



# Georgia Initiative for Community Housing



Year Nine Progress Report - 2013



# Executive Summary

With the ongoing support of our Founding Sponsor, the Georgia Power Company, the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) has facilitated progress toward housing stability in 45 Georgia communities during its first nine years. In 2013, the seventh class of communities: Auburn, Eatonton, Nashville, Washington successfully completed the program, becoming GICH alumni.



In 2013, the freshman, sophomore and junior classes of GICH continued working to revitalize declining neighborhoods, create new affordable housing options, and provide financial and home buyer education to their residents. GICH provides a platform for teams to think of creative solutions and network ideas with housing professionals, city officials and staff, as well as community volunteers from across the state. Housing teams continued to make steady progress toward building the framework and relationships on which long term housing and community programs will be built.

The direct support of the GICH partners – the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), the University of Georgia (UGA) Housing and Demographics Research Center, and the UGA Office of the Vice President of Public Service and Outreach - included ongoing technical assistance, as well as the organization and sponsorship of retreats for the participating communities. In 2013, these retreats were hosted by Cordele and Rome, where more than 150 community housing team members came together for facilitated work sessions, targeted assistance, networking and training by housing experts. Many of the initiatives implemented in the individual communities were a direct result of information shared at the GICH retreats. Additional in-kind support was provided by Georgia EMC, the UGA Archway Partnership, and the UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

GICH communities are gaining a better understanding of their local housing needs, learning about housing and community development tools, and acquiring valuable information on available funding sources to assist them with addressing those needs. As evidenced by their accomplishments in this report, they are steadily enhancing their knowledge and effectiveness in addressing the issues in their communities. Communities moved forward on plans to revitalize their neighborhoods by conducting housing assessments, removing abandoned and dilapidated houses, obtaining grants for housing rehabilitation, partnering to develop units with Low-income Housing Tax Credits, and providing housing counseling. (See following page). Many GICH communities formed significant new partnerships, created new agencies/authorities and amended ordinances in support of their objectives.

Since many housing challenges require more than three years to address, GICH is committed to providing ongoing technical assistance with local housing plans. Alumni program planning is ongoing, and sessions on special topics are offered when requested. All participants are encouraged to use the GICH networking listserv, which now has more than 680 subscribers.

# GICH by the Numbers

**Funds** (received or utilized in 2013) -

**Number of Communities: 8**

CDBG and CHIP - \$5,309,000

HOME - \$2,500,000

Other - \$274,855 (HUD, GEFA)

**Number of Units - Number of Communities: 10**

Constructed (or under construction) - 10 (Habitat)

Low Income Housing Tax Credits awarded or approved in 2013 - 263 (Auburn, Gainesville, Greensboro, Washington)

Rehabilitated - 40

Removed abandoned or dilapidated - 66

Conducted (completed or working) housing assessments - 6

**Housing Counseling, Down Payment Assistance - Number of Communities: 10**

Housing Counseling - 418 clients

Down Payment Assistance - 98 loans (\$595,000)

**New Activities - Number of Communities: 11**

*Code or ordinances implemented or updated*

Eatonton - Zoning Ordinance updated to decrease the amount of time it takes to investigate a property after receiving a complaint and broadened the definition of junk

Greensboro - Zoning Code updated to allow for personal care homes with a conditional use permit in residential areas

Harlem - Vacant and Foreclosed Property Registry Ordinance created

Nashville - Zoning Ordinance adopted the International Property Maintenance Code; and Historic District updated

*Positions created or filled*

Gainesville - Code Enforcement Officer

Warner Robins - Code Enforcement Officer

*New agencies/organizations/authorities created*

Lithonia - Quality of Life Court established and working to become part of the DeKalb/Decatur Land Bank Authority

Nashville - Urban Redevelopment Zone (Authority) created

Roswell - Urban Redevelopment Plan revised, creating a new Urban Redevelopment Area

Warner Robins - Landbank Authority bylaws being created with City Attorney

Washington - Hands On Washington established

*New partnerships formed*

Auburn - Georgia Power Company

Gainesville - Gainesville High School Construction Technology students & local contractor, Bryant Builders

Lithonia - Atlanta Regional Commission

Nashville - Georgia Power Company, Georgia EMC, Department of Community Affairs, USDA, HUD

Pembroke - United States Army Fort Stewart, Bryan County GIS, Bryan County Tax Assessors, Bryan County Planning & Zoning, Coastal Regional Commission, Georgia Southern University College of Public Health, City of Wadley, Pembroke Police Department, Pembroke Fire Department, Pembroke Code Enforcement, Bryan County Board of Education

Washington - Housing Authority, Faith Based Community

## Dalton

After a change of team leadership, the Dalton GICH Team refocused and is working to improve the housing stock on the East Side of Dalton. Beginning with the Housing Authority and surrounding neighborhoods, the following research studies were completed: a market study of Dalton with elderly and special needs components, an environmental study, an existing physical condition analysis of Housing Authority (HA) property and a (citywide) housing inventory. The HA plans to demolish the burned Underwood Circle Units and has a suggested list of potential uses for this property. The 2013 CDBG application (\$140,000) now includes street/curb improvement to the west side of Underwood Circle and a street extension creating a grid pattern physically

connecting two Housing Authority neighborhoods for improved access and safety. Three CHIP applications (\$300,000 each) were submitted for elderly very-low income households: one from the HA for rehabilitation of owner-occupied housing in east Dalton, one from the City of Dalton for the rehabilitation of owner-occupied housing in the Crown Cotton Mill District and one from Whitfield County for rehabilitation of scattered site owner-occupied housing. A down-payment assistance program for City Employees was created and informational and educational outreach is underway. In addition, three homes were rehabilitated with CDBG funds, Habitat for Humanity constructed two homes, and 191 clients received housing counseling.



*Dalton rehabilitation*

## Greensboro

With a focus on community outreach and education, the Greensboro GICH housing team worked to build an awareness of the need for neighborhood revitalization in the city. The team adopted a logo, created a website, produced a general information brochure and distributed regular news releases. In addition, the team conducted housing assessments within target neighborhoods and hosted a site visit to a neighboring city for local leadership. One very successful initiative in 2013 was a citywide clean-up which included dozens of volunteers, corporate leaders, students, and housing team members assisting with the effort in both commercial and residential areas across the



city. Clean-up activities were conducted in the Mill Village, Canaan, Oak Street, around various public housing neighborhoods, and along the Hwy 44 corridor. The city Street Department assisted with the removal of collected trash and debris. The Greensboro City Council adopted the Mill District Enterprise Zone, which creates tax incentives for property improvements and includes Mary Leila Cotton Mill, a collection of vacant industrial buildings, the Mill Village residential area, the Greensboro Depot, and a nine-acre tract slated for development as a recreational space. A local developer has received LIHTCs (\$900,000) for Mary Leila Lofts, 71 units for families, and the City was awarded CDBG funds (\$500,000) for Mill Village water improvements. Additional activities include a site visit to the City of Covington's GICH team; four homes built by Habitat; housing counseling for eight families; Zoning Code updates to allow for personal care homes with a conditional use permit in residential areas; and completion of a housing assessment in a targeted area as identified in the Urban Redevelopment Plan.

## Lithonia

The Lithonia GICH housing team worked to develop a housing inventory and to expand representation on the housing team. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) assisted to develop a tool to collect information about the housing conditions with four categories: good, fair, deteriorated and dilapidated. Community residents were trained to use the tool and ARC graduate student interns also assisted with documentation. A GIS-based program was developed that allows elected officials, staff, members of the housing team and other stakeholders to view specific parcels and identify problem areas with a concentration of deteriorated and/or dilapidated houses. Other successful activities include establishment of a Quality of Life Court to handle code enforcement and other issues (Jan 2014); collaborating with DeKalb County to become part of the DeKalb/Decatur Land Bank Authority; and removal of three dilapidated houses. The Lithonia Housing Team is now focused on the renovation/rehabilitation of deteriorated properties, as well as educating residents about the opportunities for home ownership.



*Community Housing Team members*

## Pembroke

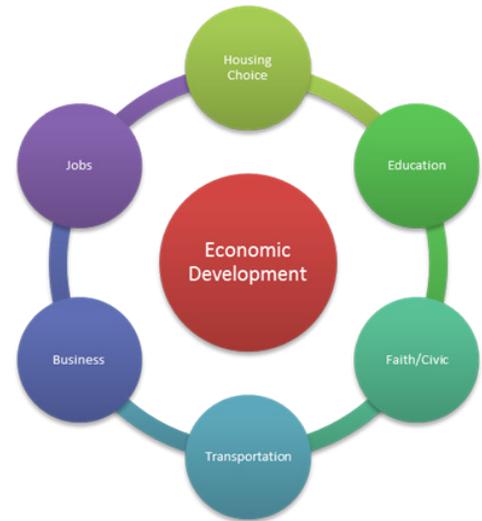
The City of Pembroke GICH team completed an in-house housing assessment of the entire City in 2013. The team collected survey data on almost 900 homes, and the data are currently being mapped with GIS to further study the needs and issues faced by residents. Several community groups are finding ways to work together to improve the housing situation in Pembroke. For example, a local church has started rebuilding dilapidated porches. In addition, the City was awarded CDBG funding (\$498,000) for water main improvements and six dilapidated housing units were removed. The team is continually adding new partners, forming successful collaborative groups and working on updating city codes and ordinances.



*Housing assessment*

# Roswell

In their first year, the Roswell GICH team worked on issue identification, information gathering, and data analysis. The team decided to focus its efforts on increasing workforce housing and positioning the City to become a lifelong community. Team members spent time analyzing community data, housing type availability, and housing costs in relation to local wages. The team determined that the draft Unified Development Code provides the best chance for housing in Roswell to change to meet the needs of the market, businesses and the local economy and adopted a resolution in support of its passage. Several area non-profit housing organizations received CDBG funding (\$415,000) through the City and Habitat for Humanity and the Roswell Housing Authority also received CHIP funds. A Low-income Housing Tax Credit and HOME rehabilitation project received application support funds (\$106,000) and area non-profits have submitted grants for homelessness and transitional shelter funding. In addition, the City created a new Urban Redevelopment Area and revised its first Urban Redevelopment Plan.



Sophomores

# Gainesville

The Gainesville GICH team hosted the City's first-ever Housing Summit in February, which connected more than 20 different housing-focused agencies. Following this, the City hosted a half-day Housing Festival in June to connect these agencies with 100 citizens in need of assistance. The City was awarded the "2013 Pillar Award" from Metro Fair Housing Services, Inc. for this very successful event. The City is actively exploring the idea of creating a land bank authority (LBA) as a redevelopment tool. The team convened experts on LBAs and conducted two educational workshops for the Gainesville City Council and the Hall County Board of Commissioners. In addition, the City completed four emergency repairs, constructed five sidewalks, and demolished three dilapidated houses (an additional 10 were demolished voluntarily by owners), and City and Regional Commission staff have surveyed and assessed approximately 50% of the housing stock. The housing team partnered with high school construction technology students and a local contractor to reconstruct a house for a mother and her adult child with a disability. Construction has started on Myrtle Terraces a Low Income Housing Tax Credit development of 84 units for seniors; the City received a \$500,000 CDBG grant for Gateway House, a transitional housing facility; the local Habitat for Humanity chapter constructed two homes; and 27 clients received housing counseling.



Housing Festival

# Garden City

The Garden City GICH team continued to focus on volunteer implemented housing activities. The citywide Housing Assessment was completed almost exclusively by volunteers. Team members established the Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN) program, which provides assistance with small home renovations and painting projects. In 2013, NHN completed five projects, which included a variety of assistance: house painting, painting of porches and doors, complete bathroom renovations, bedroom remodeling, yard work, cutting tree limbs, hauling away debris, electrical improvements, door repairs, reroofing, and various ADA adaptations. Although led by volunteers, elected officials and government staff provide general support for the program and also some hands-on assistance. The housing team has forged a partnership with Building Together Savannah and, although not funded, submitted a funding application for a pocket park in the Byck Avenue neighborhood.



*Volunteer painting project*

# Harlem

Through participating in GICH, the City of Harlem housing team learned the importance of assessing local housing conditions. In 2013, the CSRA Regional Commission completed a city-wide housing inventory with funding from the Housing Authority. This City is now in a position to identify target areas, apply for grants, and communicate the need for more housing units to interested developers. With the assistance from the Georgia Conservancy, the team has continued to work with the Superintendent and the Board of Education on the proposed relocation of two schools in a historic neighborhood. The City of Harlem continues to foster their relationship with Fort Gordon, as the base recently announced an expansion that will bring thousands of new residents to the area. The City Council adopted and staff has implemented a vacant and foreclosed property registry. Applications for CHIP and CDBG funds have been made for improvements in the target area.



*Harlem will foster the relationship with Fort Gordon*

# Wadley

The Wadley GICH team continued to educate citizens about available housing opportunities and to research various community development tools. The team held their annual housing fair in April and partnered with the Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America on a workshop in June. Public relations and marketing was a priority in 2013. A logo design was developed and a program website is under construction. Several team members visited the



*Housing fair*

City of Pembroke to learn firsthand about their housing assessment implementation strategy. Utilizing volunteers, the City of Wadley is now two-thirds of the way finished. In partnership with Georgia Southern University, the team plans to analyze additional secondary data to determine local housing needs. The City of Wadley received a CDBG grant (\$500,000) for water and sewer infrastructure and a CHIP grant (\$306,000) for housing rehabilitation.

## Warner Robins

The Warner Robins GICH team continued working to increase community involvement and awareness, revitalize neighborhoods, and build local partnerships. Addressing the affordable housing needs in Camellia Circle and Wellston Villas, the team focused on improving infrastructure, enforcing the city building code, and removing vacant dilapidated structures. This year, the GICH team hosted the city's first Housing Fair, which was a great networking opportunity for the partnering housing organizations, and the attendees learned about a variety of local housing resources. A 2012 housing assessment was used by Code Enforcement to identify substandard houses, and a dilapidated house in the target area was demolished, which was a visible sign that the GICH Team was serious about revitalizing this neighborhood. In addition, the City is currently updating the Zoning Regulations to include a mixed use district that would allow Group Homes, Transitional Housing, and Personal Care Homes. A new Code Enforcement Officer position was created to help address housing codes and community needs and the City Attorney is creating bylaws to establish a Land Bank Authority. The local Habitat for Humanity chapter built two homes, 23 clients received housing counseling, and, with CDBG entitlement funds, 23 homes were rehabilitated.



*Warner Robins rehabilitation*

## Auburn

### Juniors

The City of Auburn GICH team continued to work towards increasing affordable, quality rental housing, identified as the highest priority and greatest need in the city. In December 2013, Autry Pines Senior Village was approved for Low Income Housing Tax Credits that will generate \$6.5 million in total funding). With these 64 new apartment units for seniors, the most significant objective of the Auburn GICH work plan was accomplished. In addition, the City actively worked to increase code enforcement efforts and gained compliance from homeowners in the targeted area of the southern gateway to the City. Code enforcement was also responsible for acquiring a non-residential building that can be sold or leased to a new business, thereby increasing tax revenues. Community team members directly attribute these successes to attending the GICH retreats, networking and learning best practices. Valuable new partnerships were formed over the three years, including with the Georgia Power Company.

## Eatonton

The City of Eatonton GICH team continued to focus on addressing slum and blighted areas, with the goal to attract private development. With the input of the City Marshall, a GICH team member, the City Council made two important ordinance changes. First, they streamlined the zoning ordinance to decrease the amount of time it takes to investigate a property after receiving a complaint. Second, they broadened the definition of junk to also include motorcycles, lawnmowers and boats. In 2013, the City continued to implement the \$300,000 CDBG funds for Agnes Street Infrastructure improvements. In addition, two dilapidated housing units were removed. In 2013, the community housing team concentrated on itemizing short term goals and action steps, and with the support of elected officials, identified eleven long-term goals and objectives in December.



*Eatonton rehabilitation*

## Nashville

The City of Nashville GICH team continued to focus on housing redevelopment and code enforcement this year. The City is laying the groundwork for the donation of 18 public housing units and hopes to partner with a builder to rehabilitate the units. The City increased code enforcement, removed five dilapidated houses, updated the zoning ordinances, updated the historic district ordinance, adopted the International Property Maintenance Code, and established an Urban Redevelopment Area. The GICH team established important new partnerships with several agencies: Georgia Power Company, GEMC, DCA, USDA, and HUD. Additionally, the City received a CDBG grant (\$500,000) for sewer improvements.

## Washington

The City of Washington GICH team continued the process of eliminating slum and blight by removing 35 abandoned houses this year. Utilizing previously awarded grants, the City was able to rehabilitate 8 units with CDBG and CHIP funds, construct 44 apartment units (Foxwood, \$600,000) and provide housing counseling to 160 clients.

The City continued to implement grants for housing counseling (HUD, \$20,000) and energy audits (GEFA, \$254,855). A major accomplishment of the GICH team this year was the establishment of Hands-On Washington, a nonprofit, volunteer organization that assists low income homeowners who are elderly or disabled with maintenance. The team worked to establish a network of partnerships in the City (Housing Authority, the faith based community, local civic organizations, volunteers and local banks) to allow for a holistic approach to community development and neighborhood revitalization and sustained decent and affordable housing opportunities. A working relationship with USDA Rural Development has resulted in 20 families receiving 504 or 502 home loans.



*GICH Team*

# The Initiative's 10<sup>th</sup> Year: Looking Ahead to Progress

In November 2013, GICH selected five very qualified communities to participate in the program: Albany, Douglasville, Perry, Porterdale, and Rincon, bringing the total number of GICH communities to 50. This year these new cities will join the currently participating communities for retreats in Douglasville in February and in Valdosta in September. As always, communities continue to receive technical assistance in the intervening months to ensure forward progress on designing and implementing their housing plans.



# Georgia Initiative for Community Housing

## Partners



# Founding Sponsor



A **SOUTHERN COMPANY**

# In-Kind Partners









Georgia Initiative for  
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[www.fcs.uga.edu/fhce/gich](http://www.fcs.uga.edu/fhce/gich)