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MPC Headlines

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Affirming Value

By *W. Shedrick Coleman*
 Chair, Chatham County-Savannah
 Metropolitan Planning Commission



In the current economic climate, planning boards and commissions are finding themselves devalued by the elected officials they serve. Across the nation, communities are faced with major funding shortages and seek avenues to reduce costs. Planning boards are a ripe target for such reductions because their value is often misunderstood by the public.

The implementation of most planning projects usually extends for a number of years, thereby diminishing their perceived impact. Elected officials are faced with moving projects forward that they believe strengthen their tenure in office. Long-range projects suffer in this environment and the work of the planning board usually falls within this light.

It is important that planning boards reaffirm their value. One strategy is to leverage media opportunities to make the public aware of the projects implemented by the planning board as they are realized. Regular public announcements of achieved milestones can keep the public engaged and offer the opportunity to tout the role the board plays in moving the community forward.

These milestone events also serve as opportunities for elected officials to connect with the efforts of the planning board in a synergistic manner. Additionally, elected officials must acknowledge the involvement of the public and their

expectation of positive results from the planning board relative to healthy growth within the community.

A second path is to use reduced development periods as an opportunity to evaluate the success of prior developments. What most communities will find is a mixed bag where the intended (stated) goals have failed to materialize. Getting ahead of the next wave of development in a manner that responds to the current and future needs of the community should be promoted as an act of a forward-thinking elected leadership body.

Now is not the time to reduce experienced planning staff and defer effective planning. Effective planning is not a reactive process, the results of which we will continually find wanting. Now is the time to use our planning resources proactively to build better communities. We cannot afford to spend funds on showcase projects that do nothing to meet the need for long-term community viability. Resources are clearly finite and the public is now demanding more accountability from the leadership of our communities to solve issues directly related to their way of life.

We must recognize communities are living entities where infrastructure links the various component parts, just as the circulatory and nervous systems link our organs. To keep us healthy, planning is preventive medicine.

Shedrick Coleman is currently on the National Board of Directors of the American Planning Association

Director's Corner The MPC –Getting it Done!

By *Thomas L. Thomson*
 Executive Director, Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission

2011 will be a “Get It Done” year for the Chatham County – Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC). We are working on several important planning projects that will be completed this year. In addition, new services will be launched and important programs will continue to protect our cultural, natural and historic resources. Several transportation corridor studies that are underway will ensure our future mobility, safety and regional connectivity. The success of our efforts is highly dependent upon our partners. So your participation is important to the outcome of our work. Some of our projects are briefly described below; however you are encouraged to read more about what we are doing by visiting www.thempc.org. Please join us in planning and building a greater community that is sustainable, mobile and prosperous. Write or call us and visit our website for announcements on how you can participate in the studies and projects mentioned below.

The [Unified Zoning Ordinance \(UZO\)](#) project evolved from a significant decision made by our county and city of Savannah elected officials in 2002. Back then they realized that our primary tool for implementing our comprehensive plan was outdated and should be one document instead of sepa-

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*Recently restored commercial property
(240 Bull Street)*

Recent Planning Efforts Successful in Local Historic Designation

*Sarah Ward, Director
Historic Preservation*

On December 30, 2010 the Mayor and Aldermen unanimously approved MPC's recommendation to add 112 eligible structures to the Historic Building Map for the Savannah Historic District.

A staff study conducted from 2007 to 2010 identified 112 buildings eligible for local historic designation within the existing historic district boundaries. This group of buildings contains well preserved examples of structures that represent the physical development pattern of downtown Savannah and/or a distinctive type and period of architecture significant to Savannah's history.

Staff notified all property owners of the proposed designation and held a public informational meeting to answer questions and address any concerns. Taking into consideration the comments we received, the buildings were further analyzed and presented to the Planning Commission. The Mayor and Aldermen designated the buildings historic on December 30, 2010 upon recommendation of the Planning Commission. The user friendly supplement and updated map are now available on the [Historic Preservation](#) page of the MPC website.

Newly designated structures represent works constructed from 1820 to 1964 and were divided into seven historical

categories or contexts. A majority of the buildings fit within the existing historic context and were overlooked in earlier efforts or were restored within the last decade revealing their historical significance. Other additions include lane dwellings, carriage houses, ancillary buildings, automotive related structures, and commercial properties constructed between 1842 and 1955. Nine well preserved examples of Mid 20th century Modernism constructed between 1950 and 1960, were designated. The single-family housing building type was identified as a significant pattern of development in the historic district and 18 structures, constructed between 1949 and 1959 were designated historic. Lastly, two properties constructed in 1964 were identified



Mid-Century Modernism

These buildings attest to Savannah's a modern evolving city. Over time, no one period has dominated, but rather the whole spectrum of urban evolution is represented within the strict confines of a highly disciplined plan. It is for these reasons that the building fabric should be analyzed on a continuing basis to ensure the preservation of the best elements of each era. It is also important to recognize the character defining features of buildings from each period. By identifying these buildings and their characteristics,

rehabilitation approaches taken on Savannah's buildings will result in projects sympathetic to the original design and new construction will be compatible with these significant structures.

More of these historic building pictures are available at <http://www.thempc.org/historicpreservation.htm>



Greyhound Bus Station example of New Formalism architecture eligible for the NRHP (Exceptional Importance).

to be of Exceptional Importance and were determined by the State Historic Preservation Office to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for their contributions to the development of Savannah and as well preserved examples of roadside architecture with tourism.



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*Jackie Jackson-Teel,
Natural Resources Director
Charlotte Moore,
Special Projects Director*

Chatham County - Savannah's Tricentennial Plan

In 2002 the Savannah Mayor and Aldermen and Chatham County Commissioners launched an ambitious project known as the Tricentennial Plan. This plan includes an updated and unified comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance for the city of Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County. 2011 is an important year for the Tricentennial Plan as the Comprehensive Plan will be reevaluated and a revised zoning ordinance will be released for public comment. Please see page 4 of the Headlines for more detailed update of the Tricentennial Plan.

What Is a Comprehensive Plan?

The state-required Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2006 and provided a long-range community vision through 2033– the 300th anniversary of the founding of the city of Savannah. More specifically, the Comprehensive Plan identifies our community's goals for the following elements: Land Use; Economic Development; Housing; Historic and Cultural Resources; Natural Resources; Transportation; and, Community Facilities. Objectives have been identified for each goal and include strategies as to how each objective can be achieved.

A short-term work program is also included in the Comprehensive Plan. For each objective, the work program identifies the responsible agencies and/or departments, a time line for completion, anticipated cost and known sources of funding. The work program is updated every five years and is presently under evaluation.

As a formal policy document, the Comprehensive Plan serves as a master blueprint for guiding the community. Where there is a relationship, local government plans (including land use plans), ordinances and programs (e.g., Capital Improvement Programs) should be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that the adopted vision will be attained.

What is the Unified Zoning Ordinance?

The zoning ordinance serves as an important implementation tool for the Comprehensive Plan. Because there are two separate zoning ordinances for Savannah and unincorporated

allowed land uses and development standards (e.g., building height and setbacks) by zoning district. But it can also assist with the protection of environmentally sensitive areas, preservation of the physical and architectural integrity of applicable historic neighborhoods and promotion of better site and building design. More information about the UZO is available at www.unifiedzoning.org.

Reporting on Our Progress

At the five-year mark, it's time to report on our progress and go a step beyond: What have we been able to achieve these past five years? What remains? What new ideas, plans, programs and policies should be incorporated? How can we address the issues of the day at the local level, such as a challenging economy, an aging population, finite energy resources, climate change, among others?

This Is Your Community – Help Shape Its Future

Please consider volunteering as we update the work program and goals for the Comprehensive Plan and prepare for the public release of the UZO. By serving on a committee, you can help refine our community's long-range vision and planning efforts. For more information on the Comprehensive Plan, please contact Dennis Hutton at 912-651-1450 or via email at huttond@thempc.org. For information on the UZO, please contact Charlotte Moore at 912-651-1466 or by emailing moorec@thempc.org.



Chatham County that are a half-century old and that do not entirely reflect the long-range vision for each jurisdiction, an updated and unified ordinance is under development. The ordinance is known as the Unified Zoning Ordinance (or UZO). Its most basic function is to identify the

Tricentennial Plan Update



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Please contact Dennis Hutton at 912-651-1454 or via email at huttond@thempc.org.

Dennis Hutton, Director, Comprehensive Planning

Several years ago, there was much ado about something known as the Tricentennial Plan, which was intended to guide us into the coming end of the third century of this community (2033!). Well, how are we doing so far? Why haven't we heard about it lately? Did it disappear down the proverbial rabbit hole?

The truth is, the MPC, the City of Savannah, Chatham County and the public at large have been hard at work on the Tricentennial Plan, even when it's not so obvious to others. As you may recall, there were two parts to the Tricentennial Plan: the Comprehensive Plan and the Unified Zoning Ordinance

roads and other natural vistas along our roads and highways. In 2006, the Coastal Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (CORE MPO) adopted a Context Sensitive Design Manual which guides road designers to think carefully about how roads could potentially impact the areas surrounding them.

There are numerous other examples of objectives that have been achieved. Both the Chatham County Resource Protection Commission and the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission were created. The Chatham Environmental Forum, Healthy Savannah, Step-Up Savannah, the Savannah Economic Development Authority, the Creative Coast, and the United Way are working with the MPC to achieve many of the goals out-

lined in the Comprehensive Plan. The Savannah-Chatham County School Board has made progress in improving education as outlined in the plan, including the opening up of school grounds to neighborhood activities. Plan is a living document we can incorporate new goals. When oil prices spiked a couple of years ago, we realized that we may not have sufficient public transportation. Our food travels an average of 1,500 miles from where it is produced to where it is consumed. How do we grow our food more locally? Climatologists tell us that the weather is changing and the sea level is rising. Have we factored this into our development plans? Nutritionists tell us that we are facing an obesity epidemic, demographers warn that the graying population will overwhelm our health institutions unless we plan ahead, the price of electricity is going up...the list of new issues goes on and on.



(UZO). The Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2006 and established many of the policies that will be implemented by the Unified Zoning Ordinance. The MPC staff, a Technical Advisory Committee, and a group of volunteer citizens have been working on this task. The draft UZO will be released for public comment this year.

In the meantime, the community has been incorporating the Comprehensive Plan. In fact, many of the goals established in the Plan have been accomplished. For example, one of the important land use goals was to preserve the viability and sustainability of Downtown Savannah and great strides have been made to do just that.

Another important issue was the protection of tree-canopied

grounds to neighborhood activities.

So, it's time to find a shade tree, pour a glass of tea and take a snooze, right?

Wrong! Although we would like to take a minute to pat ourselves on the back because, to be completely honest, many of Tricentennial Plan aspirations seemed to be pie-in-the-sky when they were adopted five years ago, we realize that we are not facing the same issues in 2011 that we faced in 2006. As the urban environment and its surroundings have been become more thoroughly understood, it has become obvious that comprehensive planning is much more important to the health and well-being of a community than anyone, even planners, ever realized.

Planners have to account for both new realities and new possibilities, and since the Comprehensive

We have reason to be proud of our accomplishments over the past five years, but more importantly we need to consider our objectives for the future. The MPC is inviting the community to put on our thinking caps and develop a community work program for the next five years. We are blessed with community leaders who support this initiative. Recently Pat Shay (attending for County Commission Chairman Pete Liakakis), Mayor Otis Johnson, MPC Chairman Shedrick Coleman, Coastal Health District Director Dr. Douglas Skelton, and other community leaders lead citizens in a discussion of how to continue to make Chatham County a healthier and more prosperous community.

If you missed this opportunity you still have a chance to participate. For more information on that or on the Tricentennial Plan in general, please contact Dennis Hutton at 912-651-1454 or via email at huttond@thempc.org





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US 80 Public Meeting on Tybee Island



Concept 3 of the I-16 Flyover Removal Study

Director's Corner Continued

rate ones. So an initiative was started that resulted in the adoption of a unified comprehensive plan in late 2006 and the



drafting of a unified zoning ordinance that better recognizes the community's existing development patterns, provides for our future expansion and growth and protects our residential areas from inappropriate uses. This plan will be released for public review in the first half of 2011.

Concurrent with the UZO, a status report is due to the state by the end of October regarding the **Short Term Work Program** of the Comprehensive Plan (which is the first portion of the Tricentennial Plan). The MPC will be convening interested persons to review the progress made so far and to suggest amendments to the comprehensive plan to make it current.

The **Total Mobility Plan** will expand upon the goals and policy framework established by the Coastal Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (CORE MPO is staffed by the MPC). This plan has several elements being conducted as separate but integral studies:

- Regional Transit Mobility Vision Plan
- Detailed Plans for Corridors or Sub-areas
- Non-Motorized (Bicycle-Pedestrian) Plan
- Climate Change Assessment

The above elements will be unified in an amendment to the CORE MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan to be known as the **Total Mobility Plan**.

In addition to the major efforts above the MPC has several important transportation studies underway:

- I-16 Flyover Removal Study
- SR 204 Corridor Study
- [SR 21 Corridor Study](#)
- [US 80 Bridges Study](#)

The **I-16 Flyover Removal Study** is being done in partnership with the City of Savannah, Chatham County and the Savannah Development and Renewal Authority to examine the feasibility of removing the I-16 exit ramps at MLK Jr. Boulevard and Montgomery Street. This project has had extensive public participation and support for the preferred plan for redevelopment. Staff is currently drafting a report and preparing for the next steps.

Three transportation studies, which are funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act are currently underway for the CORE MPO to solve traffic congestion and eliminate choke points, reduce accidents and improve pedestrian and bicycle access for some key routes in Chatham County. Of significance is the **SR 204 Corridor Study** which will address the new traffic from the Truman Parkway extension (expected to open in late 2013) that will be merging into the existing SR 204 roadway. Information on the other studies can be found on our web site.

The MPC is working on many new service improvements that will be launched in 2011. A new **Savannah Area Geographic Information System (SAGIS) Internet Viewer** has already been launched updating the tools and format to current standards. SAGIS will also soon launch a subscription service geared in particular to the property appraisal and real estate professionals, providing access to special tools and data formats for a fee, which will help support SAGIS operations.

Important programs will continue to protect our cultural, natural and historic resources. Last year we fully implemented our paperless **E-Agenda system** for most of the commission and boards served by MPC staff. This system gives unprecedented public access to agendas and staff reports for all board meetings.

Please read the **MPC Headlines Special Edition: MPC Projects** or go to one of the links mentioned above for more details on the items mentioned.

Your participation and support is important to making 2011 a "Get It Done" year for the Chatham County – Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC).