

## NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION RECEIVES 2014 EXCELLENCE IN REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AWARD FROM THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS



The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) recently received a 2014 Excellence in Regional Transportation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for its Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Program. The Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards showcase organizations for noteworthy projects and practices in rural and small metropolitan transportation planning, program delivery, and special initiatives. NEGRC's Planning and Government Services Division proudly accepted the award at NADO's National Rural Transportation Conference, held in Cincinnati, OH, in December.



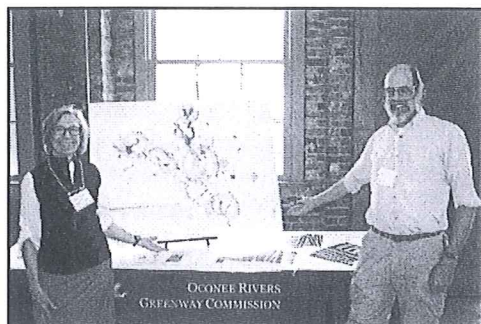
Senior Planner John Devine accepts the NEGRC's Excellence in Regional Transportation Planning Award from NADO Associate Director Carrie Kissel.

Although presented for the sum of the NEGRC's work on the subject, the NADO award highlights three specific components of the NEGRC's "bike/ped" program: the Firefly Trail, the Georgia Trail Summit, and assistance to Walton Wellness' Project Road Share.



The Firefly Trail, a 39-mile walking and bicycling path along the route of the abandoned Georgia Railroad's Athens Branch, plans to connect Athens to Union Point via Winterville, Arnoldsville, Crawford, Maxeys, Woodville, and unincorporated sections of Oglethorpe and Greene counties. Construction on the first mile of the trail, including bridges over the North Oconee River and Peter Street, will begin in Athens this spring.

Last year's inaugural Georgia Trail Summit marked the first time that the State's entire trails community came together in almost twenty years, and the NEGRC took a lead role in planning and presenting this popular event. Over 150 attendees from across Georgia and several other states experienced traditional conference sessions, "unconference" activities of their own choosing, and mobile workshops on nearly all kinds of trails. The 2015 Georgia Trail Summit will again be held in Athens, with the NEGRC resuming its roles as core planning committee member and head of the local host committee.



(Left) Oconee Rivers Greenway Commissioners (Athens-Clarke County) Karen Porter and Chris Fleisher tabling at the 2014 Georgia Trail summit.



(Right) Georgia Trail Summit attendees at "The Wall," deciding which of 28 "unconference" sessions to attend.

Walton Wellness, a health promotion nonprofit in Walton County, approached the NEGRC for mapping and graphical assistance in support of its Project Road Share (PRS) activities. PRS promotes communities that wish to welcome homegrown and out-of-town bicyclists to local roads in support of healthy recreation, safe cycling, and economic development through tourism. The NEGRC proudly produced maps and other information for use at two existing trailheads, with additional communities expected to build facilities soon.

Additional bike/ped work not highlighted in the NADO award includes the Northeast Georgia Plan for Bicycling and Walking, city and county bike/ped and greenway plans, programming and law enforcement training, the Low-Cost Bicycling and Walking Improvements guide, and other work as requested by state agencies and local governments.





(Above) Project Road Share ribbon-cutting ceremony in Social Circle.



(Left) Project Road Share kiosk at Social Circle Trailhead.

Please contact **John Devine, AICP**, with questions about the award, the NEGRC's Bicycle and Pedestrian Program, or your local bike/ped needs at [jdevine@negrc.org](mailto:jdevine@negrc.org).

## PLANNING SESSIONS AND RETREATS HELD

Executive Director **Jim Dove** and Executive Assistant **Mott Beck** recently facilitated planning sessions or retreats for three local governments. A planning retreat for the Walton County Board of Commissioners was held at the Historic Courthouse in Monroe on January 20th. The first portion of the retreat was devoted to a presentation and discussion of immediate and future objectives relative to various departments. Those departments included Roads & Bridges, Water & Sewer, Parks & Recreation, 911, Fire, Finance & Economic Development, Government Buildings & Facilities, and Sheriff's Department & Jail. The second portion of the retreat provided an opportunity for Commissioners to determine potential courses of action for those departments.

The Oconee County Board of Commissioners held a two-day planning session at NEGRC Headquarters on January 22nd and 23rd. The session provided for an open dialogue between various department directors and Commissioners. Departments represented included Finance, Planning, Utilities, Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Fire, Information & Technology, Human Resources, and Strategic & Long Range Planning. A follow-up session was held on the evening of February 16th at the Courthouse in Watkinsville. At that time, Commissioners identified priorities and timelines for action in the various departments.

The City of Madison held its annual retreat on February 2nd at NEGRC Headquarters. A number of topics previously identified by the Mayor and Council were discussed. These included budget challenges, recycling in downtown, city WIFI hot spots, crime statistics, speed bumps, crosswalks, taxes, and the roles of elected officials and staff. The retreat ended with a general discussion among participants.



Oconee County



City of Madison



Walton County

## KING ADDRESSES NEGRC COUNCIL

ACCG Executive Director **Ross King** accepted an invitation to speak at the January meeting of the NEGRC Council. Mr. King has been with ACCG since 1987, serving as the Association's Policy Director and Deputy Director prior to his appointment as Executive Director in April 2010. He expressed appreciation for the close relationship between ACCG and NEGRC and was complimentary of the outstanding leadership in this region. He mentioned those from the region who have served, or are presently serving, as Officers of



ACCG including current President **Kevin Little**, 2nd Vice President **Tommy Lyon**, Past President **Melvin Davis**, and **Billy Pittard**, a member of the Board of Managers. Mr. King explained the ACCG policy development process and the importance of the Association's commitment to continuing education which provides officials with tools, resources, and leadership skills to enhance decision-making within their communities. Further, he indicated that the commitment of ACCG to help county government operate both efficiently and effectively is best demonstrated through the success of its member services programs. Mr. King addressed questions and comments from those in attendance.



(L-R) Pittard, Little, King and Lyon

## REMINDER

The next meeting of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission Council will be held on **Thursday, March 19th at Noon at the Athens Holiday Inn**. Information on the meeting will be forthcoming.

## EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP OFFERED

The NEGRC will host a FREE educational workshop entitled **Environmental Planning: Opportunities and Financing Available to Your Community** on Tuesday, March 24th from 10:00 a.m. - noon. Workshop attendees will have the opportunity to network with and learn about environmental planning and financing opportunities from the following agencies:

- **Camilla Warren** from **EPA** and **Beth Blalock** from **EPD** will speak about brownfield revitalization opportunities
- **Liz Cole** from **GreenbergFarrow** will speak about Greenprinting, a method for identifying areas for cultural and natural resource protection, as well as lands for park, greenspace, and blueway development
- **Thomas Tkacs** from **DNR** will speak about wetland management and the Community Rating System
- **Michael Roberts** from **GEFA** will speak about financing opportunities to fund your environmental projects

The workshop will be at the NEGRC at 305 Research Dr. in Athens. Please RSVP by March 19, 2015 to [jball@negrc.org](mailto:jball@negrc.org) or **706-369-5650**.

## 2015 PLANFIRST APPLICATIONS DUE MAY 15TH

The deadline to submit an application to be recognized as a PlanFirst Community by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) is fast approaching. This year will mark the second year of the new program established by DCA to reward communities that have demonstrated a commitment to implementing their Local Comprehensive Plan.

In the program's inaugural year 30 communities applied for the designation, with 10 ultimately being selected. Within our region Athens-Clarke County, the City of Madison, and the Town of Braselton were all recognized for their efforts in working towards realizing their community's vision as described in the Comprehensive Plan. Awardees have access to a broad range of incentives during the three-year designation period. These include:

- HUD CDBG non-entitlement local governments are eligible to apply for State CDBG funding every year (vs. normal bi-annual eligibility)\*
  - 100 basis point reduction, or 1%, for loans through the Employment Incentive Program\*
  - 100 basis point reduction, or 1%, for loans through the Redevelopment Fund Program\*
  - 100 basis point reduction, or 1%, for loans through the Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund Program\*
  - Access to the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) state loans at an interest rate that is reduced by 50 basis points, or ½ percent.\*
- (\*Limited to plan implementation projects other than water resource management projects, unless otherwise specified)
- Statewide recognition for community achievement
  - Use of the PlanFirst logo
  - Highlighted on the PlanFirst webpage
  - PlanFirst plaque indicating dates of designation
  - Free attendance at any Community Planning Institute event

All communities, regardless of size, are encouraged to apply. The strongest applicants will be able to document a history of public involvement used during the development of the plan, demonstrate an active engagement in the implementation of the plan, as well as progress towards achieving the Plan's stated vision or goals.

For further information about the PlanFirst Program, its incentives, or how to apply for designation, please visit: [www.dca.ga.gov/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/programs/PlanFirst](http://www.dca.ga.gov/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/programs/PlanFirst). For information about comprehensive planning, contact NEGRC Planner **Justin Crighton** at [jcrighton@negrc.org](mailto:jcrighton@negrc.org) or **(706) 369-5650**.



305 Research Drive  
Athens, GA 30605

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*Update*

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**REGIONAL MEETINGS**  
**MARCH**

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10	8:30 a.m.	Workforce Investment Board	E.H. Culpepper Conference Room
11	1:00 p.m.	Solid Waste Management Authority	E.H. Culpepper Conference Room
19	Noon	NEGRC Council	Athens Holiday Inn
19	3:30 p.m.	Firefly Trails Advocacy Group	E.H. Culpepper Conference Room
25	9:30 a.m.	Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority	E.H. Culpepper Conference Room
31	2:00 p.m.	NEGA Emergency Medical Services	E.H. Culpepper Conference Room

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*Sincerely & Respectfully,*