

DCA RECOGNIZES CITIES AND COUNTIES FOR EXCELLENCE IN PLANNING

On November 18th, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) announced that seven Georgia communities have received statewide distinction in the PlanFirst program for 2016. New designees are the Village of Porterdale in Northeast Georgia, along with Columbus-Muscogee County, the City of Dublin, Gwinnett County, Liberty County, the City of Lula, and the City of Roswell in other regions of the state.

PlanFirst distinction acknowledges communities that have a proven track record of implementing their plan and a history of good plan development. This group of seven communities is only the second to have been given the designation, and they are representative of the variety of local governments across the state --- urban and rural, large and small, cities, counties, and one consolidated government. "We are honored to recognize these communities for their comprehensive planning and consistent use of planning strategies," said DCA Director of the Office of Planning & Environmental Management **Brian Johnson**. "It is fundamental for sound economic development and enhanced quality of life for residents. DCA values their commitment to planning at the local level."

Eligible communities were required to address four primary program criteria: goals, leadership, community participation, and implementation. The designation will last for three years, beginning January 1, 2016, and enables these communities to take advantage of various incentives that include public visibility, eligibility for funding, and reduced interest rates on certain DCA and Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) programs.

These new communities join the inaugural group of ten communities that received the designation as the PlanFirst class of 2015. From Northeast Georgia were Athens-Clarke County along with the Cities of Braselton and Madison, and from other areas of the state were the Counties of Coweta, Johnson and Jones and the Cities of Gainesville, Suwanee, Vienna and Woodstock. The next deadline for applications is May 15, 2016. Additional information about the program is available at **DCA's Planning and Quality Growth/PlanFirst webpage**.

Communities that apply, but are not selected, are eligible for a one-on-one technical assistance visit to improve their application for future designation rounds. This assistance will allow any community the opportunity to target those items and improve before the next round of applications is due. DCA developed the program with a Steering Committee comprised of partners including the Georgia Municipal Association, Association County Commissioners of Georgia, Georgia Planning Association, Regional Commissions, and the University of Georgia Archways Program. Others involved included GEFA, and DNR's Historic Preservation Division and Environmental Protection Division.

STATE GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION OFFICE

Recognizing the need to better coordinate geospatial efforts statewide, the Regional Commissions utilized funding from the federal Economic Development Administration and local monies to assist in establishing a Georgia Geospatial Information Office. **Susan Miller**, chosen to fill the role of Geospatial Information Officer (GIO), is housed at the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), and reports to leadership of the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions (GARC).

The benefits of having a GIO are numerous. The GIO will better position the state to work with the US Census Bureau to positively impact the 2020 Census enumeration. The GIO will save money for the state of Georgia through the elimination of redundant GIS data development efforts. In addition, that position will oversee technical data standardization for GIS data products that will enable better decision making. Finally, the GIO will better position the state to interact with the federal government, national vendors, and related external entities involving statewide GIS data procurement and initiatives.

The GIO will work to enable and improve geospatial efforts in policy areas such as public health; human services; emergency response and homeland security; strategic growth and land use; energy, water, and utilities; environment; and agriculture.

Further information on the state Geospatial Information Office may be obtained by contacting Ms. Miller at **susan.miller@gio.ga.gov** or **(470) 599-0631**. To discuss GIS efforts on a regional level, please contact **Kenny Gilbert** of the NEGRC staff at **kgilbert@negrc.org** or **(706) 369-5650**.

NEGRC WELCOMES NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

Due to last fall's elections, the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) Council welcomed several new members at its January 18th meeting. Lexington Mayor **Rick Berry** is replacing **Ronnie Boggs** as Oglethorpe County Municipal Representative, Winterville Mayor **Dodd Ferrelle** is replacing **Emily Eisenman** as Clarke County Municipal Representative, **Stone Workman**, Mayor Pro Tem with the City of Monticello, is replacing Mayor **Bryan Standifer** as Jasper County Municipal Representative, and **Jim Shaw**, Jackson County Chamber of Commerce President, is replacing **Josh Fenn** as Private Sector Representative from that County. Staff will ensure these members are indoctrinated in the policies, procedures, Program of Work, and services, etc. offered by NEGRC. Council members and staff look forward to working with these new members and welcome them to the organization.



L-R: Mayor Ferrelle, Director Dove, and Mayor Berry

REMINDER

The next meeting of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission will be held on **Thursday, February 18th at Noon at the Athens Holiday Inn**. Information on the meeting will be forthcoming.

MEADOWS RECEIVES CERTIFICATION

Congratulations to Career Advisor **Kimberly Meadows** on earning her Certified Workforce Development Professional Certification (CWDP). This certification is a nationally recognized credential that evaluates professionals on nine different competency areas including Business and Economic Development Intelligence, Career Development Principles, and Workforce Development Structure, Policies and Programs. The certification is issued through the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP). Ms. Meadows is a member of the NAWDP and serves on the Professional Development Committee of the organization.



PRESERVATION CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY

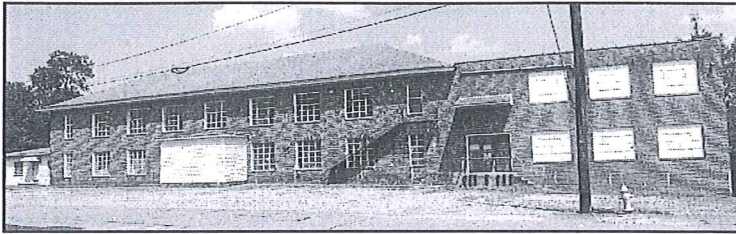
This year marks the 50th anniversary of the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. In order to celebrate historic preservation and its strength in Northeast Georgia, in each month's "Update" a preservation effort will be highlighted. These sites, buildings, and projects represent the rich heritage and spirit of our region. Please join the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission in its celebration of historic preservation during the year!

This month features the "Auburn Center" in Barrow County. This ongoing rehabilitation project will transform the former Perry-Rainey Institute dormitory into a multi-use space for adult learning and community activities. The three-story, hipped-roof building was constructed in 1902 for the Perry-Rainey Institute, and in the 1950s was converted into a textile mill. In more recent years, it has been largely abandoned and offered for sale. This rehabilitation will transform the building into a safe and usable space.

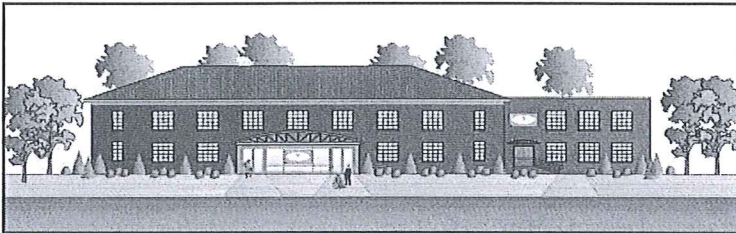
The City of Auburn is utilizing the Community Development Block Grant Redevelopment Fund (CDBG-RDF) program to fund part of the renovation in addition to city resources. The CDBG-RDF program focuses on the national Housing and Urban Development (HUD) objective of "eliminating slums or blight" and providing communities with an opportunity to leverage investment in commercial, downtown, and industrial redevelopment and revitalization projects. This program has been used with great success in Northeast Georgia, such as with the award-winning Braselton Brothers Store project. The RDF program has a rolling deadline and matching grants up to \$500,000 are available on a competitive basis. When this project is completed, it will transform an unused and blighted building

into a community centerpiece for the City of Auburn and its community. It will also achieve historic preservation objectives by preserving a historic building that reflects the City's history. To learn more about the City of Auburn's history, visit the NEGRC's website to view the Auburn National Register nomination.

For further questions about historic preservation or its 50th anniversary, contact **Jordan Shoemaker**, NEGRC Project Specialist, at jshoemaker@negrc.org or (706) 369-5650.



Auburn Center - Before and After



DOWNTOWN CONFERENCE IN ATHENS

Next month, the Georgia Downtown Association and Georgia Main Street Program will host a three-day conference in Athens from March 9th -11th. It will include educational sessions, mobile tours, exhibitions and an annual awards presentation to be held at the Historic Morton Theater. This conference is well suited for not just Main Street communities but city officials and staff involved in downtown revitalization, promotion and business recruitment. It also offers excellent opportunities for smaller, rural towns to learn more about Main Street strategies and network with other Georgia Communities.

One component of the conference is trainings offered for individuals involved with Historic Preservation Commissions and Downtown Development Authorities. This is a good opportunity for those currently serving on these appointed boards, and new appointees and others interested in serving. Of special interest is the keynote speaker, **Peter Kageyama**, whom authored **For the Love of Cities**.

For further information, visit <http://www.georgiadowntownassociation.org/conference.asp> or the NEGRC's Planning & Government Service webpage under "News" at <http://negrc.org/local-services.php>.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD HOLDS MINI-RETREAT

The Northeast Georgia Workforce Development Board held a mini-retreat on Tuesday, January 12th at Springhill Suites in Oconee County. The Board received an overview of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) from **Mary Margaret Garrett**, a consultant with the Georgia Department of Economic Development Workforce Division. Ms. Garrett also shared with the Board some of the items for consideration during the transition from WIA to WIOA. In addition to Board Chairman **Amrey Harden** and Chief Local Elected Official **Melvin Davis**, other Board members present included **Reg Woods, Andrea Daniel, Dixie Morris, Joe Vogt, Michael Smith, David Cagle, Chris Kuvas, Bob Hughes, Brenda Lazarus, Jim Dove, Howard Ledford, Carol Williams, and Lori Chafin**. **Carol Rayburn Cofer**, Workforce Development Director, assisted with the event.



Mini-Retreat Participants



305 Research Drive
Athens, GA 30605

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

PRSRT. STD.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
ATHENS, GA
PERMIT NO. 502

Update

REGIONAL MEETINGS
FEBRUARY

2	8:30 a.m.	UOBWA Joint Eng/Operations Committee	E.H. Culpepper Conference Room
16	9:30 a.m.	UOBWA Finance Committee	NEGRC Small Conference Room
18	Noon	NEGRC Council	Athens Holiday Inn
18	3:30 p.m.	Rails to Trail Advocacy Group	E.H. Culpepper Conference Room



Sincerely & Respectfully,