

CONNECTIONS

A newsletter from the
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

April 2011

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

[RPCGB Program Budget Committee Meeting](#)

April 13, 2011
RPCGB Office
9:00 am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting](#)

April 13, 2011
RPCGB Office
1:30 pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[APCA Steering Committee](#)

April 14, 2011
RPCGB Office
1:30 pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPCGB Board of Directors Meeting](#)

April 20, 2011
RPCGB Office
10:30 am, 1st Floor Conf. Rm.

[Transportation Citizens Committee Meeting](#)

April 20, 2011
RPCGB Office
Noon, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Technical Committee Meeting](#)

April 27, 2011

Letter from the Executive Director

On April 22, the world will celebrate the 41st Earth Day. As this day draws closer, I am reminded of the encounter that ultimately sparked my interest in the natural world.

When I was nine years-old, I happened upon an English Sparrow nestling that had fallen from a nest in the eaves of my family's West Birmingham house. Sparrows had nested in that same spot ever year as long as I could remember. But before that fateful day, I had no idea how a baby bird looked. I remember holding the chick in my hand, marveling at its tiny pin feathers, the translucent skin on its underbelly and the way it opened its beak wide when it was hungry. I was hooked for life.

After that point, when I wasn't reading about cities, I was reading about birds. I'd sit for hours reading not only about common city birds like English Sparrows, Cardinals and Mockingbirds, but also about more exotic ones I had never seen like Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. I also read about magnificent birds like the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, Passenger Pigeon and the Carolina Parakeet; birds I would never get to actually enjoy because they were extinct. I learned that these birds were extinct due to over-hunting and habitat destruction and fragmentation. Armed with this new information, I penned my very first public speech which I entitled "*Our Wild Brothers*." I delivered this conservation-themed piece at the Awards Day program at Princeton Elementary with the eloquence and passion of Clarence Darrow or Atticus Finch, according to my teachers. And for the past 38 years, I have continued to do my part to push for the preservation of the natural environment and its wild inhabitants, as well as encourage the enhancement of the built environment for humans.

Some might ask, "Why conserve? Doesn't Alabama have plenty of land?" Well, yes, we have plenty of land and millions of forested acres. However, not all acreage is created equal. Conservation helps us protect natural features that define Alabama; features that set us apart from 49 other states and most other countries. Since everything we preserve is



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

[MPO Subcommittee Meeting](#)

April 28, 2011

RPCGB Office

1:30pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPCGB Finance Committee](#)

May 4, 2011

RPCGB Office

9:00 am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

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

within the drainage basin of a river, stream or lake, it is automatically part of the natural filter that keeps silt and pollutants out of our water. In addition, trees in those areas help filter pollutants from our air. We could not afford to recreate the super-efficient filtering system Mother Nature has already given us. Lastly, preserving the best of natural Alabama is good for our economy. It helps us become more competitive economically by helping us attract and retain the best and brightest young workers, young entrepreneurs and high-income retirees. It is just a different type of economic development.

So on Earth Day 41, you don't have to deliver a stirring speech on conservation at an elementary school, but you can do something. Consider supporting some very worthwhile conservation-related efforts taking place in our state and in our region. You can help support the reauthorization of **Forever Wild**, a 19 year-old program which has already protected over 223,000 unique and pristine acres across our state. You can support exciting regional projects like the **Our One Mile** greenway initiative, **Red Mountain Park**, **Ruffner Mountain Preserve**, the **Five Mile Creek Greenway**, the **Village Creek Greenway** and dozens of other similar projects being developed or planned in our area. There are also scores of local conservation, restoration, anti-litter or recycling projects begging for volunteers. So, please use this day to give back to nature.



RPCGB Receives Multiple Awards at ALAPA Conference

The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) had a hand in the acceptance of four awards at the **2011 Alabama Chapter of the American Planning Association (ALAPA)** annual conference. Representatives from the RPCGB attended the conference the last week of March and were in attendance at the annual awards luncheon in Eufaula.

The RPCGB received the **Outstanding Planning Award for a Project/Program Tool** for its Building Communities Program. The Building Communities Program links transportation planning with land use planning and is designed to provide funding to local governments to assist in developing and implementing comprehensive plans which focus on the relationship between transportation and land use. RPCGB Executive Director, Charles Ball, accepted the award on behalf of the Commission.

The **Outstanding Planning Award for a Plan** went to the Highland Park Neighborhood Association for its "Highland Park Neighborhood Plan." The plan was created in a joint partnership between Gresham, Smith and Partners, and the RPCGB. The plan addresses day-to-day issues of the neighborhood, including traffic, parking and land use. It also introduced a form-based overlay to the existing zoning regulations. Highland Park Neighborhood President, Alison Glascock, accepted the award on behalf of the neighborhood association.

The **Distinguished Leadership Award for an Elected Public Official** went to Mayor Doug

Brewer, City of Graysville. Mayor Brewer was nominated by the RPCGB for his efforts in support of planning activities in the region. Mayor Brewer serves as the Chairman of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and spends countless hours promoting planning activities and educating the public on the need for planning.

The highest honor bestowed by the ALAPA, the **Kenneth J. Groves, Jr. Distinguished Leadership Award for a Planning Professional** went to RPCGB Executive Director, Charles Ball, for his years of leadership in planning. Over the past 19 years, Ball has worked to further planning efforts in Albany, GA, Gadsden and with the RPCGB. His recognition is based on contributions to the planning profession through his practice, hard work and determination to improve the communities in the region.

Highlights from the American Planning Association Conference - Alabama Chapter



TOP LEFT: RPCGB Exec. Dir., Charles Ball (middle), receives the Kenneth J. Groves, Jr. Distinguished Leadership Award
TOP RIGHT: Alison Glascock (right), Highland Park Neighborhood President, accepts the Outstanding Planning Award
BOTTOM LEFT: Graysville Mayor, Doug Brewer (right), accepts the Distinguished Leadership Award - Elected Official
BOTTOM RIGHT: Mike Kaczorowski, RPCGB Transportation Planner, presenting at the conference



The first round of community forums for the Southwest Corridor Transit Study concluded at the end of February. The forums were organized by transportation and land use planners from the RPCGB and its consultant team, and were attended by citizens, elected officials and community leaders of the corridor communities. Forums were held on

February 24 at the Brighton Community Center, February 22 at the Regional Planning Commission building in Birmingham and February 23 at the Bessemer Legacy YMCA in Bessemer.

The purpose of the Southwest Transit Corridor Study is to find ways to improve transit services in the southwest corridor of Greater Birmingham along the Bessemer Superhighway. In addition to improving transit services, the study will look at ways to encourage "smarter" and greener planning and land uses to energize economic development for those who live, work and go to school in the corridor.

The forums offered the public an opportunity to voice its opinions about transportation and land use needs and priorities. The meeting format was hands-on and attendees visited displays and participated in interactive exercises that provided an opportunity for the study team to gather input on land use, economic and transportation issues and needs, project priorities, significant activity centers and daily travel patterns in the corridor.

The exercises involved attendees mapping their daily travel patterns, ranking corridor issues as well as priority needs, and identifying activity centers that need improved public transportation access. Participants also completed a public transit opinion survey which collected travel patterns, transit service use, and asked for input on more effective ways to communicate transit information.

The results of the exercises revealed that participants desired a wide range of transit, land use and economic development solutions including increasing reliable bus service along the corridor to improve access to jobs and social service agencies; reevaluating existing bus routes to better accommodate rider's needs; new destinations and reduction in wait times; updating posted schedules and bus stops signs with route information and connection information; improving transit stops with benches and shelters; and stimulating economic development and redevelopment of vacant industrial and commercial sites. Participants also suggested developing a plan that integrates transit, as well as bicycles, sidewalks and trails solutions that improve mobility, lead to a more sustainable environment, and improve job access.

Please contact Darrell L. Howard, the Southwest Corridor Transit Study's project manager, at dhoward@rpcgb.org for additional information.

Loan Program Looking to Give Out Money



Do you know of a small business looking for financing to expand? The RPCGB has [loan funding](#) available with flexible terms and attractive rates for facility expansion, acquisition of machinery/equipment, working capital, and more. The loan programs are geared towards the stimulation of private investment and job creation. To date, the programs have loaned almost \$3.4 million and leveraged approximately \$24 million in private investment!

Does your business or municipality want to save money by saving energy? Check out our [Regional Energy Efficiency Loan Fund](#)! These low interest loans can finance window replacements, HVAC retrofits, energy efficient street and ballpark lighting, and more. To be eligible, you simply have to

be located in Bibb, Blount, Chilton, St. Clair, or Walker County, and be willing to conduct an energy audit to demonstrate what your savings would be.

For more information on any of the loan programs, visit the RPCGB [website](#) or contact Yvonne Murray at YMurray@rpcgb.org.

CommuteSmart Highlight



The month of March saw the addition of two new partners to the CommuteSmart program, ITT Tech and Virginia College. CommuteSmart would like to welcome these partners and encourage other businesses that want to find out how to promote a cleaner, cheaper commute to check out the [CommuteSmart](#) website for more information.

March also saw the release of the Spring 2011 edition of *the route*. This quarterly newsletter highlights everything occurring with CommuteSmart, as well as letting readers know about new partners and commuter events in the area. The Spring 2011 edition includes a feature on Bike-to-Work Day, sponsored by the RPCGB and held May 20. A bicycle convoy will start at Railroad Park at 7am and finish around 7:45 am at the park. Drinks, snacks and other goodies will be provided to those taking part in the event. Interested participants can find out more on the [CommuteSmart](#) website in the coming weeks.

Gallery to Highlight Greenspace



The RPCGB will host an exhibit highlighting greenspace in the region during the month of April. *Gateway to Greenspace Exhibit* will be open to the public on Tuesday, April 19 and run through Saturday, April 30. The exhibit will be housed in the Frank Setzer Gallery on the 1st Floor of the historic Young & Vann Building.

In celebration of the 40th Anniversary of Earth Day, the RPCGB is working in conjunction with Auburn University's Urban Studio and other partners to showcase maps and renderings of many existing parks, preserves, greenways and other treasured landscapes in the six-county region.

The exhibit will also feature many planned projects and ongoing initiatives related to land conservation, outdoor recreation, and active transportation such as bicycling and walking. The exhibit will also be the focal point of an RPCGB-sponsored Earth Day event on Wednesday, April 27. More details about that event will be available on the [RPCGB](#) website in the coming days. The Setzer Gallery is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm and Saturdays from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

For more information contact Tom Maxwell at 264-8445 or e-mail tmaxwell@rpcgb.org.

Community Update

City of Leeds Master Plan

The RPCGB is moving forward with the City of Leeds Master Plan. The RPCGB is hosting a Master Plan advisory committee meeting on April 5, 2011 to discuss the future development of United States Steel (USS) properties in the City 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*

Titusville North Neighborhood Plan

The RPCGB is excited to announce that it is working with the Titusville North Neighborhood Association, the City of Birmingham and Auburn University Urban Studio in developing a Neighborhood Plan for Titusville North. A formal public kick-off meeting will be held next month. The Titusville North Neighborhood Association has requested assistance from the RPCGB through the Building Communities Program. *For additional information please contact Richard Amore, Senior Planner with the RPCGB at ramore@rpcgb.org*

2010 Census Data Update

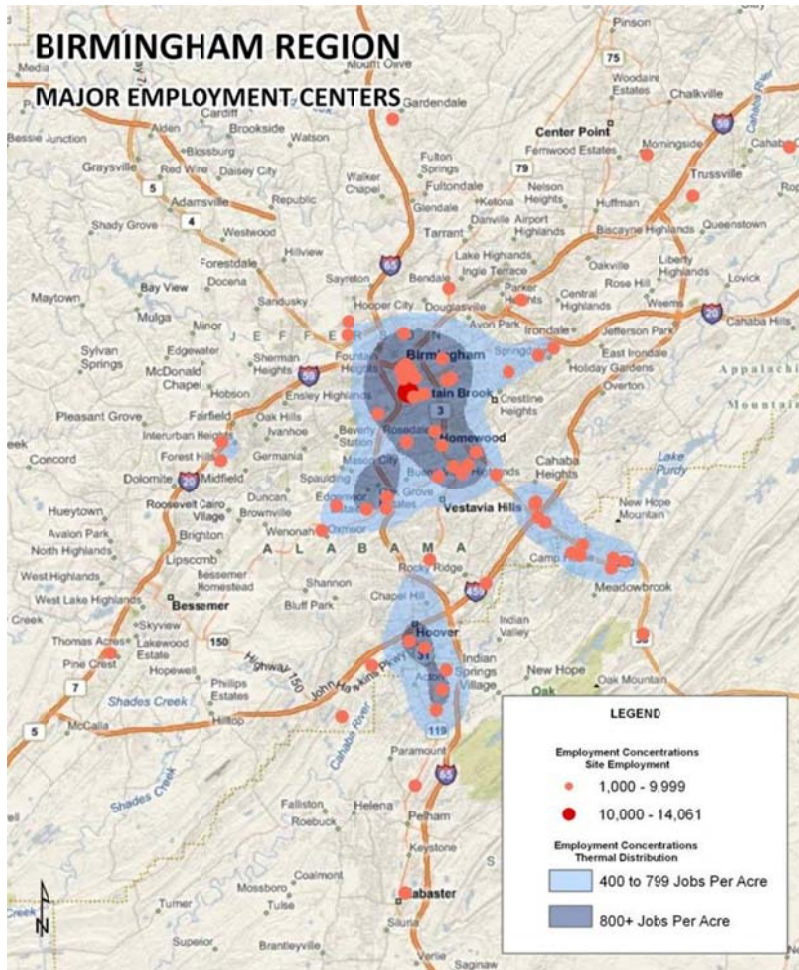
To find the latest updates on 2010 Census data for your community, visit the [Census data](#) page on the RPCGB website. Available data and links to release dates for future data products can be found on the page as well. *For further information please visit www.census.gov or contact Brett Isom at bisom@rpcgb.org.*

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

SmartCode Corner

Last month, SmartCode Corner examined emerging influences that inform the need for and the makeup of evolving codes. The 2010 Census identifies emerging changes in the area's demographic profile and is also quite illuminating when examining employment trends. This month consideration is given to workforce housing. For the purpose of this discussion, workforce housing is defined as housing for the occupations needed in every community, including teachers, nurses, police officers, firefighters and many other critical workers. A brief look will be given to major centers of employment for the region. These two factors combined are the Housing + Transportation Affordability Index.

As a prelude to further discussions on the Housing + Transportation Affordability Index there will be an examination of the employment centers and some of the external factors affecting housing choice. By analyzing employment data from various resources including the Census Bureau's LED (Local Employment Dynamics) labor shed analysis profiles and Info Group market data, definitive locations within the Birmingham MSA can be identified as major employment centers (17,500 jobs+ per square mile or site groupings of 1,000 or more jobs). The areas identified include the Birmingham City Center and Southside areas, stretching south along Highway 280 to Brookwood and southwest to Oxmoor, as well as Riverchase. These areas collectively employ over 30% of the region's workforce, or about 144,000. The map below is a spatial representation of employment in the region.



Recent presentations in Orlando, Florida by the Urban Land institute (ULI) Terwilliger Center for Workforce Housing identifies some important emerging trends. It is anticipated that two population groups at opposite ends of the age spectrum will influence housing development in the post-recession economy: generation Y (Gen Y) and people who are 65 and older. John McIlwain, ULI senior resident fellow for housing identified several factors that will influence the housing market.

- The continued decline of home prices nationally-the Standard & Poor's Case-Shiller 2010 national price of \$130,380 was down by 4.1 percent from 2009, and is expected by McIlwain to fall 5 percent in 2011;
- The ongoing foreclosure crisis-more than 2 million foreclosures occurred last year and an equally high volume is expected for this year;
- Approximately 25 percent of the nation's current homeowners have mortgages that are "under water"-meaning their home loans exceed the value of their homes;
- A drop in the national homeownership rate, from the 2004 economic-boom peak of 69 percent to the current level of 66.58 percent;
- Looming changes in the federal housing finance system that will likely raise the cost of home financing; and
- An eventual increase in mortgage interest rates back to the long-term norm of 7 to 8 percent

How does this affect these two groups? Because many of the traditional seniors will outlive their retirement funds, they have perhaps the most pressing need for affordable housing. However, regardless of the varying lifestyle choices of younger and older seniors, the housing best suited to

all is denser, mixed-use, mixed-income development that minimizes the need to drive.

Income constraints among even the most educated GEN Y, point to a strong demand for affordable housing near employment centers in urban areas. The GEN Y is the creative class, they are the group driving innovation in business and technology, and they create value-added jobs. GEN Y will represent the newest workforce housing challenge.

A competitive urban area will be one with an attractive Housing + Transportation Affordability Index. In May, SmartCode Corner will examine the Birmingham Area Housing + Transportation Affordability Index and how SmartCode can be part of the solution.

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

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

