

COLUMBUS COMMUNITY GREENSPACE REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Green space preservation is essential for future development of our neighborhoods, cities, and regional surroundings. Within the City of Columbus, the need for greenspace protection is extremely evident due to the massive expansion of urban development. In order to meet this need, Columbus seeks additional funding to ensure our most precious natural resources remain for generations to come. This Community Greenspace Report was prepared to identify our greenspace needs and illustrate our vision for preserving greenspace within Muscogee County. This report consists of various elements related to the Georgia Greenspace Program. The major elements included in the Columbus Greenspace Report are:

- 1) **Summary of public meeting and list of attendees.** A public greenspace meeting was held on July 20, 2000 to inform the public about the Georgia Greenspace Program.

- 2) **Introduction.** This section provides a brief introduction of the Columbus Greenspace Report. Our program mission and purpose are also included. Mr. Rick Jones, Director of Community and Economic Development, is identified as the responsible coordinator of the Columbus Greenspace Program.

- 3) **County Description.** The total acreage of Muscogee County is described in this section. The base greenspace acreage is also listed. This section provides population data of Muscogee County based upon the 1990 U. S. Census. A detailed description of various types of natural, historic, and recreational resources that the Columbus Consolidated

Government intends to possibly protect under the greenspace program are discussed. The various types of natural, historic, and recreational resources within Columbus are described in this section. Rapidly growing areas within Columbus are illustrated. The primary growth areas are the northern, southeastern and southwestern portions of Columbus. Our priority is to invest in smart growth strategies that will protect these growing areas.

- 4) **County Greenspace Goal.** This section illustrates the county's greenspace goals and the methods for achieving those goals. Our primary goal is to identify and permanently protect all areas within Muscogee County that are consistent with the goals and purpose of the Georgia Greenspace Program. Methods for achieving this goal will consist of educational and public awareness programs and additional greenspace policies and regulations.
- 5) **Consistency of the Columbus Comprehensive Plan with the Georgia Greenspace Program.** Major greenspace components found in Muscogee County are identified in this section. Those components include: 1) Natural Resources Element; 2) Historic Preservation Element; and 3) Parks & Recreation Element. Also, projected needs consistent with greenspace are addressed.
- 6) **Unprotected Land to be evaluated for Permanent Protection.** The Unprotected Land component describes publicly owned greenspace areas that are not permanently protected. An assessment of the county's publicly owned areas identified 24 potential greenspace areas. This section also identifies unprotected, privately owned land that the city will evaluate for

permanent greenspace protection. The Columbus Consolidated Government acknowledges that there is no existing permanently protected green space within Muscogee County that is currently owned by the federal government, the State of Georgia, the Columbus Consolidated Government, conservation organizations, or private individuals.

7) **Existing and Future Tools.** Existing and future greenspace tools that attempt to promote the protection of greenspace within our community and encourage a better quality of living for area citizens are described in this section.

8) **Greenspace Barriers.** This section addresses the barriers to achieving our greenspace goals and methods for overcoming those barriers.

9) **Sources of Funds.** This section identifies various public and private grant sources the Columbus Greenspace Program will attempt to acquire for the purpose of permanently protecting greenspace. In addition, the primary uses of funds are discussed.

10) **Ten-Year Strategy.** The Ten-Year Strategy describes various approaches for ensuring the permanent protection of greenspace within a scheduled time period. Existing and future greenspace tools illustrate various methods of meeting the statutory goals. Barriers to achieving the county's greenspace goals are also identified in this section. The ten-year strategy states the methods of removing each barrier within a specific time period.

11) **Certified Resolution.** A certified copy of the resolution adopted by the Columbus Consolidated Government is included. This document authorizes the development of the

Columbus Greenspace Trust Fund. The Columbus Consolidated Government submits this report as a major tool for achieving greenspace protection within Muscogee County. The Columbus Consolidated Government gives a special thank you to the Columbus Greenspace Task Force Committee for their hard work, dedication, and valuable input in the development of the Columbus Greenspace Program.

INTRODUCTION

The Columbus Greenspace Program's mission is to preserve our most precious resources throughout the community and invest in a better quality of life for our future. The purpose of the program will be to identify at least 20% of priority green space areas within our community, acquire or purchase available land, and preserve this undeveloped land as permanently protected greenspace. Funding for the Columbus Greenspace Program will consist of donations from community foundations, area businesses and other private and public entities. The Columbus Consolidated Government will utilize its legislative powers to enact regulations that will further the preservation of greenspace through its comprehensive plan and other related greenspace tools. Existing tools that promote the protection of greenspace are: 1) Flood plain ordinance; 2) Columbus Plan - Alternative Transportation System; 3) Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance; 4) Buffer, Screening, and Landscaping Requirements; and 5) Recreation Plan. A city greenspace ordinance will be the primary future greenspace tool used to permanently protect our natural land.

With the assistance of individuals from the community, we are currently developing materials and strategies for a public outreach campaign, which will educate citizens of all ages about the importance of greenspace preservation.

The Columbus Consolidated Government's Department of Community and Economic Development/Planning Division will administer the Columbus Greenspace Program. Mr. Rick Jones, Director of Community and Economic Development, will serve as Greenspace Coordinator. The Columbus Consolidated Government fully commits itself to the implementation of the Columbus Greenspace Program. The Planning Division is located at 420 10th

Street, Columbus, Georgia. The mailing address, telephone, and fax numbers are listed below.

The Columbus Consolidated Government
Community and Economic Development
Planning Division
PO Box 1340
Columbus, GA 31902-1340
Telephone: 706-653-4116 Fax: 706-653-4120

COUNTY DESCRIPTION

Muscogee County is an energetic and thriving community of 187,960 people. The county serves as the regional leader for West Central Georgia and East Central Alabama. It is the region's major retail center and metropolitan area. Muscogee County prides itself on a strong cultural and historic community, which sets unprecedented examples that our neighbors can follow.

Columbus is centrally located at the line, which separates the Piedmont from the Coastal Plain. The Chattahoochee River, one of the principal rivers in the State of Georgia, represents the largest surface water resource in the Columbus area. The Chattahoochee River serves as the river corridor within the limits of the City of Columbus. This protected river corridor has a 100-foot buffer between the top of the bank and the edge of river. Bull Creek, Flat Rock Creek, and Heiferhorn Creek drain into the northern portion of Columbus. Bull Creek continues to flow through the southern part of Columbus and into the Chattahoochee River.

The Columbus River Walk presents a close-up view of the Chattahoochee River and the western bank. The major focal point of this Alternative Transportation System is the River Walk area in Uptown Columbus. Future phases along the riverbank will see the development of natural walking trails, fishing, and rest stations. The river walk will ultimately extend from the Municipal Marina at Lake Oliver to Fort Benning.

In the Spring of 2001, the city will utilize the Warm Springs Trolley Line, a 12-mile abandoned rail line, to construct an alternative transportation system in the center of the county. The purpose of the site will be to construct a hike/bike trail and add a trolley line, which will run parallel to the hike/bike trail using the existing rail line. The focus will then turn to Neighborhood Connectors, as a

carefully studied bike-and- hike system will be implemented throughout the area to connect major residential and employment centers and the Warm Springs Rail Line.

The establishment of Columbus on the east bank of the Chattahoochee River at the downstream end of several major river tributaries immediately put the City at risk from flooding. Current flood- plain management uses the 100-year flood event as the primary base for regulatory activities. Muscogee County has an estimated 429 acres of flood-plain areas.

Throughout Columbus, wetlands occur at the confluence of Bull Creek and the Chattahoochee River. From this point, wetlands occur throughout portions of southwest Columbus. Wetlands are predominate along Bull Creek, in the central section of Columbus. From this point, wetlands follow Bull Creek in a northeast direction.

Columbus has 50 parks, which provide the citizens of Columbus with a broad and comprehensive selection of recreational programs and leisure activities. Of these 50 parks, 4 are regional parks, 9 are district parks, 30 are neighborhood parks, and 7 are mini- parks. Some of the amenities in the parks include natural areas such as lakes, ponds, streams, green belts, open spaces, marinas, hiking trails, and picnic facilities.

Prime agriculture and forestry lands within Muscogee County have seen a steady decline over the past few decades. The northernmost section and the “panhandle” section of Muscogee County capture the remaining agriculture and forestland within the county. The Columbus Consolidated Government will attempt to permanently protect these limited and irreplaceable natural resources. The Columbus Historic District is one of two districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places. This historic district offers a mixed neighborhood of homes, small shops, service companies, and professional offices. This district covers most of the southwest quadrant of the original city of

Columbus. It is noteworthy for its broad, tree-lined streets, diversity of nineteenth and early twentieth century architecture and its historic house museums.

There are several areas in Columbus that are eligible for listing as historic districts in the National Register. Peacock Woods, a professionally landscaped garden neighborhood that was designed in the 1920s, illustrates just one example of Columbus' rich historic character. Weracoba/St. Elmo, which includes Weracoba and Lake Bottom parks, encompasses the largest area of any of the eligible districts in Columbus. This district provides an abundance of historic value to our region.

Columbus experienced unparalleled growth during the two decades following World War II. Growth that once was centralized near the river and downtown area soon spilled across the county. Subdivisions were developed; roads were improved, and with them came new retail and industrial areas. To meet the demands of this growth, Columbus and Muscogee County merged as one in 1970, creating Georgia's first consolidated government. The consolidation streamlined and modernized the government process, offering stability to a growing community. Of the forty counties eligible for the Georgia Green Space Program, Muscogee County is one of the smallest in terms of total acreage. Today, Muscogee County's total acreage is 140,496 acres. From that total, the county may deduct 1,354 acres of open water and 48,477 acres that make up Fort Benning, leaving a base acreage for greenspace purposes of 90,665. Twenty percent of the base greenspace acreage is 18,133 acres.

Growth is currently occurring in the northern section of the county (Planning Districts 2 and 3) and the southeastern and southwestern parts of the county (Planning Districts 11 and 12). These areas are feeling the pressure of new subdivisions, shopping complexes, restaurants, road projects and proposed schools. The northern area, which was considered rural no more than ten years

ago, has now become a desired location to live and shop. According to 1993 future land-use maps, most of north Columbus was to remain low-density residential, rural residential, and agricultural. The 1998 land-use maps show an increase in residential sites, commercial sites, and industrial sites. The 1998 future land-use maps are mostly consistent with what is going on in the area. For example, the mixed office/commercial area at Veterans Parkway and Weems Road is consistent with the future land-use map. However, the low-density residential area behind that is changing to a mixed office/commercial area. It will be the site of a new shopping mall with satellite stores and restaurants. Similar growth will also occur across Veterans Parkway from this project as well as across the J.R. Allen Parkway.

The southeastern section of the county has had substantial residential and industrial growth in the last decade. The area has been impacted by new subdivisions off St. Mary's Road and Steam Mill Road. According to the 1998 land-use map, much of the area along St. Mary's Road was undeveloped. Today, most of that area is low-density residential, as shown on the 1998 future land-use map. The increase in population for that area has helped to expand growth in the East Columbus Industrial Park, increase development value along Schatulga Road, and expand Forrest Road to four lanes. The county's southwestern area has seen growth due to the development of the Oxbow Meadows Environmental Center, the Columbus Water Works South Plant, the Oxbow Meadows Golf Course, and the River Walk. This area was once the city's landfill; today it is a very popular activity area for Columbus residents. These properties hold tremendous opportunities for growth, including a new city marina, expansion of Oxbow Meadows Golf Course, relocation of the National Infantry Museum, expansion of the facilities at Oxbow Meadows Environmental Center, construction of a new hotel/convention center, and construction of a river research facility. Our plan is to intertwine green

space protection into these new plans for the area. The 1998 future land-use map identifies, in green, the areas that would be affected by new growth and greenspace protection.

Other parts of Muscogee County, such as our central area and our south central area, are completely built out. Betterment of these developed areas has included the creation of Enterprise Zones, Neighborhood Revitalization Projects, and new Historic Districts, and the strengthening of rezoning requirements. However, due to its size, Muscogee County will need to strategically balance development and preservation in order to comply with the Georgia Greenspace Program goals. It is our goal to see that smart growth takes precedence.

COLUMBUS GREENSPACE GOALS

The City of Columbus strives to enhance the aesthetic quality of its neighborhoods by educating the public about the need to preserve greenspace, implement community initiatives to ensure green space protection, and provide developers with fair incentives, which will allow them to practice green space preservation. The primary goal of the Columbus Greenspace Program is to set aside 20% of Muscogee County as permanently protected green space. Our vision of achieving this goal will be accomplished through a cooperative partnership of public and private sectors. The city seeks to permanently protect natural resources such as flood plain areas, local parks, targeted agricultural and forestry areas, historic resources, wildlife habitat, and greenway corridors in order to meet our goal.

To preserve community greenspace in Muscogee County, the Columbus Consolidated Government will:

- 1) Establish a partnership with community organizations to obtain conservation easements and provide buffers along the Chattahoochee River, local creeks, ponds, and utility right-of-way easements;
- 2) Identify and encourage the permanent protection of wetland areas;
- 3) Identify and encourage the permanent protection of flood plain areas, and/or ensure undeveloped flood hazard areas are used for open space and recreation purposes;
- 4) Identify and permanently protect local parks and other greenspace areas that encourage scenic protection and passive recreation;
- 5) Identify and encourage the protection of large tracts of agricultural fields or pastures and forest land which are not suitable for industrial or commercial development;

- 6) Identify and encourage the permanent protection of historic resources;
- 7) Identify and encourage the permanent protection of various animal and plant habitats; and
- 8) Encourage the connection of greenways and alternative transportation

The county will use the following methods to achieve these goals:

- 1) Acquiring land through:

A) property donations from landowners who wish to voluntarily preserve their land.

Donations will continuously be sought for all types of undeveloped open space areas.

Small individual tracts of land, which requires low maintenance, will particularly be sought out for donations. These lands will be permanently protected through conservation easements.

B) the purchase of land in fee-simple. This method will acquire privately owned

undeveloped land. Properties that encourage the protection of agricultural, recreational, flood plains, wetlands, or other uses conducive to greenspace will be sought.

C) Acquiring conservation easements from landowners who wish to place voluntarily

restrictions on their land but do not want to give up full ownership. Property evaluations will be conducted to determine the most feasible methods of preserving the natural land through conservation easements. Vulnerable flood plains and wetlands areas will be highly considered under this method. Additionally, buffered right-of-way areas, and future subdivisions that elect to set aside open space will be place under a conservation easement to ensure permanent protection. Developers that elect to set aside greenspace or utilize existing structures on currently developed parcels will receive density credit bonuses. Additionally, the cost of some initial start-up fees may be waived for

developers who choose to set aside greenspace or utilize existing structures on currently developed land.

- 2) Place conservation easements on publicly owned land such as local parks, flood plain areas, and wetlands areas
- 3) Revise and up-date existing land use ordinances, policies, and regulations consistent with greenspace preservation;
- 4) Educate citizens about the importance of greenspace preservation through public awareness and educational opportunities; and
- 5) Encourage developers to implement greenspace preservation strategies within their projects.

Utilizing the above tools will improve our residents' quality of life and continue to make our region a desirable place to live and work.

UNPROTECTED LAND TO BE EVALUATED FOR PERMANENT PROTECTION

The Planning Division has identified various areas and parks that will be evaluated for permanent protection as greenspace. Land that is owned by the Columbus Consolidated Government will be protected through conservation easements. Maintenance of these city properties will continue to be handled by the city departments that currently maintain these properties.

Private lands will be protected through conservation easements. This method will keep the stewardship of the property on the property owner. The city will also study the feasibility of accepting donated land. Analysis of donated land will entail looking at budgetary constraints and maintenance costs. Columbus would like to use the Greenspace Community Fund and other grants to purchase land which may tie-in with city parks or which may protect vital environmental areas that would be protected from human encroachment, such as wetlands.

Area #A is city property that is proposed as a state park. This area encompasses approximately 1,446 acres. It is located next to the Chattahoochee River. This area will offer magnificent protection of flood plains, scenic views, and passive recreation.

Area #B is land that adjoins the proposed state park. Currently these properties are in private ownership but through protection would serve as an excellent buffer for the state park. This area will ensure scenic protection and passive recreation. It will also ensure the connection of greenways and alternative transportation. Additionally, animal and plant species will be permanently protected.

Area #C comprises the northwestern section of Muscogee County. This area has a significant amount of vital undeveloped land that will promote scenic protection and protection of natural habitat and animal species.

Future land use maps identify section #E as agricultural land. This land will remain in its natural state in order to preserve its agricultural setting and promote scenic protection.

Areas #D, #F, # G, # H, #I, # J, # M, & #N illustrate large tracts of privately owned, undeveloped land that has been subdivided into large parcels of one acre or more. This land is expected to remain rural residential. Acquiring conservation easements from landowners that wish to preserve the natural land will ensure the permanent protection of scenic views and natural habitats.

Area # G and #H consists of the “panhandle.” This stretch of Muscogee County includes most of its agricultural lands. Most of the tracts are large and privately owned. The Planning Division would like to approach these residents about protection through conservation easements and may attempt to purchase some areas where the Columbus Consolidated Government does not want to encourage development. This area will ensure the protection of large tracts of agricultural fields, pasture, and/or forestlands, which are not suitable for industrial or commercial development.

The proposed Columbus Botanical Gardens will comprise area #K. It will be bordered by a green space buffer that is to be preserved by a developer who is building in this same area. A conservation easement will be granted from the developer to the city in order to ensure permanent protection. This area will ensure the protection of animal and plant species and a local park that promotes scenic protection and passive recreation. Area #L comprises the proposed National Forest Land. The Columbus Consolidated Government, Fort Benning, and the Creek Indians have recently agreed on a land swap in eastern Muscogee County. This area, #I, will have about 700 acres of land set aside for greenspace protection, some of which is wetlands area. This deal has been agreed to, but has not been finalized. This area would ensure the permanent protection of wetlands through

conservation easements. It would also encourage the protection of historic resources and large tracts of forestlands. Additionally, scenic views will be preserved and various animal and plant habitats will be permanently protected.

The Columbus River Walk stretches from Lake Oliver in North Columbus to Fort Benning in South Columbus. Most of the River Walk has passive greenspace and serves as a pedestrian connection between North and South Columbus. This area ensures the permanent protection of the River Walk. The River Walk encourages scenic protection, passive recreation, connection of greenways and alternative transportation, and the permanent protection of various animal and plant habitats. This property will be permanently protected through a conservation easement.

The aforementioned Warm Springs Trolley Line will serve as a bike-and-hike path connecting downtown Columbus with northeast Columbus. It follows the abandoned Warm Springs rail line and will have access to Cooper Creek Park and Flat Rock Park. This area encourages scenic protection, passive reaction, and the connection of greenways and alternative transportation. Permanent protection of this property will be obtained through a conservation easement.

PUBLIC GREEN SPACE INVENTORY

(to be permanently protected through conservation easements)

- 1) CHAPLIN DR.
 - off Mobley Road
 - 1.46 Acres
 - Greenspace Goal: Ensures the protection of natural scenic views and various animal and plant habitats

- 2) 300 WALDEN ST.
 - behind River Rd. Elementary
 - end of Walden St.
 - 16.3 Acres
 - Greenspace Goal: Ensures the protection of the natural scenic views and various animal and plant habitats

- 3) Municipal Marina
 - River Road
 - 10 acres
 - Greenspace Goal: This area will permanently protect a major local park that offers scenic protection and passive recreation. Animal and plant habitats will also be permanently protected.

- 4) Britt David Park
 - 2700 W. Britt David
 - 39 acres
 - Greenspace Goal: This area will permanently protect a major local park that offers scenic protection and passive recreation.

- 5) Heath Park
 - Parkway Avenue
 - 45.4 acres
 - Greenspace Goal: This area will permanently protect a major local park that offers scenic protection and passive recreation. Animal and plant habitats will also be permanently protected.

- 6) Flat Rock Park

- Warm Springs Road
- 194 acres
- will connect with the proposed Warm Springs Trolley Line.
- Greenspace Goal: This area will permanently protect a major local park that offers scenic protection and passive recreation. Animal and plant habitats will also be permanently protected. Flat Park will encourage the connection of greenways and alternative transportation.

7) Cooper Creek Park

- Milgen Road
- 187 acres
- will be near the proposed Warm Springs Trolley Line.
- Greenspace Goal: The park also serves as an environmental research center for Columbus Technical College. This area will ensure the permanent protection of a local park that encourages scenic protection and passive recreation. It will also encourage the permanent protection of various animal and plant habitats and the connection of greenways and alternative transportation.

8) Lake Bottom/ Wercoba Park

- Cherokee Avenue
- 46.3 acres
- Lake Bottom/Weracoba Park serves as the city's main park and has a strong community commitment to keep it in its current state.
- Greenspace Goal: This area will ensure the permanent protection of a local park that encourages scenic protection and passive recreation.

9) DRAINAGE ACRES

- 13th St.
- between 16th Ave. & 18th Ave.
- 2.27 Acres
- Greenspace Goal: Ensures the protection of local parks that encourage scenic protection and passive recreation.

CORNER OF 13TH ST. & OWSLEY AVE.

- in front of apartment building
- .31 Acres
- Greenspace Goal: Ensures the protection of flood plain areas

10) Dinglewood Park and Littlewood Park

- 13 Street and Wildwood Avenue
- 20.2 acres

- Greenspace Goal: Ensures passive recreation and scenic protection
- 11) Edgewood Park
 - Morris Road
 - 16.2 acres
 - Greenspace Goal: Ensures passive recreation and scenic protection
 - 12) Woodruff Farm Park
 - contains various wetlands areas
 - 136 acres
 - Greenspace Goal: This park offers permanent protection of wetland areas.
 - 13) Shirley-Winston Park
 - 2.23 acres
 - Steam Mill Road
 - Greenspace Goal: Ensures passive recreation and scenic protection
 - 14) 3034 VICTORY DR.
 - along Riverwalk
 - between Chattahoochee River & Bull Creek
 - 21.07 Acres
 - Greenspace Goal:- Ensures the permanent protection of animal & plant species, and local parks that encourage scenic protection and passive recreation; Ensures the protection of flood plain areas; Ensures the connection of greenways and alternative transportation; Possibly establishes a partnership with community organizations to obtain conservation easements
 - 15) RIVER AREA II
 - no road frontage
 - near the end of Avondale Rd. & Riverland Dr.
 - 364 ft. from Riverland Dr.
 - 23.07 Acres
 - Greenspace Goal Ensures the permanent protection of animal & plant habitats and local parks that encourage scenic protection and passive recreation; Ensures the protection of flood plain areas; Encourages the connection of greenways and alternative transportation; Ensures protection of animal and plant habitats; Possibly establishes a partnership with community organizations to obtain conservation easements
 - 16) Oxbow Meadows
 - South Lumpkin Road
 - 1600 acres

- a proposed marina south of Oxbow Meadows and a possible relocation of the National Infantry Museum to the motor park
- Greenspace Goal: These areas would probably tie-in with the various projects proposed for the area, thus ensuring scenic protection and passive recreation

17) Lindsey Creek By-Pass

- Uptoi Drive
- 20 acres
- serves as a buffer, separating the neighborhood from I-185.
- Greenspace Goal: The park ensures scenic protection and passive recreation. Each of these identified areas will be evaluated as greenspace opportunities.

18) Columbus State University Biology Research area

- lies east of I-185 in south Columbus and borders Fort Benning.
- 47.5 acres
- Greenspace Goal: This area offers excellent scenic protection.

BULL CREEK WATERSHED STRUCTURES

- 770 Acres
- Greenspace Goal: Ensures the permanent protection of wetland areas, passive recreation, and scenic protection; Ensures the protection of various animal and plant habitats

F - FLOOD AREA

- no road frontage
- behind 2nd lot on Rice St. coming off Walker St.
- .19 Acres
- Greenspace Goal: Ensures the protection of flood plain areas and local parks that encourage scenic protection and passive reaction. The current land use is low density residential.

6- KINGS MOUNTAIN ROAD (BREED'S HILL LOOP)

- off Bunker Hill Rd.
- 4.5 Acres
- Greenspace Goal: Ensures the protection of flood plain areas and the natural scenic view. The current land use is low density residential.

PROTECTED LANDS

The Columbus Consolidated Government acknowledges that there exists no permanently protected greenspace within Muscogee County, currently owned by the federal government, the State of Georgia, the Columbus Consolidated Government, conservation organizations, or private individuals.

The Columbus Consolidated Government knows of no permanently protected lands that are in fee-simple ownership, in conservation easements, and in agreements that require no net loss of comparable green space.

CONSISTENCY OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN WITH THE COLUMBUS GREENSPACE PROGRAM

The Columbus Comprehensive Plan consists of a natural and historic resources section. This section describes several green space components, which are consistent with the Columbus Greenspace Program. It provides a brief description of each element and its geographic location within Columbus. It also identifies major environmental issues within Columbus and existing or future government action to be enacted to protect our natural resources. The primary natural elements featured in the comprehensive plan are: 1) Water Supply; 2) Watersheds; 3) Ground Water Recharge Areas; 4) Wetlands; 5) Protected River Corridor; 6) Flood Plains; 7) Slopes; 8) Prime Agricultural and Forest Land; 8) Animal and Plant Habitats; 9) Soil Types; 10) Soil Erosion Potential; 11) Scenic Views and Sites; and 12) The Historic Preservation Element.

The Parks and Recreation section illustrates various programs and services offered by the department that further the protection of greenspace. Those programs include the Replacement of Lost Trees Program, the Greenways and Alternative Transportation Systems Program, the Columbus River Walk, and Columbus Gateways Program. Also, projected needs consistent with greenspace protection and methods used to meet those needs are identified.

The Community Facilities section provides a brief synopsis of water conservation and the protection of water supply within Muscogee County.

The Columbus Comprehensive Plan will make necessary revisions that will ensure its consistency with the goals and purpose of the Community Greenspace Program. The ten-year strategy will be added to the Implementation and Coordination section. The strategies will implement the

program's short and long-term goals. Additionally, possible greenspace protection methods will be considered as policy recommendations. Future land use maps will designate priority greenspace areas such as parks and recreation and flood hazard areas for permanent protection.

EXISTING GREEN SPACE TOOLS

Various other local policies, regulations, ordinances, and other tools are available to protect our natural land. Those tools consistent with Greenspace Protection include: 1) Flood Plain Ordinance; 2) The Columbus Plan - Alternative Transportation System 3) Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance; 4) Buffer, Screening, and Landscape Requirements; and 5) Recreation Plan. These existing tools promote the protection of greenspace within our community and encourage a better quality of living for area citizens.

THE FLOOD PLAIN ORDINANCE

The flood plain ordinance attempts to control and minimize the extent of flooding by prohibiting obstructions, which inhibit water flow and increase flood height and damage to flood hazard areas. Current flood plain management uses the 100-year flood event as the primary base for regulatory activities. Several amendments to the flood plain ordinance included the adoption of standards related to the regulatory flood plain and the change of the freeboard requirement for new residential construction from one to two feet. The County will continue its efforts to identify major flood plain areas and limit development in these flood hazardous areas. Conservation easements will be placed on 100-year flood plain areas that restrict urban development.

COLUMBUS PLAN - ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

The development of a comprehensive Alternative Transportation System in the Columbus Metropolitan area has become a major priority. A major focal point of the Alternative Transportation System is the River Walk. Columbus has completed the first phase of the River Walk. This site provides a natural walking trail and rest stations along the riverbank. It will further preserve greenspace by promoting scenic protection, passive recreation, water quality protection, protection of natural habitats and animal species, reduction of erosion, protection of riparian buffers, and connection of greenways. A conservation easement will be placed on the property to permanently protect the unique greenspace features. Future phases will see the development of natural walking trails further downstream, as well as fishing access, and viewing and rest stations along the bank. Acting as a major “spine” of the total Alternative Transportation System, the river walk will ultimately be continuous from the city-owned marina at Lake Oliver to Fort Benning at the southern tip of the county.

Phase III of the Columbus Plan addresses the Warm Springs Rail Line, which is expected to begin construction in the spring of 2001. The site is a 12-mile abandoned rail line. The rail line originates from the downtown switching yard and travels northeasterly through the panhandle area of Muscogee County to the Harris County Line. The purpose of the site will be to construct a Bike-and-Hike trail and add a trolley line, which will run parallel to the Bike-and-Hike trail using the existing rail line. The focus will then turn to Neighborhood Connectors, as a carefully studied bike-and-hike system will be implemented throughout the area to connect major residential and employment centers and the Warm Springs Rail Line.

SOIL EROSION AND SEDIMENTATION CONTROL ORDINANCE

In 1990, the Columbus Consolidated Government adopted the Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance. The purpose of this ordinance is to control and minimize the extent of erosion and sedimentation. In addition, this ordinance attempts to conserve and protect our natural land, water, air, and other resources. The Storm Water Management Program was initiated in accordance with this ordinance to help alleviate the growing problems of erosion, flooding, and sedimentation control. A storm water management handbook was created to establish design and construction criteria for the control and management of erosion and siltation related problems. The Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Ordinance will further the protection of greenspace by enforcing regulations that restricts or prohibit development in the areas where potential erosion is most severe. The most severe soil erosion areas will be placed under a conservation easement, which will restrict various types of development on the property, hence maintaining the natural character of Muscogee County.

BUFFERING, SCREENING, AND LANDSCAPE REQUIREMENTS

This ordinance provides minimum buffering, screening, and landscaping requirements, which ameliorate adverse impacts between uses and zones. It also helps to control soil erosion and storm water runoff. In addition, this ordinance preserves property values and the character of neighborhoods, thus improving the aesthetic appeal of the city.

RECREATION PLAN

Parks and Recreational Facilities were created to provide the citizens of Columbus with a broad and comprehensive selection of recreational programs and leisure activities to enhance the quality of life in the community. Currently, a local one-cent sales tax allows the city to maintain its recreational sites and broaden the various types of recreation within the surrounding area. Future recreation plans include developing programs that will continue to educate people about the importance of our natural environment and expanding passive recreational activities. District and neighborhood parks that offer passive recreation and scenic protection will be placed under conservation easements that permanently protect the property for future generations.

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING GREENSPACE GOALS & METHODS FOR OVERCOMING THOSE BARRIERS

In order to achieve our greenspace goal, the Columbus Consolidated Government will confront several barriers related to greenspace protection. An important aspect of the Greenspace Program is proper maintenance of land. Responsibility to maintain the upkeep of land may create a hardship for property owners and the local government due to lack of funding, personnel, and equipment. Enacting regulations to ensure that land is properly maintained may assist in removing this barrier. However, issues relating to compliance of maintenance regulations and the monitoring of property to ensure its proper upkeep impose additional barriers. Additional training of personnel and restructuring of job duties will be necessary to overcome this barrier.

The negative perception of the public on greenspace protection may hinder the overall success of the greenspace program due to a lack of knowledge and understanding about the preservation of our natural land. A false perception about greenspace protection is that it decreases economic growth within a municipal area. This reduces public support and commitment of greenspace protection. Overcoming this barrier will consist of implementing public awareness programs, workshops, and other educational opportunities to educate the public about the importance of greenspace protection. Ownership or title issues may cause barriers in acquiring land through purchase, donation, or conservation easement. This barrier may deter private owners in permanently protecting their land. Establishing administrative procedures polices, and regulations to conform proper ownership of land must be applied to eliminate this barrier.

In regulating flood plain areas, obstacles in controlling and reducing the extent of flooding are often encountered. The most prevalent obstacles in the regulation of floodplains are the county's limited ability to restrict development within flood plain areas. Placing conservation easements on major flood plain areas will continue to restrict future development and permanently protect those areas most vulnerable to flooding.

Methods to control and minimize the extent of the erosion and sedimentation exist in the city's soil erosion and sedimentation control ordinance. One of the city's highest priority is to protect those areas with the greatest potential for erosion that have not yet felt urban development. The establishment of additional protective measures to restrict development in those areas will be necessary to overcome this obstacle.

Lack of an adequate geographic information system (GIS) poses an additional barrier in accurately portraying permanently protected greenspace. The installation of a GIS system will create more accurate and precise data within a timely manner.

Additional barriers include the county's lack of adequate development standards and a Unified Development Ordinance that ensure the permanent protection of greenspace through conservation easements. The adoption of the Columbus Greenspace Ordinance and the Unified Development Ordinance will establish development standards that are consistent with the preservation of greenspace. Barriers are also presented when offering incentives that encourage developers to set aside greenspace. Acquiring additional greenspace grants to maintain the Columbus Greenspace Trust Fund will allow the city to offer tax incentives to developers. This method will also encourage developers to utilize existing structures for future development.

FUTURE GREEN SPACE TOOLS

The Columbus Consolidated Government has identified additional tools needed to achieve greenspace program goals. A greenspace ordinance is a major tool necessary to ensure the preservation of natural and cultural features and rural community character that might be lost through conventional development approaches. The local government will use the greenspace ordinance to preserve undeveloped lands, scenic views, historic resources, and archaeological sites and structures. Other key functions of the greenspace ordinance will include methods and standards of permanently protecting greenspace. These effective methods will encourage developers to support greenspace and allow greater flexibility and creativity in the design of future development.

The main elements of the greenspace ordinance will include: 1) greenspace standards and evaluation criteria for the various types of greenspace areas; 2) subdivision design guidelines; 3) methods of designating potential greenspace areas; 4) administrative procedures for application and approval of greenspace sites; and 5) options describing incentives developers may obtain by placing additional greenspace within their projects or utilizing existing structures. Offering tax incentives for developers to utilize existing structures for future development is a useful strategy to limit the development of forestlands. This strategy will encourage redevelopment in specific locations throughout the area. An additional incentive is to create density credits or bonuses. Density credits encourage additional green space by allowing developers to obtain a density increase where a vast portion of unconstrained land area in an open space development is designated as permanent, undivided open space. This strategy will permit a conservation easement to be placed on the remaining natural land to ensure the permanent protection of greenspace. A density credit will increase the

number of building lots or dwelling units permitted on a parcel of land, setting aside the remaining area as permanently protected greenspace.

The county will prepare a Unified Development Ordinance, which will combine our existing ordinances, polices, and regulations relating to greenspace protection with future green space tools. The Unified Development Ordinance will include amendments to current subdivision regulations to promote greenspace protection by enacting specific guidelines and policies to create compact neighborhoods accessible to open space amenities with a strong identity. Those guidelines and policies will provide greater efficiency in the siting of services and infrastructure by possibly reducing road lengths, utility runs, and the amount of paving for development. Performance-based zoning, environmental overlay zoning, and transferable development rights will be examined within the ten-year period to determine their feasibility within the Columbus area. The Unified Development Ordinance will offer a “user-friendly” approach to assist developers in permanently protecting all greenspace types. This ordinance will place special attention on in-fill development and redevelopment of older neighborhoods throughout the community. In turn, this will reduce urban development on undeveloped property, thus preserving our natural land.

A tree ordinance will be implemented by the Columbus Consolidated Government for the purpose of planting of trees and ensuring the proper maintenance of trees on both public and private property. This ordinance will encourage scenic protection and improve the overall aesthetic features of the city.

The Columbus Greenspace Task Force was established to allow Columbus citizens the opportunity to come together, brainstorm ideas, and discuss effective strategies for the creation of the Columbus Greenspace Program. Twenty-eight citizens with a strong interest in the permanent

protection of greenspace signed up to become committee members on the Columbus Greenspace Task Force. In the initial phase, committee members were divided into five sub-committees:

- 1) **Sources of Funds.** This committee identified private, state and federal sources of funds, which can be used to protect greenspace.
- 2) **Acquisition.** This committee identified potential private and public areas that may qualify as permanently protected greenspace.
- 3) **Legal & Development Regulations.** This committee identified existing and future tools to promote to the protection of greenspace.
- 4) **Public Relations.** This committee will develop strategies to inform the public about the greenspace program through public awareness programs and campaigns.
- 5) **Review.** This committee will be responsible for reviewing each greenspace report to be submitted to the Georgia Greenspace Commission.

In the second phase, the members will help research additional greenspace methods and prepare the greenspace ordinance. A process of identifying and permanently protecting greenspace will be established. A public awareness campaign will be developed to promote greenspace protection throughout Columbus.

SOURCES & USES OF FUNDS

Muscogee County is expected to receive \$590,577 from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Greenspace Program. The Bradley Turner Foundation has already committed a \$500,000 challenge grant to this program through the Nature Conservancy. Currently, these are the funds that will be used for the program.

The Columbus Consolidated Government intends to apply for grants from various public entities to be used for the purchase of land and conservation easements. Grant sources have been identified, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Forest Service. Through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Millennium Green Program, we have identified 17 non-profit organizations and 8 government partners, all of which will help assist us with finding and establishing sources of funds.

Non-Profit Organizations

1. Alliance for Community Trees
1. American Community Gardening Association
2. American Forests
3. American Forest Foundation
4. American Society of Landscape Architects
5. America the Beautiful Fund
6. International Society of Arboriculture
7. National Arbor Day Foundation
9. National Association of Conservation Districts
10. The National Gardening Association
11. National Association of State Foresters
12. National Tree Trust
13. Society of American Foresters
14. Tree Link
15. Tree Musketeers
16. Tree People
17. Treetures

The Government Partners

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. U.S. Department of Agriculture | 5. U.S. Department of Interior |
| 2. U.S. Department of Education | 6. U.S. Department of Justice |
| 3. U.S. Department of Energy | 7. U.S. Department of Transportation |
| 4. Environmental Protection Agency | 8. White House Millennium Council |

The county is also in the process of contacting the Trust for Public Land, Ducks Unlimited, and other conservation groups for funding guidance.

In Muscogee County, we are fortunate to have various local foundations and corporations, which may help us in our progress. Members of the Columbus Land Trust, a new locally-based non-profit organization, has helped the Columbus Consolidated Government identify multiple local non-profit foundations, conservation groups, corporations, and individual donors who are sympathetic to causes such as the Georgia Greenspace Program. The Columbus Consolidated Government will administer the program through its Department of Community & Economic Development (C.E.D.). The Planning Division, a division of C.E.D., will handle all planning and administration of the program. The city manager and the C.E.D. director will oversee all final decisions. Because this is considered a part of the planning staff's job, no additional funding will be delegated to the budget. The Columbus Consolidated Government will work with various city departments to fund any necessary improvements, operations, maintenance, and other stewardship activities for the program. For instance, any city parks that are delegated for permanent protection will continue to be serviced by the Department of Parks and Recreation. That service will continue to be funded through their budget, just as it is now. Private and non-profit organizations, such as the Columbus Land Trust, will be responsible to maintain the agreements set forth in a conservation easement and to fund any measures that must be needed to enforce the agreements.

COLUMBUS GREEN SPACE PROGRAM

TEN-YEAR STRATEGY

YEAR 1 & 2

- Revision of the Columbus Comprehensive Plan
- Establish development incentives to promote greenspace
- Adoption of the Columbus Greenspace Ordinance
- Creation of a Unified Development Ordinance
- Continual efforts to identify and develop alternative transportation routes
- Annual inventory of permanently protected land
- Annual audit of greenspace program (It will include an assessment of funding, acquisition of land, and development regulations.)
- Continual planning and development of passive recreation
- Barriers and methods for overcoming barriers will be addressed:

Maintenance and compliance regulations. Maintenance and compliance regulations will be included in the Unified Development Ordinance. Additional methods of addressing this issue will continuously be evaluated.

Negative Perception of the Public on Greenspace Preservation.

Educational opportunities such as environmental workshops and a greenspace awareness program will be established to promote greenspace preservation.

Ownership and Title. Ownership and Title regulations will be established and placed in the Greenspace Ordinance. The ordinance will identify typical conflict of ownership and title issues and describe specific criteria used to determine rightful ownership in each situation.

Flood Plain Ordinance Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance, Recreation Plan, and Columbus Plan-Alternative Transportation System. Revisions of these ordinances will further permanent protection of greenspace by allowing publicly owned land, passive parks, vulnerable flood hazard areas, and wetland areas to be placed under a conservation easement.

Geographical Information System. An updated GIS system will be installed within the Planning Division to ensure accurate and precise data in a timely manner.

YEAR 3 & 4

- Continual planning and construction of the Alternative Transportation System
- Flood Ordinance will be analyzed to determine its current feasibility
- Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance will be analyzed to determine its current feasibility

- Cooperative efforts with the Columbus Historic Preservation will be conducted to evaluate methods to permanently protected historic resources consistent with the greenspace program.

- Annual inventory of permanently protected land
- Annual audit of greenspace program (It will include an assessment of funding, acquisition of land, and development regulations.)

- Continual efforts to educate and inform the public about greenspace preservation
- Continual planning and development of passive recreation
- Revision of Storm Water Management Plan and Storm Management Handbook

YEAR 5 & 6

- Research performance zoning, environmental overlay zoning, and transferable development rights to determine if these tools are necessary for continued protection of greenspace
- Annual inventory of permanently protected land
- Annual audit of green space program (It will include an assessment of funding, acquisition of land, and development regulations.)
- Continual efforts to educate and inform the public about green space preservation
- Continual planning and development of passive recreation
- Continual planning and construction of the Alternative Transportation System

YEAR 7 & 8

- Annual inventory of permanently protected land will be conducted
- Annual audit of greenspace program will be assessed (It will include an assessment of funding, acquisition of land, and development regulations.)
- Continual efforts to educate and inform the public about the greenspace preservation
- Continual planning and development of passive recreation
- Continual planning and construction of the Alternative Transportation System

YEAR 9 & 10

- Annual inventory of permanently protected land
- Annual audit of greenspace program (It will include an assessment of funding, acquisition of land, and development regulations.)
- Continual efforts to educate and inform the public about greenspace preservation
- Continual planning and development of passive recreation
- Continual planning and construction of the Alternative Transportation System

LISTING OF PARTICIPATING CITIES

As of January 1, 2001, the City of Bibb City has voluntarily given up their city charter. Bibb City will unite with the Columbus Consolidated Government to form one municipality within Muscogee County. The Columbus Consolidated Government will maintain services and programs, previously offered by Bibb City.

APPENDIX

PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

On July 20, 2000, the Columbus Consolidated Government held a public meeting to introduce the Georgia Green Space Program to the citizens of Columbus. The meeting was attended by more than seventy citizens, thirty-five of whom signed-up to be committee volunteers. The Georgia Forestry Commission sent a uniformed representative, but no other governmental agency was identifiable. The meeting was also broadcast live on the public-access television station, Columbus Consolidated Government Television (CCGTV). It offered viewers the opportunity to send in questions or comments via e-mail to an on-site laptop (none was received).

Harvey Young, Georgia Department of Natural Resources representative, presented a brief overview of the state program. Community planners presented the requirements for program submittal, an inventory of existing greenspace candidate parcels, and a discussion of passive versus active recreation areas:

- Aronda Smith presented the most recent land-use map and indicated that Muscogee County would need to revise the map to incorporate the greenspace program into the comprehensive plan. She requested volunteers to assist in the development of the county's program.
- Will Johnson provided an overview of data and maps for the county:
 - Residential growth is occurring east-to-west, north of Columbus, and in the eastern end of the county;
 - the county includes 141,000 acres, of which 138,000 acres would be land base against which to calculate the 20% minimum

- greenspace goal; including Fort Benning, the total county acreage would be 188,000;
- the 20% goal would be 27,000 acres; including Fort Benning, 37,000 acres;
- Forested land encircles metropolitan Columbus, from 11 o'clock to 7 o'clock;
- Columbus currently has 3,500 acres and the rail-trail corridor to Warm Springs;
- Eight of the 35 parks are passive; the county also has 770 acres in a watershed.

Brad Chambers stated federal and state parks are considered permanently protected, whereas local parks are not. Local parks must be counted toward the greenspace goal. Furthermore, many of the local parks are active-use and will not count toward the greenspace goal. He mentioned Muscogee County -Columbus had established several developed parks. Now the pendulum needs to swing, and the community needs to set aside some passive-use areas.

The last half of the program was a Question and Answer session. Several questions and comments regarding the greenspace inventory, maintenance of the greenspace property, and the program itself were addressed. A retired military officer questioned whether the state would insist on any special management requirements as a condition of allowing the acreage to count as permanently protected greenspace particularly on golf courses that maintain a wooded and grassy setting. At the sign-in table, volunteer sign-up forms were distributed to interested Muscogee County citizens to form a Citizens Advisory Committee. This meeting enabled the City of Columbus to draw citizens into the program formulation process, thus creating a strong base upon the program.

Columbus Greenspace Public Meeting
Thursday, July 20, 2000
6:00 P.M.

List of Attendees

1. Chris Slembariski
2. Teresa Tomlinson
3. Grace Keith
4. Debra Wells
5. C.A. McClure
6. Moselle Fletcher
7. Janet Hollis
8. Linda Brown
9. Clifton Tucks
10. Martha Dedwylder
11. Jim Phillips
12. Jason Kyle
13. Dan Elliot
14. William Smith
15. Rita Elliot
16. Jodie Rucker
17. Nathan Boddie
18. Ken Rayley
19. Mat Swift
20. Steve Smith
21. Leslie Cooper
22. Monte Simpson
23. Cathy Vaughn
24. Bomett Woodruff
25. Erin Tilghman
26. Becky Littlejohn
27. Gloria Stewart
28. Bill Green
29. Owen Dutchfield
30. Rita Stokes
31. W. Arnold
32. Susan Williams
33. Lynette Gross
34. Charlene LeBleu
35. Peta Pease
36. Richard Smith
37. Warren Foley
38. Jan Atkins
39. Russell Weisman
40. Lorraine Norwood
41. Gay Carney
42. Roger Brown
43. David Johnson
44. Susan Kleto
45. Jim Trostle
46. Gail Franz
47. Neal Littlejohn
48. G.L. Ellerman
49. Virginia Pierce
50. George Stanton
51. Ed Wilson
52. Jo Giles
53. Edgar Hughston
54. Mark McCollum
55. Virginia Peebles
56. Jim Buntin
57. Jack Goldfrank
58. Cliff Tucker
59. Cecil Calhoun
60. Claudette Shockley
61. Marie Hand
62. Margot Bradley
63. Sam Harmon
64. Linda Harmon
65. Brad Chambers
66. James McLendon
67. Mike Edmondson
68. Phillip Adams
69. Ben Matthews
70. Henry Harris
71. Harold Watkins

THE COLUMBUS GREENSPACE PROGRAM

The Columbus Green Space Committee Task Force Members

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-----|------------------------|
| 1. | Sandy Abbot | 16. | Vicky Partin |
| 2. | Nathan Boddie | 17. | Stacy Patton |
| 3. | Erin Bouthillier | 18. | Jim Phillips |
| 4. | Gay Carney | 19. | Monte Simpson |
| 5. | Becky Champion | 20. | Chris Slembariski |
| 6. | Patti Cullen | 21. | Allison Slocum |
| 7. | Phillip DeGrames | 22. | Steve Smith |
| 8. | Gail Franz | 23. | George Stanton |
| 9. | Bill Green | 24. | Gloria Western-Stewart |
| 10. | Lynette Gross | 25. | Teresa Pike Tomlinson |
| 11. | Ken Henson | 26. | Trip Tomlinson |
| 12. | David Johnson | 27. | John Turner |
| 13. | Susan Kleto | 28. | Jeff Zuiderveen |
| 14. | Charlene LeBleu | | |
| 15. | John Olson | | |

