

SOUTHWEST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION  
FY 2023 WORK PROGRAM

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**I. COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING SERVICES**

The goal of the SWGRC's planning program is to facilitate sustainable growth through the development of local comprehensive plans and the regional plan and to facilitate implementation of those plans by assisting local governments with local ordinances, plans and regulations, identifying projects and funding sources, developing various applications, and administering local and regional projects.

**A. DCA Coordinated Planning Work Program**

The annual contract period with the *Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)* is from July 1 to June 30 of each year. Expected state funding for the FY 2023 contract is \$160,747 with a local match requirement of \$5,747. Eligible activities of this contract may include:

- **Regional Plan**: The Regional Plan is a comprehensive assessment of the region utilizing information from each community's Comprehensive Plan to determine regional priorities. Regional Commission (RC) staff will complete an entire plan update every ten years, and the Regional Work Program included in the Plan is reviewed annually.
- **Regionally Important Resource Plan (RIR)**: The RIR plan consists of an inventory of regional cultural and environmental assets that are of regional importance. It includes significant waterways, areas of rare and endangered plants and animals, and major recreational areas. Land in conservation, as well as important historic sites, are also included. SWGRC analyzes the completed inventory, and recommends best practices local governments can use to protect identified resources in their community. Nominations are requested annually from the local governments and other interested parties.
- **Comprehensive Planning & Community Work Program (CWP)**: In 1989, the state mandated that each local government prepare a comprehensive plan. As with the performance standards, failure to complete the plan would disqualify local governments from certain state grants, including Community Development Block Grants. The SWGRC planning staff assists in updating our local government's comprehensive plans to ensure compliance with the state and compatibility with local goals and objectives. The implementation portion of these plans, the *Community Work Program*, must be updated every five years. The entire plan must be updated every ten years. Each community's comprehensive plan must include community goals, needs, opportunities, and a community work program.

The SWGRC also assists communities in implementing projects listed explicitly in their community work program. The SWGRC helps the community provide evidence of its commitment to the project and that the project will help to achieve one or more of its performance standards. The Regional Commission also offers technical assistance to local governments to develop various plans and ordinances, identifies projects and funding sources, develops grant applications, and administers local projects in order to achieve the goals set in their comprehensive plans.

- **Service Delivery Strategy (SDS):** The SWGRC assists the local governments of this region with the review of and changes to their local Service Delivery Strategies. The SDS is a state-mandated process (HB489 in 1997) that requires each municipality to evaluate the services they currently provide and reach a consensus on the provision of future services. All grant applications are reviewed for consistency with both the local comprehensive plans and the SDS agreements. Service Delivery Strategies are updated if there are local service changes and must be updated along with the communities' Comprehensive Plans.
  
- **Developments of Regional Impact (DRI):** Developments of Regional Impact (DRI) are required by the state when projects reach certain thresholds of size, thus requiring a review by the SWGRC. Most types of development are covered by this rule and include commercial, residential, industrial, and public facilities. The most common type of DRI reviewed by the RC is for housing projects. Outside of the Albany/Dougherty metropolitan area, housing developments of greater than 125 units require review by the RC; within Dougherty County, the threshold is 250 units. DRIs are reviewed as necessary.
  
- **Housing Activities:** The SWGRC emphasizes that planning activities related to housing are recognized as essential elements of stable communities. Housing efforts are one of the cornerstones of community development. Over the years, we have received considerable funding from state and federal sources to provide various housing assistance types to Southwest Georgia's local governments. Activities have included strengthening local housing organizations, hosting housing conferences and workshops, and writing local plans and development ordinances.
  - **Regional Housing Conference/Workshops**  
The SWGRC, in partnership with the Southwest Georgia Housing Task Force, conduct an annual one-day housing conference.. The conference takes place in May of each year in various locations throughout the region. We offer housing education and resources sessions to local governments, developers, nonprofits, and potential homeowners. This workshop will be held in FY 2023 and it's goal is to increase communities' knowledge and bring affordable housing to rural areas.
  
  - **Educational Sessions**  
Educational sessions are a collaboration of city governments, private industry, and faith-based organizations. The sessions will be held in FY 2023 and are based on the housing trends, topics, and needs on the local, state, or regional level.
  
- **Youth Summit:** It is a priority of SWGRC to support positive youth development activities in Region 10 through collaboration with local, regional, and state partners. Youth Summits have been held annually for over ten years. Themes, such as “Real Life 101” are developed each year. Students from every school in the region (public/private/homeschooled) are eligible to participate.
  
- **Local Government Boundary Mapping and Annexation Survey (BAS) Assistance:** Any city with an annexation must notify DCA and update the boundaries with the US Census Bureau during the next regularly scheduled boundary and annexation survey. For any cities that request BAS assistance, SWGRC will assist with this effort. (GIS staff)

## B. Historic Preservation Planning

Since 1995, the *Historic Preservation Division* (now part of DCA) has granted the SWGRC funding to provide technical assistance for historic preservation related projects. The FY 2023 contract is expected to be approximately \$4,091. Because the contract funding is so limited, some services listed below may require an additional fee. The services provided include:

- National Register Listing Assistance: The SWGRC will assist property owners in listing their property on the National Register.
- Tax Incentive Assistance: The State of Georgia has tax incentives available for the owners of historic property. Both have specific requirements, including the substantial rehabilitation of the property in question. SWGRC will provide technical assistance in applying for tax incentives.
- Preservation Grant Assistance: SWGRC can research available grant opportunities for historic preservation. If there are grant opportunities available, SWGRC can assist with preparation of the grant application.
- Review of Federal and Transportation Projects: All federally financed projects and many state-financed projects require that the projects' impacts on historic properties be reviewed before funding. SWGRC can provide this review.
- Technical and Design Assistance: The preservation planner provides guidance in technical construction matters and design issues.
- Certified Local Government (CLG) Assistance: Any city, town, or county that has enacted a historic preservation ordinance and enforces that ordinance through a local preservation commission, and has met requirements outlined in the Procedures for Georgia's Certified Local Government Program, is eligible to become a CLG. Once certified, a local government becomes eligible to apply for federal historic preservation grant funds available only to CLGs.

## C. Transportation Planning

The SWGRC assists communities with bike/pedestrian planning and rural transit planning with funding from the *Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)*. FY 2023 contracts from GDOT are expected to be a total of \$46,689 with a local match requirement of \$7,861.

The following services are included in the GDOT planning program:

- Bicycle & Pedestrian Plans: update of Regional Bike/Ped Plan and development and implementation of community's bicycle and pedestrian program to expand and improve facilities and promote bicycling and walking as a means of transportation.
- Safe Routes to School (SRTS) promotes walking and bicycle safety in schools. SWGRC collaborates with the SRTS Coordinator to provide services in the region.
- Conduct crash screening analysis at three locations in the region to identify potential safety project locations.
- Update existing sidewalk data utilizing existing information and photography for two municipalities. (GIS staff)

- Update regional bike and pedestrian corridors, as needed. (GIS staff)
- Rural Transit Planning includes developing and periodically updating individual county-level transit plans and implementation strategies to promote public transit services awareness. In FY2020, the SWGRC developed its first Regional Transit Plan and in FY2022, GDOT assisted SWGRC with a Regional Transit Development Plan. This plan will be updated each year.
- The rural transit planning contract also includes activities such as conducting or assisting with public involvement and participating in coordinated planning efforts with the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS).

#### **D. Pre-Disaster Mitigation Planning**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides grants to local governments to for planning and directing hazard mitigation projects before a disaster. Funding these plans and projects reduces overall risk to the population and structures and potentially reduces the need for federal funding in actual disasters. SWGRC provides technical assistance to local governments to develop their Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plans, facilitate public participation and follow through to the plan's final adoption as required by FEMA, as part of the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program. SWGRC will be working with several counties on these plans in FY23.

#### **E. Planning & Zoning Technical Assistance to Local Governments**

SWGRC staff provides a variety of planning services and technical assistance to our local governments upon request. Some of these planning services may include:

- Housing Plans and Assessments
- Rural Zone Designations
- Opportunity Zone Designations
- Plan First Applications
- Urban Redevelopment Plan
- Revitalization Area Strategy

SWGRC staff assists with developing and maintaining any regulatory land use reviews and ordinances. Some of these services may include:

- Zoning Reviews and Recommendations
- Zoning Ordinances
- Subdivision Regulations,
- Manufactured Home Ordinances
- Flood Plain Management Ordinances
- Soil and Sediment Control Ordinances

Staff prepares specific studies for individual local governments or on a regional basis. These studies cover all areas in which the SWGRC has the expertise, including historic preservation, transportation, economic development, housing, human resources, and land use. These studies and unique projects are used to inform local and state decision-makers of issues of importance. Staff also provides training for Planning Commissioners and local government Boards.

## II. COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

### A. U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA)

- **EDA Partnership Planning:** The Economic Development Administration (EDA) planning investments focus efforts on fostering economic development through support to planning organizations for the development, implementation, revision or replacement of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The SWGRC received a \$210,000 grant for a three year period (2022-2024) with a local match requirement of \$52,500 (20%) to develop and update the CEDS as required by EDA and to ensure that economic development activities and programs within the region are designed to create and retain lucrative jobs that require a higher level of skill, primarily for the unemployed and underemployed in economically distressed regions.

The CEDS is a critical document and plan for economic development including activities such as identifying the means to attract new business ventures and retain existing businesses, and diversification of the economic base in Southwest Georgia. SWGRC staff also provides technical assistance to our local governments, community leaders and statewide developers upon request with different economic development opportunities in the region.

- **EDA Revolving Loan Fund (Legacy RLF):** EDA funded the SWGRDC in 1990 to provide gap financing for local business and industry to stimulate the creation of jobs and capital investment in this region. Initial capitalization of \$500,000 was provided through EDA which was matched by \$250,000 from the local governments in the region.

Since then, more than 30 (Legacy) loans have been made, creating and/or saving almost 1,000 jobs and providing over \$15,000,000 in additional capital investment. Loans have been made throughout the entire region, with investments ranging from \$20,000 to \$150,000.

- **EDA CARES Revolving Loan Fund:** In FY 2021, EDA granted SWGRC up to \$500,000 for additional capital for lending to businesses who suffered losses or were otherwise affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. These “micro” loans range from \$5,000 to \$40,000, at an interest rate of 1%. While there will be no additional funding from the CARES RLF program, the fund will “revolve” as loans are repaid and new loans may be made with any idle/available funds.
- **EDA Grants and Other Services:** When resources or grants are available, feasibility or marketing studies are completed and made available to potential industries with the goal of attracting new businesses to southwest Georgia. Grant opportunities, particularly, Employment Incentive Program (EIP) and Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants are tied to economic development to develop infrastructure for new and expanding businesses in the area. Staff provides technical assistance to local governments, industries and development groups, upon request.

### B. Grant Writing

SWGRC planning staff assists local governments in the preparation of grant applications for a host of many types of projects. Notification of grant opportunities are communicated through our newsletters, email and website. Staff also prepares and submits grant applications for the benefit of the region. Some of the grant applications that the Planning staff typically prepare are:

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- Community Home Investment Program (CHIP)
- USDA Housing Preservation Grant (HPG)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Assessment Grant
- Immediate Threat & Danger Grant (ITAD)
- Assistance to Firefighters Grant (FEMA)
- COPS Grant
- Disaster Relief Grant (various)
- Economic Development Administration Grant (EDA)
- AARP Age Friendly Grant

### C. **USDA Rural Partners Network**

The Rural Partners Network (RPN) is an alliance of federal agencies and civic partners working to expand rural prosperity through job creation, infrastructure development, and community improvement. In FY2022, SWGRC was one of three agencies in GA chosen as a “pilot project” community network. Community networks are getting “boots-on-the-ground” support as dedicated federal employees provide place-based community economic development guidance in navigating federal programs, building relationships, and identifying community-driven solutions. SWGRC will support and work with the RPN Community Liaison to identify needs in the region and resources available.

## III. **GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS)**

The goal of the GIS program is to provide our local governments with access to GIS resources that build spatial data infrastructure for the purpose of enhanced decision making, transparency and more efficient operations. Regional and local planning, utility management, tax assessment, emergency routing (E911) and economic development, just to name a few, are positively impacted by the use of GIS technology. Some activities under our GIS program are:

- A. **GDOT Roadway Element Validation and Mapping Program (REVAMP)**: SWGRC contracts through the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions with GDOT’s Office of Transportation Data (OTD) to collect and validate roadway data elements in order to improve existing data and capture road network changes from local governments. The program benefits both the local governments and the state and by leading to a possible increase in certain local funding programs, improved safety of the public roadway system, leading to the establishment of a formalized asset management program, improved federal reporting related to mileage, performance, condition, etc., and comprehensive statewide road characteristic information that can be used to create maps and meet multiple data requirements. The expected SWGRC funding allocation for FY23 is \$33,000.
- B. **Local Government Contracts**: SWGRC contracts with our local governments, upon request, to provide them with access to GIS resources. Some of these projects may include:
- GIS Conversion and Maintenance of utilities, tax assessment and E911 data
  - Creation of Digital Zoning Map
  - Traffic Sign Inventory
  - Solid Waste Collection Routes
- C. **Map Design & Production**: SWGRC GIS staff develops, updates and produces a variety of custom maps for our local governments, upon request.

## **IV. GRANT ADMINISTRATION**

SWGRC provides administrative services to our local governments for the implementation of funded projects which includes the technical assistance necessary for the successful completion and close-out of a project. The SWGRC also administers various grants awarded in the interest of the region. This assistance may include administration services for:

- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- Community Home Investment Program (CHIP)
- USDA Housing Preservation Grants (HPG)
- Economic Development Administration Grants (EDA)
- American Rescue Planning Act Grants (ARPA)
- Immediate Threat and Danger Grants (ITAD)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Assessment Grant

## **V. COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION**

The objective of the SWGRC's coordinated transportation program is to improve the region's transportation system by coordinating with federal, state and regional transportation agencies.

The SWGRC currently contracts with the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to provide human service and public transportation within the region. Clients of DHS, which include mentally and developmentally disabled persons and senior citizens, are provided transportation to service centers, medical appointments, dialysis and various other destinations for the benefit of their health and welfare.

General public trips, such as trips for shopping, medical or other appointments and employment, are also provided for a small fare. The coordinated program streamlines transportation in order to eliminate duplication of equipment and service and provide for a more effective and efficient service. The SWGRC Coordinated Transportation program operates 76 handicap accessible vehicles and generally provides over 200,000 trips annually. FY 2023 funding is anticipated to be approximately \$7 million.