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## Residents review Oakwood master plan at two town hall meetings

**OAKWOOD, Ga. (October 2008)** – Nearly 50 local residents visited two town hall meetings held in October by the City of Oakwood to learn more about the Oakwood 2030 master plan for future growth within the city's 253-acre downtown and commercial corridor.

The plans were generally well-received and supported by the citizens attending the two meetings. Some questions addressed during the presentations by City Manager Stan Brown included the following:

- **Do the plans create more ball fields and recreation areas for children?** A primary component of the master plan is a new community recreational center located in the planned Commercial Center district, just below Oakwood Elementary. The master plan also calls for more than three miles of green space.
- **Is there ample parking for the planned rail station?** Plans for a commuter rail station are many years away, but ample space for parking will be set aside under the master plan in anticipation of strong demand in the distant future.
- **Will Oakwood's commuter rail be tied into MARTA?** Although that is a possibility, there are no detailed plans as yet in regard to commuter rail between Oakwood and Atlanta. Keep in mind that commuter rail, like the rest of the master plan components, is part of a "future vision" with no specific guarantees or final plans at this point. Nevertheless, the stage is set with the Norfolk Southern rail that is already in place in the heart of the town.
- **There is a lot of open green space outside of the 253-acre master plan area – why did the City not expand the plan even farther?** Much of the outline of the master plan's geographic area was determined through natural borders such as creeks and, of course, the I-985 corridor. The size of the master plan is a manageable one, particularly since it is divided into seven districts. But it is possible that the master plan could be expanded in the future once development is well under way.
- **What is the timeline for completion of the Thurmon Tanner Parkway?** Construction should be completed in about 18 months, by the end of 2010. At that point, the parkway will connect Mundy Mill Road in Oakwood to Spout Springs Road in Flowery Branch.

- **Are there plans to bring upscale restaurants to Oakwood?** Yes, recruitment of high-quality restaurants and retail establishments is an integral part of the master plan's focus to create a destination community.
- **How much funding would possibly come from the upcoming sales tax vote (SPLOST VI)?** The City has requested \$1.5 million in local sales taxes to be set aside specifically for the Downtown/Commercial Center development project. The referendum is planned for March 17, 2009. SPLOST money represents only one of several potential funding sources for developing the master plan.
- **Does the master plan envision another public school for Oakwood?** That decision is up to the Hall County School Board. However, the City has met with Hall County School Superintendent Will Schofield, who stated that any future renovations to the present Oakwood Elementary School would attempt to conform to the overall look and development standards established under the Oakwood 2030 master plan.
- **What is the impact on the First United Methodist Church of Oakwood (and other downtown churches such as First Baptist Church of Oakwood)?** City planners strongly support the presence of churches in Oakwood Downtown as a vital part of the master plan's goal to create a family-friendly environment. Discussions are planned with local churches to coordinate the City's master plan development with the churches' own future growth plans.

In addition to questions, citizens attending the Oakwood town hall meetings expressed a number of suggestions and concerns related to Oakwood 2030.

For instance, one local resident threw out the idea of adding an amusement park – “a mini Six Flags” – along Thurmon Tanner Parkway.

Another resident stressed that her reason for moving to Oakwood was due to the area's rural nature with lots of trees and open pastures. Therefore, she is opposed to “developing every inch of town” and urged the City to preserve Oakwood.

City Manager Stan Brown responded that the Oakwood 2030 master plan is focused on preserving greenspace, aided by more compact development. He also stressed that the master plan would protect the city from haphazard development in the face of growth pressures moving up I-985 and across South Hall.

Brown further cited the following advantages to Oakwood residents under the City's downtown/commercial center master plan:

### **Oakwood Master Plan – Key Advantages for City Residents**

- Focuses on enhancing “small-town” quality of life
- Protects community from out-of-control growth and haphazard, unplanned development
- Sets high standards for quality growth and development
- Will enhance property values for homeowners and land owners

- Strengthens commercial tax base, keeping residential property taxes low
- Preserves large amounts of green space within the city limits
- Connects community with walking trails and bike paths throughout the city as well as linking areas across Hall County
- Sets stage for future commuter rail access to Atlanta