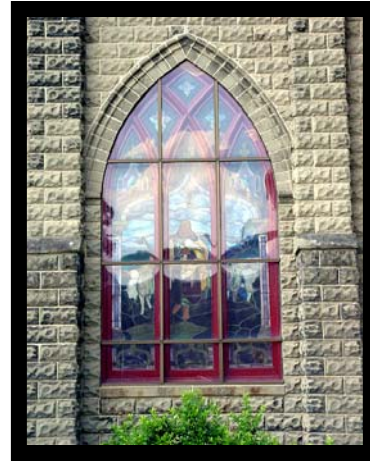


2031 JOINT BEN HILL COUNTY/CITY OF FITZGERALD COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Community Participation Program

Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald

August 2009



Prepared by the
Southern Georgia
Regional Commission



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

The preparation and implementation of the Community Participation Program (CPP) is an important first step to involve the citizens in the development of the Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of the CPP is to ensure that the citizens of Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald are aware of the planning process and have sufficient opportunity to review and comment on the Comprehensive Plan. The CPP also creates a dialogue between citizens, businesses, owners, other stakeholders and elected officials and with this two-way communication opens the way for a unified vision for Ben Hill County and its municipalities that will be supported by the public.

1.2 Requirements for Success

Pursuant to the Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Chapter 110-12-01 (Local Planning Requirements), Unincorporated Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald have to update its Comprehensive Plan by February 28, 2011, in order to maintain its Qualified Local Government Status (QLG).

The Community Participation Program (CPP), as prescribed by the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), will follow the intent of the Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning effective May 1, 2005.

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) will guide the citizen participation efforts associated with the Comprehensive Plan. Several meetings will be held to inform and educate the citizens and stakeholders about the project and to solicit their input in the definition of the Plan's vision, values, priorities, goals, objectives and policies. The meetings will be held for the unincorporated area of Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald.

The SGRC will also solicit input from other groups within the County, including, but not limited to appropriate City and County staff, Ben Hill County Planning Commission, City Council, County Commissioners, Chamber of Commerce, and the Business Development Authority.

The following principles will guide the successful implementation of this Community Participation Program and the development of the Comprehensive Plan:

- 1) The public has a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives;
- 2) The public is involved as early as possible in the community participation and decision-making process in order to build trust;
- 3) The involvement of those potentially affected is sought and participants are encouraged to assist in defining how they participate;
- 4) Participants are provided with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way;
- 5) Education and participation are directly combined whenever possible; and
- 6) The needs and concerns of the public are listened to and their input is integrated into the outcome.

2. IDENTIFICATION OF COMMITTEES AND STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders are those who affect and/or are affected by the development and implementation of the Joint Ben Hill/Fitzgerald Comprehensive Plan. The following is a list of stakeholders whose involvement will be beneficial to the development of the Plan. This list is not all-inclusive and all interested parties are encouraged to actively participate in the development the Comprehensive Plan.

2.1 Stakeholder/Steering Committee

The Steering Committee for the Greater Ben Hill County Comprehensive Plan update consists of County and City representatives and members from business and community organizations to advise, review and help shape the overall plan process:

| ELECTED OFFICIALS | |
|---|---|
| Organization/Group/Individual | Organization/Group/Individual |
| Ben Hill County Chairman & Commission | City of Fitzgerald Mayor & Council |
| Chief Tax Appraiser | Ben Hill County Sheriff |
| COMMISSIONS/BOARDS/ DEPARTMENTS | |
| Organization/Group/Individual | Organization/Group/Individual |
| City of Fitzgerald Manager & Clerk | Ben Hill County Manager & Clerk |
| Ben Hill County Planning Commission | Ben Hill County Economic Development Commission |
| Ben Hill County Health Department | Ben Hill County Board of Education |
| City of Fitzgerald, Fire Department | Ben Hill County Bldg Inspector / Zoning Administrator |
| Southern Georgia Regional Commission Planning Staff | |
| COMMUNITY / BUSINESS GROUPS | |
| Organization/Group/Individual | Organization/Group/Individual |
| Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Development Authority | Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Chamber of Commerce |
| Downtown Development Authority of Fitzgerald | Fitzgerald Housing Authority |
| American Blanching Company | Dorminy Medical Center |
| Citizens | The Herald Leader |

2.2 Other Stakeholders

Other stakeholders include representatives of various agencies and organizations such as the colleges, various schools, media, Faith-based organizations, civic associations, advocacy groups, homeowners associations, realtors and the Chamber of Commerce.

Stakeholders will be called upon to assist with the development of the Community Assessment and Community Vision, leading to the Goals and Policies of the Comprehensive Plan. Presently there are over 24 names of people that have expressed interest and are receiving regular updates and invitations to the stakeholder meetings.

3. IDENTIFICATION OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

The goal of the Community Participation Plan is to educate the public and media on the Comprehensive Plan process and content. In order to achieve broad participation, all segments of the population will be included. The following provides an overview on the public participation process and how it will be implemented.

3.1 Visioning Workshop/Kick-off Meeting

A Community Visioning/Kick-off meeting was held to announce the planning process to the citizens, and stakeholder committee and provide an overview of the Comprehensive Plan's purpose and general approach for completion. The meeting was held at:

**August 13, 2009
1:30p – 3:00P
Grand Conference Center
Fitzgerald, GA**

The goals of this workshop were:

- a) to identify the vision of the participants for all of Ben Hill County 20 years from now and translate this vision into goals and policies; and
- b) to identify issues and opportunities facing the area, including strengths and weaknesses; and
- c) to identify development characteristics and boundaries for proposed character areas;
- d) to establish participation and support for each planning area in the development of the joint Comprehensive Plan.

3.2 Initial Public Hearing

Following several stakeholder meetings, as required by the State Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning, public hearings before the Ben Hill County Board of County Commissioners and the City of Fitzgerald will be held to announce that the planning for the update of the Joint Ben Hill/Fitzgerald Comprehensive Plan is underway. SGRC staff will make a brief presentation to outline the schedule and any further public involvement opportunities. At this meeting, the public will have final opportunity to comment on the draft Community Participation Program and the draft Community Assessment. Previous input and public involvement opportunities through the stakeholder meetings will have been provided prior to this public hearing. Following the public hearing and including the input from the public and County and City officials, the Community Participation document and Community Assessment will be transmitted to the DCA for their review and comment. Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald will advertise all public hearings in compliance with adopted guidelines for public notification.

3.3 Stakeholder/Steering Committee Meetings

The Steering and Stakeholder Committee will provide continued guidance and feedback throughout the Comprehensive Plan's update process. Committee members will also be used for

stakeholder interviews in the Community Assessment and Community Agenda development. Meetings will be scheduled at regular intervals to ensure review and buy-in of deliverables and in advance of and as a follow-up to public meetings and hearings.

3.4 Public Hearing for Plan Transmittal

The Southern Georgia RC staff will make a brief presentation of the highlights of the Joint Ben Hill/Fitzgerald Comprehensive Plan at public hearings before the Ben Hill County Board of County Commission and City of Fitzgerald City Council. The purpose of the public hearings will be to authorize the draft of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan to be sent to DCA for review. All public hearings will be advertised in compliance with adopted guidelines for public notification.

3.5 Project Website

The SGRC will have a special link on its home page to a webpage that will provide information on the progress of the planning process. Additional links to the webpage will be available through Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald. This site will provide information on the Comprehensive Plan's three components including status and drafts for review. The site will also announce meeting opportunities for citizen involvement, provide contact information for staff, and will provide a dedicated e-mail address for questions and comments.

3.7 Public Information Outreach Plan

The SGRC will coordinate the development of an effective media plan to publicize the Plan and its progress to the citizens and other stakeholders. The following activities may also be used to inform the media and the citizens:

- a) The Herald Leader
- b) Media Coverage

Media outlets such as print, radio and television will be educated about the plan through the use of briefings and media sessions. The development of press releases, stories, columns and interviews will be used to inform the Public.

- c) Public Information Materials

Outreach materials will be created and used to help the public understand the comprehensive planning process, distribute information and encourage feedback. The materials will be distributed at public meetings and other geographic locations and may include items such as fact sheets, comment forms, surveys, displays, flyers, notices and a mailing distribution data base.

4. OTHER COMMUNITY INPUT OPPORTUNITIES

Major planning activities that have recently occurred or are occurring in Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald include:

- Planning for Rural Public Transportation
- Southern Georgia Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

5 . SCHEDULE FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE COMMUNITY AGENDA

The following is a tentative schedule for the completion of the Community Agenda of the 2031 Joint Ben Hill/Fitzgerald Comprehensive Plan. For future updates to the completion schedule visit the Ben Hill/Fitzgerald 2031 Comprehensive Plan webpage on the Southern Georgia RC website (www.sgrc.us) or on the Ben Hill County (www.benhillcounty.com) or City of Fitzgerald (www.fitzgeraldga.org) websites or call the Southern Georgia RC at 229.333.5277.

| DATE | OBJECTIVE |
|------------------------------------|--|
| August 13, 2009 | Public Workshop (Kick-off Event) with Steering Committee and expanded Stakeholder Group to explain planning process to the community and receive preliminary input and to discuss and prioritize the preliminary Issues and Opportunities list and outline preliminary boundaries for Character Areas & Areas of Special Attention |
| August 14, 2009 – December 1, 2009 | Processing of public, Steering Committee and Stakeholder input and feedback to Southern Georgia RC to draft CPP and Community Assessment and monthly Stakeholder Committee meetings |
| March 22, 2010 | 1 st Public Hearing on the draft Community Assessment and Public Participation Program and subsequent transmittal to DCA for review by Transmittal Resolution |
| March 2010 – August 2010 | Develop Draft Community Agenda through meetings with Stakeholder Steering Committee and Technical Advisory Committee for feedback and input |
| September 2010 | Community wide Public Meeting to present Draft Community Agenda and receive final comments and revisions. |
| October 2010 | 2 nd Public Hearing to transmit Draft Community Agenda to DCA for review by Transmittal Resolution |
| November/December 2010 | DCA Review period |
| January 2011 | Adoption by Public Hearing and Resolution of 2025 Joint Comprehensive Plan for Ben Hill County/City of Fitzgerald |