

Community, College Participate in County Planning Effort

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Most students who attend College of Coastal Georgia have an opportunity to participate in one or more service-learning classes. Since 2011, CCGA has used service-learning as the anchor of its quality enhancement plan and has not just developed a rich program, but a culture of service at the college. These faculty-developed courses allow students to participate in organized service experiences that respond to a wide spectrum of community needs.

One such need was identified for me by county commissioner Allen Booker and the Glynn County Planning and Zoning department. The county released their 2018 comprehensive plan last fall which, among other things, identified areas in our community in need of redevelopment.

One area that stood out was the Arco community, which roughly spans from Altama Avenue to Newcastle street (East to West) and Q Street to Community Road (South to North). Last year, Commissioner Booker worked to have a soccer field put in at Paulk Park within the Arco Neighborhood as an anchor project for greater revitalization in the area; that park is now under renovation and the field has been completed. The larger vision for revitalization will be laid out in the community redevelopment plan that the County Planning and Zoning department initiated, but quickly realized needed to be spearheaded by the community itself; this is where service-learning comes in.

This semester, 10 students in my upper division Managing State and Local Government class worked to create tools to help assist the Arco/Washington Heights/Lawrenceville Neighborhood Association in their efforts to inform the planning department through the redevelopment process. The students created a community profile document that laid out everything from street light locations to demographics to land use data, and a short survey that the neighborhood association can use to gather feedback from interested parties in the area.

Beyond gaining some satisfaction that they were able to participate in the revitalization of one of the county's oldest neighborhoods, the students learned some valuable lessons about successful planning processes.

Namely, by turning the process over to the neighborhood association, the county recognized that they cannot foresee or understand every variable or need that may impact the project. Planners have tremendous technical expertise, but those living within the community hold valuable information and perspectives that can only make the planning process more effective.

Involving residents and community leaders in the planning process also ensures long term viability and stability. City councils, planners, commissioners and managers come and go, but as we learned through this class, many of Arco's residents have been and intend to be around for many years. Building their feedback into the process improves the likelihood that this redevelopment plan will last through the years.

While our CCGA students played a limited role in this redevelopment process, the Arco/Washington Heights/Lawrenceville Neighborhood Association co-chairs, Odis Muhammad and Moses Clark, have a long road ahead in gathering perspectives, ideas, and feedback from their community.

Involving the public is never an easy task. I am optimistic, however, that the benefits to this approach will be plentiful and lead to long-term sustainability in the community.