

The Chatham County – Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) is a lot like an onion. Once you begin to peel it, you see just how many layers there are. The first layer includes its most visible functions, development and zoning. Since much of the MPC's meeting items relate to this function, most people readily recognize this layer. After all, it's what the public can watch on the Government TV replays. But, when you begin peeling back this first layer, a number of other layers are revealed.

For example, the public may not be aware that the MPC staff serves 11 other boards as well as numerous ad hoc committees. Our staff provides a range of expertise and efficiencies to best support these boards, and the process that serves one board is similar when serving other boards.

Another layer or dimension of the MPC involves its planning activities that fulfill numerous federal and state requirements to maintain eligibility for tens of millions of dollars of funding. Meeting the state's comprehensive planning requirements enables local governments to obtain Qualified Local Government status and thus gain access to community planning and housing program grants. Maintaining the federal transportation planning program through the Coastal Region Metropolitan Planning Organization ensures the flow of federal transportation funds for Chatham highway, transit and other related projects.

We also assist many of our local governments in maintaining their permits for various resources. For example, a coordinated annual report prepared by the MPC staff provides an efficient, cost-effective way for the local governments to maintain their storm water permits. Other programs, like the Historic Preservation programs ensure that our historic, cultural and natural resources are protected and give property owners access to tax credits and funding for other programs.

Another layer that is not immediately visible is the range of uses for the Savannah Area Geographic Information System (SAGIS). Through this mapping system, citizens and staff are able to access data for business and planning purposes. While the public may know that information relating to properties can be found at SAGIS.org, it may not realize that SAGIS member governments and organizations also have access to more than 300 data layers. The role of SAGIS is to coordinate standards, ensure quality data and develop programs for using the data. Its operations ensure seamless sharing of data sets and programs. One example is the support it provides for such critical functions as 911 and emergency management response plans.

As our service delivery processes evolve, we continue to uncover even more layers. Our goal is to provide more efficient service delivery and maintain transparency and access for our citizens. Our current effort is to convert to a paperless e-agenda system for all the boards we serve. One obvious benefit to this system is that it saves reams of paper. The most important benefit, however, is the improvement in access to staff reports. All of the backup staff reports and other information for agenda items are now available to the MPC on the internet and will soon be available to all the boards we serve as well.

When the MPC was originally formed in 1955, it was to create a multi-jurisdictional master plan. In 1994 the Chatham County Commission and City of Savannah mayor and aldermen renewed their commitment to a city-county agency, designating the MPC as the "principal planning agency for Chatham County and the City of Savannah." This joint resolution stipulated

numerous additional duties and services, which expanded as the needs for area-wide planning grew. At our core are the volunteer planning commission members and the talented, dedicated professionals and support staff that serves the community through the MPC. Today, after 54 years, the MPC continues to serve as a high-energy, transparent and customer friendly place for consolidated government planning.

You make us cry without hurting us.
I have praised everything that exists,
but to me, onion, you are
more beautiful than a bird
of dazzling feathers,
heavenly globe, platinum goblet,
unmoving dance
of the snowy anemone
and the fragrance of the earth lives
in your crystalline nature.

from

Ode To The Onion

by

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