

## PLANNING FOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Adapted from the *Green Infrastructure Toolkit*

In most regions of the U.S., the rate of land consumption far exceeds population growth. Often homes and offices are being built as upgrades on cheap land with high costs to governments for supplying public services to the urban fringe. Much of the land that is being lost is not simply waiting to be developed; rather, it serves important, economic and life-sustaining functions. This land is home to wildlife and plant species, agricultural and forestry lands, scenic lands, water purification and flood



management zones, historic sites and places for recreation and tourism.

The good news is that voters in the U.S. and Georgia have shown they are concerned about the loss of natural areas. They are willing to contribute to the conservation of land for both environmental and recreational purposes. In 2004, Georgia voters in the city of Alpharetta and in Athens-Clarke, Cherokee, Gwinnett, Hall, and Rockdale counties passed seven of eight proposed measures for land conservation by way of bonds and dedicated sales taxes to fund greenway improvements, greenspace acquisition, and recreation. The support continued in 2005 with bond measures passing in DeKalb County and the City of Smyrna.

The bad news is that despite this support, Georgia lags behind other states in funding land conservation. According to the Trust for Public Land, from 1999 to 2004, Georgia spent on average of \$1.81 per capita annually on land conservation, while Florida spent \$24.10 per capita. North Carolina which has a comparable population to Georgia, dedicated \$206 million between 1999 and 2004 compared to Georgia's \$80 million.

"Green infrastructure" is described as an interconnected network of land and water that supports native species and air and water quality, and contributes to the health and quality of life of its residents. Composed of natural areas, greenways and open spaces, it elevates air, land and water to equal importance as built or other infrastructure such as roads, sewers, and power lines.

Pairing growth management with green infrastructure creates a united front to mitigate the impacts of rapid suburban and exurban development.

### Carroll County

#### Preserving Rural Environment

In 2003 Carroll County residents approved a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for greenspace acquisition and protection. The county has partnered with several organizations to build support for the program and to identify acquisition areas. Two primary purposes are being served through the protection and/or acquisition of greenspace: water quality protection and the preservation of scenic views and working landscapes.

Successes from the initial SPLOST built momentum and given substantial visibility to the program, such that property owners are becoming more comfortable with all options that are available to them. The county utilizes fee simple acquisition and easements (conservation and agriculture) for greenspace protection.

Green infrastructure initiatives should promote a systematic, strategic and comprehensive planning effort to acquire, protect and manage conservation lands, open space, green space and agricultural/farmlands in perpetuity.

The Atlanta Regional Commission has produced a *Green Infrastructure Toolkit* that provides information on green infrastructure specific to Georgia and presents successful tools and strategies available within the state. It may be found online at

<http://www.atlantaregional.com/environment/greenspace>.

## Upcoming Events

### Newly Elected Officials Institute

March 5-6, 2010—Tifton, GA

For more information visit [www.gmanet.com](http://www.gmanet.com)

### Main Street Institute

March 17-19, 2010—St. Marys, GA

For more information visit [www.gmanet.com](http://www.gmanet.com)

### ACCG Spring Training

March 18-19, 2010—Tifton, GA

For more information visit [www.accg.org](http://www.accg.org)

### Community Planning Academy:

#### Training for Planning Officials

March 23 & May 18, 2010—Atlanta, GA

For more information visit [www.atlantaregional.com/cpa](http://www.atlantaregional.com/cpa)

### Camden County

#### Partnership for Preservation

Camden County partnered with the Trust for Public Land to produce a Greenprint Report, which represents the culmination of a more than fourteen-month public participation process to identify the county's highest conservation values and recommend steps to save them for the ecological, economical, social, and cultural health and vitality of the community over the next twenty-five years.

The Trust for Public Land was hired by the City of St. Marys to help develop a Greenprint for the county, a tool that includes a shared vision, recommendations, and a series of detailed maps that show opportunities for conserving land, linking communities, and preserving heritage.