



For Immediate Release

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Georgia Communities Rewarded for Innovative Plans and Projects

(ATLANTA – October 26, 2010) Whether helping kids get to school safely, planning for inevitable growth or making a serious effort to “go green,” communities all over Georgia were recently recognized at the Georgia Planning Association’s awards ceremony.

The Georgia Planning Association (GPA) has provided resources and services to planners and communities for more than three decades, offering education, legislative support, the Community Planning Institute and other resources. Each year, GPA rewards local communities and regional commissions for their work to make Georgia a better place to live.

The 2010 Chapter Awards were given to plans and projects that showed innovation, transferability, quality, effectiveness of implementation, public participation, technology, equity and sustainability.

The winners of the 2010 GPA Chapter Awards were:

- **Fitzgerald City African American Cemetery, *Outstanding Planning Process Small Community*** – The Southern Georgia Regional Commission assisted the City of Fitzgerald in the documentation of individuals in the Fitzgerald City Cemetery, a virtually abandoned African-American cemetery. Through an Historic Cemetery Heritage Tourism Grant, and using GPS technology and GA DNR HPD Individual Marker Survey Forms, some 217 marked and unmarked graves were mapped and 39 individuals were identified. The lives of all 39 were explored in detail to help develop a history of African Americans in Fitzgerald.
- **Active Valley Initiative, *Outstanding Planning Process Large Community*** - The ActiveValley Initiative focuses on encouraging, educating and promoting the 16-county River Valley Regional Commission region as being bicycle and pedestrian friendly. The initiative lists its goals as: Increasing the number of people that make the switch from their vehicles to their bicycles, educating motorists and cyclists on the importance of sharing the road, increasing the number of children walking and cycling to school, and helping the environment. More than 18 elementary and middle schools in the region have partnered with the Safe Routes Resource Center. A grant has been awarded to one school, and five more schools have applied.
- **Columbus Design Guidelines, *Outstanding Planning Document Large Community*** – The Columbus Consolidated Government established new guidelines for recognizing and protecting historic neighborhoods, commercial buildings, site features and significant landmarks. The new guidelines provide uniform standards to maintain continuity and promote appropriate rehabilitation and



construction activities. The document uses sketches, photos, renderings, digitalization and other tools, as recommended by a stakeholder committee of citizens, partners and city staff. A series of public meetings was held during development of the document and special care was taken to invite residents of historic areas in the community. The meetings were advertised in the local newspaper, on local TV and on the planning department's Facebook page.

- **Cherokee County Community Patterns, *Outstanding Planning Document Large Community*** – After making 23 field visits, taking more than 1,000 photographs and conducting an in-depth GIS analysis, the Cherokee County planning staff created The Cherokee County Community Patterns book. The book describes the existing development patterns in Cherokee County through text, maps, statistics and photographs. This document is intended to help ordinary citizens, developers/builders, local government staff and elected officials visualize and discuss different types of development around Cherokee County based on a common set of examples. The Community Patterns will also serve as a stepping stone to implementing changes to the Zoning Ordinance and Development Regulations.
 - **A Framework for Green Transit Oriented Development, *Outstanding Planning Document Honorable Mention*** - A Framework for Green Transit-Oriented Development documents the groundbreaking Green-TOD Framework developed by Sizemore Group and Gordon Burns & Associates for the Cumberland Community Improvement District to assist the transformation of auto-oriented Cumberland into a transit-ready, livable community and to empower local and regional stakeholders to compete for the funds that will make their collective vision a reality. The Framework document is designed as a guidebook for suburban communities seeking to implement sustainable and transit-oriented retrofits of existing job centers and commercial corridors.
 - **The City of Quitman Urban Redevelopment Plan, *Outstanding Plan Implementation Small Community*** – In 2008, the City of Quitman, the Brooks County Economic Development Authority and the Southern Georgia Regional Commission partnered to create an Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) to revitalize the City of Quitman. After documenting the blighted building conditions in Quitman, procedures were put in place for slum clearance and future land acquisition. Next, an Enterprise Zone was established, incentivizing new business to move to Quitman and existing businesses to expand. Upon reviewing Quitman's URP and Enterprise Zone, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs granted an Opportunity Zone to Quitman. In 2009, based on the URP, Quitman was awarded an \$800,000 Community Development Block Grant for housing rehabilitation and infrastructure improvements. Currently, these funds are being used in a six-block area to increase fire protection, relieve drainage problems, pave two dirt streets, demolish vacant dwellings and rehabilitate existing houses.
 - **The City of Statesboro Master Plan – 2009-2029, *Outstanding Plan Implementation Large Community*** - Faced with restricted budgets over the last two fiscal years, the Mayor and City Council of the City of Statesboro are fulfilling their commitments to the citizens by prioritizing projects that implement many recommendations of the City of Statesboro Master Plan (2009-2029). A mix of
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more than 20 planning, growth management and infrastructure projects are funded and progressing. These projects reflect priorities identified by the public during the comprehensive planning process.

- **VALOR Interactive Community Map, *Outstanding Educational Tool*** - The Valdosta Lowndes Regional Interactive Community Map <http://www.valorgis.com> improves communication between the local government and citizens by providing a user-friendly, no cost, tool as part of the Valdosta Lowndes Regional program. Using this GIS-based map: users may cross-reference Enterprise and Opportunity zone information with zoning, city limits, utilities and property information; potential property owners and developers can find environmental or natural hazard information specific to individual properties; interested parties can access weekly crime data for site selection and neighborhood watch functions; planners and citizens can access traffic cameras, project sheets and other resources from one source; and the site fulfills a CALEA accreditation requirement for the Valdosta Police Department.
 - **Victoria Place Redevelopment Plan, *Outstanding Initiatives Small Community*** - The Victoria Place Redevelopment Plan promote appropriate infill housing developments, rehabilitation and reinvestment while addressing public infrastructure deficiencies, blight and unsightly and hazardous property conditions. Through the planning process, strategies were developed to promote investment within the area through the utilization of public / private partnerships to mitigate physical, social and economic barriers isolating the Victoria Place neighborhood from the remainder of the community.
 - **Chatham County Resource Protection Commission, *Outstanding Initiatives Large Community*** - Focusing on preservation at the local level, the CCRPC works to identify, protect and conserve sites within Chatham County that are of natural and/or historic significance. In the two years since the program began, the CCRPC has standardized its protection process, evaluated 26 sites and protected more than 970 acres. The properties preserved include high-quality habitats, historical landmarks and recreational trails. This network of greenspaces provides for the sustainability of the community, while allowing public access to some of the county's most beautiful natural resources. By encouraging public access and incorporating public participation, the CCRPC has garnered community support and in turn ensured its own sustainability.
 - **Chattahoochee River Restoration Project, *Outstanding Initiative Large Community Honorable Mention*** - On April 26, 2010, Columbus area government and business leaders announced the Chattahoochee River Restoration Project. When the project is completed, it will provide environmental benefits for the fish and vegetative habitats along a 2.5-mile stretch of the river and will have the distinction of being the longest urban whitewater venue in the world. With the first person anticipated to run the rapids in 2012, the Whitewater project is expected to have an economic impact of \$42 million and more than 700 new jobs in the Columbus area. It is estimated that this project will attract some 188,000 sports participants annually. The region hopes that the
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project will serve as a catalyst for the restoration of properties within this National Historic Landmark District.

- **A Plan for Industrial Land and Sustainable Industry in the City of Atlanta, *Outstanding Student Project*** - More than 12 percent of Atlanta's industrial land was rezoned or lost to other development between 2004 and 2009. Unlike many other cities in recent years, Atlanta did not supplement conventional land use planning and economic development policies with targeted strategies for industry. To address this oversight, the Atlanta Development Authority (ADA) and the City of Atlanta supported a Georgia Tech School of City and Regional Planning master's level studio in fall 2009 that focused on creating the City's first industrial land and sustainable industry plan. The studio's work provides both a vision and road map for sound policy. It is the hope of Georgia Tech and the City that it will be the foundation for strengthening Atlanta's industrial base and overall economy.
 - **The Stadium Neighborhoods TAD, *Outstanding Student Project*** - The Atlanta Stadium Neighborhoods Study identified critical urban design issues, including the redevelopment of 8000 surface parking spaces, through (1) case studies of recent stadium redevelopment projects across the country and (2) urban design investigations of the site with regard to neighborhood connections and regional accessibility, surface parking conversions to deck parking, park space and sports legacies, and flexibility for future land use, density, and phasing. The project will be used by the Atlanta Development Authority to initiate public education and stakeholder participation in decision-making.
 - **Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, *Great Places in Georgia, Public Spaces*** - Native Americans called it Okefenoka, meaning "Land of the Trembling Earth." Now this place, where earth, air, fire and water continuously reform the landscape, is preserved within the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, created in 1937 to protect wildlife. With almost 402,000 acres of cypress forest, marsh, lakes and islands, the refuge is filled with alligators, Sandhill cranes, red-cockaded woodpeckers and more than 400 other species of animals, it is a wonderful place to learn about the wildlife of Georgia and Florida. Guided boat tours take visitors through cypress forests, historic canals and open prairies. Water trails and platforms allow people to canoe for the day or stay overnight. Winding boardwalks and trails lead through unique habitats to observation towers and viewing platforms.
 - **City of Valdosta, *Great Places in Georgia Public Spaces*** - A foundation of preserved historical buildings, along with public and private investment, continues to revitalize Valdosta's historic downtown. With Valdosta's selection as a Main Street City in 1984, the downtown area established itself as the center for business, government and culture. Since the streetscape project of the mid 90s, downtown has truly witnessed a rebirth, reaping the benefit of a mix of uses that include retail shops, service businesses, restaurants, professional offices, government offices, churches, historic buildings and residential units. The City of Valdosta and the Central Valdosta Development Authority (CVDA) are currently considering a Downtown Master Plan.
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- **Folkston Funnel, *Great Places in Georgia – Public Spaces Honorable Mention*** - Folkston is located on the CSX Transportation double-track main line, 40 miles north of Jacksonville, FL. From its depot, train watchers can see where the tracks split, one going northeast to Savannah and beyond, the other going west to Waycross and on to Atlanta. On a typical day, some 60 trains go by carrying everything from passengers (Amtrak), grain, automobiles, molten sulfur and orange juice. At the city-run depot is a covered train-viewing platform, a radio scanner that picks up engineers talking as their trains pass through, free WiFi, benches, chairs, picnic tables, BBQ pits and restrooms.
- **St. Mary's River Management Committee, *Grassroots Initiative Small Community*** - The St. Marys River is a 130-mile blackwater stream that forms the eastern portion of the Georgia – Florida boundary. The St. Marys River Management Committee was formed in 1991 to maintain local control of the largely pristine river. The quasi-governmental advisory board reports to the four counties bordering the river and its 20 members volunteer their time to promote and protect the long-term viability of both the environmental and economic resources of the river.
- **Fifty Forward, Atlanta Regional Commission, *Grassroots Initiative Large Community*** - Imagine the ideal Atlanta region 50 years from now. What does it look like? How does it work? What did we do to make it happen? Between 2008 and 2010, the Civic League for Regional Atlanta asked some 750 people these questions through a series of facilitated discussions called the Fifty Forward Neighborhood Forums. Held in conjunction with the Atlanta Regional Commission's Fifty Forward visioning initiative, these forums allowed residents of the 10-county region share their ideas and insights on such critical topics as sustainability, land use, transportation, diversity and public health.
- **Cam Jordan, *Distinguished Leadership Award*** - Cam Jordan spent more than 20 years in a series of self-help programs for recovering Journalism and Psychology majors before spending the last 13 as Community Development Director for the City of Fitzgerald. He advocates for safe, decent and affordable housing from his own two-room cabin on a local pond. When not working, Cam is a woodworker who enjoys the company of his dog and cat.

Press Release courtesy of:

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