

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A large group of people is seated in a room, facing a stage area. A man is standing on the stage, speaking into a microphone. A large projection screen is visible on the wall behind him, displaying text that is partially obscured but appears to include 'CALIFORNIA' and 'ASSOCIATION'. The room has a high ceiling with recessed lighting and a polished floor with white and red lines. The overall atmosphere is professional and organized.

CHAPTER 3

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

In order to engage the community effectively for this master plan, several methods were employed to ensure that the planning team heard from the experts of the community- its residents! The planning team utilized a steering committee, public meetings, and key stakeholder interviews.

Four Steering Committee meetings were held with appointed representatives from the following organizations: City of Opelika, Opelika City Council, the Opelika Housing Authority, and several other key community leaders.

The broadest outreach and most input was gained through two large-scale public meetings with interactive exercises. Approximately 250 people participated in these two meetings. Summaries of these community meetings are provided in this chapter.



Approximately 100 attendees participated in the Kickoff Workshop.

KICKOFF MEETING SUMMARY

The Opelika Master Plan Community Kickoff Meeting was held on May 22, 2014 at the Covington Recreation Center in the Carver neighborhood. The meeting began with a brief presentation, and was followed by a series of interactive stations. The presentation provided an overview of the project process and reviewed previous plans that included downtown recommendations. Lastly, the interactive stations were explained.

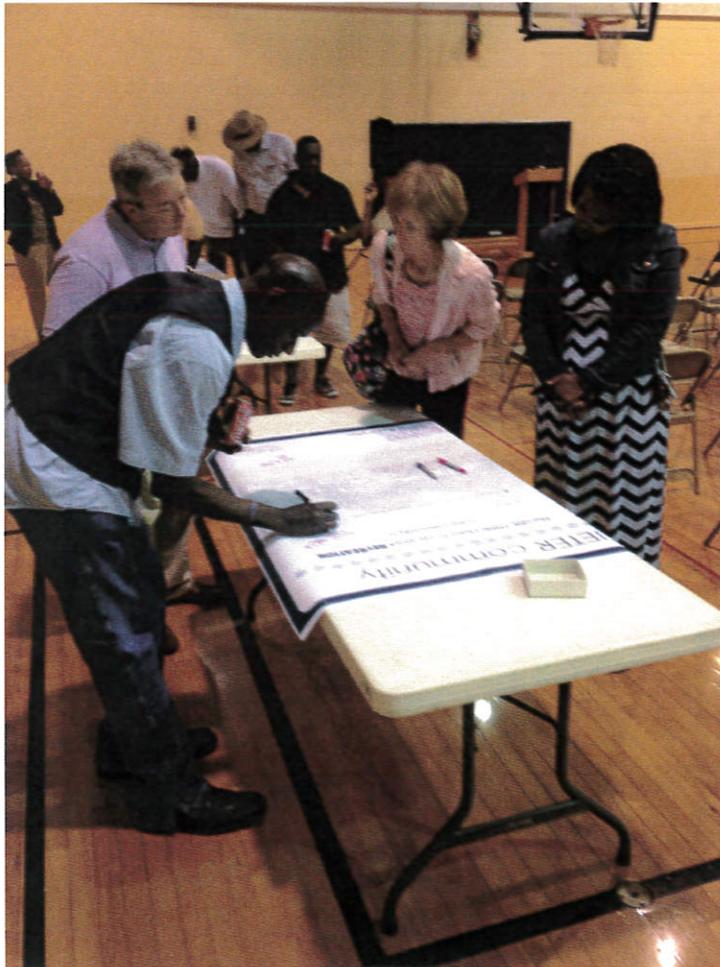
There were stations with activities and questions related to several areas of interest for each neighborhood:

- What do you love about the Carver and Jeter neighborhoods
- What do you dislike most about these neighborhoods?
- What would you like to change in these neighborhoods?

Community members were provided multiple opportunities to express their opinion regarding the state of the Carver and Jeter communities.



The majority of attendees at the workshop noted that poor condition of housing in the Jeter and Carver areas is a primary concern.



- What would you like to preserve in these neighborhoods?
- What do you think about housing in the area?
- What do you think about jobs in the area?
- What do you think about mobility in the area?
- What do you think about education in the area?
- What do you think about recreation in the area?

It was stressed that these stations were meant to be subjective and allow/enable people to voice ideas, suggestions, concerns, and issues.

CARVER COMMUNITY

People were asked to mark a place with a dot that they wanted to make sure was preserved and a place that they believed has to change for the sustainability of the area's future. Participants were also asked to write down their ideas to finish the following statement, The one improvement I would like to see made in the neighborhood is...

- The most popular area to save was the old East Street School which was Carver Elementary and most recently operating as the VFW Library/Historic home.
- People are concerned about the drugs/crime in both areas.
- Carver residents love the Covington Recreation Center and want it to continue to thrive.
- Most of the housing concerns in the Carver area center around maintenance issues and absentee/unengaged landlords.
- Many see that adding sidewalks and fixing broken sidewalks are the best way to improve mobility in the Carver area.
- Many residents wanted to see higher paying jobs, more training, and more entry level jobs for unskilled labor.

JETER COMMUNITY

Many people provided the following comments at the Kickoff Workshop for the Jeter area:

- Jeter residents are happy with the educational system provided for their children.
- There is a strong desire for more job training and incubator programs for local entrepreneurs.
- Jeter residents desire additional sidewalks, biking options and public transportation options
- There are a large number of abandoned homes that either needed to be destroyed or rebuilt.

Absentee landlords seem to be a major problem.

- There is significant concern regarding crime and lack of police presence in Jeter Park.
- Many people noted a desire to preserve the playground area on Jeter Avenue.

PLAN PRESENTATION SUMMARY

The Plan Presentation Community Meeting was held on August 25, 2014. This meeting was more centered on the presentation of the concepts; afterwards the attendees were then able to review the big ideas in more detail with planning team members.

The presentation first reviewed what input and feedback was gained through the first community-wide meeting. Then the “big ideas” were covered, including strong illustrative examples to convey the preferred future voiced during this process. The concepts for improvements in the existing areas



The community gathered at Greater Peace Baptist Church to hear an update on the proposed recommendations for the Jeter and Carver areas of Opelika.

of Carver, Jeter, and the current downtown were presented. Then the concepts for the new potential developments were reviewed in detail.

After the presentation, attendees were then able to visit stations staffed by planning team members to ask detailed questions, share comments, and review more detailed graphics related to each project area.

Following the presentation, many attendees expressed a high degree of excitement and anticipation regarding the recommendations of the plan. They especially liked the gateways and roundabout possibilities. Again, through the process the citizens expressed a desire to identify key historical places like the Darden High School and the South Fourth Street area. Residents of Jeter and Carver did want to be reassured that the downtown proposals would benefit them as well.

In the end, the Carver and Jeter neighborhood have incredible champions and are eager to begin the work in making Opelika and even better place to live.

Meeting participants were given an opportunity to weigh in on every plan recommendation at the 2nd public meeting.





Local citizens expressed an overwhelming excitement and eagerness for the preliminary recommendations of the master plan to be implemented as soon as possible.