



City of Chattahoochee Hills

Comprehensive Plan

Community Participation Program



May 4, 2010



Chattahoochee Hills Mayor and City Council

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Purpose

One of the best ways to strengthen communities is to create opportunities for citizens to work collaboratively on the challenges that shape their community. Accomplishing this requires political leadership, citizen education, and active involvement. A successful comprehensive plan begins with a process of thinking about and visualizing the future. It is about carrying on a dialogue with the community concerning its vision for evolving and growing. This Community Participation Program was crafted with these principles in mind and established a two-way communication between local citizens and their government officials, with the overall goal of better decisions supported by the public.

The purpose of the City of Chattahoochee Hills' Comprehensive Plan is to develop a vision for the community's future that will be implemented through city policies and code of ordinances, the city's Short Term Work Program and everyday decision-making by the Mayor and City Council and city staff. When implemented, the Comprehensive Plan will help the community address critical issues and opportunities while moving toward realization of its unique vision for the community's future.

A Comprehensive Plan, in the State of Georgia, is composed of three components:

1. Community Assessment
2. Community Participation Program
3. Community Agenda

This document represents the first component, the Community Participation Program. The purpose of a Community Participation Program is to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan reflects the full range of community values and desires, by involving a diverse spectrum of stakeholders in development of the Community Agenda. This broad based participation in developing the Community Agenda will also help ensure that it will be implemented, because many in the community are involved in its development and thereby become committed to seeing it through.

The City of Chattahoochee Hills has a history of strong community involvement through the formation of the city and previous land use planning efforts that support the vision of villages, hamlets and preserved open space. Previous planning efforts include the Chattahoochee Hills Country (CHC) Land Use Plan and Community Guidelines, the CHC Overlay District Ordinance (for South Fulton County) and a Transfer of Development Rights Program. Through a community led and participative process, the Chattahoochee Hill County Alliance created the Chattahoochee Hill Country Community Plan, clustering development into the villages and hamlets. The Plan was incorporated into the South Fulton 2015 Amended Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the Fulton County Chattahoochee Hill Country Overlay District Ordinance.

Stakeholders

Experience in public involvement has shown that lasting solutions are best identified when all segments of a community – individuals, elected officials, the business community, and civic organizations – are brought together in a spirit of cooperation. A collaborative approach to community engagement is not an opportunity, but a necessity. Community engagement and involvement is done for three reasons:

- To educate and increase public awareness
- To capture the knowledge and preferences of the people who live in and support the communities
- To mobilize support and acceptance of the plan

Communities that prosper do so because people work together to improve the quality of life that they want to sustain. The measure of effectiveness of a public involvement program is not that the public has been informed, but that public input has contributed to making a decision that is feasible and is supported by a large segment of the community. Public comment and sentiment are a rich source of information about peoples' values and philosophies. These values and philosophies must be interpreted into meaningful information to guide the project. It is essential to know the community's values to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts as well as narrow the field of alternative solutions.

This process is designed to accomplish the following:

- Improve the quality of decisions
- Increase ease of implementation
- Provide greater public understanding of community goals and objectives
- Provide tangible evidence that the community created its own identity

Comprehensive Plan Task Force

Beginning in December of 2009, the Mayor and City Council began recruiting citizens to work on the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan was discussed at City Council and Planning Commission Meetings, information was posted on the City's website and information about the Comprehensive Plan was reported in the Weekly Reader, the weekly on-line newspaper for Chattahoochee Hills. The Comprehensive Plan Task Force is the body that will create the Community Agenda of the Comprehensive Plan. The task force was created through appointments from the Mayor and City Council and citizens volunteering. There are presently 46 people on the task force. There may be additional volunteers helping with the effort in the future.

The task force is guided by three facilitators, two of whom are professional planners (Consultant from HOK Planning and city planner) and the President of the Chattahoochee Hills Civic Association, who serves as the Citizen Chair. The following details the make up the Comprehensive Plan Task Force. The next section will break down the task force into committees and define each committee's responsibilities.

Facilitators

Steve Cover, HOK, Process Facilitator

Jahnee Prince, City Planner, Staff Chair

Tom Reed, President Chattahoochee Hills Civic Association, Citizen Chair

City Staff

City staff is included in the task force for the knowledge that they bring to the process. Four out of five of the Planning Commissioners are included in the task force because planning is the focus of their positions on this appointed board. The Chairman of the Planning Commission has elected not to serve on the Comprehensive Plan Task Force due to his work schedule.

Carol Wolfe, City Manager

Pat Crook, Finance Director

Damon Jones Police Chief

Larry Parrot, Public Works Director

Jahnee Prince, City Planner

Dana Wicher, City Clerk

Participating Planning Commissioners

Rocky Reeves, Vice Chairman

Mark Prater

Clay Stafford

Hugh Tyer

Community Organizations

Because of the community's strong planning history, there are a number of community organizations working in the City of Chattahoochee Hills. The following appointees to the Comprehensive Plan Task Force represent various community organizations.

Alan Merrill, Chairman, Chattahoochee Hill Country Conservancy

Nancy Green-Leigh, Sustainable Development Committee

Laurie Searle, Scenic Byways

Reverend Dusty Womack, Friendship Church

Steve Kopelman, PATH program

Business and Education Community

The business community and education community were also targeted for involvement in the Comprehensive Plan Task Force.

Business Community

Sandra Storrar, Realtor

Fuller Anderson, Farmer/Forester

Steven Dray, Architect
Dr. George Brown
Andy Hanna, Builder

Education Community

Sandra Huffmaster, Educator
Clifford Blizzard, Educator
Judy Henderson, Chattahoochee Hills Community Library

Large Parcel Landowners

The Mayor and City Council also invited the largest landowners in the City to participate in the process because of the impact that those parcels will have once they are developed. They are:

Mark Hennessey
Stacy Patton, Minerva
Carl Bouckaert, Bouckaert Properties
Brook Cole, Merrill Trust
Steve Nygren, Serenbe

Citizen Representatives

Citizen representatives were selected to be part of the process based on interest and willingness to serve the city. The citizens serving on the Comprehensive Plan Task Force are:

Paul Alford
Margaret Clime
John Graham
Gene Griffith
Nehemiah Haire
Don Harrelson
Michael Harris
Monte Harris
James Hutcherson
Wendy McGhee
Dan Sanders
Rick Sewell
Allen Shropshire
Bob Simpson
Rick Stevens

Variance in Planning Level

Unlike the other new cities that have come into being over the past several years, the demographic history of Chattahoochee Hills has not been accurately tracked. The Cities of Sandy Springs, Milton, Johns Creek, and Dunwoody have all been specifically monitored as “Census Designated Places” over a number of census cycles. Because of Chattahoochee Hills’s rural location and historically diffuse population, it has never been specifically monitored by the U.S. Census Bureau. The census tracts in this area of Fulton County in no way line up with the boundaries of the City of Chattahoochee Hills and after consulting with a number of expert sources, city staff determined that there is no reliable, statistically valid method of extrapolating the extensive data required for a comprehensive plan in the Atlanta region where the advanced planning level is required.

The City of Chattahoochee Hills has received a variance from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to plan at the “basic” level, due to the lack of available required demographic data. Upon release of data from the 2010 Census, the City will review and evaluate all data that specifically pertain to Chattahoochee Hills to determine if any material generated by the census substantially impacts the issues, opportunities or other underlying assumptions upon which the City’s Community Agenda will be based. If such material is found and the Comprehensive Plan has already been adopted, the city will amend the plan at the time. If work on the plan is still underway when the census materials become available, the city will address the new material in the Comprehensive Plan prior to its submission to DCA for review.

While city staff was working with ARC and DCA to find a solution to the problem of not having any city level Census data, applying for the planning level variance, and waiting for a response on the variance application, work stopped on the Community Assessment. However the Comprehensive Plan Task Force members, having already attended an introductory meeting, were anxious to get to work on their committees. All of the topic based committees, the ones who will write the Community Agenda, were asked to wait for the city to go through the DCA variance process and get the Community Assessment and Community Participation Plan submitted. The very enthusiastic Public Participation Committee had already drafted the Community Participation Plan and wanted to begin its work right away. The variance from DCA was granted on March 23rd, 2010. The Community Assessment was completed, minus Census data, but the Public Participation Committee was already at work.

Comprehensive Plan Task Force Committees

Members of the Task Force have been divided into five committees based on interests and expertise. The five committees are Public Participation, Natural and Community Resources, Economic Development, Housing and Land Use and Transportation. Some citizens are on more than one committee.

Public Participation Committee

The Public Participation Committee comprised of: Gene Griffith, Mark Prater, Laurie Searle, Sandra Storrar, and Dana Wicher, has two main objectives. One is gathering opinion based information from the community to guide the development of the Community Agenda. The other is helping all of the committees of the task force reach out to the community as needed to gather any additional information they may need and to help present information from the committees to the public.

The Public Participation Committee has undertaken two activities to date. First was the creation of resident survey to gather concerns about various topics that will be addressed in the Community Agenda. The survey is on SurveyMonkey.com with a link from the city website and has been mailed to all households in the city with a postage paid return envelope included. The Weekly Reader advertised that the survey is underway. The results of the survey will be presented to the entire task force to inform the planning process of the committees. So far 432 responses have been gathered. The survey questions and results to date are in an appendix to this document. The survey results will continue to be gathered until the other committees begin their work.

The second activity was a series of outreach meetings to gather even more information to inform the committees. Five outreach meetings were held around the city during the last two weeks of March and first week of April. Four meetings were held at local churches and one at the Serenbe Institute. The meetings were advertised through all four church bulletins, the Weekly Reader, an email blast to all residents with email addresses on file at City Hall and through flyers posted at Smith's Grocery Store (the only grocery store in Chattahoochee Hills) and at Blue Eyed Daisy in Serenbe (one of two restaurants in Chattahoochee Hills).

The format of all of the meetings was the same. There was a visual preference survey given to inform the land use and transportation committee about preferred development types. There were walls with signs posted on them. Each sign was the same "Tell us your concerns about _____" with all of the required topics of each of the chapters of the Community Agenda inserted. One wall sign read "Tell us your concerns about Transportation", another about Development, another about Natural Resources, Housing, Economic Development, Intergovernmental Coordination, etc. Next to each sign were five by eight inch post it notes where participants could write their concerns and stick them to the wall.

The consolidated list of concerns for each topic will be presented to the committee working on that part of the Community Agenda. These comments have also been helpful in creating the issues and opportunities lists in the Community Assessment. There were 66 attendees in the five outreach meetings. At this time, the public participation committee is debating the merits of holding more meetings. The City of Chattahoochee Hills is accustomed to very robust public participation in planning efforts and the comprehensive planning process is continuing that trend.

Whether or not additional meetings are held, the survey results, the visual preference survey results and list of residents' concerns will be compiled into a report that all of the task force members will receive along with the Community Agenda and other supplemental information. The committees will utilize a visioning process; hold a workshop or two with experts in their subject areas and possibly have a charrette. Each committee will wrap up their work by developing policies to achieve goals set by the committee, and steps to implement each policy.

Natural and Community Resources Committee

The Natural and Community Resources Committee will address the Natural and Cultural Resources element, the Community Facilities and Services element and the Intergovernmental Coordination Element of the Community Agenda. This committee has lots of information in the Community Assessment and will likely undertake site visits to further understand their topic areas. This committee will be the first topic based committee to begin work. The first meeting of the Natural and Community Resources Committee is tentatively scheduled for June, 2010. Members of the committee include:

Paul Alford
Fuller Anderson
Clifford Blizard
Sandra Huffmaster
Dorsey Ernest
John Graham
Judy Henderson
Damon Jones
Steven Kopelman
Alan Merrill
Stacy Patton
Rocky Reeves
Laurie Searle
Bob Simpson
Clay Stafford
Hugh Tyer
Dana Wicher
Rev. Dusty Womack

Economic Development Committee

The Economic Development Committee will address the Economic Development element of the Community Agenda. Unlike the Natural and Community Resources Committee, there is very little Chattahoochee Hills specific data available to inform their work. This group will likely have speakers from the Sustainable Development Committee, the Georgia Tech City Planning program, the Serenbe Business Incubator and the South Fulton Chamber of Commerce to assist the committee in its work. This committee will be the second topic based committee to begin work. The first meeting of the Economic Development Committee is tentatively scheduled for June, 2010. Members of the committee include:

Paul Alford
Pat Crook
John Graham
Nancy Green Leigh
Alan Merrill
Wendy McGhee
Steve Nygren
Stacy Patton
Rocky Reeves
Ricky Stevens
Dana Wicher

Housing Committee

The Housing Committee will address the Housing element of the Community Agenda. There is very little Chattahoochee Hills specific Census housing data available for the committee to review. This group will likely have speakers from the Georgia Tech City Planning program, the Atlanta Regional Commission Aging Division and the Fulton County Housing Authority to assist the committee in its work. This committee will be the third topic based committee to begin work. The first meeting of the Housing Committee is tentatively scheduled for June, 2010. Members of the committee include:

Steve Dray
Andy Hannah
Michael Harris
Damon Jones
Nancy Green Leigh
Rick Sewell
Allen Shropshire
Bob Simpson
Dana Wicher

Land Use and Transportation Committee

The Land Use and Transportation Committee will address the Land Use and Transportation elements of the Community Agenda. This committee has lots of information in the Community Assessment and will consider the work of the other topic based committees. This committee will be the last topic based committee to begin work. The first meeting of the Natural and Community Resources Committee is tentatively scheduled for July, 2010. Members of the committee include:

Dr. George Brown
Carl Bouckaert
Margaret Clime
Brook Cole
Steve Dray
Gene Griffith

Nehemiah Haire
Michael Harris
Don Harrelson
Monty Harris
Mark Hennessey
James Hutcherson
Steven Kopelman
Nancy Green Leigh
Wendy McGhee
Alan Merrill
Steve Nygren
Larry Parrott
Stacy Patton
Tom Reed
Rocky Reeves
Laurie Searle
Dan Sanders
Bob Simpson
Sandra Storrar
Hugh Tyer
Dana Wicher

Project Webpage

On a regular basis, the City Planner will produce materials in a format suitable for posting on the city website and work with the Information Services Director, Manny Lopez, to maintain a webpage that addresses the city's needs and furthers public education regarding the project. The webpage address is through the Chattahoochee Hills website at www.chattahoocheehills.ga.us.

Additional Public Meetings

The following table shows the overall timeline for the public participation process. The committee meetings for the community agenda will take place from June to September 2010. The committees may elect to have additional outreach meetings if they need to gather more information or communicate what they are doing to the larger community. Open house and task force meetings will take place in August and September to present the results of each committee's work to the community and entire task force respectively.

Draft Community Agenda

Staff will prepare several drafts of the Community Agenda that will be available for public review. The final version of the Community Agenda for submittal to ARC will undergo two public hearings tentatively scheduled for March 2011.

