ORDERLY GROWTH ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

River Valley Regional Commission
Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report
Our past fiscal year began with business as usual – staff continued to administer the many programs the RVRC oversees, and things were seemingly normal. That all changed in March when COVID-19 presented our organization and the region with a new reality and new challenges to overcome.

To halt the transmission of the coronavirus, staff implemented social-distancing guidelines and telecommuted from home to slow the spread. Our Executive Director, Jim Livingston, worked with our IT consultants to ensure staff had what they needed to do this. The RVRC acclimated, maintaining pivotal programs and services without compromise.

Adapting to remote working was no easy challenge, but all the while, we needed to find ways to expand the Commission’s services to help combat the impact of the pandemic. One measure staff took was applying for federal aid through the CARES Act program. Through three grant opportunities, the RVRC secured $2.5 million in pandemic response aid and will use these funds over the next fiscal year to help the River Valley “prevent, prepare for, and respond to” the economic and social shock of COVID-19.

Despite the COVID-19 disruption, staff made great strides and progress over the course of the fiscal year. There was a steady, concerted effort to get communities counted for the 2020 Census, and the Area Agency on Aging program expanded and improved with new services. Workforce Development programs outperformed state-measured expectations, economic development projects like the revolving loan fund program continued; and planners pursued grants to improve the infrastructure in the region. Additionally, staff worked to solve agricultural and food insecurity problems through the completion of a USDA grant that helped with the development of a regional food hub; the Transportation Investment Act Roundtable was reconvened to begin looking at the continuation of the Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax; and local governments progressed in their comprehensive planning efforts. It has been a busy year.

In FY20, the RVRC brought in approximately $12.3 million to the 16-county region. This means that for every single dollar of dues received by the RVRC from our cities and counties, their overall return on investment was $33.80 in federal and state funding. 83.7 percent of funding received this year was federal, and 16.3 percent was received from the state.

As we look to next year, we will have a major emphasis on executing our obligations related to the CARES Act. Our increased capacity will have benefits for the region and the number of people we can help and the number of small businesses we can aid. We will also be working hard with the TIA Roundtable to determine what regional transportation projects will go before voters in 2022 to help support our continued development.

It has been a privilege serving as the Chair of the River Valley Regional Commission during this past year, and it will be an honor continuing to serve during the next one. As another fiscal year passes, we reflect on what we have accomplished, but we also consider the future and the ways in which we will work toward orderly growth and economic prosperity for the region.

I am pleased to present a new annual report showcasing the great work Council and the Commission staff have accomplished over the reporting period of 2019 and 2020. I want to thank each and every community in the River Valley for their support throughout this past year. You all make the RVRC stronger, and our partnerships make the region better.
MISSION
The mission of the River Valley Regional Commission is to create, promote, and foster orderly growth and economic prosperity for our region.

VISION
A region where current and future generations succeed at home, at work, and in their communities.

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River Valley Communities
16 Counties, 35 Cities

CLAY COUNTY
Bluffton
Fort Gaines

CRISP COUNTY
Arabi
Cordele

UNIFIED GOVERNMENT OF
CUSSETA-CHATTahooCHEE

DOOLY COUNTY
Byronville
Dooling
Lilly
Pinehurst
Unadilla
Vienna

MACON COUNTY
Ideal
Marshallville
Montezuma
Oglethorpe

MARION COUNTY
Buena Vista

MUSCOGEE COUNTY
Columbus

RANDOLPH COUNTY
Cuthbert
Shellman

SCHLEY COUNTY
Ellaville

STEWART COUNTY
Lumpkin
Richland

SUMTER COUNTY
Americus
DeSoto
Leslie
Plains

TALBOT COUNTY
Dvara
Junction City
Talbotton
Woodland

TAYLOR COUNTY
Butler
Reynolds

UNIFIED GOVERNMENT OF
WEBSTER COUNTY

Commission Staff

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Jim Livingston

ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Sarah Walls

ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT
Emily Chambers, Finance Officer
Tammy Collins, Finance Officer
Becky Holmes, Office Manager
Annie Thompson, Financial Assistant
Debbie Zwaga, Secretary/Receptionist
Grace Grant, Executive Secretary

PLANNING DEPARTMENT
Rick Morris, Planning Director
Gerald Mixon, Planning Director
Allison Stocum, Senior Planner/Historic Preservation Planner
Laura Schneider, Environmental/GIS Planner
Jarrod McCarthy, Mobility Manager
Jill Holnecker, Regional Bicycle-Pedestrian Planner
Mariyana Kostov, GIS Specialist
Scott DeClue, Regional Planner

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Grant Richardson, Community Developer
Will Griggs, Community Developer

AREA AGENCY ON AGING
Katya Howard, Director
Kia Barrow, Program Manager
Shere Stewart, HCBS Program Manager
LaCarole Lloyd, MDS-Q Options Counselor
Robert Andrews, HCBS Case Manager
Marie Peterson, AEA Monitor
Elizabeth Young, Data Resource Specialist (ADRC Counselor)
Bill Weathers, ADRC Counselor
Annie Poole, ADRC Counselor
Ebony Morris-Key, ADRC Counselor
Ryan Moorer, ADRC Counselor/Care Consultant
Latanya Albright, ADRC Counselor/Care Consultant
Frances Miles, Wellness/Special Projects Coordinator
Gail Simpson, Fiscal Analyst
Ronny Graves, Fiscal Analyst

WORKFORCE INNOVATION DEPARTMENT
Janice West, Director
Tenisha Tookes, Program Specialist
GFOA Certificate of Achievement

Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting to River Valley Regional Commission for its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2019. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its administration.

DNR Adopt-A-Stream Award

RVRC Environmental Planner Laura Schnieder was honored by the Department of Natural Resources’ Environmental Protection Division with a 2019 Watershed Award for excellence in implementing goals of the Georgia Adopt-A-Stream organization.

RVRC Staff Years of Service Recognition

Four staff members were recognized for a combined 80 years of service to the River Valley Regional Commission. Gail Simpson, Fiscal Analyst, was recognized for 25 years; Becky Holmes, Office Manager, was recognized for 25 years, Allison Slocum, Senior Planner/Historic Preservation Planner, was recognized for 20 years; and Debbie Zwaga, Executive Secretary, was recognized for 10 years of service.

REGIONAL IMPACT

Regional Snapshot

Each year, the RVRC strives to impact the communities it serves by securing and managing funds for our communities as well as facilitating and managing services. Funding may come in the form of federal, state, and/or local dollars, and services range anywhere from comprehensive planning to workforce development. For FY20, over $12.3 million in funding was secured for projects and development across the region.

Every community in the River Valley region gains access to the services provided by the RVRC through annual dues, which come in the form of a one dollar per capita fee. For fiscal year 2020, there were an estimated 366,689 people in the region, resulting in $366,689 in annual dues paid by the communities.

RVRC calculates return on the investment for the region by dividing the number of funds received in federal, state, and other dollars by the amount of annual dues. For FY20, the ROI is $33.80 for every one dollar of dues. This means that for every one dollar paid by each community, the RVRC was able to generate $33.80 in programs and services.

366,689
Current population in the River Valley Region

$4,687,843
Allocated toward Community & Economic development

$1,129,139
Allocated toward Workforce Development

$5,466,832
Allocated toward various Aging Services

$1,106,795
Allocated toward Planning initiatives

Breakdown of State vs. Federal Dollars Brought to the Region

16.3% State Funding
$4.69M
Community/Development Planning Services
Area Agency on Aging

83.7% Federal Funding
$5.47M
Comprehensive Economic Strategy Revolving Loan Funds ITAD Grant Funds

Programmatic Allocation of Resources

RETURN ON INVESTMENT: ANNUAL DUES

$33.80 per $1.00
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Left to Right: Gail Simpson, Allison Slocum, Becky Holmes, Emily Chambers, and Laura Schneider

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Beginning in late March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic began impacting Georgia and affecting the communities within the River Valley region. Consequently, the programs and services provided by the RVRC were also impacted. Statewide stay-at-home orders imposed significant obligations on staff to create new working policies and procedures limiting the risk of COVID-19 transmission to keep the workplace safe. Staff implemented social distancing guidelines from state and federal medical agencies, and as RVRC operations changed in the wake of the pandemic, so too did the needs of the region. The RVRC began looking for ways to mitigate the River Valley’s COVID-19 fallout and worked to find solutions to an ever-growing list of pandemic-related problems such as economic fallout and access to additional resources.

Applying for CARES Act Funds

In April 2020, staff applied for and received three federal Economic Development Administration CARES Act grants. These grants totaling $2.5 million will go toward three programs: $1 million will be available for a revolving loan program to help businesses affected by the pandemic, $400,000 will go toward hiring additional staff to develop a comprehensive regional economic disaster response; and $1.1 million will go toward developing additional AAA services and fortifying existing ones.

Personal Protective Equipment

One of the first major pandemic-related issues confronting the region was lack of adequate access to personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect against COVID-19 transmission. When staff learned of the dire need for these items, they immediately began working to locate PPE, acquire it, and formulate a plan for distributing the crucial masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer. Through rapid efforts, Area Agency on Aging obtained over 21,500 items, quickly distributing the PPE to senior centers and counties in need across the region.

Workforce Resiliency

The pandemic affected the WIOA enrollments for PY 19 as the area served 30 percent less participants than the previous year. Georgia was awarded $12 million in National Emergency Grant (NEG) funds to assist the disaster recovery and helping individuals laid-off to return to employment. The NEG funds will be utilized statewide between Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL) and WIOA to assist Georgia’s recovery from the pandemic.

Getting Counted

As a regional development organization, the RVRC understands how important the 2020 Census is to securing crucial resources for the region. That’s why in FY20, staff put a great deal of effort into encouraging communities to get counted and working with local governments and state agencies to improve Census efforts in the River Valley.

In fall of 2019, staff assisted with the U.S. Census Bureau’s address canvassing operation that improves and refines the Bureau’s address list in advance of the 2020 Census. Staff also facilitated a regional Census kickoff meeting with the Department of Community Affairs, state agency representatives, and local government officials. The meeting allowed Census workers to help communities brainstorm ways to improve their methods of increasing counts.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, staff continuously pushed reminders and updates to local governments, urging them to remind their communities to participate in the pivotal decennial event.

Social-Distancing Measures

At a time when providing comprehensive case numbers was critical to communities planning their response to the pandemic, GIS staff began developing an interactive map to provide real-time, easily accessible case data to local governments to help them track the spread of the disease.
AAA Covid-19 Response

The River Valley Area Agency on Aging received funding from the Families First Recovery Act and the CARES Act to provide additional services to seniors. In FY20, 9,985 additional meals were served, and we expect to serve 109,989 additional meals in FY21. Funding was also received to expand respite care services for caregivers with an expected 10 additional clients to be served.

Several new programs were added with the additional money including home modifications. The AAA will be able to provide ramps for at least 10 clients in the region depending upon the cost of each ramp. The service providers also have a new program – Material Aid. This program will allow the providers to purchase groceries, help with utilities and rent, and purchase glasses as well as dentures. ADRC Counselors are working with Adult Protective Service staff to provide in home services for 90 days when referrals are made to the ADRC. Counselors are also assessing callers to determine if Assistive Technology would allow them to either go off the Waiting List for services or reduce their need for them. This has been very popular with clients and has allowed several to go off the Waiting List. All of these programs are time limited due to stimulus funding ending in October of 2021.

Seniors' Farmers' Market

The 2020 Senior Farmers Markets were held during June, July, and August of 2020 in the heart of the Pandemic. However, AAA staff was determined that the seniors in the region would receive their fresh produce and worked to devise a plan of delivery that was safe for both seniors and staff. Twenty Senior Farmers Markets were held with at least one in every county in the region, culminating in a drive-thru Farmer’s Market held at the Columbus office. This season 1,803 clients were served and each client received a $20 voucher to exchange for fresh produce from two local farmers.

A Client’s Success Story

Through the Georgia Legal Services Program

A client contacted the Columbus office of the Georgia Legal Services Program (GLSP) for help with a housing problem in February 2020. The client, a 64 year old woman, had been living in a home owned by her mother since before her mother’s death in 2016. She fell behind on the mortgage payments last year and received notices accelerating the debt and foreclosing on the property. The sale of the home was scheduled for April 7, 2020. GLSP filed a Petition for letters of administration on March 3, 2020. The other heirs to the property consented to the client being appointed as the Administrator. Still, it would prove challenging to complete the probate case and contact the mortgage company to negotiate before the sale of the home at auction. However, the client’s mother’s mortgage was federally supported. As a result, the CARES Act prevented the sale of the home at auction. The pandemic bought GLSP staff the time needed to complete the probate case and have the client named as administrator of her mother’s estate. The mortgage servicer added the client to the loan account as an authorized party and negotiated an agreement with the client to accept four regular monthly payments in a lump sum, adding the remaining arrears to the balance of the loan.

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$1,107,658
Amount Received in CARES Act Funding

2,150
Number of clients served in FY2020

1,800+
Number of clients who participated in the Annual Seniors’ Farmers’ Market

544
Number of clients receiving senior center meals

779
Number of clients receiving home delivered meals
“Older Georgian of the Year” and “Volunteer of the Year” Named

Columbus City Councilor and RVRC Council Vice-Chairman, Jerry “Pops” Barnes (left), was recognized twice this year for his contributions to seniors in the state and in the Southeast. On February 13, 2020 he was recognized as the “Older Georgian of the Year.” This award is given annually by the Georgia Council on Aging. In September of 2019, he was recognized at the Annual Southeastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging Training Conference as the “Volunteer of the Year.”

Columbus Lift Assistance Program

During normal times, Columbus Emergency Medical Services provides transfer assistance from bed to chair, etc. to seniors with mobility issues in Columbus. This assistance is usually requested 10-12 times each month. However, during the coronavirus pandemic, Columbus EMS was concerned about the system being overwhelmed. In April of 2020, a partnership was formed to determine if volunteers in the community could assist/relieve some of the burden from first responders. Community Warriors stepped up to assist.

The Community Warriors are a volunteer group which partnered with the Columbus Consolidated Government Fire and EMS as well as the 911 Center. Always Caring, United Way, MercyMed and the RVRC have helped with training volunteers, testing them, and organizing the program. The program ended in May.

River Valley Senior Hunger Coalition

The River Valley Senior Hunger Coalition has been meeting for over a year and continues to focus on issues such as the health impact of senior hunger, food access, food waste and reclamation, and meeting the community’s needs.

The Hunger Coalition met once in person prior to the Pandemic and has met virtually since then. Prior to the Pandemic, the main goal of the group was to increase awareness about the issue of Senior Hunger. After the Pandemic began, members shifted their emphasis to delivering groceries to those seniors who were either not able or afraid to go to the grocery store.

Through a coalition of agencies including Feeding the Valley, St. Anne’s Outreach, Adventist Community Services of South Georgia, Department of Human Services (DHS) Transit, and Family Connection Coordinators, we were able to arrange delivery of emergency food to five counties.

There have been no requests for emergency food in the remaining 11 counties, but food will be provided as requests are received. Through this program, food is meant to be supplemental, but not the only source. This service is Pandemic specific and will not continue after the Pandemic ends.

Seated Tai Chi for Arthritis at Schley County Senior Center

Seated Tai Chi for Arthritis, developed by Dr. Paul Lam, began eight consecutive sessions at Schley County Senior Center in Ellaville, Georgia on January 8, 2020. This effective, ancient-Chinese exercise is known for its slow, smooth, and gentle movements that help with the control of breathing as well as mental concentration. About 22 participants ages 67 to 89 were taught the basic Seated Tai Chi movements to help increase flexibility and muscle strength, better body posture, and relief of aching joints.

Participants were reminded of how important fitness is for overall health and proper functioning of the heart and lungs, specifically when blood and joint circulation are improved. They also recognized that practicing Tai Chi helps to reduce soreness and decreases emotional and physical stress.

What We Do

Area Agency on Aging
- Nursing Home Transitions
- Medicaid Waiver Services for persons with limited financial resources
- Options Counseling and Money-Follows-The-Person Program
- Home and Community Based Services
- Senior Center Programs
- Case Management
- Wellness and Evidence Based Services
- Caregiver Support

River Valley Senior Hunger Coalition
- Meeting for over a year
- Focuses on issues such as health impact of senior hunger, food access, food waste and reclamation, and meeting community’s needs.
- Met once in person prior to Pandemic, shifted to virtual meetings since then.
- Initially focused on increasing awareness of Senior Hunger.
- Post-Pandemic, emphasis shifted to delivering groceries to seniors who were unable or afraid to go to the grocery store.
- In partnership with various agencies, delivered emergency food to five counties.
- No requests for emergency food received in remaining 11 counties.
- Service is Pandemic specific and will cease after Pandemic.

Columbus Lift Assistance Program
- Usually requests 10-12 transfer assistance per month.
- Concerned about system being overwhelmed during pandemic.
- Formed partnership to determine if volunteers could assist.
- Community Warriors stepped up to assist.
- Partnered with Columbus Consolidated Government Fire and EMS, 911 Center, Always Caring, United Way, MercyMed, and RVRC.
- Trained volunteers, arranged program.
- Program ended in May.

Seated Tai Chi for Arthritis at Schley County Senior Center
- Sessions began in January 2020.
- Developed by Dr. Paul Lam.
- Ancient-Chinese exercise known for slow, smooth movements.
- Taught basic movements to 22 participants ages 67 to 89.
- Participants reminded of the importance of fitness for overall health.
- Recognized that practicing Tai Chi reduces soreness and decreases stress.
Regional Developments

In an effort to improve telecommunication services in the RVRC region, service providers are adding new towers and improving existing ones. Quitman County is the recipient of two new telecommunication facilities and a 100-foot tower height extension to an existing tower, an improvement that will add needed revenue to the county budget. Staff completed a DRI report for the Woodland Hills subdivision located in Harris County. The developers propose to add 440 single-family homes, a 40,000 square foot anchor store, and 50,000 square feet of retail space. Staff also reviewed two DRI’s for four large solar fields in Sumter and Stewart Counties that were submitted to the Department of Community Affairs.

Food System Development

In FY20, staff worked to strengthen the agricultural industry and reduce food insecurity in a number of ways. Staff served as technical advisors on boards of two food system development non-profits in Muscogee County, UGrow and Columbus Food Oasis. Additionally, staff participated in Georgia Organics-led Urban and Regional Planners meetings to help share and locate resources to assist with economic and community development. Staff also reviewed two DRI’s for four large solar fields in Sumter and Stewart Counties that were submitted to the Department of Community Affairs.

Comprehensive and Pre-Disaster Planning

Clay County’s and Macon County’s Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan updates were adopted in FY 20, while Stewart County’s Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan was completed in FY20. Webster County and the Unified Government of Georgetown-Quitman County Comprehensive Plans were adopted in FY20, and work began on comprehensive plans for Chattahoochee, Marion, and Talbot Counties.

Geographic Information Systems: MAP-21 and Census

During FY20, the RVRC GIS staff focused on two main projects: MAP-21 and Census2020. MAP-21 is the first long-term highway program enacted since 2005 and is a milestone for the U.S. economy and the nation’s surface transportation program. By transforming the policy and programmatic framework for investments to guide the system’s growth and development, MAP-21 improves surface transportation programs and builds on many of the highway, transit, bike, and pedestrian programs and policies established in 1991.

Transportation Investment Act

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Approved Budget</th>
<th>Total Expenditure to date</th>
<th>Tax Revenue Collected to date</th>
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<tr>
<td>$410,754,730</td>
<td>$365,074,507</td>
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The Transportation Investment Act (TIA) Roundtable was convened in FY 2020 to reconsider the regional Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST). All 16 counties were represented and an Executive Committee formed to oversee the process. The Roundtable made the decision to wait until 2022 to ask voters to consider renewing the 10 year TSPLOST.

Developing the region’s food distribution system is a key factor in helping its communities stay healthy and strong.
Environmental Funding, Protection, and Recognition

A 319(h) grant for the Pataula Creek Watershed, located in Clay, Quitman, Randolph, and Stewart Counties, concluded in March of 2020. Throughout the duration of the project, staff completed and implemented many environmental studies and protective measures. Georgia Outdoor News magazine also featured an article in their May 2020 issue highlighting this work.

Dirt road Best Management Practices (BMPs) were installed in Stewart County on Dairy Road and Philadelphia Church Road to reduce sediment runoff into Pataula and Hodchodkee Creeks. Silvicultural BMPs implemented in Quitman County included over 200 acres of tree/shrub establishment to improve water quality.

In February 2020, the RVRC was selected by Georgia Adopt-A-Stream for the Regional Watershed Award for their hard work and dedication to the program throughout 2019. Staff were recognized during Georgia Adopt-A-Stream’s Annual Conference awards celebration, which took place in August 2020.

Environmental Planning

- Prepares Total Maximum Load (TMDL) implementation plans for impaired streams
- Prepares and implements watershed management plans to improve water quality in impaired stream segments and maintain water quality in healthy stream segments
- Assists with development of ordinances for the protection of environmental resources

Grant Closeout

319(h) grant for the Pataula Creek Watershed, located in Clay, Quitman, Randolph, and Stewart counties, concluded in March of 2020.

224 Monitoring Events

224 monitoring events at 24 sites in 7 counties and 4 watersheds collecting visual, chemical, bacterial, and macroinvertebrate data were conducted.

37 Signs installed

Signs addressing illegal carcass dumping were installed. Signage informs hunters about the illegality of carcass dumping and provides contact information for the DNR Ranger Hotline.

106 samples for chemical and nutrient analysis collected

2 Americus employees trained in Adopt-a-Stream monitoring techniques

42 samples for E.coli analysis collected

10 Dirt Road Best Management Practices installed

2 educational environmental presentations delivered

4 Adopt-A-Stream monitoring workshops offered

15 samples for DNA/microbial source tracking analysis collected

8 silvicultural studies (the study of cultivation and management of forest trees) completed

Illegal carcass dumping is a problem the RVRC addresses through signage.

Signs addressing illegal carcass dumping were installed. Signage informs hunters about the illegality of carcass dumping and provides contact information for the DNR Ranger Hotline.
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Oglethorpe DDA Strategic Planning Session

The City of Oglethorpe has recently created a Downtown Development Authority and hired Natalie Bradley as the First Executive Director. Mrs. Bradley approached RVRC staff about facilitating a strategic planning session for the new organization to identify priorities and potential activities.

On January 21, 2020, Allison Slocum, RVRC Historic Preservation Planner, met with approximately 40 stakeholders in Oglethorpe. She led the group in an exercise to determine the boundaries of downtown Oglethorpe and identify their favorite parts and their not-so-favorite parts of downtown. The group spent the main portion of the evening discussing and listing the strengths and weaknesses of downtown Oglethorpe as well as the opportunities and threats approaching the community.

Vernacular GA, "Follow Me"

On October 25th, 2019, the Vernacular Georgia (VGA) members returned to the River Valley region for a historical architecture excursion. Eleven people from around the state of Georgia attended the tour led by Allison Slocum and Ed Howard (husband of our Katie Howard), a historic preservationist on Post. The group consisted of historians, architectural historians, historic preservationists, and other interested individuals. This was their first tour in over thirty years of a military base, giving the group an up close view of the history of defending our nation.

City of Vienna Applies for Funds, Works Toward Local Government Certification

Vienna, GA, like many communities across the state, is actively taking steps to improve its status as a historic preservation community by completing a historic resources survey of the city, a process that is a requirement of the Certified Local Government Program (CLG).

Historic Resources Surveying is a process used to record and collect information about extant historic resources on a community-wide basis. Vienna will use the information from the survey to complete a number of historic preservation and heritage tourism projects.

To get assistance with the comprehensive survey, Vienna has applied to the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) grant program, a funding source from the National Park Service that can go to communities participating in the CLG program. Currently, there are only 154 cities and counties in the State eligible for the HPF due to their designation as CLG communities.

Regional Histories: The Zion Episcopal Church in Talbotton County

The Zion Episcopal Church in Talbotton is a beautiful Gothic Revival building. Established by Episcopal Clergyman, Richard Johnson, Zion was built in the manner of a typical rural English church of the Tudor-Gothic period. The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta gave Zion to the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation in 2019. The Georgia Trust then deeded the church building to a newly formed local “friends” group, Zion Church Restoration, Inc., an organization dedicated to the restoration and revitalization of the building.

Not long after taking ownership of Zion, Zion Church Restoration, Inc. applied for and received a $100,000 Public Participation Grant from the Historic Columbus Foundation. The grant has funded exterior restoration of the building with the priority being stabilization of the bell tower, buttresses, and the front facade. Zion Church Restoration, Inc. has also received a $90,000 gift from the Merrell and Constance Calhoun Foundation and other donations from Clarence Robinson, Robinson Paving; The Callahan Foundation, Atlanta, GA; UPSON EMC, Thomaston, GA; and Oglethorpe Power, Tucker, GA, as well as the many individuals who have stepped forward as donors to this wonderful project.

Oglethorpe

Facilitated a strategic planning session for Oglethorpe’s Downtown Development Authority.

Cordele

Provided technical assistance to Cordele’s 10th Street TE project nearing completion.

Shellman

Provided technical assistance to Shellman’s Downtown Streetscape TE project which is now complete.

Andersonville

Completed a historic development narrative for the Andersonville Depot.

Vienna

Wrote the Historic Preservation Fund grant application to complete a historic resources survey of Vienna.

Fort Benning

Led a group of historic preservationists on a tour of historic sites on Fort Benning.

What We Do

Historic Preservation Planning

- Prepares applications for and administers preservation grants
- Provides technical assistance to private businesses and individuals with nominations to the National Register of Historic Places and historic preservation tax credits
- Coordinates with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and performs historic resource surveys
- Performs Section 106 Reviews
- Provides technical assistance to Historic Preservation Commissions
- Develops design guidelines
BIKE-PED PLANNING & TRANSIT AND MOBILITY

Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning

RVRC Bicycle and Pedestrian planning staff have had a busy year coordinating events, developing safety and education initiatives, and working with advocacy groups to promote cycling and walking as healthy forms of transportation. RVRC staff assisted with the planning, marketing, and implementation of several cycling events. RVRC also partnered with Sumter Cycling, Cafe Campesino, and Phoebe Sumter Hospital to bring the BRAID Dream Team to Americus for a ride. Nearly 40 Sumter County middle and high school students joined with the Dream Team to ride bicycles safely through downtown Americus.

Safety and Education

RVRC Bicycle and Pedestrian planning staff partnered with Safe Kids Columbus to facilitate bicycle rodeos, which teach children cycling skills and safety, and to host helmet giveaways in both Columbus and Americus. RVRC also assisted the Reynolds Ramblers with a helmet giveaway in Reynolds. Combined, over 300 helmets and 14 bicycles were given to community members. Bicycle Columbus hosted the first half of the League of American Cyclists’ Smart Cycling Course.

Reynolds Rocks!

RVRC completed a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the City of Reynolds, and the Reynolds Ramblers cycling advocacy organization was established, with RVRC serving as technical advisors. A Complete Streets Policy was crafted by the two groups and adopted by the city. This has encouraged the incorporation of more bicycle and pedestrian considerations into transportation planning, such as newly installed bicycle racks and a Fixit bicycle repair station.

Mobility Management Program

Mobility Management staff produces three deliverables each year that support the region’s numerous transit services: the Existing Conditions Report, a Regional Transit Directory, and a Regional Coordination and Action Plan. With this information, participants can identify cooperative partnerships and determine the overall appeal of possible transit enhancements for the region. Staff also present an innovative idea for a Regional Employer Transit Plan. Although these documents have typically been composed on a county by county basis, focus was shifted to a more regional perspective. The plan considers economic needs in terms of mobilizing the workforce instead of the traditional concentration on the general population.

Transit Activities

The RVRC administers the Pataula Transit System in Quitman, Randolph and Stewart Counties on behalf of the Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transportation Authority. Transit services are delivered by Resource Management Systems, Inc., from the Authority’s facility in Springdale, GA. Staff continues to work with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to enhance coordinated transportation efforts across the region. DHS programs transport elderly residents to senior centers where they access resources and receive hot meals. These facilities also allow seniors to have social interaction and maintain meaningful personal relationships. Other DHS services transport people to work, developmental disability care sites, medical resources and other locations they choose. Muscogee County residents are also transported to dialysis.

What We Do

Transportation Planning

- Member of the Technical Advisory Committee for the Columbus Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization
- Coordinates with GDOT in the development of Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian plan and website
- Provides staff to the Citizens Review Panel for implementation of the Transportation Investment Act
- Plans, develops, and executes bicycle events and programs which focus on bike education and connectivity

- Provides electronic data adhering to all format quality measures specified by GDOT
- Assists with development of pedestrian and bikeway facilities planning

- Presents the Pataula Transit System in Quitman, Randolph and Stewart Counties on behalf of the Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transportation Authority
- Assists with development and administration of Transportation Enhancement Projects

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Workforce Development

The RVRC serves as the grant recipient and administrative entity for the local area Workforce Innovation & Opportunities Act (WIOA). These services are governed by the Middle Flint Workforce Area Board, which is composed of local area private and public sector members who oversee development in eight counties. WIOA services offer educational and training opportunities to eligible individuals ages 17 and up. These services assist and enhance employment opportunities which will lead to employment, retention in employment, and self-sufficiency. WIOA Grant Awards during Program Year 2019 (PY19) and FY20 totaled $1,129,139. These grant awards are for a two-year period that ended June 30, 2020.

Individual Training Accounts

The Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) are training services that provide educational and/or occupational skills training to enhance individual’s employability. This includes both classroom training and hands-on learning for specific educational and/or occupational related areas. Georgia has an Eligible Training Provider List of trainers who provide ITA training services. Technical colleges, public colleges and universities, as well as private training providers are typically the location for the ITA services. Albany State University (Albany & Cordele campuses), South Georgia Technical College, and Georgia Southwestern State University are three ITA eligible training providers located within the area. ITA participants receive assistance with fees for tuition, books, training supplies, and supportive services for transportation costs while in training. ITA enrollments totaled 96 individuals in PY 2019.

On-The-Job Training

There were five On-The-Job (OJT) enrollments with several local area employers participating for PY19. The OJT training service assists local area employers with finding skilled employees. Employers work with an OJT Career Advisor to outline work duties, needed qualifications, required skills, and to determine length of training time needed to master job tasks. WIOA customers are interviewed by the employer, who later makes the final hiring decision. The OJT participants are paid wages by the employer during the training period, and the employer is eligible to receive a reimbursement for the training and permanent employment of the OJT customer.

GED Plus Training Services

General Education Diploma (GED) Plus enrollments totaled 40 individuals in PY 2019. GED Plus training activities are designed to assist WIOA customers obtain their GED by offering basic literacy skills remediation. Work Readiness training is the “Plus” portion of the training, which focuses on resume preparation, job search techniques, interviewing skills, career exploration, work ethics, personal budgeting and finances, youth Work Experience, dress for success training, job search assistance, post-secondary educational exploration, and workplace skills. GED examination fees and supportive services benefits are available to assist with cost of training.

RVRC Annual Report 2019-2020
Work Experience

Work Experience services are designed to provide hands-on training with a participating employer to individuals with limited or no prior work history. Occupational assessments are provided to WIOA participants to determine their occupational interest and aptitude. These results help Career Facilitators identify possible employment occupations for the individual. Individuals are placed on a worksite with a participating employer to gain knowledge and experience in the occupational area.

During PY19, Work Experience activity had 25 participants who received $28,947.97 in wages.

Work Experience worksites included: Americus Housing Authority, Taylor County Chamber of Commerce/Development Authority, Webster Family Connections, New Horizons, Habitat for Humanity, Sumter County Sheriff’s Department, City of Reynolds, Georgia Center For Youth, Innovative Senior Solutions, Little Blessing Daycare, Macon County Board of Commissioners, Montezuma Public Library, and the City of Americus.

One Stop Services

Georgia Department of Labor Americus Career Center serves as the local area Comprehensive One Stop Center. The One Stop Center has two part-time staff members to coordinate service delivery, on-site scheduling, and the customer referral process. In addition, WIOA mandated partners for the area began offering information and services through the One Stop Center. Area partners include Georgia Department of Labor, South Georgia Technical College, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Middle Flint Workforce Services, and SWGA United YouthBuild.

Partners hold quarterly meetings and training sessions to share information and enhance services available through the One Stop Center services delivery. The Georgia Department of Labor Americus Career Center had a WorkSource Georgia Middle Flint sign posted on the exterior of the building. WorkSource Georgia Middle Flint is the Georgia statewide branding identifier for WIDA, partner services and America Job Centers.

Business Services

WIOA provides Business Services to local area businesses and employers through the On-The-Job Training (OJT) and Work Experience (WEX) Businesses. Employers can participate with the OJT and WEX services by serving a “worksite.” OJT Training employers receive reimbursement for participant training costs. WEX participants’ hourly wages and Worker’s Compensation Insurance is provided by the WIDA Service Provider.

Labor market information, local area unemployment rates, job fairs, job announcements postings, and employer committees are a few of the additional business services available in the local area through WIOA and Georgia Department of Labor Americus Career One Stop. Additional services may be available based on need and funding availability.

Performance Outcomes For PY18

WIOA has 12 Performance Measures reporting standards. The Middle Flint Workforce Area Board negotiates performance measures annually with the State Workforce Division. Our most recent available performance measures exceeded negotiated levels for PY18.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Negotiated Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entered Employment Rate Q2 Adult</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<td>75%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>60%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
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<td>Enter Employment Rate Q4 Youth</td>
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EDA Awards $1.4 Million in CARES Act Funding to RVRC

This fiscal year, economic development staff applied for two CARES Act grants through the U.S. Department of Commerce. In August, staff were informed that the Department’s Economic Development Administration (EDA) was awarding a total of $1,401,000 in CARES Act Recovery assistance to the River Valley Regional Commission (RVRC) from two funding sources. The first award of $1.01 million will be used to capitalize and administer a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) for small businesses affected by coronavirus. The second award of $400,000 will fund regional economic disaster response coordination for a two-year period. The RVRC is one of 11 grant recipients of the $16 million invested statewide in the EDA CARES Act program. Through these two CARES Act grants, RVRC will have more resources to respond to the economic impacts of COVID-19. The region’s small businesses are vital components of the communities the RVRC serves, and these investments in small businesses and economic planning will strengthen our resiliency and empower the region.

COVID-RLF Loans

The RVRC is currently looking for potential COVID-19 Revolving Loan Fund candidates. Any business affected by the coronavirus pandemic may apply for up to $200,000 through the low-interest program, so long as they meet certain criteria.

$1.4 Million
Amount of CARES Act funding secured by RVRC staff for economic response to COVID-19

$1,001,000
Amount of CARES Act funding to be used for the COVID-19 Revolving Loan Fund Program

$400,000
In CARES Act funding to be used for economic disaster response coordination

Community Development

- Writes and administers CDBG Grants
- Prepares applications for project funding to implement local plans. These include Department of Natural Resources Grants, Federal Emergency Management Agency grant’s, Employment Incentive grants, OneGeorgia, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rails-to-Trails grants, GDOT Safe Routes to School grants, and others
- Provides public administration technical assistance as requested by local governments

What We Do

- Provides staff assistance to cities, counties, and regional organizations for the RLFs
- Assists local governments and others with downtown redevelopment efforts
- Works with EPA and GA partners to help address the redevelopment of Brownfields

$2.95 Million in CDBG Infrastructure Improvements Awarded to Four Communities

In late August of 2019, 59 Georgia Communities received a total of $41 million in federal assistance, $2.9 million of which went toward funding development projects in the cities of Vienna (Dooly County), Marshallville (Macon County), Plains (Sumter County), and Reynolds (Taylor County), within the River Valley Region. Of this fiscal year’s grant awards, all $2.9 million will go toward infrastructure projects like water, sewer, street, and drainage improvements. The total cost of projects between the four communities is $3,288,119, with the state awarding 90 percent of funding needs. In total, 1,084 people will benefit from the community improvements, 82 percent whom are low to moderate income individuals.

Local governments’ public works departments are invaluable when it comes to infrastructure projects and community development.