenry members. The Local Plan Coordination Committee will be formed and extensively involved in the preparation of the *Community Agenda* from community visioning, to prioritizing issues/opportunities, to evaluating and selecting alternatives for implementation. Hands-on interactive techniques for involvement of committee members will be employed. These will include a modified TOPS (Treasures/Opportunities) exercise, additional issue/opportunities exercises at subsequent meetings, input on character areas and development of an appropriate implementation strategy. Members will also be encouraged to be liaisons and seek further input from their represented constituencies. The Local Plan Coordination Committee will meet as needed, but likely at least bi-weekly for a period of about three to four months, to visit the issues and design the community vision and implementation strategy in a detailed and thorough manner.

Public validation of committee results and solicitation of further input will be sought through stakeholder interviews, public hearings, other public meetings, and publication of draft results. Key stakeholders, particularly local government, but others also, have already been interviewed in one-on-one meetings to solicit data, ideas, and opinions on the *Community Assessment*. Follow-up contacts and wider contacts for the *Community Agenda* will be employed. This will allow for even wider community input free of immediate committee and peer scrutiny or damper. Only the one required public hearing on completion of the draft *Community Assessment* has been held thus far, but it confirmed and validated the process as no new ideas resulted, and the scope and depth of identification of issues/opportunities was complimented. At least one public meeting on community visioning in addition to the required public hearing on the draft *Community Agenda* may be planned. A community survey may also be attempted. Printed copies of the draft *Community Assessment* were made available through the local governments. Internet publication, at least on the regional RDC website, will be utilized during review and after approval. The planned participation techniques are not exclusive, and additional techniques could be employed if the planning process develops and reveals a beneficial need.

The required public hearing on the draft *Community Assessment* and *Community Participation Program* was properly advertised and was held December 22, 2008. A required public notice on the availability of the approved *Community Assessment* and *Community Participation Program* will be published in *The Vidalia Advance* after DCA approval. Other legal requirements to be met will be an advertised formal public hearing on the draft *Community Agenda* anticipated in early spring, and the public notice on the availability of the adopted plan (including the *Community Agenda*) after the *Community Agenda* is approved by DCA and it is formally adopted by the local governments (Early Summer, 2009).

Schedule for Completion of the *Community Agenda*

The following timeline depicts The Toombs County Joint Comprehensive Plan preparation process, including the preparation and adoption of the *Community Agenda* component.

	2008						2009							
Task	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Staff *Community Assessment* Preparation/ Finalization														
Executive Comm. Meetings on *Community Assessment*														
Public Hearing on *Community Assessment/ Community Participation Program*														
Local Government Approval of *Community Assessment/Community Participation Program* Submittal														
Community Assessment/Community Participation Program Review														
Public Notice of *Community Assessment/ Community Participation Program*														
Local Plan Coordination Committee Formation														
Local Plan Coord. Comm. Meetings on *Community Agenda*/Agenda Preparation														
Community Visioning Public Meeting														
Public Hearing on *Community Agenda*														
Local Government Approval of *Community Agenda* Submittal														
Community Agenda Review														
Local Government Adoption														
Public Notice of *Community Agenda* Availability														