



Mike Beatty, Commissioner

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### **Five New Communities Chosen to Participate in GICH**

The Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) announced the selection of five Georgia communities – Gainesville, Garden City, Harlem, Wadley and Warner Robins - to participate in a three-year program developed to assist them with their housing needs.

GICH is a partnership of the Housing and Demographics Research Center at the University of Georgia and the Office of the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and the Georgia Municipal Association. The three year program is partially funded by the Georgia Power Company, with additional financial support provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, and Wells Fargo. The Georgia Electric Membership Corporation, the University of Georgia Archway Partnership, and the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government also provide in-kind services to support the Initiative.

"The quality and appearance of a communities' housing sets the tone for the community. As you drive by the city limits, and see attractive homes and yards, you immediately form a positive image of the community as a whole," said Tom Rodgers, Director of Housing at UGA's HDRC. "It is our hope that GICH will help communities set a positive image for their community."

During GICH's three-year program, each community housing team will receive facilitation, instruction, and technical assistance as they design and implement a housing program to improve both the quality of life of its citizens and the communities' economic conditions. The centerpiece of the Initiative is a series of retreats, where each housing team will work separately with a facilitator/housing professional, as well as engage in cross-community sharing and collaboration. Communities will have access to technical assistance and receive continuous feedback throughout the three-year program.

"Housing plays a key role in the economic viability and development of communities," said Mike Beatty, DCA Commissioner. "The local communities that are participating in this initiative have taken an important first step that will help them meet their unique housing needs."

Any city, county, or public housing authority in Georgia is eligible to apply on behalf of a community housing team. The teams consist of about twelve members and include representatives from local government, business (banks, real estate, and builders/developers), nonprofit housing organizations, and the public housing authority. Other groups may include faith-based organizations, churches, development authorities, chambers of commerce, school system, major employers, and law enforcement agencies.

"Nothing is more important to a community's viability and quality of life than having an adequate supply of decent, safe and affordable housing," said Jim Higdon, GMA Executive Director. "We applaud the local governments selected to participate in this program for their commitment to involve a broad cross-section of their community to address this critical issue."

The new communities join those entering the second and third years of the program: Auburn, Berrien County, Eatonton, Sylvania, and Washington and Americus/Sumter County, Covington, Gray/Jones County, Thomson/McDuffie County, and Winder respectively. In August, Brunswick, Hawkinsville, Rome, Sandersville/Tennille/Washington County, and Vienna joined twenty-one other alumni communities that have completed the program.

Additional information can be found at <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/hace/hdrc/gich.html>.