$2.95 Million in Community Development Block Grants Awarded to Four Communities in the River Valley Region

City of Vienna $707,712
Left to right: Carter & Sloope Charlie Tucker, DCA Commissioner Christopher Nunn, DCA Region 8 Representative Casey Bean, Vienna City Administrator Michael Bowens, RVRC Community Developer Grant Richardson.

City of Marshallville $750,000
Left to right: DCA Region 8 Representative Casey Bean, DCA Commissioner Christopher Nunn, Marshallville Mayor Valery Davis, RVRC Community Developer Grant Richardson.

City of Plains $750,000
Left to right: Plains City Councilor Eugene Edge, Sr., Plains Mayor L. E. Godwin, DCA Commissioner Christopher Nunn, DCA Region 8 Representative Casey Bean, RVRC Community Developer Grant Richardson.

City of Reynolds $750,000
Left to right: City of Reynolds Public Works Director Scott Jones, DCA Region 8 Representative Casey Bean, Still Waters Engineering Brian Henderson, RVRC Community Developer Grant Richardson.
MEETINGS IN THE REGION

Bill Twomey, ACCG, spoke with the RVRC Council in September of this year about the upcoming legislative agenda. Mr. Twomey gave a general overview of legislation that is proposed for ACCG to consider including discussions of rural broadband, short-term rentals paying fair share of taxes, and a review of occupational tax rates.

Columbus Mayor Skip Henderson spoke at the October 23, 2019 RVRC Council meeting about the “State of Aging” in 2019.

In November, Council was visited by Deron Davis, Executive Director of the GA Chapter of Nature Conservancy, Saralyn Stafford from UGA, and LuAnn Craighton from the Chattahoochee Fall Line Conservation Partnership. While Davis and Craighton shared with attendees the importance of economic stimulation through land and water conservation, Stafford discussed municipal training opportunities at UGA's Carl Vinson Institute.
Aerial satellite imagery is a game changer for this decade’s U.S. Census Bureau count, and this October, the RVRC planning department added a surprising 37,612 new addresses to the U.S. Census Bureau for the federal agency’s Address Canvassing phase – the largest number of addresses sent to the Bureau from the commission to date.

RVRC Geographic Information Specialist Mariyana Kostov attributes the spike in numbers to advancements in data collection methods and better record keeping. “Each census, the Bureau requests address lists from local governments during the canvassing operation and then uses aerial satellite imagery to confirm whether those addresses are in fact residential,” Kostov said. “Because these aerial images have more clarity than ever before, census workers’ precision in address canvassing is unprecedented.”

While this increase in the number of addresses might imply a boost in the region’s population, what it actually represents is much more significant. What this number really indicates are improvements in accuracy for the 2020 census data. Accuracy improvements in census data collection lead to breakthroughs in regional planning and enhancements in economic and community development. Simply put, the more we know about our communities, the better we are at serving them.
RVRC Planning Department continues to engage regional communities through bike events, civic meetings, and transportation planning. Bicycle Columbus held their On the Table Chatt event on the evening of October 22nd and had approximately 50 people attend and share their ideas to improve cycling in Columbus. Additionally, Bicycle Columbus held the first half of the League of American Bicyclists Smart Cycling Course on October 25th. Sumter Cycling has confirmed that ALTA Planning + Design will be in Americus from December 9-12 to give their recommendations on bike paths/trails throughout the city. Sumter Cycling partnered with RVRC, Café Campesino, and Phoebe Sumter to bring the BRAG Dream Team to Americus November 2nd for a ride. This ride saw nearly 40 middle and high school students from around the county on bikes riding through downtown Americus. At the end of the ride, the Atlanta BRAG Dream Team Chapter donated 10 bikes to Sumter Cycling and the RVRC to use for events and to potentially start a BRAG Dream Team Chapter.
Planning Department Engages in Regional Food Resiliency Initiatives

The RVRC planning department continues to make headway on the regional food resiliency front through its support and involvement with two non-profit food sustainability entities in Muscogee County – Ugrow, Inc. and Columbus Food Oasis, the ladder of which is an extension of the state-wide entity, Georgia Organics. Most recently, RVRC planners attended an On the Table Chatt hosted by Columbus Food Oasis that focused on improving the local food system. “On the Table,” which is sponsored by the Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley, is a one-day opportunity for community members to gather around a table to talk about problems. A major result of the event was the Muscogee County School District’s lead nutritionist joining the Columbus Food Oasis team to assist in tackling food issues within the school district.

Vernacular Georgia Tour Returns to River Valley Region

On October 25th, the Vernacular Georgia (VGA) members returned to the River Valley region for a historic architecture excursion. Eleven people from around the state of Georgia attended the tour led by RVRC historic preservation planner Allison Slocum and Ed Howard, a historic preservationist on Post. The group consisted of historians, architectural historians, historic preservationists, and other interested individuals. The Vernacular Georgia group has been in existence for around thirty years and has visited the River Valley region in the past.
Access2Independence’s “Money Follows the Person” Program Helps Participant Find Independence

With the help of Access2Independence’s “The Money Follows the Person” program, a man has gained some independence, pride, and little more dignity. Brian was born with a disability. His predicament limited his independence and made living without assistance difficult. But now, A2i has helped Brian transition into a nursing home, which has afforded him access to invaluable assistance with his condition, making life a little easier. Since his move, Brian has adapted to the new lifestyle and is adjusting well according to A2i workers. One worker said, “We were pleased to connect with Brian and watch his dreams of independence begin to come true.”

WIOA Participant Meeting Goals and Moving Forward

Noah Foster, a WIOA participant, came to Eckerd Connects needing to obtain his General Education Diploma (GED) to achieve his personal goals. Noah enrolled with the Eckerd Connects GED Plus services and earned his GED within 8 weeks. After obtaining his GED, Noah continued his training by enrolling in the Work Experience services to gain hands-on work skills. Noah was placed in Work Experience with the Sumter County Sheriff’s Department. Noah has exceeded his own expectations and is currently first in line for the next available employment position at the Sumter County Sheriff’s Department. CONGRATULATIONS to Noah on earning his GED and meeting your personal goals!

Tai Chi Sun Style 73 Forms With Dr. Paul Lam

RVRC Tai Chi for Arthritis Certified Instructors, Gail Simpson and Marie Peterson-Barnes, attended a workshop where Dr. Lam shared his knowledge and expertise by teaching numerous forms Tai Chi. His Tai Chi Programs have impacted millions of participants worldwide.

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Counties Take Measures to Protect Pataula Creek Watershed from Dumping

County road departments in the region have begun installing signage to address illegal carcass dumping within the Pataula Creek watershed. The illegal dumping of deer carcasses was noted as a contributing source of fecal coliform contamination in the watershed management plan which was completed in 2014. Several stream segments in the watershed are listed by GAEPD for exceeding the state water quality criteria. Visual surveys conducted during this time documented a number of dump sites in the watershed. Over twenty carcasses were noted in a single day during one event. Most commonly, remains were found dumped over bridges and/or directly in streams and along roadsides in remote rural areas. Water quality data collected during this time also linked higher levels of fecal coliform, a type of bacteria which at high levels indicates the possible presence of pathogens, to the beginning and end of deer hunting season. Signs will be installed at a total of 20 locations throughout the watershed. These locations were determined by RVRC staff and county road departments as areas frequently impacted by dumping. Signage will inform hunters about the illegality of carcass dumping and will provide contact information for the DNR Ranger Hotline where illegal dumping activity can be reported.

New RVRC Staff

Scott DeClue
Regional Planner

Scott DeClue is the newest member of the RVRC Planning Department. He is a regional planner focused on grant writing and community development. A recent graduate of Columbus State University, he studied technical writing and psychology while working as the editor of the student newspaper, The Saber. A Columbus resident since 1998, he grew up in the River Valley region and now looks forward giving back to the communities he has grown to know and love.

Sheree Stewart
HCBS Program Manager

Sheree Stewart is the new HCBS Program Manager and looks forward to helping seniors and people with disabilities. She received her B.S.N. degree from Albany State University and M.B.A. degree from Troy University. She has worked in hospice for the past 18 years mainly in quality and compliance roles. She enjoys being with family and friends, reading, and traveling.
Happy Holidays