

Planning Ahead

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Planning & Government Services (PGS) Division

The Planning & Government Services (PGS) Division's staff assists local governments in a range of services and programs related to local and regional planning, transportation, and community and economic development on a local and regional level. Information on these services and programs are provided in greater detail on our website negrc.org.

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PGS Education Series: November 2011

Join PGS staff and colleagues throughout the region at the November program of the Education Series entitled, "Identifying & Funding Housing, Infrastructure, and Public Facilities Projects."

Representatives from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and NEGRC will present information on typical housing, infrastructure, and facility issues and case studies of successful projects addressing community needs. Attendees will gain knowledge about how and where to look for such projects, and how to engage NEGRC in seeking funding for implementation in advance of the FY 2012

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) cycle. This program is offered for FREE to local government and community representatives in Northeast Georgia. Details are as follows:



Identifying & Funding Housing, Infrastructure, and Public Facilities Projects

- November 15, 2011 @ 10:00 AM
- NEGRC offices (305 Research Drive, Athens)
- To register, contact Julie Ball at jball@negrc.org or 706.369.5650 by Friday, November 11.

A list of resources for all Education Series programs is provided via the Education Series tab on the Planning & Government Services page of the NEGRC website (www.negrc.org). PGS staff will continually update this information as programs are developed. For more information or to suggest topics for the future, contact Nina Kelly, Project Manager, at nkelly@negrc.org.



Changes Coming To Planning Standards

In an effort to reduce costs for local governments, the Georgia General Assembly passed Senate Bill 86 this spring to remove many of the state's local planning requirements. The bill was vetoed by Governor Nathan Deal, but further changes are now proposed for state requirements for a variety of plans. Solid Waste Management planning is now mostly optional (aside from a state requirement to ensure the capacity of landfills is adequate to serve communities). Also, the DRI process will serve as a notification service to area governments of new developments rather than a review process to determine project suitability.

Georgia's Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has formed a committee to rewrite the state's minimum comprehensive planning standards and meetings are currently underway. DCA has already determined local governments should not have to pay for comprehensive plans. In the future, basic comprehensive plans prepared by the regional commissions will be paid for by DCA and regional commissions. During the interim period, DCA is offering communities with comprehensive plan update deadlines in 2011 and 2012 an option to defer the update of their plans for five years. With deferment, governments can simply update their short term work program and verify that their current plan meets local needs. Defer-

ment also requires pre-approval by DCA. More changes to state standards are expected in the coming months and will be shared by the NEGRC with local governments and interested parties.

2012 CDBG Applications

Each year, the NEGRC's Planning & Government Services (PGS) staff assists local governments in preparing Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) for submission to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). These grants typically provide financial assistance for a constructing a range of projects for public facilities and infrastructure. Each application competes for state funding based on a range of criteria but all projects must benefit low- to moderate-income persons--both for eligibility and competitiveness. For more information about CDBG, visit the DCA website at www.dca.ga.gov under the 'Helping Build Communities' section.

CDBG applications require months of development in coordination with a project designer (architect and/or engineer). NEGRC staff typically advises local governments throughout the application development phase that begins in December of each year and concludes in March. To help inform communities about the CDBG program, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) is providing an "Applicants' Workshop" in Macon on December 7-9, 2011. NEGRC staff will attend this workshop to understand this year's application process toward assisting its local governments. Information about the workshop can be obtained by contacting Lisa Smith at (404) 679-5276.

Local governments with ideas for housing, infrastructure, or public facilities projects through the CDBG program are encouraged to complete a Project Development Questionnaire and submit to Nina Kelly, Project Manager, at nkelly@negrc.org by November 28, 2011. This questionnaire will allow PGS staff to preliminarily evaluate potential projects for competitiveness and ensure enough time to develop a comprehensive funding proposal in preparation for the 2012 grant cycle. Please visit the Planning & Government Services tab at www.negrc.org to download the questionnaire form.

Question Corner

The "Question Corner" highlights a REAL, planning question posed to NEGRC staff from a local government and the response. It's intended to offer guidance on common planning issues and provide follow-up technical guidance.

Question:

A local government's city hall was slated for exterior improvements using SPLOST funds. The building is historic and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The building's porch, however, was without an exterior porch rail (i.e., balustrade). The code enforcement officer required the addition of a porch rail to be included in the improvements. Since it is listed in the National Register, is the building exempt from complying with the porch rail requirement?

Answer:

There are really three issues surrounding this question: First, the National Register of Historic Places does not provide any restrictions on what an owner can do to a property. So, this property is not protected/exempt by the improvements/SPLOST actions. Second, the National Register and local designation of a historic property are two different things. If the property is "locally designated," changes to its exterior would be protected by a historic-preservation ordinance that requires design review by a preservation commission. This property was not locally designated or protected by a preservation ordinance. If it was, design guidelines would help the city consider appropriate porch railings. Third, building codes are intended to provide for the safety and welfare of citizens for new construction and improvements to existing buildings. So, as a publicly accessible building (or any building, for that matter), compliance with the code is paramount as well as mandatory. The solution lies in *WHAT* the porch railing will look like, not whether it will be installed.

This issue is really not a question of one or the other. There is no reason why the porch railing cannot satisfy local building code AND not alter the building's historic character even though it is not formally protected. Through a thoughtful design process, a compatible porch railing can be built. There are lots of supporting information to assist historic-property owners, namely in the Preservation Briefs. These Briefs provide guidance on a range of Preservation topics concerning the treatment and rehabilitation of historic properties. The two most relevant Briefs (#14 & #45) on this question are listed below with links.

<http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm>

The Briefs can provide a lot of help, but project-specific

questions can also be answered by planning professionals at the Historic Preservation Division and NEGRC:

<http://georgiashpo.org/>

<http://negrc.org/historic-preservation.php>

On a final note, the real answer to this question is large: historic properties often can be adapted for new and continued uses. When a historic building is considered for rehabilitation, guidance on appropriate design and code compliance are essential. Typically, this assistance is provided by a preservation architect, but sometimes smaller projects can be guided by asking either formally or informally for technical guidance. Reusing our existing infrastructure of buildings can make a lot of sense.

NEGRC's GIS Services

GIS analysis and mapping services are a versatile resource and invaluable tool within the NEGRC's Planning and Government Services (PGS) Division. The PGS Division continues to offer GIS services on a range of potential projects and uses to our local governments. Many, if not all, of these efforts use GIS as a planning tool in promoting the growth of an efficient, safer, and more vital region. We do this by providing a number of GIS and mapping-related services including: data management, spatial analysis, and mapping capabilities.

In application, GIS often aids local governments in observing trends and characteristics that define their communities and our region as a whole. The GIS data the NEGRC maintains is intended to be used as a regional resource and for regional collaboration. It is frequently used by staff planners in the development of both local and regional comprehensive plans. The Regional Plan, for example, is being developed with GIS data and mapping provided by the PGS staff. These maps provide an analytical tool for plan stakeholders and others that provide input into the Regional Plan and, most recently, the development of the Regional Agenda.

New GIS tools and applications come about often. These tools are developed to help generate innovative solutions to local government needs. As these become available, they will be shared through this newsletter and other NEGRC sources to better inform our local governments.

If you would like more information about our GIS services or to discuss its various applications in planning, please contact Burke Walker, Director of PGS at (706) 369-5650.