**2013 Transforming Local Government Conference: Call for Sessions Application**

1. **Cover Sheet Information:**

*Case Study Title:*

**Collaboration Promotes Sustainable Growth for a Small Towns in the Rural South**

*Case Study Category:* Partnership

*Jurisdiction Name:* Newton County Board of Commissioners

*City/County Manager/ Name:* Kathy Morgan, Chairman

*Would you like the application to be considered for our Rapid Fire Session?* Yes

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**Interview Notes**

Challenge, Approach and Innovation Qualities: The challenge is growth at a seriously rapid pace. Went from rapidly growing to being seriously impacted by fiscal constraints. 2008 all community partners came together to create a sustainability model for the future. Create a method to work with federal, state and other legislative players effectively. Plan built from data and logic.

Transferability: development of a model that works. The leadership collaborative is neutral ground. Consistent plan that is followed through. Seeing savings based on the planning decisions. Allows a politician, political cover when a group decision is made.

Results: Aligning ordinances, plans, goals for growth. Job growth, cost savings. Allows for coordinated effort. Ability to get things done in a more effective manner. Provides a foundation for moving things forward. Created a consistency for the community regardless of elected officials.

Presentation: base presentation on PREZI, with specialty pieces used to gear toward particular audience.

Possible to be located in Economic Vitality.

1. **Synopsis**

The Intent of this application is to showcase the exemplary partnership and community engagement taking place in Newton County, GA that can be applied to small towns and cities around the country. The overarching theme that arises from this case study is collaboration: Successful stewardship ultimately depends on the cultivation and promotion of communitywide, cross-sector collaboration to achieve goals.

*Overview*

Newton County, Georgia, is a rural county that lies directly in the path of urban sprawl from greater Atlanta. In recent years the county has been flooded with new growth that conflicts with historical patterns of development and places huge demands on local infrastructure and services. Working through the Center for Community Preservation and Planning, a local nonprofit community organization, and the Newton County Leadership Collaborative, which represents local governments and key stakeholders, the county and its jurisdictions have moved from fragmentation to collaborative action for a smarter approach to growth. Together, they have developed the 2050 Plan, a framework for sustainable growth designed to align local plans, ordinances, land use decisions, and capital investments across the county. The result is a visionary approach to small-town growth and development in the rural South and beyond.

The local officials, the center, and community are guided by a framework that has come to be known as the Newton Model, which focuses on a Place, a Process, and a Plan.

**The Place**

The building known as The Center provides a neutral space for the process to occur. Renovated from a former single-story storefront and turned into a community facility, the building is the physical manifestation of the Center’s mission. At this building, the Center hosts, facilitates, documents, and supports collaborative planning in Newton County, based on the principles of “Think, Plan, Act.” It includes a large meeting room, up-to-date data projector and AV technology, wall space for large drawings and displays, and the capacity to stage everything from workshops and lectures to receptions for up to 200 people. Among the tools employed at the Center facility are: community meetings, forums, and lectures; displays on the ongoing work of the Center and leadership collaborative; offices for the Center and related research and planning projects; and a general facility for other community events and gatherings.

Since its inception, the Center has hosted more than 2,000 events, forums, meetings, and planning sessions involving approximately 20,000 participants, including citizens, planning advocates and experts, local government representatives, and community stakeholder groups. In aggregate terms, this means that nearly one in every five county residents has been a participant—a staggering community engagement accomplishment that builds a strong foundation for sustained, hands on stewardship.

Under the guidance of the Center, in 2007 the leadership collaborative took part in a hands-on planning exercise, developed by a retired professor from Georgia Tech, investigating population growth and

open space allocations for the county. Simultaneously, the Center engaged an MIT planning student (and longtime local resident) to assess the county’s carrying capacity as permitted by existing local ordinances. The findings of these two concurrent exercises were revealing: Local ordinances in Newton County were effectively tuned to promote urban sprawl; and the impacts of such sprawl on Covington, Oxford, and neighboring small communities were profound.

The leadership collaborative concluded that the more density they could design into local plans, the more land, water, and other resources they would conserve countywide. As a result, the Center and the leadership collaborative resolved to launch a comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional planning process that would investigate alternative approaches to growth management and planning countywide. They called it the 2050 Plan.

**The Process**

The Center’s process, which has evolved over the years, incorporates elements of public education and deliberative dialogue, stakeholder involvement, technical planning activities, outreach and community engagement, and ongoing research and advocacy.

In recent years, the Center has focused on stakeholder involvement and technical planning through the leadership collaborative and development of the 2050 Plan, a collaborative, countywide initiative to develop sustainable small-town growth alternatives to urban sprawl in Newton County, Georgia. The Newton County Leadership Collaborative is a multijurisdictional alliance of community leaders focused on planning and includes key local government officials, the school board, water and sewer authority, and all city representatives. This group was instrumental in securing adoption of the 2050 Plan by nine local governments and key stakeholder groups.

The 2050 planning process focused on gathering data and input from local opinion leaders, key stakeholders, and other contributors with specific knowledge or expertise. It included a series of workshops on such topics as economic development, housing, schools, and social issues. Community-based stakeholder advisory groups were engaged to help develop the strategies.

Through this initiative, the Center developed an alternative growth scenario for the county. It revealed a startling fact: The county could accommodate upward of 400,000 people (more than four times its current population) on just 30 percent of its land base if growth in the county was accommodated through a network of interconnected, compact, walkable communities. Additionally, the remainder of the county’s land base could be preserved to accommodate agriculture and protect natural resources, along with tourism, recreation, and green enterprises.

In short, this analysis confirmed that Newton County could continue to grow, sustain a larger population, and build its economy with far fewer negative impacts on its land base, all while preserving its core values and small-town way of life. (A subsequent financial analysis sponsored by the Center estimated that the county could save an estimated $3.3 billion by using this approach as opposed to the current sprawl approach.)

Based on this analysis, the planning process produced a final report, “The 2050 Plan: Building a Sustainable Community,” which presented a build-out strategy for the county and its local communities to the year 2050.

In a fittingly bold conclusion to the process, in 2010, members of the leadership collaborative presented the 2050 Plan to their respective organizations and agencies, along with a recommendation for its adoption. In a joint resolution, all nine bodies signed on in support of the plan. Subsequently, a goal was established that ordinances covering the three zones identified in the 2050 Plan would be developed by 2012 and that incorporation of the plan by local governments would begin thereafter.

Now that there is an overall growth framework and decision makers are on board, the Center is turning its attention to broadening the base of community involvement and support for this new approach to growth. The tools employed during this new phase will be all about stewardship: media outreach; electronic outreach, including e-mail blasts and updates on Twitter and Facebook; traveling displays; and, important in the rural South, outreach in the form of face-to-face contact.

In 2012, The Center, working in partnership with the leadership collaborative, launched a new engagement process called Celebrate Our Home. The 2050 Plan was rolled out across the county, with 30 large traveling exhibits that showcase the community’s land, culture, and people. In Southern style, the process emphasized “fun, food, and facts.” In short, the process was as much about community building as it is about introducing the 2050 Plan. The Center’s goal was to reach out to all of the county’s residents, emphasizing the 61 percent of the local population who could be considered newcomers to the area.

**The Plan**

The newly adopted 2050 Plan was developed to guide both future planning of local governments and the ongoing work of the Center. As an overarching framework, the 2050 Plan now must be vetted fiscally, integrated into local plans, and translated in local codes and ordinances. This process is already well under way, led by the research of the Center and planning initiatives of the City of Covington, City of Oxford, and the other members of the leadership collaborative. Tools employed by the Center to facilitate this process include: continued grant-funded research and advocacy, ongoing meetings and education of the leadership collaborative, and their serving as a resource to local governments as they begin to implement the new strategy for growth.

Since the adoption of the joint resolution, the Center has launched a number of more detailed technical studies to validate the plan’s findings and support its implementation. Using formulas developed by a professional economist, for example, each local jurisdiction soon will be able to input its own numbers to determine costs of specific development decisions.

Today, local governments are busy implementing 2050 Plan initiatives. The City of Covington and Newton County have jointly revised their ordinances for a designated growth corridor in the Covington area, in compliance with the new plan. Covington has also adopted a formbased code promoting mixed-use development for greater densities and decreased auto dependency as the basis of all planning in the city. Following the local tradition of collaboration, Covington’s new codes are intended to serve as a model for new ordinances in all urbanizing areas of the county. And, with the help of students working through the University of Georgia’s Metropolitan Design Studio, hosted in Covington each spring semester, the City of Oxford is updating its master plan.

Kay B. Lee, one of the founders of the Center and its current director, emphasizes the significance of these accomplishments: “All of these things happening locally is a kind of miracle in itself, given the lack of resources in this community. If we can set a more sustainable growth pattern and save millions of dollars in the process, would it not be reasonable to assume that any community, anywhere, can replicate what we have done?”

1. **Presentation Style**

Our PREZI Interactive presentation will point out the specific advantages of collaboration and government interaction by showing what Newton County might look like in 2050, by proving how planning infrastructure will save the community $3.3 billion, and by describing how each organization is working together to complete their piece of the whole to implement, including the process by which ordinances are being blended.