

**COMMUNITY GREENSPACE PROGRAM**  
**FOR**  
**AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY, GEORGIA**  
**AS UPDATED OCTOBER 2002**

**Prepared by the Augusta-Richmond County Planning Commission**

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Community Greenspace program is a long range plan for the permanent protection of greenspace within Augusta-Richmond County. It provides policies and specific proposals for long term and short term greenspace preservation. The community greenspace program serves as the basis for the expenditure of grant funds from the Georgia Greenspace Commission, donated funds, and local funds toward the ultimate goal of preserving twenty percent of Augusta-Richmond County's land area as permanently protected Greenspace. The program also includes specific recommendations as to ordinance and rule changes that will promote greenspace preservation. This Community Program is essentially a continuation of the original Community Program adopted in November 2000.

Augusta-Richmond County consists of 210,029 acres including the former City of Augusta, the former unincorporated Richmond County, Fort Gordon, and the incorporated towns of Hephzibah and Blythe which have elected not participate in the Greenspace Program. Excluding Fort Gordon, the base acreage for the Greenspace program is 166,346 and Augusta-Richmond County's goal for permanently protected greenspace is 20 percent of the base, or 33,269 acres. Augusta-Richmond County expects to achieve the acreage goal by 2052.

This Community Program continues the effort to protect the most environmentally sensitive lands in Augusta-Richmond County which are the floodplains and surrounding areas of the Savannah River, the major tributary streams, and the Phinizy Swamp. It also targets land around the Augusta Canal. Since the adoption of the original Community Program Augusta-Richmond County has permanently protected 650 acres of greenspace. Of that total, 225 acres were City owned land around the Augusta Canal and Savannah River, and 155 acres are on Butler Creek, which was identified as the first priority area by the Augusta-Richmond County Commission. The Community Program proposes a continuous greenbelt around the developed portion of Augusta-Richmond County. It would begin on the Savannah River at the Columbia County line, linking to their trail system, extend along the levee system through the Augusta CDB linking with North Augusta, South Carolina's trail system, then extend along the levee to the Phinizy Swamp and finally along Butler Creek to Fort Gordon.

Augusta-Richmond County will revise its Zoning Ordinance to promote methods of development that result in the creation of permanently protected greenspace. We will receive donations of greenspace when appropriate, we will purchase fee simple ownership of greenspace properties or conservation easements over such properties where it is compatible with the Community Program, and we will place conservation easement over additional County owned properties. There will be a greenspace element in the Comprehensive Plan that will be adopted in 2003 so that our greenspace effort is compatible with other aspects of physical development.

There are numerous barriers to the achievement of the program goal. The primary barriers will likely be lack of funding. Augusta-Richmond County has contributed \$55,000 per year to a local land trust to facilitate the implementation of the program, and we realize that other funds, probably SPLOST and general funds, will be needed to achieve the 50 year goal.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

Augusta-Richmond County, Georgia has been known as the Garden City because of the beauty of its public open spaces and private yards and gardens. As the community has grown, however, land development has reduced the amount of open space within the urban area. With this growth has come shopping centers and subdivisions where there were once woods and fields, and outside the central city very few new areas have been created as permanent open space.

The establishment of the Georgia Greenspace program was extremely timely, as the disappearance of greenspace from Augusta-Richmond County has emerged as an issue as part of the new interest in growth management. It is now widely recognized that measures must be taken for the community to start to reverse the urban sprawl that has characterized the development of the past 40 years. The preservation of open space is clearly one of those measures. There is broad support for the preservation of greenspace as evidenced by the public input received at a public meeting held on September 4, 2000 and on September 10, 2002 (Appendixes A & B).

Augusta-Richmond County's Greenspace Program provides a plan for creating new greenspaces within the currently developed area and preserving substantial greenspaces during the course of future development. The Augusta-Richmond County Planning Commission administers this Community Greenspace Program. Executive Director George A. Patty is responsible for coordinating the program. The address of the Planning Commission is 525 Telfair Street, Augusta, Georgia 30901. The telephone number is 706-821-1796, the Facsimile number is 706-821-1806, and Mr. Patty's E-mail address is gpatty@augustaga.gov. The FEI Number for the County is 582204274.

Richmond County includes Augusta-Richmond County and the incorporated towns of Blythe and Hephzibah. Augusta-Richmond County is a consolidated government including the former unincorporated portion of Richmond County, and the former City of Augusta. It has the powers of a municipality and also those of a County under Georgia Law.

### 3. COUNTY DESCRIPTION

#### a) Physical Characteristics

Augusta-Richmond County is located in east central Georgia. It is a typical medium-sized fall line City, being located at the shoals of the Savannah River. From a physiographic standpoint, it is dominated by the sand hills, but the northern part of the county is representative of the piedmont and the southern part is on the coastal plain. Figure A is a map of Augusta-Richmond County. The northern part of the county characterized by rolling topography, clay or loamy soils, and relatively steeply defined streams. The sand hills providence is characterized by deep sandy soils often lacking tributary streams, and gently rolling topography. The extreme southern part of Augusta-Richmond County is relatively flat with a wide variety of soil types, and it is dominated by floodplains in many areas.

The Savannah River and its tributaries drain the entire county. The river separates the eastern edge of the county from South Carolina and generally flows southeasterly. The major tributary streams are Rock, Raes, Rocky, Butler, Spirit, and McBean Creeks. They all flow generally from west to east and form a well deferred trellis pattern throughout Augusta-Richmond County. About 25 percent of the land area of Augusta-Richmond County is comprised of floodplains and stream terraces. The elevation along the Savannah River ranges from 100 feet to 140 feet, above mean sea level. The elevation at Hephzibah, in the southern part of Augusta-Richmond County, is 435 feet. The elevation of some high ridges on Fort Gordon Military Reservation is 500 feet or more.

The first Europeans to visit Augusta-Richmond County were the expedition of Hernando Desoto around 1540. The area was settled by English fur traders just prior to 1736 when General Oglethorpe planned and laid out the City of Augusta. Richmond County was formed from St. Paul's parish in 1777. After the Revolutionary War Augusta briefly served as the Capital of Georgia. By 1820 Augusta was the thriving terminus for riverboats, barges, and wagon trains carrying staples and produce to be shipped to overseas markets. In the 1830's industries were established and by 1850 the Augusta Canal was completed and flour and textile mills were using it as a power source. After the Civil War the canal was enlarged and the resulting industrial explosion led to the designation of Augusta as the "Lowell of the South.

There is a rich collection of remnants from Augusta-Richmond County's early history. There are few buildings from the colonial period, but there are many that predate the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. These include commercial buildings, churches, and homes in the older parts of the City. The Augusta Canal and the mills located on it are perhaps our greatest historical treasures. They are still relatively in tact, and the Augusta Canal Authority was formed to assure their preservation and promote their use and improvement.

FIGURE A

The Savannah River and the Augusta Canal are Augusta-Richmond County's dominant recreational resources. The River and the Canal offer boating, fishing and other passive recreational opportunities. There are numerous access points and areas reserved or developed for use of the River and the Canal. The tributary creeks, however, are generally inaccessible, and there are few developed recreational areas on them. Fort Gordon offers some recreational opportunities to civilian and military residents of Augusta-Richmond County. There are also numerous city parks and three regional parks located within Augusta-Richmond County. The Phinizy Swamp is an 8,000 acre area east of downtown Augusta that offers numerous recreational opportunities for public and private use. Included within this area are the Phinizy Swamp WMA and the Phinizy Swamp Nature Park.

Because of Augusta-Richmond County's location, climate, and physiography it offers a unique natural environment, combining temperate seasonal weather, rolling topography, lush vegetation, and abundant surface water resources. Augusta began to grow as an urban area over a century ago, and during the 1940-1960 period it grew numerically by leaps and bounds. Until about the 1970's, however, land was used relatively conservatively, and the geographic size of the urban area changed slowly. After 1970, however, the area of Augusta-Richmond County has increased at an increasing rate, and this sprawling development threatens to overwhelm the natural environmental features that were the original attraction of the area.

Augusta-Richmond County consists of 210,029 acres, or 329 square miles. Included within these boundaries are the incorporated towns of Blythe and Hephzibah with 695 and 11,976 acres respectively. Both are located in the southwestern part of the county in what were formerly rural settings, and both have experienced growth of population and land development in recent years. Also included is the Fort Gordon Military Reservation at 44,286 acres (within Augusta-Richmond County). Fort Gordon is the home of the Military Signal School and the Eisenhower Medical Center. The reservation is sparsely developed and much of it is available for limited public access and use. The remainder of the land area was formerly divided between the City of Augusta (13,108 acres) and the Unincorporated County (139,964) until they were consolidated in 1996.

Countywide, excluding Fort Gordon, it was estimated in 1992 that 14 percent of the land area was in residential use, 3 percent was in commercial use, 3 percent was in industrial use and 16 percent was in other developed uses. The remaining 70 percent was either in farming or forestry, or it was undeveloped. These numbers are currently being updated as part of the process of creating a new Comprehensive Plan that will be completed in 2003.

Arguably, there is a lot of land in recreational or conservation use in Augusta-Richmond County. The actual areas will be covered elsewhere in this Community Program, but if Fort Gordon is counted then the area is large. Lands owned by Augusta-Richmond County along the canal and riverfront, regional parks, and State owned lands would put the total between 48,000 and 50,000 acres, roughly 24 percent of the land area of Augusta-Richmond County. This acreage is misleading; however, because Fort Gordon offers only limited recreational opportunities and some of State-owned facilities also offer only limited opportunities. A more realistic percentage of the land within Augusta-Richmond County that is readily available for public recreation is 2 percent. The amount of land that is permanently protected for conservation is much less than 2 percent, as will be covered elsewhere in this Community Program.

Growth occurred in a rather compact form during the first 220 years of the City's existence, so the area occupied by the former City of Augusta and its environs is relatively densely developed, with the typical concentric pattern of central business district,

manufacturing/warehouse district, and residential/commercial districts. There are two regional parks within this area and abundant open space along the river and the canal, most of which is owned by Augusta-Richmond County. After 1960, however, the nature of growth and development changed drastically. With increased ownership of automobiles came suburbanization and the density of development decreases as you move out from the former city. Unfortunately as this sprawling development has occurred, attention has not been given to preserving recreational opportunities and open space until recently.

b. Rapid Growth Areas

Overall, there have only been moderate increases in population, housing, and employment in Augusta-Richmond County as evidenced by the .05 percent annual rate of population increase over the 1990-2000 census period. There are, however, areas of significant growth as a result of redistribution from older areas to peripheral areas, resurrection of some inner city and downtown locations, and suburban developments related to infrastructure and highway improvements.

Beginning about 1970, the area between Butler Creek and Tobacco Road began to develop. There were several large subdivisions initiated that now contain over 1,000 homes. In the 1980's that area began to become saturated and the area south of Tobacco Road began to develop. Between 1980 and 1990, over 3,000 housing units were constructed in the area south of Tobacco Road in Richmond County, and the population increased 58 percent, almost twice the rate of increase of any other area. In 1995 it was estimated that there were 67,643 acres of undeveloped land in south Augusta-Richmond County. Accounting for floodplains, wetlands and other environmentally restrictive areas, that represented an estimated 76 percent of the remaining developable land in Richmond County. The current Comprehensive Plan, which is being updated, projects that south Richmond County will see an additional 2,900 acres developed between 1996 and 2015. Most of this development was projected to be residential, including 7,000 new homes.

A second relatively rapid growth area is known as Bel Air, which is located west of the Bobby Jones Expressway, north of the Gordon Highway, and south of Columbia County. Columbia County is one of the State's fastest growing counties, but that growth has only recently spilled over into the Bel Air area of Richmond County due to the lack of public sewerage. Between 1980 and 1990 the growth of population in Bel Air was 54 percent. During that period just under 1,000 housing units were constructed in Bel Air. That is almost half of all housing units that now exist in the area. It was projected that 2,652 acres would be developed between 1996 and 2015, most of it residential, accommodating 6,350 housing units.

There is also projected to be substantial commercial and professional development in the Bel Air area, especially at the new intersection of I-20 and Wheeler Road and along the newly constructed Dyess Parkway which connects I-20 and Fort Gordon. There are extensive development plans for these areas and it represents the last expanse of developable land remaining in Augusta-Richmond County with the exception of the area of south of Tobacco Road.

There are redevelopment activities in the inner city and downtown areas that are uplifting those areas, although they fall short of the numerous changes in the other fast growth areas. The state-supported Augusta Neighborhood Improvement Corporation and several faith-based non-profit groups have started to construct meaningful numbers of new homes in some of the dilapidated inner cities neighborhoods. Although they probably number less than 100 units collectively, they have been successful and the numbers should continue to

climb. In the downtown area, housing has been built on the riverfront in various locations, and loft residential development in the CBD is probably the most popular new housing in Augusta-Richmond County. Several large abandoned buildings have been renovated for high-end housing and other projects are being planned.

c. Population

The following table summarizes the 2000 Census population of the various components of Richmond County:

<u>JURISDICTION*</u>	<u>2000 CENSUS</u>	<u>% COUNTY</u>
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY	199,775	100%
BLYTHE	713	.3%
HEPHZIBAH	3,880	1.9%

d. Future Land Use Plan

The City of Augusta and unincorporated Richmond County adopted a joint Comprehensive Plan in 1992 to replace a plan that was woefully out of date and to conform to the Georgia Planning Act of 1989. As a result Augusta and Richmond County achieved status as Qualified Local Governments. In 1993 and 1994 the political climate changed and an effort to draft a new land use element was initiated. As a result Richmond County adopted a Comprehensive Land Use Plan in August 1995 which has served as a general long-term guide for development of the Unincorporated County. The future land use plan map is listed as Appendix E. After the completion of the 1992 Comprehensive Plan, the neighborhood plans for most of the former City's neighborhoods were updated. These neighborhood plans serve collectively as the guide to development in the former City.

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\*Richmond County is a consolidated government which includes the former City of Augusta, former Unincorporated Richmond County, Fort Gordon, and the municipalities of Blythe and Hephzibah. Neither Blythe nor Hephzibah wish to participate in the Greenspace Program.

In 1999 the Augusta-Richmond County Planning Commission initiated the process of updating the 1992 Comprehensive Plan. To date two series of ten public hearings have been held, and meetings with stakeholders have been held toward the development of the new Comprehensive Plan. The staff is now finalizing data collecting and policy development toward completion of the Plan in mid 2003.

The Neighborhood Plans for the former City all provide strategies for revitalization of depressed areas and encourage development programs to create new energy for those areas. The "Augusta 2000 City Center Master Plan" provides an aggressive plan for the downtown area to follow up on the \$25 million in improvements that have recently been made in that area. It is largely devoted to making downtown Augusta a tourist attraction and a local activity center.

The 1995 Comprehensive Plan for Unincorporated Richmond County was in many ways a turning point in local land use policy. It included many growth management-oriented initiatives that were somewhat radical in 1995, but most have been or are being implemented. It is anticipated that the new Comprehensive Plan when completed, will be heavily growth management-oriented, expanding on the policies of the 1995 plan.

The 1995 plan sought to slow the outward expansion of the urban area in several ways;

- ❑ It called for the rezoning of three large areas totaling 17,000 acres to a residential classification that does not permit manufactured homes. Manufactured homes are widely recognized as agents of sprawl;
- ❑ It called for preferential treatment for developers in infill areas relative to sewerage and other services;
- ❑ It called for higher density infill development ;
- ❑ It sought to limit commercial development to areas where it is already established and to nodes at major intersections;
- ❑ It called for industrial development to be limited to several planned areas, and it sought to limit all spot zoning; and
- ❑ It sought to limit the extension of utilities to those areas where substantial growth was planned.

The 1995 plan also made recommendations relative to environmental and recreational issues. Among them was essentially that many additional recreation areas are needed in a hierarchy ranging from small neighborhood parks to a few large passive recreational areas. The future land use map that was part of the Plan showed all of the areas proposed for greenspace in the Community Program as undeveloped land, but there were no specific recommendations made relative to Greenspace or conservation of open space. The new Comprehensive Plan, when completed, will be compatible with this Community Greenspace Program.



**4. STATEMENT OF VISION AND GOALS**

a. Required Statement.

Through the actions described in this program submittal, Augusta-Richmond County commits to promote the permanent protection of 33,269 acres of greenspace, which constitutes 20 percent of the geographic area of the County. Augusta-Richmond County proposes to achieve this goal by 2052.

b. Calculation

Following is a calculation of Augusta-Richmond County's Greenspace Goal:

<u>FACTOR</u>	<u>ACRES</u>
Total County Area	210,632
Less Fort Gordon	44,286
Equals Base Acreage	166,346
20% of Base: County's Goal	33,269

c. Proposed Areas for Greenspace Protection.

Augusta-Richmond County's vision for the Greenspace Program is that it will result in a community where developed areas are interspersed with permanently protected natural open spaces where many of the remaining significant natural areas have been protected, and where the Savannah River/Augusta Canal/Phinizy Swamp/Butler Creek form a seamless greenbelt with passive recreational/trail areas surrounding the heavily urbanized portion of the area. Appendix F is a map of Augusta-Richmond County that illustrates the areas where permanent protection has been achieved and where it is proposed.

The Savannah River frontage and the surrounding area are a world class natural resource owned primarily by the Augusta-Richmond County. In 2002 we began the process of permanently protecting the Riverfront properties by placing perpetual conservation easements over the northernmost 225 acres. During the next few years the rest of the Riverfront (that has not been developed) will be scrutinized for the possibility of permanent protection. The lands around the River, including the Levee south of downtown area are proposed for possible future protection. The portion of the Riverfront above downtown is traversed by a pedestrian/bike trail that we would eventually link to the Lock and Dam Park south of the downtown area and the Phinizy Swamp Nature Park, a distance of 20 miles. This trail system is planned to link to Columbia County's system (6 miles) and North Augusta, South Carolina's system (6 miles).

In addition to placing easements over land that is owned by Augusta-Richmond County, easements may be purchased, or fee simple ownership may be purchased for lands that are adjacent to the River. Land purchases would only occur when it is necessary to prevent development of riverfront or surrounding purposes. For the purpose of this Community Program the Augusta Canal will be considered as part of the City's Riverfront Lands. It lies parallel to the river above Augusta. In the downtown area it is an engineered structure that would not qualify as Greenspace under the Program definition. The properties to be protected that are located on or adjacent to the Savannah River and the Augusta Canal are a mixture of floodplains and other lands that would serve as a river buffer. Included would be numerous scenic vistas, river and canal access points, historic resources, pedestrian trails, and passive recreational areas.

The Phinizy Swamp is an area of approximately 8,000 acres that occupies the eastern portion of Augusta-Richmond County. It is a landform created by the changing path of the Savannah River over time. Some of it is farmed, some of it has been (or is being) mined, and most of it has been timbered. An expressway crosses it and it is surrounded on two sides by industry and on one side by the Savannah River. Within the area, however, is a system of natural areas that is unique and wonderful. The Phinizy Swamp includes several large properties that we will seek to permanently protect. Most of it is within the floodplain of the Savannah River or its tributary streams. Some of the lands to be protected within the Phinizy Swamp are owned by Governments – Augusta-Richmond County and the State of Georgia - and we will continue to pursue easements over those areas. We will also pursue easements over privately owned properties but if necessary to prevent development of inappropriate properties then we will purchase properties fee simple.

Butler Creek traverses Augusta-Richmond County from west to east as a major tributary of the Savannah River. We have aggressively pursued easements and fee simple ownership of this floodplain and buffer area as the first priority of the Greenspace Program. This pursuit will continue until we have completed a greenbelt from Fort Gordon on the west to the Phinizy Swamp on the east. Our first choice is to achieve protection through easements, but the experience thus far is that fee simple purchase is the landowner's preference.

Raes Creek is predominantly a piedmont stream, and the lands surrounding the lower portion are heavily urbanized. Ideally we would protect the remaining floodplain and natural buffer areas but the cost of land and easements in this area has proven to be prohibitive. If the opportunities present themselves to reasonably protect such lands then they will be seized. We may also use Greenspace funds, if appropriate, to participate in the purchase of repetitive flood loss properties along Rae's Creek. The upper reaches of Rae's Creek lie within the Bel Air area, which has been documented as a fast growing area. The area around the Creek is relatively undeveloped and we will attempt to protect this area by easements and fee simple ownership.

The other main tributary streams in Augusta-Richmond County are Rock, Rocky, Spirit and McBean. We will accept donations of easements or property on any of these streams, or their minor tributaries where there are significant environmental resources or where there is an opportunity to achieve some sort of connectivity with other resources or public area in the future. We may consider purchasing land or easements in these areas if the environmental quality is significant enough to merit expenditures of Greenspace or other funds.

The following table illustrates the estimated acreage by land type that we purpose to protect to achieve the 20 percent goal and the vision that has been expressed. It must be pointed out that our program is oriented toward river and stream floodplain and buffers, but within those areas that will be protected are numerous stream access points, corridors for pedestrian trails or wildlife movement, scenic vistas, steep slopes, wetlands, erodable soils, passive recreational areas and possibly commercial forest lands.

LANDS TO RECEIVE PERMANENT PROTECTION

LAND TYPE	ACRES	STATUTORY GOALS	TOOLS FOR PROTECTION
Floodplain (100 yr.)	20,000	A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation Easement</li> <li>• Permanent Restrictive Covenant</li> <li>• Fee Simple Acquisition</li> </ul>
Other River/Stream Buffers	13,269	A-C-D-E-F-G-H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation Easement</li> <li>• Permanent Restrictive Covenant</li> <li>• Fee Simple Acquisition</li> </ul>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33,269</b>		

**5. EXISTING TOOLS**

a. Listing of Tools.

Augusta-Richmond County has an aggressive Greenspace Program directed by the Augusta-Richmond County Planning Commission. The purpose of the program is to permanently protect as much land as possible in a manner consistent with the Community Greenspace Program. Augusta-Richmond County has utilized local funds to contract with a local land trust to market the program and to do the negotiations for the acquisitions, whether easements or fee simple purchases. We have overcome some initial problems and we are steadily progressing toward our goals. It is anticipated that the relationship with the Land Trust will continue as long as funding is available.

Augusta-Richmond County is assessing all of the properties it owns to determine whether permanent protection is warranted and possible. While many locations are being debated we have already placed easements over a substantial number of acres, and we will continue to do so in the priority areas.

Augusta-Richmond County accepts donations of properties that warrant acquisition based on a rating scheme that is included as Figure B. It was necessary to develop this rating process because there were numerous efforts to dedicate small unconnected undevelopable properties to Augusta-Richmond County that would have collectively become maintenance and enforcement nightmares.

Another tool that is being used to pursue the goals of the Greenspace Program is the community outreach effort which is the responsibility of the Central Savannah River Land Trust as part of their contract with Augusta-Richmond County. The Land Trust has published and circulated high quality brochures advocating the dedication of conservation easements, and they speak to individual and civic groups in an effort to promote permanent protection of greenspace. They have held a symposium of conservation easements and will continue to promote the program.

There are numerous tools that temporarily protect lands described in the Greenspace Program. Many of these tools will permanently protect greenspace as long as they are in effect, although they fail to meet the statutory definition of permanent protection. The current

Zoning Ordinance utilizes prescriptive zoning as a basis for regulating land use. It currently includes several provisions that further the protection of Greenspace. One such provision is the Planned Unit Development (PUD) Section of the Ordinance that allows flexibility, including mixture of land uses, within a development in exchange for at least 25 percent open space. A second provision of the Zoning Ordinance is similar to the PUD section except that it does not permit non-residential land use. This section, classified as R-1E, promotes flexibility in mixture of housing types and densities in exchange for 25 percent open space. It has proven to be much more popular than PUD. The Zoning Ordinance also provides overlay zoning over the lands surrounding the Savannah River. This overlay zone does not include a specific greenspace set aside, but it sets standards for development and limits land uses along the River.

FIGURE B

Several ordinances and amendments to existing ordinances were added in response to the Title V Environmental Planning Criteria included in the Georgia Planning Act, which will have an impact on future greenspace. They include the following:

- ❑ Groundwater Recharge Area Protection Ordinance - set new minimum lot area standards for areas where public sewer is not present, thus promoting development in presently sewerred areas and discouraging development where sewer is not present.
- ❑ Savannah River Corridor Protection District - an amendment to the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, which preserved a 100 foot natural, buffer along the Savannah River.
- ❑ Water Supply Watershed Ordinance - provided for additional land use regulation within area above the City's raw water intake on the Savannah River. This Ordinance will be expanded in 2003 to cover the area above Fort Gordon's intake per agreement with DCA. This will require a buffer and limit development in the upper part of the Butler Creek Watershed.
- ❑ Amendments to the Site Plan Regulations and the Subdivision Regulations requiring proof of federal approval to impact wetlands shown on the National Wetland Inventory Map. This assures the protection of such wetland areas consistent with Federal regulations.

Augusta's Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance was recently amended to make it very difficult to develop property lying within the 100-year floodplains, thereby temporarily protecting this area as Greenspace. Among provisions of the new ordinance are:

- ❑ Limitations on grading in floodplain, no fill to be brought into floodplain;
- ❑ Lower half of floodway fringe to be treated like floodway;
- ❑ Limitation beyond FEMA standard regarding how no rise certification may be done; and
- ❑ Three foot freeboard for finished floors within the 100-year floodplain.

This strengthening of the Flood Ordinance has impacted greenspace in two ways. First, it has meant that some properties cannot be developed. Second, it should encourage the owners of those properties to consider granting easements to permanently protect their greenspace or to gift it to the City or another conservation group. It is estimated that 18 percent of the land area of Augusta (excluding Fort Gordon) lies within 100-year floodplains. Appendix G includes attachments of the pertinent section of the Flood Ordinance, Zoning Ordinance, and other Ordinances.

A 1540 acre tract owned by the Georgia Department of Transportation and leased for 50 years to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to manage and operate as a wildlife management area constitutes greenspace that is temporarily protected. This tract is in the heart of the Phinizy Swamp area. It was acquired by DOT to mitigate the impact on wetlands of the Bobby Jones Expressway. DOT pledged to attach restrictive covenants to the property as permanent protection but they have not done so to date. Augusta-Richmond County will work with both parties to assure that permanent protection is achieved.

As stated previously, Augusta-Richmond County is in the process of amending the current Comprehensive Plan, which does not specifically provide for the Community Greenspace Program, although the future land use plan does show the priority greenspace areas as

undeveloped land. A new Comprehensive Plan, which is consistent with the Community Greenspace Program, will be adopted no later than December, 2003.

b. Required Statement

Augusta-Richmond County hereby commits to use existing tools described in this Community Greenspace Program to give permanent protection to greenspace within its jurisdictional boundaries to the best of its ability.

c. Required Table

The following properties have been permanently protected as greenspace:

<b>PROPERTY</b>	<b>OWNERSHIP</b>	<b>ACREAGE</b>	<b>PUBLIC ACCESS</b>
Phinizy Swamp Nature Park	City of Augusta	234.0	Yes
Butler Creek – Boy Scout Tract	City of Augusta	75.0	Yes
Butler Creek – Parham Tract	City of Augusta	3.5	Yes
Butler Creek – Sibley Tract	City of Augusta	50.0	Yes
Butler Creek – Spence Tract	City of Augusta	25.5	Yes
Spirit Creek – S Specialties Tract	City of Augusta	36.0	Yes
Savannah River/Augusta Canal	City of Augusta	215.0	Yes
Savannah River Islands	City of Augusta	10.0	Yes
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>649.0</b>	

d. Publicly Owned but Unprotected Greenspace

There are several large tracts that are publicly owned by various bodies that are not currently permanently protected that we are working on to achieve permanent protection. Preceding the required table is some explanation that is necessary. The first tract is the 1540 acre tract owned by the Georgia Department of Transportation and leased to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources via a 50 year management agreement. DOT agreed to put restrictive covenants over the property to mitigate the impact of Bobby Jones Expressway, but never did. We will continue to pursue the protection of this tract, which is in the heart of the Phinizy Swamp, but no commitment can be made that it will happen.

The second large tract is the 570 acre "Spirit Creek Educational Forest" owned by the Georgia Forestry Commission. There are apparently statutory reasons that the Forestry Commission cannot "permanently" entail properties that it owns. We are working with them and DNR to solve this problem, but once again, no commitment can be made.

Augusta-Richmond County owns 479 acres, more or less, located between downtown Augusta and the New Savannah Lock and Dam. Some of this tract would not qualify due to the existing land use, and some of it maybe needed for future development. The City will evaluate the tract in 2003 and if enough of it appears to warrant permanent protection, then surveys or GPS based mapping will be initiated. There are currently no known plats or surveys of these properties.

The City owns almost 1,500 acres on the Savannah River near the New Savannah Lock and Dam in the Phinizy Swamp area that will be considered for permanent protection. It includes approximately 650 acres used and proposed for sewerage treatment facilities and

234 acres included in the Phinizy Swamp Nature Park. Of the remaining 616 acres, most can probably be protected, but surveys or GPS based mapping must be done to delineate the eligible area as there are no current plats or surveys. These studies will be initiated in 2003. The actual amount to be protected cannot be determined without the geographic information.

There are other tracts owned by Augusta-Richmond County that could be converted to greenspace. These properties are being investigated to determine whether permanent protection would be appropriate, and some will be protected. A commitment cannot be made at this time to protect all of them because the information necessary to make those decisions is lacking.

PUBLICLY OWNED GREENSPACE TO RECEIVE PERMANENT PROTECTION

<u>Facility Name</u>	<u>Ownership</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Date to Achieve Protection</u>	<u>Public Access</u>
Phinizy Swamp WMA	GDOT	1,540	2052	Yes
Spirit Creek Forest	GA Forestry Comm.	570	2052	Yes
River/Levee	Augusta-Richmond	479	2052	Yes
River/Phinizy Swamp	Augusta-Richmond	616	2052	Some
Gordon Hwy. Ponds	Augusta-Richmond	35	2003	Yes
Boy Scout Pond ET AL	Augusta-Richmond	35	2004	Yes
Skinner Mill Retention	Augusta-Richmond	28	2004	No
Butler Creek/Woodlake	Augusta-Richmond	<u>50</u>	2003	No
TOTAL		3,353		

e. Land in Private Ownership to be Permanently Protected

The remainder of the goal (aside from c and d) to protect 33,269 acres by 2052 will be achieved as a result of Augusta-Richmond County accepting and purchasing conservation easements and fee simple ownership of private properties, and restrictive covenants or conservation easements placed on private property as a result of private initiative or in response to land development ordinances. The following table projects the amount of land currently in private ownership that Augusta-Richmond County will protect.



PRIVATE LAND TO BE PROTECTED

	<u>Estimated Acreage</u>	<u>Protection* Methods</u>	<u>Juris- diction</u>	<u>Date to Achieve</u>
100-Year Floodplain	15,000	1, 2, 3, 4	A - RC	2052
Floodplain (>100 Year)	5,266	1, 2, 3, 4	A - RC	2052
Other River & Stream Buffer	3,000	1, 2, 3, 4	A - RC	2052
Non Riparian Wetlands	2,000	1, 2, 3, 4	A - RC	2052
Groundwater Recharge Areas	2,000	1, 2, 3, 4	A - RC	2052
Commercial Forest Lands	<u>2,000</u>	1, 2, 3, 4	A - RC	2052
TOTAL	29,266			

f. Summary of c, d, and e

The following table summarizes the current and proposed protection methods and acreage from subparagraphs c, d, and e:

<u>Current Ownership</u>	Type of Permanent Protection		<u>Proposed For Permanent</u>	<u>Total Acreage</u>	<u>% of County</u>
	<u>Existing Permanent</u>	<u>Currently Designated for Permanent</u>			
Federal	-	-	-	-	-
State	-	-	2,110	2,110	1%
Local	649	-	1,244	1,893	1%
Private**	-	200***	29,066	29,266	18%
TOTAL	649	200	32,420	33,269	20%

\*Methods are:

- 1) fee simple acquisition
- 2) conservation easement acquisition
- 3) restrictive covenant
- 4) negotiated or privately initiated easements/covenants

\*\*This includes land now in private ownership that may be purchased by Augusta-Richmond County as part of the Greenspace Program.

\*\*\*Tracts in priority area of Butler Creek.

## 6. BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING THE GOAL FOR GREENSPACE PROTECTION

This section discusses the obstacles that Augusta-Richmond County has encountered and expects to encounter in the implementation of this plan to protect 33,269 acres of greenspace.

### a. Legal Barriers

There are some legal barriers to achievement of the goal, some of which are solvable and some of which are not. Our evaluation of these legal barriers is as follows:

- 1) The original Community Greenspace Program proposed the creation of a "Greenspace Mitigation Bank" to be funded by extractions from the developers of large projects. It is the City Attorney's opinion that statutes do not exist to support this proposal and that it would be illegal to proceed with it.
- 2) The Spirit Creek Educational Forest, owned by the Georgia Forestry Commission cannot be counted as greenspace because of a prohibition in Georgia Law or their rules regarding permanently entailing properties.
- 3) The Georgia Greenspace Statue and Administrative Rules could provide greater flexibility regarding what qualifies as greenspace. Greenspace is simply too narrowly defined to reasonably hope to attain the goal. Many properties that Augusta-Richmond County owns cannot be counted due to technicalities. Examples are the City's constructed wastewater wetlands, and numerous properties that serve as retention ponds, cemeteries, various types of rights-of-ways that will never be developed but fail to qualify.
- 4) Augusta-Richmond County's Zoning Ordinance contains provisions for planned unit developments and infill developments that we feel are flexible and user friendly, but we need to incorporate other concepts into the Zoning Ordinance that would promote the permanent protection of greenspace.
- 5) Augusta-Richmond County's Zoning Ordinance allows essentially urban residential development to occur in agricultural zones. This has been a facilitator of urban sprawl.
- 6) The tax-shelter incentives in Federal and State law are insufficient to cause significant numbers of landowners, especially the owners of large important tracts, to donate or sell conservation easements over their properties. There are no provisions in Georgia Law for income tax credits or any other incentive like there are in North Carolina and other states.

### b. Structural Barriers

Following is a listing of structural barriers to achieving the Greenspace protection goal:

- 1) The primary obstacle to achieving the Greenspace Goal is and will be money. We estimate the absolute minimum cost of achieving the goal to be in excess of \$39 million, and that would require substantial donations and private actions. State funding at the current levels won't be enough, and taxpayer dissatisfaction with local government spending appears to be at an all time high.
- 2) Within the most urban areas the cost of land is high, even where regulations currently preclude development. This makes any permanent protection

- difficult, and it makes continuously protected areas nearly impossible to achieve.
- 3) There have been many requests to gift or sell small tracts of land to Augusta-Richmond County. Most of these tracts have been undesirable tracts in the middle of subdivisions or other developments. Initially, we wanted to facilitate the gifting of these type properties, but we quickly realized that owning a myriad of scattered, small tracts with no continuity and no appeal would become a maintenance and enforcement nightmare for Augusta-Richmond County.
  - 4) In spite of our outreach efforts there is still confusion about the Local and Georgia Greenspace Programs and very little understanding of conservation easements and their advantages on the part of the general public.
  - 5) To date we have promoted easements over fee simple acquisition with no success. All landowners with one exception have wanted to sell their properties outright. There have been several reasons given, but the tax deduction incentive is insufficient, and many property owners simply want to dispose of the property if it has no development potential.

## **7. TEN YEAR STRATEGY TO REMOVE OR MITIGATE LEGAL AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS**

This section describes the activities that Augusta-Richmond County is committed to taking to overcome the obstacles identified in the preceding section, and also activities that would have to be taken by others to overcome the obstacles.

### **a. Legal Barriers**

- 1) The proposals in the original Community Greenspace program relating to extractions from developers cannot be achieved because there is no State enabling legislation. Instead, Augusta-Richmond County will modify the Zoning Ordinance to encourage voluntary preservation of greenspace in new developments. If the Georgia Code is amended, then the extractions will be reconsidered.
- 2) The Law or rule that prohibits the Georgia Forestry Commission from permanently protecting their properties needs to be modified to provide a procedure under which it can be done. We suggest that the Greenspace Commission initiate the appropriate action.
3. We suggest that the Greenspace Commission provide more flexibility in defining greenspace. We have reviewed the proposed rule changes in this regard and feel that the definitions are still too restrictive when compared to the program goals.
- 4) Augusta-Richmond County will amend the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to provide for Conservation Subdivisions. Whether such uses would be allowed within any single-family zone based on overall density by right of by special exception will have to be debated. Allowing them by right would make the concept much more attractive to developers and the staff favors that method.
- 5) We will amend the Zoning Ordinance to increase the minimum lot size in agricultural zones from 1/3 acre to 2 acres or more. This will slow the conversion of land in rural areas from agriculture and forestry to urban uses, and it might make permanent protection more attractive if low cost development is not an option.

- 6) We suggest that the Greenspace Commission promote a bill to allow State income tax credits for donated conservation easements. We have found that the present tax deductions are simply not attractive enough to entice owners of significant properties to make a donation.

b. Structural Barriers

- 1) Local governments will have to seek funding other than Georgia Greenspace funds if they hope to achieve the 20 percent goal. In Augusta-Richmond County we will seek Federal grants and other funding where it is available. We will continue to provide funds for the activities of the Central Savannah River Land Trust from general funds so long as the financial ability exists to do so. We will include significant funding in the next two phases of the SPLOST program for support of the Community Greenspace Program. This funding will be used to acquire land and easements, and also to improve the greenway that is being acquired for trails, minimal parking and access improvements and passive recreational facilities. In addition, we would like to see Georgia follow some of the other states like Florida that have spent tremendous amounts of money to protect greenspace.
- 2) The solution to the problem of the high cost of land and easements in the most developed areas lies in the ability to spend more money and in the passage of Federal and State laws that would provide better incentives for donations and the sale of easements. There is no apparent action that Augusta-Richmond County can take in the next few years to achieve better results in the urban sections of Raes Creek and Rock Creek, and in some cases on the Augusta Canal.
- 3) Augusta-Richmond county will continue to determine which tracts are desirable for the Greenspace Program by evaluation of each donation proposal against the ranking scheme that is illustrated in Figure B. This will assure that we do not become responsible for vacant lots that would be high maintenance and enforcement problems, but that we do continue to receive donations of properties that have possibilities for connectivity and also properties that have significant greenspace value on their own.
- 4) We will continue to provide outreach through the Central Savannah River Land Trust using the same methods that we have used, and we will also review methods used by other Greenspace Communities and Land Trusts for new ideas in regard to community outreach.
- 5) The difficulty we have experienced in acquiring easements could be cured by more attractive incentives such as tax credits, which would have to be initiated at the State level. To some extent, our outreach efforts cited above should help educate and persuade landowners to donate or sell easements. We will continue to review methods used by other Greenspace Communities and Land Trusts for new ideas in regard to this problem.

c. Barriers, Strategies, and Timeline for Accomplishment

The following table is a summary of the barriers and strategies described in subparagraph (a) and (b) above.

<b>BARRIERS, STRATEGIES, AND TIMETABLE FOR ACCOMPLISHMENT</b>			
<b>BARRIERS</b>	<b>STRATEGY TO REMOVE BARRIER</b>	<b>JURISDICTION</b>	<b>DATE TO IMPLEMENT</b>
L-1 Extractions proposed in original CGP are not supported by State enabling legislation, therefore probably illegal	a) enactment of enabling law, b) changes in Zoning Ordinance to promote voluntary contributions	State Aug-Richmond	2003
L-2 Can't convert Georgia Forest Commission land to permanent protection	Changes to the law or rule	State	?
L-3 Lack of flexibility in Greenspace law and rules re: definition of Greenspace	Change law and rules to liberalize the definition	State	?
L-4 New provisions are needed in the Zoning Ordinance to promote Greenspace protection	Amend the Zoning Ordinance to provide for Conservation Subdivisions	Aug-Richmond	2004
L-5 New provisions are needed in the Zoning Ordinance to deter urban development of agricultural land	Amend the Zoning Ordinance to require large lots in Agricultural districts	Aug-Richmond	2004
L-6 Tax-shelter provisions of Federal and Georgia law are insufficient to encourage permanent protection by easement or deed restriction	Change Federal and Georgia Tax Codes to provide for Tax Credits	Federal State	?
S-1 Lack of funds	a) seek Federal Grants b) continue to fund Land Trust c) fund Greenspace Program with SPLOST #5 and #6 d) increase State funding	Aug-Richmond Aug-Richmond Aug-Richmond State	2003-2013 2003-2013 2005 and 2010 ?
S-2 High cost of urban land	a) more funding per S-1 b) provide better incentives per L-6	State/Aug-RC Federal/State	2003-2013 ?
S-3 Selection of appropriate tracts for Augusta-Richmond County to accept as donations	a) continue to evaluate against rating formula	Aug-Richmond	2003-2013
S-4 Lack of public understanding and cooperation with the Greenspace Program	a) outreach through the Land Trust b) research for better methods	Aug-Richmond Aug-Richmond	2003-2013 2003-2013
S-5 Landowners favor fee simple transaction instead of easements	a) provide better incentives per L-6 b) outreach through the Land Trust c) research for better methods	Federal/State Aug-Richmond Aug-Richmond	? 2003-2013 2003-2013

## 8. FUNDING\*

### a. Allocation of Greenspace Funds

No municipality within Augusta-Richmond County has elected to establish a separate greenspace trust fund. Augusta-Richmond County will receive the entire greenspace grant award for FY-03.

### b. Sources and Use of Funds

The proposed use of funds for Augusta-Richmond County's Community Greenspace Program has been described in Sections 3-7. As previously stated, the overall program goal is to permanently protect 33,269 acres of Greenspace by 2052. The vast majority of cost of the Greenspace program would be incurred in acquisition of properties. Acquisition will be done through fee simple ownership purchases, easement purchases, donations of properties and easements, and actions to protect properties through easements and covenants that are privately initiated or initiated by developers in response to regulations and/or incentives.

The additional acreage to be acquired was calculated by deducting the acreage already protected, and the land identified for protection that is publicly-owned, from the overall goal. This indicates that the acreage that is now in private ownership to be protected over the 50 year period is 29,266. If one-third of this acreage must be protected through fee simple purchase and the \$2040 average cost per acre for the land acquired to date through the greenspace program is applied, then the cost of acquisition of fee simple ownership would be \$19,900,89. If one-third of this acreage must be protected by purchasing easements at a cost of \$1000 per acre, which is a reasonable amount for which to acquire development rights to land that has no present development potential, then the cost of acquiring such easements would be \$9,755,333. This community program assumes that the remaining one-third of the land to be protected will be donated to Augusta-Richmond County or privately subjected to conservation easements or restrictive covenants. The acquisition cost of donated land, easements, and purchasing protected properties includes the cost of appraisals and surveys and other eligible costs may be increased. The cost of acquisition services is projected to be \$500,000.

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\* For the purpose of this section and throughout the community program, funding is expressed in constant 2002 dollars

The following table summarized the projected cost of acquiring the property interests that are necessary to permanently protect Augusta-Richmond County's Greenspace goal.

ESTIMATED TOTAL COSTS TO ACQUIRE  
PROPERTY INTERESTS

Fee Simple Purchases	\$19,900,879
Easement Purchases	9,755,333
Acquisition Services (appraisals, surveys, title Work, closing and closing fees for donated Land)	500,000
TOTAL	<u>\$30,156,212</u>

The source of funding for implementing the entire acquisition Greenspace as outlined above is illustrated in the following table. This table does not include the projected value of dedicated or gifted land and easements. We project that value to average \$1500 per acre for a total of \$14,632,999. This would bring the total value of the acquisition to \$44,789,211.

ESTIMATED TOTAL SOURCE OF FUNDS  
(2003-2052)

State Government Funds	
Greenspace	\$25,000,000
Governor's Discretionary Grant Fund	1,000,000
Local Government Funds	
General Revenue	0
SPLOST	3,556,212
Federal Grant Funds	
Hazard Mitigation Grant Program	\$ 100,000
Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996	500,000
TOTAL ACQUISITION COSTS	<u>\$30,156,212</u>

c. Planning

Planning for the Greenspace program includes staff time related to management of the program, preparation and submission of reports, record keeping, and public relations. This activity is estimated to cost \$10,000 annually. Augusta-Richmond County will continue the relationship that has been established with the Land Trust as long as funding permits. The cost of this service, which include acquisition, public relations and stewardship is \$55,000 per year. This means the total cost over the 50 years of planning, management, and administration of the program will be \$3,250,000, and it will most likely be done by Augusta-Richmond County through general funds.

d. Improvement of Greenspace Properties

Improvement of Greenspace Properties will be the responsibility of Augusta-Richmond County, although there are possibilities for grant assistance from sources such as the National Heritage Area program (Canal) and Enhancement Funding. We estimate the total cost of improvements to greenspace properties for trails, passive recreational facilities, and support facilities to be \$5,000,000. This will be covered primarily from SPLOST funding, but some general funds may be used.

e. Other Costs

The costs of operations, maintenance and security for the Greenspace properties will be substantial. The cost will increase over the 50 year period as properties are added to the inventory. These costs will be funded from Augusta-Richmond County's general fund and services will be provided through the Parks and Recreation Department, the Public Works Department, and the Sheriff's Department. The total cost of these services over the 50 years is projected to be \$1,000,000. Stewardship activities, which would ensure that the conditions for permanent protection are not violated, have been included in Subparagraph c.



**9. SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND SCHEDULE**

a. Required Statement

Augusta-Richmond County expects to achieve its goal of greenspace protection in 2052

b. Permanent Protection Acreage Summary

The following table summarizes the acreage expected to be under permanent protection when Augusta-Richmond County attains its goal of 20% permanently protected greenspace.

SUMMARY OF GREENSPACE PROTECTION UPON  
ATTAINING THE GOAL

Ownership	Acreage	% of A-RC
Federal	0	0
State	2,110	1%
Local	1,893	1%
Private*	<u>29,266</u>	<u>18%</u>
TOTAL	33,269	<u>20%</u>

c. Permanent Protection of City Owned Land

The following table summarizes the acreage that Augusta-Richmond County currently owns that is currently protected or will be permanently protected.

PERMANENT PROTECTION OF LAND CURRENTLY  
OWNED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

<u>Tools for Protection</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Year to Provide Protection</u>
Permanent Conservation Easements	1,883	2050

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\*This includes land now in private ownership that may be purchased by Augusta-Richmond County as part of the Greenspace Plan

d. Strategy for Acquiring New Lands

This table summarizes the Augusta-Richmond County's strategy for acquiring new lands to protect as greenspace.

ACQUIRING OF NEW LANDS BY AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY

<u>Tools for Protection</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Year to Provide Protection</u>
Fee Simple Acquisition		
Purchase	9,755	2052
Donations	4,878	2052
Conservation Easements		
Purchase	9,755	2052
Donations	<u>4,878</u>	2052
TOTAL	29,266	

e. Use of Local Development Regulations

This table describes changes to local zoning and development regulations that Augusta-Richmond County will use to encourage the permanent protection of greenspace.

USE OF ZONING AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS FOR GREENSPACE PROTECTION

<u>Tool for Protection</u>	<u>Year to Implement</u>
Incorporate the Community Greenspace Program into the Comprehensive Plan	2003
Amend Zoning Ordinance and Development Regulations to provide for Conservation Subdivision	2004
Amend Zoning Ordinance to require 2 acre minimum Lot size in agriculture zones	2004