



GEORGIA PLANNER

NEWSLETTER OF THE GEORGIA PLANNING ASSOCIATION, A CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION
2161 PEACHTREE ROAD, NE – SUITE 806 – ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30309

DECEMBER 2005

North Georgia Counties Successful with Land Use District Regulations

The task of adopting land development regulations in rural areas, and in particular the mountain counties of north Georgia is a challenging one. Whereas cities more readily embrace zoning regulations because of the greater variety and density of land uses in a smaller geographic area; counties, on the other hand, often require years of negotiation and consensus building before some type of land use regulation finds its way into the code book. Such is the tale of three substantially rural, but rapidly growing, counties in North Georgia – Murray, Pickens, and Gilmer Counties. Recently, with the assistance of the North Georgia Regional Development Center, all three have adopted simplified land use district regulations modeled after DCA's Model Code for Rural Areas. These regulations tactfully avoid the ominous "Z" word, and draw the initial land use district boundaries based on how the land is currently used. While such a concept generally flies in the face of accepted planning principles or traditional zoning regulations, residents in each case were generally assured that their current use of the land would not be negatively affected by the proposed regulations. In addition, the Counties set aside a period of time before the adoption of the map, whereby citizens could come forward and request a district classification different from their current use, if they had other plans for the use of their property.

In Murray County, it was substantial population growth and rapid expansion of residential development, some of marginal quality, that stimulated the leadership of Sole Commissioner Tyson Haynes, who stepped forward to say that something had to be done differently for the future. He made no secret that part of his election platform included the adoption of some type of land development regulations to improve land patterns in Murray County. Their land use district ordinance was adopted in August, 2003 after 14 to 15 months of intense work on a draft document by a group of citizens with RDC assistance. Current Commissioner Jim Welch has now picked up the challenge of managing the land use district regulations and says that "the only bad part of the regulations is that we did not adopt them 25 years ago." He added that "change is tough to accept and admitted that some portions of the population that are the most vocal are often the slowest to change." He stated that "good" is all that is expected in Murray County as a result of the adoption of the Ordinance. Dick Barnes, the Land Use Administrator, indicated that adoption of the ordinance has been a positive experience in Murray County and he stated that "initial implementation was surprisingly easy." He added that "day-to-day it seems like we are saying "no" a lot more, but we are making positive strides in making residents feel for the effect and impact on their neighbors."

Pickens County Sole Commissioner Robert Jones, who began his first term on January 1, 2005, adopted their land use district ordinance on May 2, 2005 with very few negative comments. He explained "that five years of citizen work ultimately resulted in the final Ordinance, plus a straw poll at the ballot box about two years ago gave the elected officials their marching orders when 65 percent expressed support for some type of land use regulations." Following up, the seven-member Planning Commission made a concerted



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President's Corner...

GPA CHALLENGES IN 2006

What can we expect for Georgia planning and zoning issues in 2006? Quite a lot if the past few years are an indication. Most parts of Georgia will continue to experience significant growth. We do not often get time to conduct real strategic planning before the next new development or zoning issue dominates our attention and the news. I believe that an almost unmanageable amount of growth is a certainty for our state for many more years. Add to this growth, the real likelihood of fewer funds in the future for new road construction and automobile dependent development will become downright uncomfortable. Local governments have come to expect that when growth occurs, roads will be improved with state or federal funds providing a large share. With demands for maintenance and increasing costs for construction, permitting, etc., building roads and other infrastructure is very challenging. There has been no more important time for Georgia planners to be considering the right locations to guide growth and be more strategic linking new development with finite public resources for infrastructure. Permitting development far from major roadways is a recipe for a congested community.

At the same time this growth is occurring, the Georgia legislature is considering laws that would likely make planning and zoning more difficult. Included in these legislative proposals is a move to defining a "taking" as any regulation that can be proven to reduce the value of property. Through my career I have always relied on the simple legal goal of seeking a "reasonable use" of property. Consider if every rezoning request or ordinance must be judged on whether it could reduce property values. Once more definitive information, is available, GPA will be requesting that you communicate with your peers, planning commissioners and elected officials on these proposed bills.

Many people move to the suburbs and rural areas to get more house for their money, but many also move further out to live in a house they can afford. Only 25% of Georgians have a college degree. Service sector employees or persons without college degrees are likely not buying homes in exclusive communities. With rising costs of living, planners will increasingly find political support for communities with many housing choices.

GPA will make many improvements in 2006 to better serve our membership. We will launch a new website and electronic newsletter. It is absolutely essential that you visit APA's website at www.planning.org to ensure your contact information including e-mail is correct. During 2006, GPA will reduce from 6 annual to quarterly newsletters. We look forward to a vibrant GPA in 2006. Happy New Year!

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To be Appointed
Chair, Legislative Committee

To be Appointed
Professional Development Officer

To be Appointed
Planning Officials Development Officer

Fulton Commissioners Approve Chattahoochee Hill Country Conservation Subdivision Ordinance

Fulton County Commissioners unanimously approved a zoning amendment to help preserve open space in the three-year-old Chattahoochee Hill Country development. Commissioners approved the amendment during the Wednesday, December 7, 2005 Commission meeting.

“The unanimous passage of the amendment shows that the Commissioners are strongly behind the concept and vision that we have for the Chattahoochee Hill Country Community,” said District 6 Commissioner William “Bill” Edwards. District 5 Commissioner Emma Darnell described Chattahoochee Hill Country as an “excellent” model for community development and preservation.

The amendment to the Fulton County Subdivision Ordinance creates separate subdivision standards for the 65,000 acre community and requires the development of all subdivisions within Chattahoochee Hill Country as conservation subdivisions. Developers must maintain a minimum of 40 percent of open space. The only exception will be subdivisions with lot sizes exceeding five acres.

The amendment provides the following protections:

Minimizes the environmental impact of new development on historic sites and the community’s rustic surroundings,

Places limits on land clearance and removal of plant life to prevent erosion and sedimentation,

Allows the clustering of houses and structures to reduce the number of paved surfaces and utility lines, and

Supports the development of walking trails and bike paths within subdivisions to allow easy access to neighboring communities, businesses and facilities.

The pedestrian and biking concept reduces reliance on automobiles to encourage fuel conservation and promote cleaner air.

Cooperation between Fulton County and the Chattahoochee Hill Country Alliance provided the means for development of Chattahoochee Hill Country, which emphasizes “Smart Growth.”

Chattahoochee Hill Country is part of the South Fulton 2015 Amended Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the Fulton County Chattahoochee Hill Overlay District Ordinance. The development covers four counties; South Fulton, northwestern Coweta, eastern Carroll and eastern Douglas counties.

Steve Cover, Director of Fulton County Department of Environment and Community Development

Do you have a SESSION idea for the 2006 Spring Conference in Athens on March 23 and 24?

Now is the time to make a session proposal for a 2006 Spring conference (due by January 27th).
Contact Rob LeBeau at rlebeau@atlantaregional.com or visit the GPA website to receive the necessary form and submit by the due date.

Would your community like to host a conference in 2007?

This is an excellent economic development opportunity and
a chance to highlight your community to planners from around the state.

Contact Rob LeBeau at rlebeau@atlantaregional.com

or

visit the GPA website to receive the necessary form and submit by the due date.

Georgia Planning Association 2005—2006 Calendar of Planning Related Events

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	CONTACT
January 11 th	P& Z Workshop & GPA District Luncheon	Perry	pclark@mgrdc.org
January 17 th – 18 th	Historic Preservation Tax Incentive Workshop	Royston, GA	kcarter@dca.state.ga.us
January 20 th	GPA Board Meeting	TBA	tdunnavant@cityofnewnan.org
January 24 th	Property Taking Through Eminent Domain	Atlanta	www.nbi-sems.com
January 26 th – 28 th	New Partners for Smart Growth	Denver, CO	www.planning.org
January 29 th – 30 th	2006 Legislative & Policy Conference	Washington, DC	www.planning.org
February 2 nd – 3 rd	GAZA Winter Conference	Athens	www.georgiazoning.org
February 15 th – 16 th	Land Use Law After the Four Supreme Court Decisions of 2005 Tax Policies & Techniques that Support Planning	San Diego	www.planning.org
February 17 th – 18 th	Growing Green, Achieving Sustainability Paying for Economic Development	San Diego	www.planning.org
March 23 rd – 24 th	GPA Spring Conference GPA Board Meeting	Athens	rlebeau@atlantaregional.com
April 22 nd – 26 th	APA National Planning Conference	San Antonio	www.planning.org
April 22 nd – 25 th	ACCG Annual Meeting	Savannah	www.accg.org
May 16 th – 18 th	NARRP Recreation Planning Conference	Nashville, TN	www.narrp.org
June 14 th – 15 th	Land Use Law After the Four Supreme Court Decisions of 2005 Paying for Economic Development	Chicago	www.planning.org
June 16 th – 17 th	Growing Green, Achieving Sustainability Tax Policies & Techniques that Support Planning	Chicago	www.planning.org
June 24 th – 27 th	GMA Annual Convention	Savannah	Janice Eidson (678-686-6256)
July 21 st	GPA Board Meeting	TBA	tdunnavant@cityofnewnan.org
October 11 th – 13 th	GPA Fall Conference	St. Simons	rlebeau@atlantaregional.com
September 20 th – 22 nd	GEDA Annual Conference	Savannah	www.geda.org
December 8 th	GPA Board Meeting	TBA	tdunnavant@cityofnewnan.org

Residents Ask for Roundabouts

By Dena Levitz | Staff Writer
Saturday, November 26, 2005

Slow and steady wins the race for more than just the tortoise. Roundabouts, or traffic circles, are quickly becoming known as safer, smoother traffic alternatives to traditional signaled intersections.

Hoping to jump on the bandwagon, a number of residents involved with transportation planning for the area are pushing for the addition of roundabouts.

Citizens Advisory Committee Chairman Eric Schumacher, for one, is asking local decision makers to look to Aiken, which has three traffic circles in its downtown alone, and a single-lane traffic circle near its mall.

His suggestion is the conversion of the intersection of Wheeler and Aumond roads, once considered but not yet acted on with regards to roundabouts, and the conversion of the intersection of Stevens Creek and Evans to Locks roads.

"People are slowing down there anyway," he said, explaining that a traffic circle would, therefore, be logical. "And that way you'll get better flow."

"Long used in Europe, roundabouts are just starting to catch on in the United States."



Ron Cockerille/Staff

Planners with Department of Transportation and in Richmond and Columbia counties will look into the feasibility of roundabouts for the area.

(Continued on page 6)

(—District Regulations: Continued from page 1)

effort to put the document and proposed map continuously in front of the public. Property owners were offered the opportunity to change their proposed land use district designation prior to map adoption, but surprisingly, not a lot did. Requests were made and reviewed for consistency with the adopted Comprehensive Plan. Norman Pope, Director of Planning and Development, commented that "overall the regulations help protect property values, and when land developers and speculators come to the County we are finding that some regulations help more than they hurt." He credits an extensive public information process in helping to improve the land use district map before its adoption. He commented that all of the up-front work has led to the fact that Pickens County has had only one rezoning request since the adoption date in May. Commissioner Jones "affirmed that sharing information with the public is critical to success" and he summarized that "the regulations are an effective tool that leads to better infrastructure planning and coordination throughout the community."

Gilmer County's path to ordinance adoption began in the mid-nineties with an ordinance that was ultimately deemed too comprehensive and complex for the initial needs of the County, at least that was the position taken by those citizens who adamantly opposed the effort. Time passed and growth continued to mix land uses, sometimes in conflict with each other. A straw poll was conducted, and a majority of citizen indicated that land use regulation was favored. A concerted effort to develop a simplified land use district ordinance began in the last half of 2002 before the three-member Board of Commissioners. Weekly work sessions brought the Ordinance together page-by-page in the following months leading into mid-2003. A draft ordinance was completed; however the adoption process was delayed due to elections. Unrelated to the ordinance development, a new slate of County Commissioners took office January 1, 2005 and continued the effort to develop a "user friendly" land use ordinance, making additional modifications to the draft document. As efforts moved toward adoption, the Commissioners worked hard with the public, addressing as many concerns as possible, especially concerning the land use district map. A ninety day period was created in which the public could comment and in that time over 500 written comments were addressed. In remarks about the Ordinance adoption on August 25, 2005, Commission Chairman Jerry Farist says that "the applause by the public at the second reading of the ordinance was statement enough about the need and acceptance of the ordinance." Jim Smith, the Director of Planning and Community Development, says that "implementation has gone very well since the adoption and two items helped to make things easier – employing the services of an experienced zoning administrator and reinstating a local Planning Commission into the land use district process." He also addressed a theme common to all three counties by stating that "while public acceptance of the concept of land use regulations is critical to success, the hallmark of the ordinance is public participation in an open process."

(Contributed by Larry Vanden Bosch and Barnett Chitwood, GPA District One)

Middle Georgia Brown Bag Seminars

The second session of the “brown-bag” seminar was another great success. Thanks to Vernon Ryle, III, executive director of the Macon-Bibb county planning and zoning commission, zoning officials throughout the middle Georgia region are gaining a better understanding of the zoning administration process that will lead to more effective decisions and less legal problems. There were a total of 12 administrators in attendance representing 8 communities in the Middle Georgia region.

The topic for the session was the administration of rezoning, text amendments, conditional uses, permitted uses, platting and appeals. Through the use of a short PowerPoint presentation and handouts that included sample forms and checklists, Mr. Ryle explained in a simple, and straightforward manner how to properly administer these zoning issues that met the requirements of the law, and to have sufficient documentation in the event a decision is challenged in court.

The next session of the “brown-bag” seminar is scheduled for early February with the topic to be determined in the future with input from the regional planning and zoning administrators.

(—Roundabouts: Continued from page 5)

According to Richard Retting, a senior transportation engineer for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, while France boasts a whopping 20,000 traffic circles and England a mighty 10,000, the United States has at the most between 800 and 1,000, all built within the past decade.

The apparent reluctance to use traffic circles here is not because they don't work, he said. His institute's studies over the past five years conclusively show that these specialized circles reduce crashes with injury by as much as 80 percent and delays in traffic by up to 75 percent.

"All the basic measures that engineers use to judge intersections improve when roundabouts are installed," Mr. Retting said. "It's hard to justify not installing them. It would be as if there was a vaccine out for a particular disease and health officials were not making it public.

"The key is that roundabouts enable all cars at a busy corner to move slowly but continuously, without delay; by forcing stops and alternating the movement of cars, traditional intersections are less efficient, his findings state.

That has certainly been the case in Aiken, where Advisory committee member Marianne Pecoraro said there was resistance to sprinkling the traffic circles around the city a few years ago; now residents see them as beneficial to traffic flow. "It looks better, requires less maintenance, electricity," she said. "It's been a success".

"On average, it doesn't cost any more to build a roundabout, and often the price tag is lower since workers don't need to install or maintain the traffic signals, according to Mr. Retting. "It varies from location to location," he said. "But if you're building an intersection from scratch, a roundabout will many times be a cost saver."

Reach Dena Levitz at (706) 823-3339 or dena.levitz@augustachronicle.com.

By the numbers

1905: Year the first traffic circle was installed in the U.S.
 20: Speed roundabouts are designed for cars to travel on in miles per hour
 1,000: Approximate number of roundabouts in this country
 6,000: Number of hours of vehicle delays a roundabout eliminates annually
 265,000: Number of signaled intersections in the United States
 \$150,000: Estimated cost to install a traffic light Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Institute of Transportation Engineers

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS: The Georgia Chapter does not maintain address lists. All lists are maintained at the national office and are mailed to the local chapters each month. If you have moved, e-mail: addresschange@planning.org, go to Member Login at www.planning.org, or write to:

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APA National Headquarters
122 South Michigan, Suite 1600
Chicago, Illinois 60603-6107



MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION: If you are interested in joining GPA or the American Planning Association, contact the national headquarters at the address above or call (312) 431-9100.

CONTACTS: Direct financial inquiries and address payments to the Treasurer. Direct questions about chapter records to the Secretary. Direct matters for the Board of Directors to the President. See mailing and email addresses inside.

SUBMISSION: The Georgia Planning Association welcomes articles, letters to the editor, photos of planning events or state happenings, calendar listings, job notices, planners on the move, etc. We are always interested in publishing items you think may be of interest to others throughout the state. Graphics are especially welcome. Articles may be edited for space. Articles printed in any issue of The Georgia Planner are not the expressed opinion of the Chapter.

DEADLINE: The deadline for the next issue is **January 31 2006**.
Send items for the newsletter to:

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DEADLINE: January 31, 2006.



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APA ... MAKING GREAT COMMUNITIES HAPPEN