

CONNECTIONS

A newsletter from the
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
March, 2010

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

[RPCGB Finance Committee Meeting](#)

March 3, 2010
RPCGB Office
9:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\) Committee meeting](#)

March 9, 2010
RPCGB Office
10:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPCGB Program Budget Committee Meeting](#)

March 10, 2010
RPCGB Office
9:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting](#)

Canceled

[APCA Steering Committee Meeting](#)

March 11, 2010
RPCGB Office
1:30pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

Letter from the Executive Director

Although March has come in like a lamb, the RPCGB is working to create a big stir with a lion of a project for the U.S. 11/Bessemer Road corridor.

The RPCGB has received proposals from seven nationally and locally-renowned planning/engineering teams to help explore public transportation options such as bus rapid transit, commuter rail and light-rail service for this corridor. In addition, we will look at ways to exploit the enormous redevelopment potential of the corridor's seven cities and numerous neighborhoods using transit. The RPCGB and the selected team will help residents, representatives from community institutions, business leaders, property owners and community leaders to develop a new vision for the corridor.



Too often, we look at the condition of our surroundings and believe there is little we can do to change things. We say to ourselves, "This is the way it is, and this is how it's always been." However, in many cases, this is a false assumption.

Most residents over the age of 45 probably remember when the retail offerings in Five Points West rivaled those of Downtown Birmingham. Some may recall when Downtown Bessemer and Fairfield teemed with small businesses and pedestrian activity or when nearly 50 years ago, G.E.S. on Lomb Avenue provided residents with everything that Walmart Supercenters provide shoppers with today, or that Bessemer Road was once lined with thriving businesses like Marsh Bakery and Lonnie Russell Ford. Yes, many of our corridor cities and neighborhoods have seen better days, but it does not mean those days are gone forever.

The U.S. 11/Bessemer Road corridor planning process will not have to start from scratch. It will involve the review of past plans and studies and will merge existing plans and projects like the Red Mountain Park, the Village Creek and Valley Creek Greenways, Rickwood Field and Museum, and the Fairgrounds Sports Complex with new ideas for the community.

I often think about how so many of our residents travel to beautiful and vibrant European cities on their vacations. Or they

[Transportation Citizens Committee Meeting](#)

March 17, 2010
RPCGB Office
Noon, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPCGB Board of Directors Meeting](#)

March 17, 2010
RPCGB Office
10:30am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Technical Committee Meeting](#)

March 24, 2010
RPCGB Office
10:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Subcommittee Meeting](#)

March 25, 2010
RPCGB Office
1:30pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

For meeting information, including postings of any meeting notices and cancellations please visit the [RPCGB website](#).

visit what they perceive to be attractive, vibrant cities in other parts of our own country. Yet, rarely do we allow ourselves to imagine that our own communities could be so beautiful or so vibrant. In fact, many of us would probably think such an idea laughable. But if you propose this to a four year-old, you will probably get, "Why not?" So, for the next 18 months, the RPCGB and its planning team will be asking corridor stakeholders to think like four-year-olds for the sake of their communities.



RPCGB To Move Forward on Securing Funding for ITP

The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) announced that it will proceed with acquiring funding for the In-Town Transit Partnership (ITP). The funding will go to the creation of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in downtown Birmingham.

The RPCGB applied for \$64 million from the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant to fund the project. Funding was ultimately awarded to the planned intermodal facility in McCalla. The RPCGB will now continue to explore other funding options from local and federal levels that existed prior to the TIGER grant option.

Program funding will cover the cost of building the transit system, and will result in job creation and better transit connections to existing jobs in the region. A combination of funding sources may include some federal programs and local financial commitments.

The BRT system will link multiple areas in the downtown core of Birmingham, offering riders an opportunity to move quickly and efficiently through the city center. The enhanced system will bolster connections to local bus service in communities surrounding downtown Birmingham. The ITP route was chosen on the basis of serving the greatest number of potential riders and key activity centers while simultaneously supporting land use plans in the corridor. BRT vehicles, which resemble light-rail cars, will run every ten minutes from BRT stations located throughout downtown Birmingham. BRT vehicles will use a dedicated lane allowing for accurate pick-up/drop-off times. Connector vehicles will allow riders in neighborhoods surrounding the downtown area to easily access the BRT system.



Each month, we look at the profile of an RPCGB employee. This month's profile is Allison Nichols, Program Manager, CommuteSmart.

Hometown: Atlanta, GA

Education: Bachelor's Degree in Information and Communication Sciences from The University of Alabama.

How long have you been with CommuteSmart?: Since January 11th

Give a short overview of your job: Program Manager for CommuteSmart involves educating the public on alternative commute methods and working with the team to spread the word!

What is your favorite aspect of your job?: The people I work with.

Tell us one thing we don't know about you: I have been skydiving.

Finish this sentence: "Ten years from now, I hope to be..." Retired and relaxing on the beach with my family! But in the "real world" I just hope to have a happy and healthy family and be successful in both my personal and work life.

Howard Named to ALAPA Executive Committee



Darrell Howard, Principal Transportation Planner, was elected to serve on the executive committee as the Central Section Representative for the Alabama Chapter of the American Planning Association (ALAPA). As part of the executive committee, Howard is responsible for managing business affairs, membership activities, policy-making, and coordinating continuing education.

Transportation Planning Update

MPO Approves Funding for Projects

A Request for Proposals (RFP) to fund projects under Federal Transit Administration's Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom programs was publicized in October 2009. Funding is limited to projects in the urbanized area. Furthermore, funding under the JARC program is limited to projects that support the development and maintenance of transportation services designed to transport low-income individuals to and from jobs and activities related to their employment. Funding under the New Freedom program is limited to projects that overcome barriers and/or expand transportation mobility options available to individuals with disabilities.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization voted to approve the following projects:

- **Glenwood, Inc.** in the amount of \$12,500 under the JARC program
Funding for operational expenses to transport residents to/from jobs using their own vehicles.
- **Travelers Aid Society** in the amount of \$25,000 under the New Freedom program
Funding for transportation of clients using approved providers
- **Alabama Kidney Foundation** in the amount of \$65,000 under New Freedom
Funding for transportation of clients using approved providers
- **Transportation General** in the amount of \$56,000 under New Freedom
Funding for two ADA-accessible vehicles

U.S. 280 Transit Study Under Contract

The US 280 Corridor Transit Study has been under contract since January and the study is progressing well. This study is funded through grants from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the focus of this study will be on transit and land use alternatives in the corridor. The RPCGB and the project consultant will be setting up individual meetings with each of the cities and counties in the corridor to educate them about the study and solicit their initial comments. The project team will also be coordinating with ALDOT and their elevated roadway/highway expansion project. ALDOT's project will be studied as one of the highway alternatives in this transit study.

MPO Recovery Act Projects Fully Obligated

The RPCGB is pleased to report that 100% of the \$22,983,937 allocated to the Metropolitan Planning Organization under the Recovery Act was obligated before the March 2nd deadline. The work funded in this stimulus effort includes a wide variety of projects such as transit costs and transit vehicles, sidewalk projects, an upgrade to the traffic management center, as well as roadway widening. We would like to thank ALDOT and the local sponsors who worked diligently to ensure this deadline was met.

HARPO Meetings a Success

During the month of February, Steve Ostaseski, Principal Planner, visited the RPCGB's four rural counties, Walker, Blount, St. Clair and Chilton, and hosted the Heart of Alabama Rural Planning Organization (HARPO) series of transportation meetings. A review of projects in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program were discussed and Mr. Ostaseski requested everyone arrive with their "big ideas." Ideas ranged from over/under passes for rail lines to interstate art presenting the heritage of their county. Laurel Land, Coordinated Human Service Transportation Planner, and Marshall Farmer, Senior GIS Analyst also attended the meetings to discuss transit issues.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HARPO MEETINGS





(Wild turkey sighting on the trip to Blount County)

CommuteSmart Update

CommuteSmart Highlighted in Newsletter

CommuteSmart received recognition in the January edition of the Children's Health Systems (CHS) employee newsletter, "Our Way". CHS is a Silver Partner with CommuteSmart.

shorts



**CommuteSmart Wants to Make
Your Commute Easier**

CommuteSmart
BIRMINGHAM

Do you ever sit in traffic and think, “there’s got to be a better way to get to work?” CommuteSmart is here to help everyone enjoy an easier commute and reduce traffic congestion and air pollution in Jefferson and Shelby counties. For commuters, CommuteSmart offers free online ridematching, carpool and vanpool services, the Emergency Ride Home program and more. They can help you get on the road to a better commute. CommuteSmart is designed for anyone that lives or works in Jefferson or Shelby Counties. For more information, go to <http://www.commutessmart.org/birmingham/commuterservices.html>

To find out how your company can get involved, visit the [CommuteSmart website](#).

Alabama Partners for Clean Air Update

Schools Get on Board for Idle Free Zone

Almost three years after Auntie Litter, Inc. and the Alabama Partners for Clean Air (APCA) began pitching its "Idle Free Zone" campaign to all 13 school systems within Jefferson and Shelby Counties, the program has garnered outstanding participation. To date, Jefferson County, Shelby County, Bessemer, Birmingham, Fairfield, Hoover, Leeds, Midfield, Mountain Brook, Tarrant and Vestavia Hills City School Systems are actively participating in the "Idle Free Zone" program, which

aims to reduce harmful emissions found in alarming levels around school campuses.

Executive Director and Founder of Auntie Litter, Inc., Pat Mitchell, developed the APCA-sponsored "Clean Air" program, which also offers complimentary school presentations at participating "Idle Free Zone" schools. Additional components of the campaign include distribution of educational materials and posters, and installation of "Idle Free Zone" signs next to school carpool lanes that read, "Do Your Share for Cleaner Air, Turn the Key Be Idle Free." Dr. Joseph B. Morton, Alabama State Superintendent of Education, endorsed the program with a letter encouraging all school systems in the two-county area to participate.

"The goal of the "Clean Air" initiative is to remind drivers to reduce harmful emissions by simply turning off their engines while waiting in carpool or drive-thru lanes," said Ms. Mitchell. "By reaching the children, we are reaching their parents."



With the Jefferson County Health Department monitoring air pollution at four Birmingham area schools, and the U.S. EPA performing emissions testing at Lewis Elementary, North Birmingham Elementary, and the Riggins School in Birmingham along with Tarrant Elementary, Auntie Litter, Inc. is confident that informed parents will realize their participation in the program is vital to protecting the lungs of the students and staff at their school.

As part of the 2009 campaign, area hotels and restaurants distributed "Clean Air" placemats to their patrons from May through September to generate additional awareness during Ozone Season. Establishments that participated included Applebee's, Clarion Hotel, Courtyard Marriott at UAB, the Hampton Inn, Hotel Highland, Outback Steakhouse, Rime Garden Inn's Magnolia Grille, Ruth's Chris, Up the Creek and the Wynfrey Hotel's Chicory Grille.

For more information on APCA's "Clean Air" program, please visit the [Auntie Litter website](#).

Economic Development and Loans

CEDS Meeting Scheduled for March

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee will meet on Tuesday, March 9, 2010, at 10am in the 1st Floor Conference Room of the RPCGB offices. The meeting

topic will be "Rail and Economic Development." For questions, please contact Yvonne Murray at YMurray@rpcgb.org.

Be Counted In The 2010 Census

**United States
Census
2010**

The 2010 Decennial Census is a mere eight weeks away and the stakes couldn't be higher for local municipalities. The results of the census will determine the amount of federal funding available to local governments for the following decade. Each year the federal government distributes more than \$400 billion to state, local and tribal governments based on census data. These funds support tangible benefits in every community by determining funding allocations for neighborhood improvements, public health, education, transportation and other planning projects. It determines Congressional reapportionment and is used to define legislative districts, city council districts, and school districts. It is often a requirement for grant projects and even economic development projects, site analysis, and business recruitment and retention efforts.

The US Government Accountability Office (GAO) has recently reported that each of the 10 largest federal assistance programs (many of them benefiting the low income, the disabled, and minority populations which are also the segments of the population most likely to be under-counted) in fiscal years 2008 and 2009 relied at least in part on the decennial census and related data - that is data that depends on the decennial census, or statistics derived from the data such as per capita income. For fiscal year 2008, this totaled about \$335 billion, representing 73 percent of total federal assistance. In fiscal year 2009, that amount increased to \$478 billion, representing about 84 percent of total federal assistance. This amount included nearly \$123 billion funded by the Recovery Act and about \$356 billion funded by other means.

It has been estimated that for each citizen not counted in the census, a community will lose out on an average of \$1,269.33 per person per year, or approximately \$10,000 per person for a decade. The 2010 Census begins on April 1st. Get the word out to your fellow neighbors and BE COUNTED!

2010 "Your Town Alabama" Right Around the Corner

The 2010 **Your Town Alabama** workshop is scheduled for Wednesday, June 2 - Friday, June 4, 2010 at Camp McDowell. This is the 12th anniversary and the workshop consists of highly informative presentations and problem-solving activities for participants. It is also a wonderful opportunity to network with other community leaders and make contacts with presenters who work throughout Alabama in the planning, design, economic development, and resource preservation fields. The focus of the workshop aims specifically to introduce small town and rural technical assistance providers and decision makers to the role of design in community planning. Former participants remark that the workshop is FUN and invigorating and opened their minds to many possibilities.

Participants may only attend the workshop ONCE. If you or other community leaders are interested in attending this workshop, please complete an application on the [workshop website](#) and return by May 3, 2010. The number of participants is limited so you are strongly encouraged to apply as early as possible. You can also register and securely pay online using a credit card through [RegOnline](#).

Community Updates

16th Street Corridor Study and Conceptual Streetscape Plan

The RPCGB is moving forward with the draft of the 16th Street Study and Conceptual Streetscape Plan for Fountain Heights. The RPCGB will be presenting the draft plan to the residents of

Fountain Heights on Thursday evening March 4th at 5:30pm in the first floor conference room at the RPCGB. The Fountain Heights Neighborhood Association and the City of Birmingham have requested assistance from the Regional Planning Commission through the Building Communities Program to complete this study. *For additional information please contact Richard Amore, Senior Planner with the RPCGB at ramore@rpcgb.org*

City of Leeds Master Plan

The RPCGB is currently evolving the Community Assessment section of the City of Leeds Master Plan. The RPCGB met with several stakeholders in February, including the planning commission, city staff, and the Leeds Area Chamber of Commerce, to gather their input in the planning process. The RPCGB looks forward to kicking off the public involvement meetings in the coming months to gather input from the residents of Leeds. The City of Leeds has requested assistance from the RPCGB through the Building Communities Program to complete the master plan for the city. *For additional information please contact Richard Amore, Senior Planner with the RPCGB at ramore@rpcgb.org*

RPCGB Planner Gives Sustainable Communities Presentation

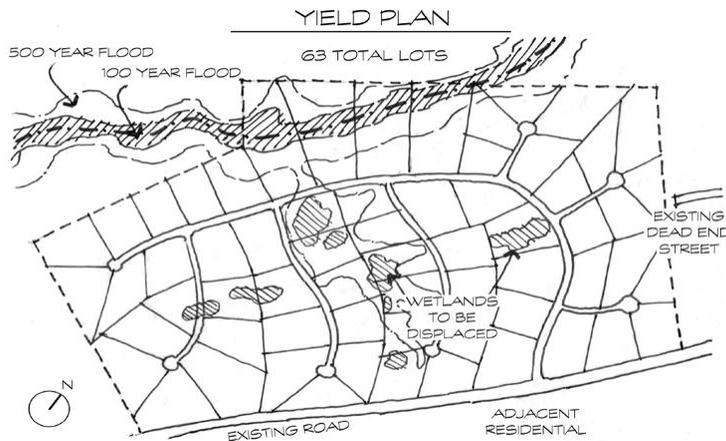
Philip Amthor, Community Planner, gave a presentation on Sustainable Communities at Auburn University's 53rd Annual Transportation Conference on February 23rd in Montgomery. The event was held at the Renaissance Convention Center in downtown Montgomery and featured speakers and attendees involved in all transportation-related fields. To view the slide show or for more details on the conference, visit the [conference website](#).

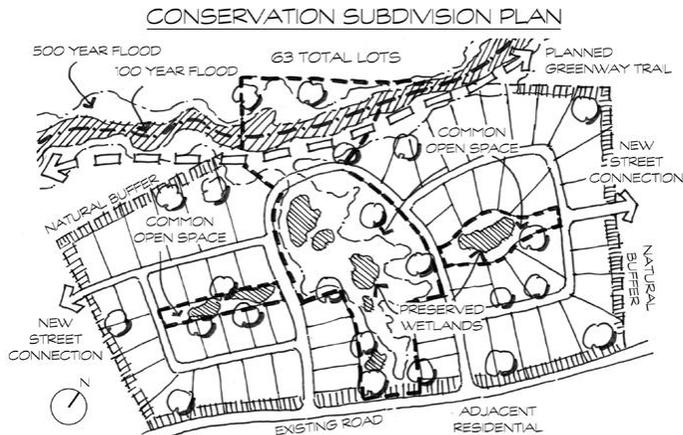
To see a complete list of community planning projects completed over the last year, visit the Community Planning section of the [RPCGB website](#).

SmartCode Corner

We have been speaking of making our everyday codes a little smarter. The advent of increasingly tighter stormwater management controls will bring the discussion of Low Impact developments to the forefront of zoning code and subdivision regulation conversations.

Conservation subdivisions in rural, suburban edge areas with codes that allow development of large lot zoning districts can easily achieve 70% (or more) of the land preserved as natural areas by providing conservation subdivisions as an overlay.





Conservation Subdivisions have several advantages.

Economic Advantages

For the municipality:

- Open space enhances the municipality's quality of life, one of its chief assets in attracting quality businesses and in encouraging economic growth.
- Municipal service provision is cheaper when homes are not widely scattered.
- Open space dedications may provide public parkland, reducing public land acquisition costs.

For the developer:

- Site plan review is smoother when development plans conform to local planning objectives.
- Development costs are reduced as utility lines, streets, driveways and sidewalks are shorter.
- Conservation subdivisions have marketing and sales advantages, as buyers prefer lots close to or facing protected open space.
- Where zoning permits, a variety of housing types, ranging from single family detached to attached units, may be accommodated.

Environmental Advantages

For water quality:

- Common open space can be designated as buffers to protect wetlands, streams and ponds.
- Water quality is enhanced when impervious surfaces such as streets, driveways and pipes are minimized.
- Where appropriate, stormwater and sewage treatment facilities can be located within the open space.

The RPCGB has several model ordinances, and we can assist the local community in calibrating a conservation subdivision code for your municipality.

If you have SmartCode questions, please contact Steve Ostaseski, Richard Amore or Philip Amthor at the RPCGB. Steve may be reached by phone at 205.264.8422 or by email at smo@rpcgb.org. Richard may be reached by phone at 205.264.8447 or by email at ramore@rpcgb.org. Philip may be reached by phone at 205.264.8421 or by email at pamthor@rpcgb.org

CAWACO Update

Spring Five Mile Creek Greenway Event

The Five Mile Creek volunteer events are a project of the Five Mile Creek Greenway Partnership.

The events help restore Five Mile Creek and raise awareness about the ongoing development of the 28-mile Five Mile Creek Greenway. Learn more at the [Five Mile Creek website](#). Another great project supported by Cawaco RC&D Council.

Graysville Canoe Launch Volunteer Event 2010
Tree planting, landscaping and launch clean-up

DATE: Saturday, March 27, 2010 (rain or shine)

TIME: Registration begins 8 a.m. Work begins at 9 a.m.
Free hot dog lunch while supplies last!

LOCATION: Five Mile Creek canoe launch in Graysville
U.S. 78, just north of Interstate 22 (Corridor X) interchange. From downtown Birmingham, take Highway 78 West to the Interstate 22 interchange in Graysville (about 15 miles). Stay on 78 for about a quarter mile past the interchange. Event site is on the left (follow signs to designated parking areas). GPS coordinates N 33 39' 48.2" W 86 58' 25.7"

BACKGROUND: Last year Alabama Power Service Organization helped build the new canoe launch on Five Mile Creek. This year volunteers will be planting trees and landscaping the area. Boy Scouts will be continue building the primitive camp ground.

MORE INFO: Francesca Gross, Five Mile Creek Greenway coordinator, (205) 264.8464, fgross@rpcgb.org or Doug Morgan, City of Graysville public works 438-2902, or Herman 438-1701

CHILDREN WELCOME! WEAR COMFORTABLE CLOTHES & STURDY SHOES. Bring light tools (rakes, shovels) if you have them!

CONNECTIONS is brought to you by the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
Find out more at www.rpcgb.org

