

IDENTIFICATION OF PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

In recognition of the importance of incorporating meaningful input and participation of residents into the planning process, thus ensuring the comprehensive plan and planning agenda ultimately reflects the full range of community values and desires as expressed by a diverse representation of the population, a full range of possible techniques were examined. These included a wide array of passive and interactive participation methods. Standard, time-tested techniques were considered as well as opportunities presented by the latest in technological advances and the Internet. Identified selected methods include:

- Formation of Technical Advisory Committee;
- Appointment of Comprehensive Planning Committee;
- Public meetings (i.e. Kick Off meeting, Public information/input work sessions);
- Joint meetings with Advisory organizations (Vision 2020)
- Speakers bureaus at Meetings of Professional and Service Organizations;
- Periodic briefings of elected officials, business leaders, the media, regional groups, and special interest groups;
- Stakeholder Involvement in completion of Community Agenda;
- Dedicated Comprehensive Plan website;
- Email blasts;
- Electronic and Hardcopy Response and Comment Collection Venues;
- Media interviews and planned press releases (Local radio, television, newspaper);
- Kiosk and local government lobby displays during development of Community Agenda; and
- Public Hearings.

From the outset, three primary public participant achievement goals were defined. The first was to make certain that the citizens of Houston County, including the incorporated and unincorporated areas, were sufficiently aware of the planning process. Second, that ample opportunity to engage in this process was provided. Third, that meaningful data and input from the citizens would be obtained and incorporated into the plan. Potential options were balanced against existing parameters including budgetary, time, scheduling, and additional resource restraints.

Using these criteria, a combination of techniques were selected that would form the basis of the Community Participation Plan. Upon implementation, this plan was designed to ensure that:

- The citizens within the Joint Houston County planning area would have a say in the forthcoming decisions and actions that affect their lives;
- Citizen involvement would be intrinsic in the development of the plan;

- Citizen involvement would be introduced at the beginning of the planning process and continue throughout the decision-making process in order to build trust and demonstrate a commitment to the process on the part of plan coordinators;
- Necessary and adequate information for residents to become educated with regard to the planning process, in order to facilitate meaningful participation, would be provided; and
- The needs and concerns of the public are listened to and their input is integrated into the final plan.

The foundation of the public participation plan was the selection and appointment of the Community Planning Committee (CPC) by the elected officials of the participating local governments. Representation on the CPC includes residents from Centerville, Perry, Warner Robins, and Houston County. The group's designated primary responsibility is to facilitate the entire planning process. All decisions related to the plan and the planning process are guided and directed by this group of citizen representatives. The CPC reports on the progress of the plan regularly to official elected bodies and to the communities and citizens of Houston County as a whole.

The efforts of the CPC are further supported by technical assistance provided by the departmental staff of the various communities and the Middle Georgia Regional Development Center (RDC). The membership of this group represents a diverse, cross-section of the community.

From its inception, the CPC was dedicated to taking the necessary steps to insure that the work of the group would be visible and allow ready and open access to the public. The primary vehicle for this access was the creation of a dedicated website focusing on the comprehensive plan and planning process. The website, located at <http://mgrdc.org/jointplan/index.html>, provides postings of minutes and agendas for every meeting and presentation of the CPC. In addition, a full selection of planning resource documents is available through the website. Anyone wishing to become knowledgeable about comprehensive planning would find much of the relevant documents at one convenient location. Linked sites provide the opportunity to explore specific subjects further. Also, visitors are provided the means to contact the planning group and register their thoughts, comments, and questions. The presence and location of this website has been widely promoted in all public discussions related to the comprehensive plan and is a featured link on each of the individual community websites.

In the effort to encourage support and awareness of the CPC and the comprehensive planning process, newspapers and media outlets were contacted. Media representatives were invited to attend CPC meetings and staff has been readily available for interviews. Lead articles through the various outlets have been helpful in getting the word out to the public that the planning process is underway and explaining how citizens may get involved.

In order to facilitate the CPC's work and to increase public awareness and access to the process, an e-mail-oriented, distribution list for the dissemination of planning materials to LPAC and members and all other interested parties was developed. Anyone wishing to be included on this

list is welcome to do so. In order to create a comprehensive record of information and activities, the CPC initiated implementation of both a digital and hard copy system for the keeping and handling of planning archival records. Materials are consistently and readily available via direct web access, the Middle Georgia RDC central office, and by mail upon request.