

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

Section 7

Kevin A. Cowper

*Gainesville City Manager
Candidate Report*

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Cover Letter and Resume

Section 7

Kevin A. Cowper
1668 Presley Court
Auburn, AL 36830
(334) 502-1141
KevinCowper@aol.com

February 11, 2016

Colin Baenziger
Colin Baenziger & Associates

Dear Mr. Baenziger:

Please accept this letter as my application for the position of City Manager for the City of Gainesville. As demonstrated on my resume, I have 25 years of experience in city and county government including 20 years in executive management positions at the department director level and above. My background includes extensive management and budgeting experience as well as significant experience in community planning and economic development that I believe will be an asset to Gainesville. I have excellent management and leadership skills together with a strong work ethic, high moral character and enthusiastic attitude. Throughout my career, I have worked closely with elected and appointed officials, business leaders, developers, community leaders, neighborhood organizations and employee groups. My track record is one of achievement and effectiveness and my wide-ranging experience uniquely qualifies me for this position.

As Assistant City Manager for the City of Auburn, Alabama, I am involved in all operations of the City but am directly responsible for the oversight of several departments and for the production of the bi-weekly City Council meeting agenda materials. I am currently overseeing a large scale capital program focused on transportation enhancements, downtown redevelopment and redevelopment of an aged commercial corridor. Prior to my appointment as Auburn Assistant City Manager, I spent approximately 12 years working on the Gulf Coast in Baldwin County, Alabama and Pensacola, Florida. I have been instrumental in managing organizational change in my current and previous positions.

In addition to my work related experience, I am heavily involved in professional and community activities. I hold a Master of City and Regional Planning Degree and am certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). I am also recognized by the International City/County Managers Association as a Credentialed Manager (ICMA-CM). I am seeking a challenging position in a progressive organization where I can contribute to the long-term success of the community. I believe that I have the personal and professional skills necessary to serve as Gainesville City Manager. I have attached my resume for your review and would welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications further in an interview. Please contact me at the above telephone number or address if you desire to discuss my qualifications further. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kevin A. Cowper

Kevin A. Cowper, AICP, ICMA-CM

Section 7**KEVIN A. COWPER, AICP, ICMA-CM**

1668 Presley Court
 Auburn, Alabama 36830
 (334) 502-1141
KevinCowper@aol.com

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Dynamic professional with extensive local government executive management experience and proven record of accomplishment in:

Community Planning • Growth Management • Economic Development • Redevelopment • Neighborhood Development & Relations • Budgeting & Financial Management • Capital Planning & Budgeting • Project Management • Organizational Change & Development • Strategic Planning •

Management - Highly responsible self-starter with strong work ethic, enthusiastic attitude and excellent management skills. Decisive leader and creative problem solver with inclusive management style. Strong budgeting and financial management skills. Experienced in managing organizational change.

Communication - Persuasive communicator with well-developed presentation, facilitation, and negotiation skills. Ability to present complex information in a concise and understandable manner and to build consensus among diverse and competing interest groups. Able to develop productive relationships with elected and appointed officials, colleagues, citizens, media and staff at all levels.

Strategic Planning - Comprehensive strategic thinker with ability to see the big picture, establish goals and design specific programs and actions to produce desired results.

Leadership - Highly regarded and accomplished leader with vision and skill to lead large organization.

EXPERIENCE

Assistant City Manager – City of Auburn, Alabama. 2007 to the present. Auburn (population 60,000) is part of the Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Area (population 140,000) and is home to Auburn University. The City has approximately 600 employees in 12 departments with budgets totaling over \$120 million, including a General Fund budget of \$75 million.

Responsibilities:

- Oversee activities of the City's Neighborhood, Growth, Development & Infrastructure Business Unit which includes the Planning, Public Works (engineering, construction/maintenance, traffic), Environmental Services (solid waste, recycling, ROW maintenance, fleet services, animal control) and Water Resource Management (water, sewer, stormwater) departments consisting of 170 employees and budgets totaling approximately \$50 million.
- Coordinate with departments to develop annual work programs, bi-annual operating budgets, capital budgets, and six-year capital plan. Align budgets with department goals, work programs and adopted plans, and evaluate department directors based on results achieved.
- Oversee downtown activities including parking management, redevelopment, infrastructure improvements, beautification efforts, and downtown events and festivals.
- Review, edit and assemble bi-weekly City Council meeting agenda materials. Prepare and present various reports for City Council and City Manager and attend all City Council meetings. Conduct City Council meetings in absence of City Manager and serve as Acting City Manager in absence of City Manager. Respond to City Council inquiries and concerns.

Accomplishments:

- Prepared a reorganization plan for the City's Neighborhood, Growth, Development & Infrastructure Business Unit including functional responsibilities and personnel to better align department resources with the City's strategic objectives.
- Evaluated department operations and implemented organizational, personnel, and operational changes to improve performance and coordination between departments. Introduced inter-departmental project management teams to improve project design and delivery.

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- Prepared a growth management strategy to effectively manage growth including annexation, extraterritorial planning, development agreements, development costs and impacts, creation of improvement districts, infrastructure planning, downtown redevelopment and corridor redevelopment.
- Oversaw downtown improvements including parking, landscaping, streetscapes, street signs and way-finding, pedestrian crossings, improved lighting and beautification projects. Oversaw establishment of a downtown entertainment district and preparation of a downtown redevelopment plan and a downtown parking plan.
- Developed a Leadership & Innovation Team consisting of approximately fifteen emerging leaders to provide leadership training opportunities and promote innovation in the city organization.
- Promoted the High Performance Organization (HPO) model as a means of improving employee and organizational performance.

Community Development Director - City of Pensacola, Florida. 2001 – 2007. Pensacola (2007 population 56,000) is a full service coastal city with a 2007 operating budget of approximately \$236 million and is the central city of a two-county metro area with a population of over 420,000.

Responsibilities:

- Member of the City's executive management team advising the City Manager and City Council on various issues affecting city government operations. Served as principal staff to the City Council's Economic and Community Development Committee and was responsible for producing and presenting bi-weekly meeting agenda materials.
- Administered all operations and directed all programs of the Community Development Department with a 2007 budget of \$2.5 million.
 - Planning services including comprehensive planning and current planning activities (zoning, subdivision, historic districts).
 - Environmental services including Brownfield and Superfund Site remediation and redevelopment.
 - Inspection services including plan review, permitting, inspections, building/zoning code enforcement, and business licensing.
 - Economic development programs and initiatives designed to stimulate economic activity including the Pensacola Enterprise Zone.
 - Neighborhood development programs including the Urban Infill and Redevelopment Area Program and the Weed and Seed Partnership Program.
- Oversaw operation of the Pensacola Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) with a 2007 budget of \$5.5 million derived from tax increment revenues.

Accomplishments:

- Amended the City's comprehensive plan and land development regulations to support neighborhood preservation and downtown/inner city redevelopment objectives.
- Prepared several neighborhood strategic plans for target neighborhoods and secured funding to implement recommended actions including tax increment financing.
- Developed and oversaw programs and initiatives designed to improve the physical health of neighborhoods and to improve neighborhood relations and increase neighborhood involvement.
- Oversaw environmental services program to manage environmental issues including formation of an Environmental Advisory Board and remediation and redevelopment of Superfund Sites and Brownfields.
- Oversaw hurricane response and recovery activities including post-disaster damage assessment, construction permitting, contractor licensing, temporary housing, code enforcement, and operation of information call center as well as long term recovery plans in coordination with FEMA and the Florida Department of Community Affairs.

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Director of Planning and Zoning - Baldwin County, Alabama. 1995 - 2001. Baldwin County is a high growth coastal county located on the Gulf of Mexico in the Mobile metropolitan area.

Responsibilities:

- Advised County Commission on planning and zoning matters. Attended County Commission meetings and presented all planning and zoning related matters.

Accomplishments:

- Established the Planning & Zoning Department and all operating procedures.
 - Drafted amendments to the County's Planning and Zoning Enabling Legislation enacted by the State Legislature as Act No.98-665.
 - Drafted the *Baldwin County Zoning Regulations* adopted by the County Commission in 1999 to manage growth and development.
 - Directed the *Tensaw River Initiative*, which resulted in the designation of the Tensaw River as Alabama's second *Outstanding Alabama Water*.
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EARLY CAREER

Land Development Planner - Shelby County, Alabama. 1991 - 1995.

Planning Research Assistant - Regional Economic Development Center. Memphis, Tennessee. 1989 to 1991.

Planning Intern - Shelby County, Alabama. June 1989 to August 1989.
Mobile, Alabama. March 1988 to May 1988.

EDUCATION & TRAINING**Master of City and Regional Planning**

University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee (1991).

Bachelor of Science

University of South Alabama, Mobile, Alabama (1988).

Leading, Educating, and Developing Program (LEAD)

Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia (2013).

ACTIVITIES & ASSOCIATIONS

- Member of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) since 2000.
 - ICMA Credentialed Manager (ICMA-CM) since 2010.
 - 2016 ICMA Conference Planning Committee.
 - Member of the Task Force on Financing ICMA 2012-2013.
 - ICMA Emerging Leaders Development Program 2008 graduate.
 - Member of the Alabama City/County Management Association since 2007. Board Member 2013-2014, Secretary/Treasurer 2014-2015, Vice President 2015-2016.
 - Member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) since 1994 (Certificate No. 10626).
 - Member of the American Planning Association since 1988. Secretary of the Alabama Chapter 1998-2001.
 - United Way of Escambia County (FL) Board of Directors (2006-2007).
 - Escambia County (FL) Financial Literacy Coalition Chairman (2006-2007).
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Candidate Introduction

Section 7**KEVIN A. COWPER, AICP, ICMA-CM**

Education

Master of City and Regional Planning, University of Memphis (1991).

Bachelor of Science, University of South Alabama (1988).

Leading, Educating, and Developing Program (LEAD), Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia (2013).

Experience

Assistant City Manager – City of Auburn, Alabama.	2007 - Present
Community Development Director - City of Pensacola, Florida.	2001 - 2007
Director of Planning and Zoning - Baldwin County, Alabama.	1995 - 2001
Land Development Planner - Shelby County, Alabama.	1991 - 1995
Planning Research Assistant - REDC.	1989 - 1991
Planning Intern - Shelby County, Alabama.	1989 - 1989
Planning Intern - Mobile, Alabama.	1988 - 1989

Background

The City of Auburn, AL is located on Interstate 85 in east-central Alabama between Montgomery, AL and Atlanta, GA. The City is home to Auburn University and its 27,000 plus students. Auburn's most recent population estimate is approximately 62,000 residents. It is part of the Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Area with a population over 140,000 residents. Auburn consistently receives accolades and recognitions as a high quality place to live, work, and do business. For example, CollegeValuesOnline.com recently listed Auburn as #12 in a list of the 50 "Best Small College Towns." Auburn is home to GE Aviation and numerous other high tech and research companies. The City enjoys a high rate of population growth resulting from the high quality of life offered by the community.

Auburn is a full service city with approximately 670 FTE's in twelve operating departments. The annual budget is approximately \$120 million which includes a General Fund budget of approximately \$75 million. Other major funds include sewer at \$15 million, water at \$11 million and solid waste at approximately \$5 million. Currently I oversee the activities of the City's Neighborhood, Growth, Development & Infrastructure Business Unit which includes the Planning, Public Works (engineering, construction/maintenance, traffic), Environmental Services (solid waste, recycling, ROW maintenance, fleet services, animal control) and Water Resource Management (water, sewer, stormwater) departments consisting of 170 employees and budgets totaling approximately \$50 million.

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The three most significant issues facing Auburn are:

Growth. The general population is increasing rapidly and maintaining city services, infrastructure and quality of life expectations is increasingly challenging. The student population is also increasing and maintaining a positive partnership with Auburn University is critical in providing infrastructure, housing and public safety services.

City organization. Related to the growth mentioned above, the city is continually challenged to provide services in an efficient, friendly and innovative manner. The City organization is well positioned to meet these demands but some change in the organizational structure is necessary to meet changing the demands of the community and the vision of the city council expressed in multiple planning documents. Several key positions will become vacant in the near future and the opportunity exists for some restructuring to better align the organization and encourage innovation to meet the vision of the future.

Economic development. The city has a very active economic development program to encourage industrial and commercial development. Continued partnership with Auburn University has generated significant growth in research and technology particularly in the jointly funded Research Park. Significant opportunities exist to encourage redevelopment in the downtown urban core as well as older commercial corridors. The following strategy has been used to generate significant reinvestment in these areas:

- Preparing plans for target redevelopment and infill areas.
- Enacting development regulations to ensure appropriate (re)development.
- Investing in infrastructure improvements and upgrades to stimulate (re)development.
- Providing targeted incentives (where necessary) to encourage appropriate (re)development.

General Management Style

The Gainesville City Manager position is appealing to me because it offers an opportunity for career advancement and growth in a position for which I am highly experienced and qualified. Gainesville offers a high quality of life and a family friendly environment. This position offers an opportunity for me to contribute my skills and knowledge to a progressive organization and community. My innovative, collaborative approach together with my technical skills and personal attributes make me uniquely qualified for this position. I have significant experience in planning, community development, downtown and neighborhood redevelopment, public finance and economic development. I have also been instrumental in managing organizational change in my current and previous positions. On a personal level, this is the right position at the right time in the right community. I am 51 years of age and am ready to pursue the next level of my career path...progressing from assistant city manager to city manager. I believe that my experience and

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qualifications are extremely well suited to this position and that I have the personal and professional skills necessary to serve as the City Manager for Gainesville.

My management style has developed through my collective experiences, insights, observations and training over the past 25 years that I have worked professionally in city/county government. Through these experiences, I have developed excellent management and leadership skills. I believe that effective management and leadership begins with clear vision and direction. I think comprehensively and act strategically to lead, manage and motivate my staff to produce desired results. Staff is involved in decision-making and cross-departmental teamwork and coordination is always stressed to achieve results. Department directors and major division managers are given strategic direction and empowered to think out of the box to produce results while being held accountable for reaching goals and fulfilling expectations. I highly value personal and professional integrity and I manage and lead by example. I am confident in my ability to lead and manage, and others are confident in me. Coaching, learning, continuing education and celebrating success are ongoing activities. I am approachable, friendly, humble, fair, organized, and consistent while maintaining high energy, enthusiasm and a sense of humor. The work environment for my employees is always pleasant and challenging for motivated employees. As a long time manager I have dealt with many sensitive issues ranging from personnel to political. My approach to handling such issues is to be fair, honest, consistent, and above all else ethical at all times.

Over my 25 years of experience I have been able to develop productive relationships with elected and appointed officials, colleagues, citizens, media and staff at all levels. Feedback I receive from these individuals is complimentary and positive. Current and former elected officials with whom I have worked over the years would likely say that I am professional, ethical and highly engaged in working to better the community. The Auburn City Manager has provided very positive feedback regarding my work and ability to motivate staff to get major projects accomplished. The former Pensacola City Manager identified my strengths as a “progressive and innovative leader and department director, follows through on implementation of new initiatives, always willing to be challenged and accept additional responsibilities, responds extremely well to diffuse confrontational situations and is committed to excellence in customer service.” As part of my management approach I routinely “round” my staff and engage in brief but personal discussions to stay in tune with them and their work and home activities. This activity keeps me in touch with staff and provides a mechanism for me to receive input and feedback in a relaxed atmosphere. My door is always open and I am approachable at all times. Feedback I receive from employees is positive and respectful. I recently completed a 360 degree evaluation and was very pleased with the results and feedback I received from those who work for me. Knowledgeable, flexible, organized, calm, visionary, passionate, professional, genuine are some of the words used to describe me by those who work for me.

I believe my strength as a leader lies in my ability to think strategically and to organize resources to accomplish tasks. I utilize this approach in developing plans, work programs and budgets as well as in designing and carrying out programs and capital projects. Recently, I have successfully undertaken several large-scale capital projects utilizing staff, skills and resources from multiple

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departments. The use of cross-departmental teams has now become systemic in the Auburn organization. The success of this approach can best be described by team members..."[he] has a unique ability to cohesively pull together project-based teams with members from diverse backgrounds, departments, and fields to accomplish organizational goals. He always makes sure that each team member understands their individual role and importance in the big picture"...[he] is very good at getting members from various city Departments together to solve problems or to have a unified approach to completing a project. [He] clearly articulates the vision and expectations for the project, sets goals and timelines as appropriate and follows up to ensure staff are meeting those goals."

In terms of weaknesses, I have come to understand that my calm demeanor and desire to listen first may sometimes be misunderstood. Experience has taught me to assert myself as a leader and to gauge a group or situation quickly and act assertively while assuring that all perspectives are heard.

The performance of the departments that I directly supervise is evaluated through the development of an annual work-program that is linked to the budget. Annual department head appraisals are then based on achieving goals outlined in the work-program. The City of Auburn engages a survey firm to perform an annual assessment of city services. The survey results are used to identify community needs and priorities to evaluate performance of specific programs and services.

Early in my career, I was selected as the first professional planner for Baldwin County located on the Alabama Gulf Coast. Here, I had the opportunity to make a significant difference in the future growth and development of an environmentally sensitive and geographically diverse area. During my tenure, I was able to build a very high quality planning and zoning department and implement a sustainable comprehensive plan and unified zoning ordinance. The unified zoning ordinance would prove to be a monumental achievement requiring extensive communication and technical ability. After two years of effort, the *Zoning Regulations* were unanimously adopted by the County Commission. I was able to complete this project successfully because I was able to build consensus between the various participants in the process by listening and understanding concerns while maintaining my focus on the overall project goal.

More recently, I have had the opportunity to work on a new vision for Downtown Auburn. This began with a community-wide planning process and identification of opportunities for the future. Last summer, the "Corner Construction" project was completed in a very condensed timeframe. The massive project completely redeveloped the main intersection in Downtown Auburn know as Toomers Corner. With the intersection closed for four months, and downtown business owners and citizens endured limited access and traffic delays. However, the project enjoyed widespread support and was completed on time cumulating in a community celebration "come home to the corner." While this project had the potential to create poor relations with the business community and general public, I was particularly proud of our communication and outreach efforts that kept all stakeholders involved and up to date.

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Following Hurricane Ivan in 2005, the Pensacola City Council charged me to develop a consensus redevelopment plan for a historic waterfront neighborhood near downtown. The character of the area, property values, neighborhood vitality, waterfront access and waterfront views were some of the many issues to be considered. Of course, there was significant disagreement on the future vision between neighborhood home owners and waterfront property owners and developers. Following a planning process with significant public involvement and input, a plan was approved. Unfortunately, the plan did not generate any significant redevelopment; therefore, I consider it a failure. I learned that while consensus is important in the planning process, a plan must be based in economic reality to succeed.

Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to work with some incredibly talented professionals. I've been fortunate to hire many great employees and to develop very productive relationships with the vast majority of them. Unfortunately, there have been some instances where employees must be terminated. I've overseen terminations that were relatively straight forward because the employee violated city policy; even after receiving counseling and additional probationary time in some cases. The most difficult separation I have been involved with was a department director. The employee was a very talented and knowledgeable individual; however, personality and public interaction was an issue. After significant coaching it was clear that the individual could not meet our team oriented approach and customer service expectations. On a personal level, this was probably the most difficult time I can recall in my professional life. However, the organization benefitted from this separation.

Gainesville is a healthy, vibrant, well-managed community offering its residents an outstanding quality of life. Challenges for the community that I see include:

- Providing increasingly better services while receiving fewer financial resources with which to operate. This requires Gainesville to continually assess program performance in meeting citizen needs, and to seek new and more innovative means of delivering services through improved operational and organizational efficiencies, engaged employees, and use of technology.
- Managing financial resources in a sustainable and transparent manner. Maintaining the City's excellent bond rating and financial position are key to maintaining the quality of life that residents enjoy and the level of services they expect.
- Maintaining effective and productive relations with the University of Florida and Santa Fe College is paramount. I see the presence of two institutions of higher education as a significant challenge and opportunity for the City. Infrastructure, public safety, and economic development are all areas of potential synergy and cooperation. Of course, being home to and taking care of 50,000 university students is a responsibility of upmost importance.
- Maintaining downtown Gainesville as the center of the community is of critical importance. Providing a vibrant downtown center for dining, entertainment, hospitality and culture is vital to the economy and to the image and character of Gainesville.

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- Leveraging Gainesville’s assets, such as the high quality environment, educational institutions, downtown, great neighborhoods, and the historic home town character, are all means to economic development that should be explored.

My first six months in Gainesville will be a time of listening and learning. A time to learn about the community and the vision for the future. A time to learn about and assess city operations and its financial position. A time to meet with elected officials, employees, citizen groups, business groups, and university officials. A time to think about a future strategic direction...

Over my career, I have been able to develop very good relationships with the media. An electronic search of newspapers will identify dozens of articles in which I am named and quoted. The articles include no personal controversies but describe routine and sometimes controversial land development, environmental, infrastructure and similar community matters of interest. Having worked in public service for approximately 25 years I have had extensive interaction with special interest groups, citizen groups and media. By far the vast majority of my interactions have been positive but I have been on the “opposite side of the table” from some groups and individuals dissatisfied with local government policies and positions. I have also authored some viewpoint articles published in the Pensacola News Journal and Opelika-Auburn News. Numerous stories you will find describe various activities, plans and programs that I have initiated. I think you will find these articles to be very positive overall.

While I do not maintain any personal social media accounts, I have effectively used social media as a means of disseminating public information particularly for projects with significant public impacts and for community wide events.

Six Adjectives or Phrases I Would Use to Describe Myself

- Professional and calm
- Innovative and knowledgeable
- Strategic Thinker
- Collaborative team approach
- Leader and visionary
- Public service focused

Leisure Time

I enjoy spending time with my wife and daughters; early morning time running on the treadmill in the gym; working in my yard; cooking; traveling; and watching sports.

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KEVIN A. COWPER, AICP, ICMA-CM

Current Salary

\$150,000 salary, \$6,000 car allowance, \$2,000 deferred compensation.

CB&A Background Checks

Section 7**Background Check Summary for
KEVIN A. COWPER**

Criminal Records Checks:

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Lee County, AL	No Records Found
Escambia County, FL	No Records Found
Baldwin County, AL	No Records Found
State	
Alabama	No Records Found
Florida	No Records Found

Civil Records Checks:

County	
Lee County, AL	No Records Found
Escambia County, FL	No Records Found
Baldwin County, AL	No Records Found
Federal	
Alabama	No Records Found
Florida	No Records Found

Motor Vehicle

Alabama	No Records Found
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Credit

Excellent

Bankruptcy

No Records Found

Education

Confirmed

Employment

Confirmed

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**Background Check Summary for
KEVIN A. COWPER
Personal Disclosure**

Personal Disclosure Questionnaire

Name of Applicant: KEVIN A. COWPER

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?
Yes No
2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?
Yes No
3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?
Yes No
4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
6. Have you ever been convicted of driving while intoxicated?
Yes No
7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?
Yes No
8. Do you have a personal My Space, Face Book or other type of Web Page?
Yes No
9. Do you have a personal Twitter Account?
Yes No
10. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?
Yes No
11. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.

Attested to: _____


Signature of Applicant

Please email this form via PDF DOCUMENT to kknutson@cb-asso.com or via fax to
(888) 539-6531 **no later than 9:00 AM CST 03/07/2016.**
(Note: Please be sure to sign the form with your actual signature if you are sending Fax or PDF Document)

Section 7

CB&A Reference Notes

Section 7**Reference Notes
KEVIN COWPER**

Robert Wills – Former County Attorney, Baldwin County, AL 251-937-2411

Mr. Wills worked with Mr. Cowper from 1995 to 2001. Mr. Cowper was an excellent Director for Planning and Zoning.

Mr. Cowper gave good advice to his elected officials. He was respected and worked well with them. The staff in his department changed and grew under his leadership. The employees seemed to enjoy working for him.

Mr. Wills was always well informed by Mr. Cowper. The two men spoke as needed, sometimes every day. When speaking to the Commission at public meetings, Mr. Cowper was direct and presented his material in an organized, intelligent manner. He sat down and discussed issues with residents when appropriate. Projects in his department were completed on time.

Mr. Cowper rewrote the County's zoning laws. He first had to present the laws to the Zoning Commission. Then, once they were approved, he presented them to the County Commission. The new zoning laws were controversial. Baldwin County had historically been a rural, agricultural county. Many residents were opposed to being told what they could or could not do with their properties. Mr. Cowper handled tense situations professionally.

During Mr. Cowper's time in Baldwin County, the County experienced record growth. His department worked at top speed and was very efficient.

Mr. Cowper kept himself educated about new initiatives in his field. Many times he used new and innovative ideas, especially when revamping the zoning laws.

Mr. Wills holds Mr. Cowper in high regard, both as a professional and as a friend. Any city or county that hires him as its manager will gain an exceptional asset.

Words or phrases used to describe Kevin Cowper:

- Knowledgeable,
- Professional,
- Honest,
- Good person,
- Active member of the community, and
- Respected.

Strengths: Not afraid to give a recommendation. Some recommendations might not have been the best politically, but his concern was only what was best for the county.

Weaknesses: Sometimes too direct with his opinions, though they were based on good information.

Section 7**Reference Notes
KEVIN COWPER**

Maryann Ustick – Former Assistant City Manager, North Las Vegas, NV 505-863-1220

Ms. Ustick was the Assistant City Manager in Pensacola when she hired Mr. Cowper as the Community Development Director. He worked for Ms. Ustick from 2001 to 2003. Mr. Cowper did an outstanding job.

It was obvious to Ms. Ustick even back then that Mr. Cowper could go places. He got along well with both the City Council and the City Manager.

Of all the department heads under her supervision, she worked most closely with Mr. Cowper. They developed future planning and zoning ordinances for the city, reflective of what the Council wanted. Mr. Cowper constantly kept Ms. Ustick updated.

Mr. Cowper's presentations to Council were not forceful, but clear and concise. He regularly spoke to community groups. He delegated some customer service responsibilities to employees within his department if they were in a better position to help the residents with their problems.

Mr. Cowper is ambitious without having to step on people's backs to get where he wants to go. His career progression has been well thought out and planned; which is exactly how he handles his job. His departmental processes are well thought out and planned as well.

In Pensacola Mr. Cowper did not gain much experience in disciplining personnel because he hired superb individuals. He has a knack for hiring the right person for the job. He is one of the top two or three writers Ms. Ustick has worked with during her thirty-year career.

Mr. Cowper was the first Director for the newly created department of Community Development. Despite a controversial change made by the City Manager, he put together a strong team. Community Development had previously been the Planning Department. With the creation of the Community Development Department the existing Planning Director was demoted to Assistant Director. Many employees were loyal to him. Mr. Cowper displayed sensitivity on this issue and was able to bring staff together.

During his time in Pensacola, the city experienced considerable growth. He worked on crime prevention, citizen committee issues, and developed changes to ordinances which Council could agree on. A train went through a historic area of the City and created noise. Mr. Cowper was the lead contact on efforts to find a compromise on the noise issue.

Pensacola had three superfund sites, and Mr. Cowper was very knowledgeable about environmental issues.

Ms. Ustick once had a conversation with the City Manager, Tom Bonfield, who stated that Mr. Cowper never ceased to exceed expectations.

Section 7**Reference Notes
KEVIN COWPER**

Ms. Ustick enjoyed working with Mr. Cowper. He would make an exceptional City or County Manager because he knows how to get things done and how local government works.

Words or phrases used to describe Kevin Cowper:

- Has an outstanding family support system,
- Calm,
- Professional,
- Dedicated to public service,
- Dry sense of humor, and
- Resilient.

Strengths: Thorough, creative and a phenomenal writer. Progressive and thinks ahead. Well read, and does not create any controversy.

Weaknesses: Not a great deal of experience working on personnel issues.

Frank Burt, Jr. – County Commissioner, Baldwin County, AL 251-937-0395

Mr. Burt worked with Mr. Cowper from 1995 to 2001. Baldwin County did not have a Planner before hiring Mr. Cowper. He was a fantastic Planning Director.

When Mr. Cowper started in Baldwin County, Mr. Burt was his toughest critic. Mr. Cowper worked many hours trying to convince Mr. Burt of the usefulness of his ideas. In many instances Mr. Burt attempted to draw him into an argument, but Mr. Cowper remained calm at all times.

The County public meetings were televised, so it was extremely important for the Council to be informed. Mr. Cowper's department never surprised them with any previously unknown items at those meetings. His presentations were exceptional.

Baldwin County was moving from being an agricultural community to a more progressive, fast growing area. Many people were against this change. One of the controversial areas of change was the new zoning laws. The County had been broken up into districts, and each district was allowed to make up its own zoning laws. Mr. Cowper developed a county-wide zoning comprehensive plan so that the County would be more uniform and organized. To put this plan in place he had to do a great deal of community outreach and education. Many of the laws he helped establish remain in force today.

Mr. Cowper worked well with other department heads. He was always willing to offer his input and support. Baldwin County was the first county in the state to put together a GIS system. Mr. Cowper was instrumental in making that happen.

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KEVIN COWPER**

The Planning and Zoning Department had some of the best employees in the city. Mr. Cowper knew how to put together an ad for open positions. He brought in excellent people to work for the County. Unfortunately, once those employees acquired sufficient experience they moved on to work for larger organizations.

Mr. Cowper is meticulous about meeting deadlines. When setting deadlines, he is realistic and careful not to be overly ambitious.

A few years after he left to take a position in Pensacola, Mr. Cowper applied for the open County Manager position in Baldwin County. The Commission had four members, three of whom were newly elected and unfamiliar with what he was capable of. Mr. Burt and another Commissioner voted to hire him, but it was deadlocked with the other two Commissioners voting against.

If a community is planning for future growth, then Mr. Cowper is the best candidate. He would make an outstanding City or County Manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Kevin Cowper:

- Leader,
- Active in the community,
- Not excitable,
- Quiet voice,
- Calm, and
- Believes in and cares about the community.

Strengths: Educated, patient and understanding. Never loses his temper, no matter how contentious the situation.

Weaknesses: Sometimes so calm it can be unnerving and may give the impression of not being aggressive enough. However, this is not the case, he gets things done.

David Bailey – Town Manager, Town of Seaside, FL 850-533-6148 850-231-1861

Mr. Bailey worked with Mr. Cowper in Pensacola. Mr. Bailey was the Director of the Community Redevelopment Agency. They worked together from 2002 to 2007. Mr. Cowper did an excellent job as Director of Community Development.

Mr. Cowper had daily interactions with the City Council. He had a good relationship with each of the elected officials because he was responsive to their issues. He took the time to research ideas before presenting them to the Council.

The two men met formally once a week and informally on a daily basis. Mr. Cowper is a good judge of character. In order to recruit the right people, he set up appropriate job descriptions and

Section 7**Reference Notes
KEVIN COWPER**

requirements. Productivity and professionalism increased under his leadership. Conscious of the required details, he clearly outlined each person's responsibilities.

Mr. Cowper never went over budget or had projects which took too long to complete. He has extensive experience speaking in public. He interacted with the public every day. He knows when to delegate a customer's issues to his staff and when to handle them himself.

The City Manager pushed for Mr. Cowper's department to establish better relationships with the neighborhood organizations. He also wanted them to help create more neighborhood groups and assist those groups with establishing leadership in their communities. In 2002 the City had twenty neighborhood groups. When he left in 2007 it had over 100.

Pensacola was hit hard by Hurricane Ivan in 2004. In the aftermath Mr. Cowper was responsible for relocating many parts of his department. Most noteworthy were his efforts to relocate the waste management facility.

The Community Development Department was an excellent department. With the amount of oversight he had, Mr. Cowper was essentially an Assistant City Manager. Within his department he revamped the Planning, Housing, and Engineering areas so their efforts were headed in the same direction. He focused on the sum of the parts rather than each group individually.

Mr. Cowper had to deal with controversial issues, but he never engaged in any activities that embarrassed or brought bad press to the City. One such controversial issue was a tree ordinance. He took the time to explain the City's reasoning behind the ordinance and calmed people down.

The scale of responsibilities Mr. Cowper handled in Pensacola could easily transfer to a larger organization. Mr. Bailey enjoyed working for him. He will make a phenomenal City or County Manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Kevin Cowper:

- Passionate,
- Efficient,
- Subdued in public settings,
- Affable,
- Approachable, and
- Not intimidating.

Strengths: Cares about his work, is detail oriented, and understands city planning. Senses what needs to be done to get support for initiatives.

Weaknesses: Sometimes too nice. Able to get what he needs but, had he been more forceful with people, things could have moved along a little faster.

Section 7**Reference Notes
KEVIN COWPER**

Eve Brantley, PhD – Associate Professor, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 334-844-3927

Ms. Brantley first met Mr. Cowper in 1998 when she worked as a Watershed Coordinator in Baldwin County. They worked together until Mr. Cowper left in 2001. They met again in Auburn and collaborated on several occasions. Ms. Brantley thinks highly of Mr. Cowper both for the job he did in Baldwin County and the work he is doing now in Auburn.

Mr. Cowper had an open door policy. Ms. Brantley knew she could call or stop by his office and always speak to him. He tactfully tells elected officials which direction they should take.

In Baldwin County he spoke at Commission meetings and to citizen advisory committees. One time he made a presentation to a neighborhood organization made up of irritable retirees with strong opinions. They asked Mr. Cowper tough questions. He listened, and then clearly explained the County's vision. He did not take their berating personally.

In Auburn, Mr. Cowper has been supportive of Ms. Brantley and the stream restoration project she is coordinating. She relies on him to let others know about her work. He never makes her feel as if her requests are a burden to him.

Auburn University and the University of North Carolina partnered to develop finance technical training to assist with the financing of storm water improvement and watershed projects. Again Mr. Cowper has been indispensable in helping her get the word out to other communities.

Mr. Cowper and the City of Auburn were exploring ways to improve storm water runoff. Mr. Cowper led a team which completed an annual public survey concerning the possibility of implementing water impact fees. The feedback was positive. The majority of residents involved in the survey were willing to pay the fee if it led to improvements in water quality.

With his experience in Baldwin County, Pensacola, and Auburn, Mr. Cowper is familiar with coastal environments, sustainability, and how to make a community better. Mr. Cowper would be an asset to any organization. He will make an exceptional City or County Manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Kevin Cowper:

- Respected,
- Leader,
- Dry understated wit,
- Happy,
- Makes people feel at ease,
- Quick to smile, and
- Family oriented.

Strengths: Listens to people and can see the big picture. Identifies where his organization can improve- but does not get bogged down when making those improvements.

Section 7**Reference Notes
KEVIN COWPER**

Weaknesses: Ms. Brantley did not work with him on a daily basis, so she could not identify any particular weakness.

Michael Wiggins – Former Mayor, Pensacola, FL 850-438-6109

Mr. Wiggins worked with Mr. Cowper from 2001 to 2007. Mr. Cowper did an outstanding job as Community Development Director.

Mr. Cowper communicated effectively with elected officials. Mayor Wiggins especially appreciated how he explained technical problems in laymen terms. Understanding that Councilmembers were not experts in all areas he made an effort to educate them when necessary.

When Mr. Cowper made presentations to the Council explaining issues in his department he was organized and stated his case clearly. He was customer service oriented. Pensacola had about one hundred neighborhood organizations and many other community groups. Mr. Cowper worked with these groups and developed positive relationships with their leaders.

Pensacola is a coastal community. He developed new classifications for waterfront zoning. Developers pressured the city to allow them to build high rise condominiums on the waterfront. Many area residents did not want that to happen. Mr. Cowper worked closely with the neighborhood groups involved and found a compromise which fit into the City Council's plans.

The Community Development Department was made up of excellent employees, many hired by Mr. Cowper. He always completed projects within the time allotted.

Mr. Wiggins wishes Mr. Cowper had never left Pensacola. He will work hard for any organization that employs him. He is ready for the top management position and would make a fantastic City or County Manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Kevin Cowper:

- Excellent work ethic,
- Knowledgeable,
- Methodical, and
- Intelligent.

Strengths: Creative planner, knows how to develop a comprehensive plan, and has the ability to bring groups together, despite differing points of view.

Weaknesses: None identified.

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KEVIN COWPER**

Ed Polasek – Transportation Services Director, Georgetown, TX 512-971-6795

Mr. Polasek worked with Mr. Cowper from 1997 to 2001 in Baldwin County. As the Environmental Planner in Baldwin County, Mr. Polasek reported directly to Mr. Cowper. Mr. Cowper handled his position with grace and ease.

Good communication was central to Mr. Cowper's success. He always informed the County Commissioners about issues before the meetings. His door was open, and he made himself available for his staff. In the four years they worked together his door was closed only twice and Mr. Polasek knew that, if the door was closed, something very important was happening.

During Commission meetings Mr. Cowper gave good presentations. He could explain why certain policies existed, especially on the planning side. He could also identify national trends and frame local issues within those happening nationally.

The Community Development Department was a very visual department because of the projects it handled. Mr. Cowper worked well with residents. He sat down and talked to them or, if it was more beneficial for the individual to speak with someone else in his department, he directed them to the appropriate staff.

Mr. Cowper received pressure from the Commission to hire certain people, because they were friends of elected officials. However, Mr. Cowper always hired the person who was best fit for the position. He could explain to the Commissioner pressuring him why he did not hire their friend and his explanation was accepted. Because he hired the best candidates he had few, if any, personnel issues. He gave his employees good feedback and clear expectations for their responsibilities.

As long as Mr. Cowper did not have to rely on outside groups, he completed tasks on time. He was innovative with his creation of policies and procedures which were not within the framework for the County as a whole. As an example, he developed his own performance evaluations and put together rules which applied only to employees under his purview.

Mr. Cowper was heavily involved in making changes to zoning. He discovered that many developers were not following zoning laws if they did not agree with them, and the Commission was not enforcing those laws. He conveyed to the Commission and developers that, if they did not like the laws, then they needed to change them. He advised them that they could not just operate on a whim and do whatever they wanted.

The zoning changes Mr. Cowper made helped unify the County. The County was separated into 24 districts and each district had its own zoning regulations. Mr. Cowper developed a master zoning ordinance plan. Each district could then choose from the master plan the zoning ordinances which best fit that area's needs.

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Baldwin County did not have an Economic Development Department. So essentially, via city planning and zoning, Mr. Cowper was responsible for bringing in new businesses.

Due to his position Mr. Cowper was involved in lawsuits. He was never visibly shaken or offended by these lawsuits. He did not take such challenges personally.

Mr. Polasek thinks highly of Mr. Cowper. He will make an exceptional City or County Manager because he will gain the trust of Commissioners.

Words or phrases used to describe Kevin Cowper:

- Reserved until he gets to know you,
- Wry sense of humor,
- Driven,
- Outgoing,
- Approachable, and
- Unflappable.

Strengths: Organized, and supports his staff.

Weaknesses: When he had information about a certain issue he passed it on to the one or two of the Commissioners leading the discussions on that subject. Some elected officials felt that not everyone was getting all the information. Eventually he addressed the issue by making a policy whereby memos would be sent to each Commissioner.

Thomas Bonfield – City Manager, Durham, NC 919-323-9437 919-560-4222

Mr. Bonfield worked with Mr. Cowper from 2001 to 2007 in Pensacola. Mr. Bonfield was the City Manager of Pensacola at the time. He holds Mr. Cowper in the highest regard for his exceptional work ethic.

Mr. Cowper had a positive relationship with the City Council. He knew when to be casual and when to be professional in conversations. Council had confidence in him and his recommendations.

For the first two years in Pensacola Mr. Cowper reported to the Assistant City Manager. When she left he reported directly to Mr. Bonfield. Mr. Cowper kept Mr. Bonfield well informed and could be counted on to complete his work independently. He did not need a great deal of guidance, but he still sought approval from Mr. Bonfield or the Council when necessary.

Employees in the City wanted to work for him. Mr. Cowper was adept at communicating with different groups, from neighborhood organizations to high powered developers. He gave thorough

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presentations to the Council. Mr. Bonfield saw him operate under significant fire in public meetings but Mr. Cowper remained calm and professional at all times.

Pensacola was hit by three hurricanes between 2004 and 2005. Many City offices were destroyed. Mr. Cowper created a taskforce to find and move the department to a temporary work place. He took the lead with getting information out to neighborhood organizations and handling complaints from them.

Mr. Cowper was instrumental in establishing a stronger neighborhood-based community effort. He put together neighborhood colleges which educated residents on how to become more involved in their city. Other initiatives he worked on in Pensacola include developing tree ordinances and working with the EPA on superfund sites.

Mr. Cowper is capable of being a great City or County Manager. The only hesitation Mr. Bonfield has is that it would be Mr. Cowper's first experience as a manager at that level, and the fit needs to be just right. With his overall skills and knowledge, he will be a success in many environments.

Words or phrases used to describe Kevin Cowper:

- Conscientious,
- Initially not seen as outgoing,
- Puts out quality work,
- Gains credibility,
- Unflappable, and
- Competent.

Strengths: Knowledge in planning and zoning, able to engage the community and balance getting things done with building a solid team within his staff.

Weaknesses: Has never been a manager before and does not have a great deal of experience in finance, budget, and social services.

Joey Bunch – Former Reporter, Mobile Press Register, AL 303-523-7786 303-954-1174

Mr. Bunch was the government beat reporter in Baldwin County. He interacted with Mr. Cowper in this capacity from 1995 to 2001. Mr. Cowper showed leadership and avoided politics. Mr. Cowper was well regarded by the County Commission. Baldwin County has a large Commission which makes it difficult for employees to gain the respect of all of them. However, because he stayed out of the politics he got along well with them.

In public meetings Mr. Cowper explained decisions in a non-political manner. Even after working with him for six years, Mr. Bunch still has no idea whether Mr. Cowper is a Democrat or Republican.

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Mr. Cowper was respected by his employees. He was a leader and an exceptional delegator. He held his staff accountable and knew who to assign certain projects to based on their strengths and expertise.

The County experienced intense pressure for development during Mr. Cowper's tenure. Developers did not want to be told what to do and wanted to build condominiums all along the coastline. It became a hot issue pitting development against environmental preservation.

More wealthy people lived along the coast, south of I-10, and were progressive. North of I-10 lived the more established Alabama residents who were concerned about the environment and retaining their quality of life. Working on this issue he developed a County comprehensive zoning plan.

Mandatory garbage collection was yet another contentious issue Mr. Cowper worked on. Despite having to operate in this tough environment, he never lost his temper.

Mr. Cowper was never suspected or accused of any misconduct.

Mr. Bunch worked with Mr. Cowper and his team on a daily basis. The education he received from them on environmental issues earned him the award for Environmental Reporter of the Year. Mr. Cowper deserves some of the credit for this accomplishment because he was accessible and always gave straight answers.

Mr. Bunch has only positive memories of working with Mr. Cowper. He will do a great job as a City or County Manager, and Mr. Bunch highly recommends him. He is well admired for his accomplishments and would be an asset to any organization.

Words or phrases used to describe Kevin Cowper:

- Not a push over,
- Personal credibility,
- Trustworthy,
- Apolitical, and
- Does not attract negative attention.

Strengths: A phenomenal communicator.

Weaknesses: By remaining apolitical he was sometimes blindsided by politics.

Will Brantley – Former Environmental Planner, Baldwin County, AL 334-242-5502

Mr. Brantley worked for Mr. Cowper from 1996 to 2001. Mr. Cowper did a tremendous job as Planning and Zoning Director and he was a pleasure to work for.

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When Mr. Cowper announced that he was leaving, the County Commission, despite having just gone through an election, wanted to keep him. However, they could not compete with what Pensacola was offering.

Mr. Brantley always felt in the loop on the things that pertained to him. In Baldwin County all work sessions and meetings of the Commission were televised. Mr. Cowper gained a great deal of experience with the public through his efforts in these meetings. Several times a month he gave presentations, either to the Commission or to community groups. He got his ideas across well, without controversy, while promoting the important issues.

As a manager he gave general directions then allowed his staff to do their jobs. He was available if they needed his help and periodically spot checked their work or asked for written reports. Mr. Brantley has incorporated some of Mr. Cowper's approach into his own management style.

Baldwin County was the fastest growing county in the state at the time. As one of only two counties with coastlines Baldwin was also a tourism driver for the State. Mr. Cowper was involved in addressing problems which arose from these two issues.

Mr. Cowper put together the County's first comprehensive zoning plan. He had to gain the consensus of Commissioners before putting that plan into action.

Mr. Brantley moved to Auburn from Baldwin County. Mr. Cowper is now the Assistant City Manager in Auburn. Not long after Mr. Cowper came to work in Auburn the two men went out to dinner. During dinner he made observations about certain areas in the City which needed to be spruced up. He had driven around and made notes about what needed to be improved. A few months after their dinner, Mr. Brantley saw work crews putting in flower arrangements and new fencing in the areas Mr. Cowper had highlighted. A parking deck which Mr. Cowper had said was the dirtiest thing in the city, was power washed. Although these may seem like little things, to Mr. Brantley it demonstrated Mr. Cowper's attention to detail and his initiative.

Mr. Brantley wishes Mr. Cowper luck in his career but has mixed emotions because he does not want him to leave Auburn. Mr. Cowper will do a fantastic job as a City or County Manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Kevin Cowper:

- Professional,
- Unflappable,
- Detail oriented,
- Knowledgeable/educated,
- Personable, and
- Easy to talk to.

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Strengths: Never gets rattled, no matter how tense the situation; gets things done.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Completed by Lynelle Klein and Emilee Anderson
Colin Baenziger & Associates

CB&A Internet Research

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Kevin A. Cowper
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Auburn Plainsman, The: Auburn University (AL)
January 26, 2016

Krispy Kreme construction delayed, now moving along

Author: Maria McIlwain

The Krispy Kreme construction site at the Auburn Mall on Saturday, Jan. 16, 2016. The skeleton of a Krispy Kreme is rising near the Auburn Mall, but doughnut fans will have to wait a little longer than expected for the "Hot Now" sign to illuminate the highway. The Krispy Kreme was originally scheduled to be finished by the end of 2015, but construction was delayed because of pipes being replaced near the site. The pipe replacement was delayed by significant amounts of rain, according to Coles Doyle, marketing director of Hull Property Group, which owns the mall. Doyle said she thinks the shop is a great addition to the property and will attract both old and new customers to the mall. "I do think it will be appealing to college kids and the community at large," Doyle said.

Kevin Cowper, assistant city manager, said the pipe replacement was not connected to Renew Opelika Road, a joint city and state project also making repairs and improvements in the area. "That was their own project on private property," **Cowper** said. **Cowper** said Renew Opelika Road projects near the mall include turn lane improvements, pedestrian lights and sidewalk construction from Zaxby's to the movie theater on East University Drive and from the mall entrance on Opelika Road to Mall Boulevard. Doyle said construction on the 35,000-square-foot building is on track now and should be completed by spring. "Who doesn't love Krispy Kreme doughnuts?" Doyle said.

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Opelika-Auburn News (AL)
July 1, 2015

Auburn creating tomorrow's history with time capsule

Author: Staff Writer

One business in downtown Auburn has a plan to make the most of the summer-long Toomer's Corner construction project by offering Auburnites a glimpse into the city's history. But the story it will tell is still in the making; the story is today. Auburn Art, a specialty gift shop, and the City of Auburn are collaborating to create a time capsule titled "Preserve the Present." It will be buried beneath the sidewalk in front of the College Street store during construction.

What will be included in the capsule? They want the community to decide. Auburn Art owner Cliff Hare said the mission of the project is to represent what Auburn means to the community in 2015. All members of the Auburn family are invited to submit a photo or message to be included in the capsule. Hare asks that submissions be no larger than 4-by-6 inches, to ensure there is enough space for everyone. "We just wanted to do something fun that Auburn hasn't done before," Hare said. "Hopefully in 50 years, people can laugh at our clothes and hair and know what Auburn was like during this time."

Members of the community can also submit ideas of what significant items should be included in the capsule. Hare said ticket stubs to the 2010 National Championship have been donated. A chunk of asphalt from the tiger paw in the intersection at Toomer's Corner may also be included. Hare said the memories will be stored in a large locked and watertight case. An engraved brick paver will designate the spot of burial with a note that it should be opened in 2065.

Since the idea crossed Assistant City Manager **Kevin Cowper**'s desk, things have been in action to help facilitate the project. "I'm sure the folks that find it in the future will find something interesting that speaks about our time," **Cowper** said. "It's a neat opportunity to do something." The date of the burial has not been set because of the fluctuating nature of construction, but the community can keep up with the project on social media through # Preserve The Present.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
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Opelika-Auburn News (AL)
June 2, 2015

Citizens express concern over lack of lighting in downtown Auburn during construction

Author: Katherine Haas

While fences that separate downtown Auburn patrons this summer from the construction zone at the intersection of College Street and Magnolia Avenue are indicative of progress and improvement, some citizens are concerned that they also carry with them potential safety concerns in the evening and nighttime hours. It has been less than a month since construction began on a \$2.1 million project to aesthetically enhance Auburn's Toomer's Corner intersection. Downtown businesses have stressed that they are still open during the construction, which is slated to be completed in mid-August.

Contractors have removed light poles that stood in the construction zone behind the fences — poles that will be replaced as part of the project. According to eight-year Auburn resident Melissa Humble, not only does the physical presence of the fences limit sight, but she also believes the dark-colored privacy mesh on the fences reduces visibility at night, creating more opportunity for unsafe situations to occur. "The dark green-black mesh blocks light, but also absorbs light that might be reflected otherwise, making the walkways even darker," Humble said. "With the loss of visibility, one literally doesn't know what's around the corner of those fences when navigating the area. If there is a police or security presence, I can't see it."

Humble added that her concerns were further raised following an incident last week involving a friend that Humble described as "both uncomfortable and potentially dangerous." "A friend was leaving The Bank Vault on Wednesday evening and was sexually harassed while walking to her car," Humble said. "This harassment included a man exposing himself to her." Humble posted her concerns on Facebook and received feedback from others sharing similar worries. "I absolutely agree," stated Facebook user Amanda Weaver in response to Humble's post. "There is little to NO light, specifically around The Bank Vault, and with fences with black fabric on them surrounding everything, it makes it even darker and scarier to walk around downtown at night. I've also never felt unsafe downtown until now."

Humble said some suggestions to help the problem would be for Bailey-Harris Construction, the contractor for the project, to replace the dark privacy mesh with a lighter colored-mesh that better reflects light and to add more lighting along the walkways. She would also like to see more police foot patrols in the area. "When large construction projects take place in some cities, scaffolding and other construction gear blocks sidewalks," Humble said. "Those projects include specific tunnel-like structures so people can still use the sidewalk. Lights are generally placed in those structures so pedestrians aren't walking in the dark. I think a number of temporary lights could be put between the construction fence and buildings. This would also help people see the sandbags that are weighing down the fence."

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Humble added that her concerns have not gone unheard. In response to an email she wrote to Assistant City Manager **Kevin Cowper**, Humble said that **Cowper** assured her that the city is working with Bailey-Harris Construction to add lights that will attach directly to the fencing. “Our goal is to greatly improve the downtown experience with this project, and we recognize that the construction is a major disruption to our downtown businesses and patrons,” **Cowper** stated in the email. “We are very aware that it is incumbent upon us to provide a safe environment for patrons of our downtown businesses while this project is under way.”

Auburn’s Director of Public Works Jeff Ramsey said the city will be installing temporary lighting this week. “We will have light strung along the construction fencing, which will improve the visibility for the people walking downtown at night,” Ramsey said.

Allen Harris, owner and CEO of Bailey-Harris Construction, also confirmed that his company has been working with the city on “a couple of lighting schemes.” Harris stressed that this will be temporary lighting, as Bailey-Harris is eventually installing the new permanent lighting as part of the project. “My expectation is that in the next several days there will be lighting in downtown Auburn ... installed by one entity or the other,” Harris said. “The city is right on top of it.”

Humble said she also received a response from Mayor Bill Ham reminding her or anyone to call police in a potentially unsafe situation. “I do think that the City of Auburn is doing a great job,” Humble said. “They put out lots of information prior to the start of the construction. I don’t think anyone is not doing their job. I just think this is a huge project with lots of components. Oversight can happen easily, but should be addressed as soon as possible.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Kevin A. Cowper
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Opelika-Auburn News (AL)
November 5, 2014

Auburn council approves contract for Phase 1 of Renew Opelika Road project

Author: Katherine Haas

The Auburn City Council approved a contract with D & J Enterprises Tuesday evening for Phase 1 of the Renew Opelika Road project in the amount of approximately \$1.5 million. The Renew Opelika Road Corridor Plan intends to “aesthetically and economically revitalize Opelika Road,” by decreasing the high number of vacant buildings, curb cuts, building setbacks (large parking lots in front of buildings set back from the road), outdated buildings and adding pedestrian-and-biker-friendly elements.

Phase 1 specifically addresses the area of Opelika Road between Gay and Ross Streets. Assistant City Manager **Kevin Cowper** discussed how the area is subject to vacant buildings, poor drainage, broken sidewalks and aged infrastructure. “Over the years, it has seen some significant disinvestment,” **Cowper** said. However, he noted pluses on that stretch of Opelika Road like the recently renovated Frank Brown Recreation Center and the post office that the corridor plan will help enhance. “It has a lot of strength,” **Cowper** said of the area.

Phase 1 will involve adding new sidewalks, crosswalks traffic signals, streetlights and landscaping elements to make the area more pedestrian friendly. **Cowper** said it would appear “similar to what you’d see on Magnolia (Avenue).” Also, a left turn lane from Opelika Road onto Ross Street is planned, as well as eliminating the sweeping right turn lane from Gay Street onto Opelika Road. Instead, the plan calls for a stop and turn right scenario, with green space created on either side of the roadway.

Phase 2 of the Renew Opelika Road Project will address the intersection of Opelika Road and East University Drive near the Village Mall, while Phase 3 will involve restoring the Opelika Road/Dean Road intersection. At the Auburn City Council’s Committee of the Whole meeting Tuesday, **Cowper** also presented plans for a number of downtown projects including the enhancement of alleyways leading from the Municipal Parking Lot to Magnolia Avenue and College Street, creating an outdoor patio area behind Little Italy and Moe’s Barbecue for outdoor dining, a complete upgrade to the Toomer’s Corner intersection, a redesign of the South College Street/Samford Avenue intersection, a South College streetscape and sidewalk and parking improvements on North College Street near Papa John’s.

While some projects such as the South College/Samford Avenue intersection upgrade and South College streetscape will be state funded with an 80/20 split between the state and the city through the Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation Improvement Plan (ATRIP), funding for others has been budgeted from the General Fund. “We do have some opportunities for some grants,” **Cowper** explained, referencing a grant application that is in progress for brick pavers at the Toomer’s Corner intersection.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Kevin A. Cowper
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Crimson White (<http://www.cw.ua.edu/article/2014/04/downtown-revival-city-still-considers-entertainment-districts>)

April 1, 2014

Downtown Revival: City still considers entertainment districts

Author: FRANCIE JOHNSON

A state law that passed in May 2012 allows cities of a certain size to create districts with relaxed open container laws, making it legal for individuals to purchase alcoholic beverages, bring them outside and carry them around within the confines of the district. According to this law, Tuscaloosa could create up to two such districts. Shortly after the state legislation took effect, Tuscaloosa City Councilman Kip Tyner called together an ad hoc committee with representatives from city departments and local bar and restaurant owners. “I thought we should look at having an entertainment district where people could walk freely from one place to the other with a drink, if they chose to do that,” Tyner said. “It was mainly just trying to make it more cohesive for an art- and entertainment-friendly downtown.”

The committee has met several times since 2012 and discussed creating an entertainment district on the Strip or Temerson Square in downtown Tuscaloosa. However, the progress of the proposed entertainment districts slowed following the July 17, 2012, Temerson Square shootings, in which Northport resident Nathan Van Wilkins allegedly opened fire in Copper Top bar downtown injuring 18 people. Former City Attorney Jimbo Woodson said at the time that security would play a major role in the continuation of the discussions for the committee. Since then, the proposal has continued to meet resistance from city officials and residents. “I actually was surprised,” Tyner said. “I didn’t [think] there would be much controversy to it because other cities do it. Maybe [people are] worried because it’s a college town and it might be abused as far as walking around with open beverages, but we basically do that at every home game.”

Since the law passed, several cities in Alabama have successfully incorporated entertainment districts into their downtown areas, including Huntsville and Auburn. Huntsville’s entertainment district allows those of legal drinking age to purchase alcoholic beverages from one of 17 licensed bars and restaurants downtown. The drink is then served in a designated plastic cup, and the customer can take the drink outside and walk around with it. However, the district rules prohibit drinking in parking lots or bringing in outside alcoholic beverages.

Kelly Schrimsher, director of communications for the city of Huntsville, said its entertainment district was designed with an emphasis on art and culture instead of the open beverage aspect. “We decided what we wanted was an arts and entertainment district, an area where there would be cultural animation, things to do, but something that was less predicated on an open container district,” Schrimsher said “We didn’t want it to become more of a Bourbon Street in New Orleans. We wanted it more on culture and activities and, oh, by the way, you can walk outside with a drink.” Huntsville debuted its entertainment district in the summer of 2013 with a 90-day trial period during which it operated on Thursdays and Fridays from 5 to 9 p.m. After the trial

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period ended, the district extended its hours to include Thursdays and Fridays from 5 to 11 p.m., as well as Saturdays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Schrimsher said the added maintenance and law enforcement costs played a major role in determining when the entertainment district would go into effect. “There were some people that talked about [having the district] seven days a week, but what it really came down to was resources,” Schrimsher said. “Once you open the district up and you have more people walking around with plastic cups, you have more garbage. We like to have a little bit stronger police presence, and that really was a cost issue for the city. We really did not have it in our budget to have that kind of enhanced presence.”

To jump-start the entertainment district and create the culture-rich atmosphere they desired, Huntsville city officials asked the arts council to program the district with live entertainment and creative activities. “By putting the focus more on entertainment, I think people were anxious to come downtown and just see what was going on anyway,” Schrimsher said. “I do think there were a number of people who, after they got their drink and walked around, thought, ‘This is nice, but it’s really not the biggest deal in the world. It’s not a dealbreaker.’”

Although there have been some garbage-related complaints, Schrimsher said Huntsville’s entertainment district has generally been positive for the city. However, she said she’s unsure whether a college town like Tuscaloosa would experience similar results. “I would be very nervous, to be honest, if I were [in] city leadership,” Schrimsher said. “For all the reasons Huntsville was worried about it, I think you would have that on steroids. I can tell you it will add a considerable cost to the government there. I’m not really sure the money the bars and restaurants will make off of it will compensate for the additional cost to the city.”

Nevertheless, Auburn has avoided many potential problems by only operating its entertainment district on special occasions, about six to eight times a year. “I think by [only having the district for certain events] we’ve made it special, and people have responded to that,” said **Kevin Cowper**, Auburn’s assistant city manager. “They enjoy coming to the events, and they enjoy walking around while sipping a glass of wine or drinking a beer. The crowd has been very well behaved, and we’ve really not had any problems.” Due to the flexible hours of its entertainment district, Auburn hasn’t had the significant increase in expenses that Huntsville experienced after launching its district. “It really hasn’t been [more expensive],” **Cowper** said. “But then again, these are events where we would ordinarily have our crews come in for cleanup. So we really haven’t noticed any significant impact as a result of the events. We will typically put out extra garbage cans and bring in crews, but we would do that regardless.”

The downtown bars and restaurants generally see an increase in business during the district’s hours of operation, but **Cowper** said it’s unclear if that can be directly attributed to the open beverage policy. “Whether [the increase in business] is strictly a result of the entertainment district or a result of the particular event that’s happening, that’s hard to say,” **Cowper** said. “But

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I think that we get more people attending these events because the entertainment district is in effect. So in that regard, the impact is positive.”

Tyner said the endeavor would benefit from reaching out to other cities with entertainment districts to get a better idea of how the districts function in a realistic setting. “In the very beginning of the recycling program, we visited places that had great recycling programs,” Tyner said. “I think we need to do the same thing. Just go visit. That’s probably what I would recommend.”

Tuscaloosa being a college town could create obstacles for establishing an entertainment district in Tuscaloosa, but it has its benefits. Since Tuscaloosa’s police force typically deals with large crowds during home football games, enforcing an entertainment district would be much easier in comparison, Tyner said. “We sure have more crowd control experience than most cities. We have about 150,000 people come to town for games,” Tyner said. “There’s always a handful of arrests, as there is on any college campus, but not anything that this would add to at all.”

Cowper said Auburn’s experience with game day crowds has prepared the city’s police officers to maintain order when the entertainment district is active.

Tyner said the committee will most likely meet again sometime this year, but it’s still unclear whether plans for an entertainment district will move forward. “I called for [the committee], and I made it very inclusive with everybody that I thought [the entertainment district] would affect,” Tyner said. I thought it was great. It was healthy conversation, a great debate, and if anything goes on from here, I can’t say. There was the feeling that most people wanted it, but there were still so many unanswered questions.”

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Opelika-Auburn News (AL)
July 17, 2013

Auburn approves purchase of seven parking kiosks

Author: Drew Taylor

The City of Auburn is hoping to change the way people pay for parking with the addition of seven automated kiosks to be placed downtown. The Auburn City Council recently approved a contract with Ventek International of Petaluma, Calif. to purchase seven automated parking payment kiosks for the 93-space Gay Street parking lot project located across from Auburn Bank downtown. The agreement, which includes the purchase and installation of the kiosks, will cost the city \$215,740.96.

Assistant City Manager **Kevin Cowper** presented the resolution during the council meeting Tuesday night, saying that with the kiosks, a person would only have to type in which parking space they were using and the machine would electronically file their information, as well as be able to process coins, cash or credit/debit cards. “Technology allows us to better enforce the rules and it is more convenient that people,” **Cowper** said.

Cowper said several options were considered before Ventek came into consideration and that the price of installing the same number of mechanical parking meters would have cost roughly \$60,000. **Cowper** said up to four hours of parking time could be paid for on the kiosk, which had not been done before in Auburn. “What we’ve heard is we need a place for downtown employees to park and we need a place for people who want to shop around downtown for more than two hours, and so the concept that we are following is to have short-term parking on College and Magnolia,” **Cowper** said. “The longer-term parking would be in the parking lot so that you stay in downtown longer.”

Cowper said he and his department have been researching automated parking payment kiosk for four years and that over the last two months, the department had been using a test kiosk in the parking lot behind Magnolia Avenue. “We had some kinks with it, we worked through them and the system has been operational and has been working very well, and so we were comfortable that this was a workable system and we’re ready to bring it forward to you,” **Cowper** said.

Councilman Bob Norman questioned whether the kiosks would be user-friendly, to which **Cowper** said that their diverse payment options would be well served. **Cowper** said there would likely be additional technological expenses incurred, but that he expected a good return on their investment. “It’s hard to say exactly how much money we will generate from parking meter fees, however I’m estimating in the \$40,000 range,” **Cowper** said, adding that the city would likely pay off the kiosks within five years.

Councilman Arthur Dowdell said that while he was content that the city would make its money back in five years through the project, he hopes that the city would be more accountable for its

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spending and that it would concentrate on other vital projects. “I’d like to see city money spent more wisely and I hope we would consider that,” Dowdell said.

Mayor Bill Ham said he was happy with the reports on the new machines and that they would alleviate parking issues downtown. “Although it is expensive, it gives me some comfort long-range as we move forward,” Ham said. Additionally, **Cowper** said that if there were any kiosks that were underused, they could easily be transferred elsewhere. Plans are if the kiosks are successful, they can move to other areas of town.

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Opelika-Auburn News (AL)
April 20, 2013

‘New’ Toomer's Corner will blend past and present traditions

Author: Kristen Oliver

With the imminent removal of the oaks at Toomer’s Corner, many Auburn fans worry about the future of the tradition. David Housel, former Auburn University athletic director and Auburn graduate, said it’s hard for him to imagine Toomer’s Corner being greater and more memorable than it has in years past. He said two memories have stuck with him more than any, one being the 17-16 “Punt, Bama, Punt” win in 1972. “And then, Dec. 2, 1989, Auburn 30, Alabama 20,” Housel said. “Alabama’s first trip to Auburn after they kept saying, no they’d never come, never come. Well they came. They were No. 2 in the nation. And it was a grand and glorious night.”

Housel said he was at the BCS National Championship game on Jan. 10, 2011, so he couldn’t celebrate the win at Toomer’s. He said for him, no celebration could be better than that in December 1989. “There was a camaraderie, a feeling of unity,” Housel said. “Auburn talks about being a family. And on that occasion, Dec. 2, 1989, it was true. There will never be another day like that. There will never be another feeling like that.”

The question many Auburn fans are now asking is whether or not that feeling will be affected by the imminent changes coming to Toomer’s Corner. The final design will be revealed today, and Dan King, Assistant Vice President of Facilities at Auburn, feels confident it brings all the things people are looking for at the corner. “This final design is not something entirely new,” King said. “Of the last two you saw, it will either look like one of those two or a combination.”

King said the two key features of the last designs were the things they wanted to be sure to include in the final design. “We had a lot of feedback of the Christmas period that keeping the arches was most important,” he said. “So that was in all the last designs. That was a given. With this last set, people liked aspects of both. A lot liked the tree-lined curving walkway ... a lot of people like that and the thought that you could sit on either side of that without being in the path was appealing to folks. “Then on the Circle Wall scheme, people liked the ability to have a place right near Toomer’s that might be shaded to hang out, eat lunch, read a book and just maybe spend 15 or 20 minutes without being in the plaza section right by the corner. Not that you’d be far away, but it’s a little separate from that.”

King said the two, low brick walls extending from the gates to the street will be in the final design as well. Before construction on this design starts in 2014, a wiring system will be installing to be used for several years to come. Three concrete poles would be placed near the white rock in the median on College Street and in the two landscaped islands in front of Toomer’s Drugstore and the Bank Vault on the opposite sides of the corner to replace the ailing Toomer’s Oaks, which are set to be removed Tuesday, April 23, days after the Tigers’ A-Day football game and the trees’ last rolling. “It will be in the shape of a triangle, and we’ll span two

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wires between the poles, 3 or 4 inches apart, which will help the toilet paper catch on the wire,” said **Kevin Cowper**, assistant Auburn city manager. “It’ll be at the height of the traffic lights, so it’ll be a pretty easy height for people to reach as well.”

The structure will be erected this summer, **Cowper** said. **Cowper** said several schemes were considered, but the city didn’t want to do anything too expensive or extravagant for a temporary structure. He said the pole-and-wire design was chosen because it will cost the city less than \$15,000 and possibly allow more funds to go toward the permanent changes to the corner. **Cowper** said the pole design will most likely be used for more than just the coming football season — horticulture experts at the university are saying the new trees will need about three years to establish themselves after being planted before they will be able to withstand rolling. **Cowper** said he believes the new structure will be a good way to blend the traditions of the past with the corner’s needs in the future. “That’s actually how the tradition started (with rolling wires), so this is kind of going back to that tradition,” he said.

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Opelika-Auburn News (AL)
March 21, 2013

Wiring system to temporarily fill rolling tradition

Author: Kristen Oliver

The Toomer's Corner rolling tradition will continue this fall with a triangular wiring system, and students at Auburn have mixed feelings about the intermediate fix. Three concrete poles would be placed near the white rock in the median on College Street and in the two landscaped islands in front of Toomer's Drugstore and the Bank Vault on the opposite sides of the corner to replace the ailing Toomer's Oaks, which are set to be removed April 23, days after the Tigers' A-Day football game and the trees' last rolling. "It will be in the shape of a triangle, and we'll span two wires between the poles, 3 or 4 inches apart, which will help the toilet paper catch on the wire," said **Kevin Cowper**, assistant Auburn city manager. "It'll be at the height of the traffic lights, so it'll be a pretty easy height for people to reach as well."

Cowper said the university will begin construction of a permanent rolling structure after the 2013 season. One Auburn student said while he understands the structure is only temporary, he'd hoped it would be something grander than wires from three poles. "I think it's sort of dumb, honestly," said Ben Holmes, a senior in marketing. "I think they could have come up with a better solution for us to have something to roll until they can put in some new trees."

Holmes said he worries the temporary structure will be too small to facilitate the large crowds that can turn out after Auburn victories. Sara Vaughan, a senior in early childhood education, said she, too, wonders about that. "People are used to rolling trees up and down College and Magnolia, and now hundreds of people will have to crowd under wires at the corner. It'll definitely work for a while, but let's just say I'm glad this is only temporary." The structure will be erected this summer, **Cowper** said.

"The city is also planning to have a downtown plan for the other parts of the corner; we'll want those to blend with what the university is proposing," he said. "That leaves us with some time after the university plants those trees before they want them rolled. In order to carry on the rolling tradition, we're having to come up with something different." **Cowper** said several schemes have been considered, but the city didn't want to do anything too expensive or extravagant for a temporary structure. He said the pole-and-wire design was chosen because it will cost the city less than \$15,000 and possibly allow more funds to go toward the permanent changes to the corner.

Cowper said the pole design will most likely be used for more than just the coming football season — horticulture experts at the university are saying the new trees will need about three years to establish themselves after being planted before they will be able to withstand rolling. **Cowper** said he's confident the new wire structure will suffice for that period of time. "That's actually how the tradition started, so this is kind of going back to that tradition," he said

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The Plainsman, Auburn, AL
August 24, 2012

City Council Approves Entertainment District

Author: Zeke Turrentine

At its Aug. 7 meeting, Auburn City Council voted to approve a new ordinance that creates a downtown entertainment district. The entertainment district will only be active on specially designated days or weekends and will allow patrons and revelers to buy an alcoholic drink at one bar or restaurant and leave that establishment to go to another one.

Patrons will also be able to walk around the street with the same drink in tow. Its borders would be approximately from Gay Street to Wright Street from east to west and from Glenn Avenue to Thach Avenue north to south. The southern section of the district would end on its west end at College Street to avoid including the trees and part of Auburn's campus. Alabama only recently put in place new legislation that made entertainment districts like this possible. Auburn will join Montgomery, Mobile, Tuscaloosa and Orange Beach as other cities with such districts. "This would allow you to walk into any establishment within the entertainment district that is licensed to sell alcohol, buy a beer or wine or whatever you like, and walk out with it as long as you stay within the confines of the entertainment district," said Assistant City Manager **Kevin Cowper**.

Auburn City Manager Charlie Duggan hopes Auburn will not abuse the new law. "We hope the community will come out and support the downtown area while responsibly practicing this new privilege," Duggan said. This was the second time the council had discussed approval of the ordinance. At the first reading, Ward 8 Councilman Bob Norman voted "no." The second reading needed only a majority vote of the eight member council and approval from Mayor Bill Ham Jr.

Norman voiced his concerns again during the meeting. "I just think this is a mistake in terms of traffic flow in potentially hurting businesses ... I see a problem with people from out of town; where are they going to park?" Norman said. "I'm not a teetotaler, but is it in the best interest of all the citizens of Auburn to walk around on the street with a cup of beer?"

Duggan tried to assuage Norman's apprehension and said that the city is going to be monitoring the district very closely for any negative incidents. He said if it appears to be too problematic, the council will be recommended to close the district. Plans are already under way for the first night of the district on Sept. 14, the night before Auburn hosts its first football game of the fall. Called "AUtumn Night," the event is being put together by the Auburn Downtown Merchants Association, Auburn athletics and the Auburn Chamber of Commerce. The group hopes the event will entice people who may not usually come to the city's downtown area on game weekends. Another AUtumn Night is scheduled for Nov. 16, the night before Auburn's final home game of the season.

Owners and managers from businesses on West Magnolia Avenue voiced worries that their shops would experience a drop off in customers when the event closes traffic for live music.

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Chick-fil-A owner Bob McFadden also raised concerns during the citizens' communications portion of Tuesday's meeting. "I'm asking that if we're not going to host events where everyone can be happy, I'd like for it to be postponed," McFadden said. Auburn Chamber President Lolly Steiner defended the council's decision. "We don't want to do something that could potentially hurt downtown businesses," Steiner said. "This is a big event for the community, and we think it could actually help those businesses."

Cowper said the city's stipulations would ensure that the details of the new ordinance are properly enforced and not abused. "Places like Montgomery and Mobile that have vibrant downtown districts--they'll do that all the time any day of the week," **Cowper** said. "We're not planning to have that. We're planning on two, possibly three of those Friday night events. We may also have it for our annual ArtWalk that we do in the summer."

Many parts of the ordinance were included specifically to make the events as safe as possible. Coolers pre-loaded with alcohol purchased outside the district will not be allowed, and no glass containers will be allowed either. "We will have public safety officers down there to ensure that people are not leaving the entertainment district with alcohol or that they are buying alcohol for their underage friends," **Cowper** said, adding that they will likely have designated cups for alcohol purchased in the district. The entertainment district would only be designated for certain hours. "We would end it at a certain time on a Friday night to avoid the college kids," **Cowper** said. "Downtown is a lot different at 2 a.m. than it is at 8 p.m." Organizers hope the parking lots and empty areas to the northeast of downtown can be used to host the live music acts.

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Opelika-Auburn News (AL)
August 26, 2012

Auburn outlines plans for downtown parking facelift
\$1.3M project would commence in summer 2013
Author: Ed Enoch

The city of Auburn hopes to take the first steps this fall toward transforming the area around the parking deck downtown into a vibrant public space. The city's vision, shaped by input from civic groups, business and property owners and others, is a redesign of the space around the deck to add almost 100 new public parking spaces, event space and improved pedestrian pathways. The city's director of public affairs, David Dorton, estimated the project would increase the overall parking downtown by about 17 percent. The city staff estimates there are 538 spaces downtown currently. The staff presented its recommendation for redeveloping the area to the Auburn City Council on Aug. 7.

The recommendation calls for most of the new public parking spaces to be created on the east side of the deck, where AuburnBank's drive-thru teller complex and a city-owned vacant building stand currently. The city plans to demolish the buildings once the bank vacates the old drive-thru, which is on property leased from the city, and moves into its new drive-thru on the other side of Gay Street. AuburnBank President Bob Dumas said the bank expects to make the move by mid to late September. On the west side of the deck, the proposal calls for 47 parking spaces in a dual-purpose area that could also be used for outdoor events such as the city's periodic street festivals. Along the backside of the storefronts on East Magnolia Avenue and North College Street, the plan calls for brick-paver sidewalks and spaces for outdoor, café-style dining.

Assistant City Manager **Kevin Cowper** said the city would work with property owners on the redesign, noting the area is a patchwork of city- and privately-owned property. **Cowper** said the leased parking spaces on the west side would be moved into the parking deck. The plan also shows sidewalks in the parking areas that will connect with College and Magnolia along with enhancements of the existing alleyways. **Cowper** said the changes would give pedestrians a clearer sense of direction toward downtown. **Cowper** said the proposal, which is in the conceptual phase, will be incorporated into a comprehensive downtown master plan the city hopes to begin in early 2013 after finishing the planning for the redevelopment of the Opelika Road corridor. **Cowper** said the city has already budgeted for the process. The comprehensive plan's goal will be similar in spirit to the plans for Opelika Road, seeking to improve the downtown's aesthetics, infrastructure and development opportunities.

City Manager Charlie Duggan said the city plans to build temporary parking once the drive-thru and vacant building are demolished this fall while detailed plans for the area surrounding the deck are created by city staff and a consultant. Duggan and **Cowper** predicted the city would hire a consultant to help with the plans by early 2013, with major work on the east side of the

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deck beginning in summer 2013. The two expect work on the west side of the deck to begin sometime in 2014. **Cowper** said the city would try to schedule construction at a time that doesn't interfere with the college football season and the peak semesters at Auburn University. The cost for the project is estimated at \$1.3 million. When the redesign was first discussed in late 2011 leading up to a referendum vote in January, the estimate was \$750,000. **Cowper** said the cost increased after the city broadened the scope. "We kind of took it from a pure parking project and looked at the other things we could achieve," **Cowper** said. He said the city decided to broaden the scope after reviewing results from the annual citizen's survey and the comments from the early discussions. "It was apparent that it was more than purely parking," **Cowper** said.

Duggan said the staff was encouraged to explore different configurations and possibilities based on the input they received about redeveloping the area. The project will be funded primarily with revenue from bonds, which Duggan said sold better than expected when the city went to market. Duggan said the city may use additional revenues in the later phases of the project. "Things look pretty good," Duggan said.

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Opelika-Auburn News (AL)
June 5, 2011

Auburn Council to decide sewer, trash rate hikes

Author: Ed Enoch

The Auburn City Council will revisit ordinances to increase sewer and trash rates at its regular meeting scheduled for Tuesday. The proposals would increase the combined bill for solid waste, sewer and water fees by approximately \$5 beginning in October, if approved. The ordinances would also establish new security deposits and late fees for both services and a new formula for calculating water usage rates for multi-unit developments, such as apartment complexes. The increases would affect about 29,300 residential and commercial customers for both services, according to city officials. The increases would help pay for everyday operations, equipment replacement, debt retirement and capital projects.

City leaders defended the rate increases as the best way to raise needed revenue for the respective departments. “One way or the other, the city will have to come up with the money to pay for those upgrades,” assistant city manager **Kevin Cowper** said. “That can either come through rate payers, or it will have to come from other sources. If it comes from other sources, it means the General Fund.” The council delayed the vote on the ordinances at its May 17 meeting, citing a desire to provide residents with more information about the proposed hikes. Under the proposed increase for solid waste fees, monthly charges for curbside and backdoor service would increase to \$20 and \$30 per month, respectively. The rate is planned to eventually increase to \$23.50 for curbside and \$33.50 for backdoor by 2014.

Currently, customers pay about \$17 a month for curbside and \$26.50 for backdoor service. Trash rates would increase by approximately \$1 annually through 2014. The ordinance would establish a \$30 security deposit and a late fee of 5 percent of the total bill or a minimum of \$5. The plan also calls for a \$350,000 annual subsidy from the city’s General Fund to help pay for operations of the department. The proposed amount would be a reduction from the current subsidy from the General Fund used to shore up the budget for the service.

Currently, the city subsidizes the trash service with approximately \$650,000 from the General Fund, **Cowper** said. “The rates we are charging do not pay to fully support the system,” he said. The increases would help reduce the subsidy from the General Fund and replace old equipment including an aging fleet of garbage trucks, he said. “We have stretched our equipment as much as we could,” **Cowper** said. If the rates are not increased, the question for the city likely becomes where to cut. “If we don’t want to increase the rates, we can reduce the services we offer,” **Cowper** said. **Cowper** said the city could look at cutting nonessential services in the department, such as recycling or yard waste collection.

Mayor Bill Ham also used the example of recycling, which is popular but not essential. While not ideal, Ham said the city could save money by letting the material go to the landfill. “We have

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to pick up the garbage: that is a health and sanitation concern,” **Cowper** said. “Recycling is not something we have to do. Yard waste is not something we have to do. The noncritical components would be the ones we would look at the hardest to see whether we could reduce the cost.” The city’s Water Resource Management Department also faces a similar dilemma, **Cowper** said.

The sewer system runs the risk of failing to meet state and federal environmental guidelines with its aging infrastructure and facilities. The city hopes the rate increase will allow the department to make improvements to address regulatory requirements, increase capacity and fix aging infrastructure. The funds will also be used to cover debt service for larger projects.

The sewer rate hike would increase usage rates from \$4.32 to \$4.62 per 1,000 gallons of water beginning Oct. 1. The rate would increase annually through 2013. The sewer rate ordinance would also set new minimum monthly charges for the first 3,000 gallons of water. The minimum charges would be \$13.86 for 3/4-inch meters, \$23.17 for 1-inch meters and \$46.32 for 1 1/2-inch meters, with annual rate increases through 2013.

The sewer ordinance would revise the use charges for meters serving apartment complexes and other multiple-unit properties. The new charges are based upon a minimum usage charge of 2,000 gallons per unit. Existing charges are based upon a minimum usage of 3,000 gallons of water. The ordinance calls for security deposits from \$30 to \$165 based on meter size and a late fee of 5 percent of the total bill or a minimum of \$5. Director Laura Koon said her department has delayed everything it can. The upgrades have to be made to stay in compliance with state and federal regulations. The city’s current facility discharging water into the Saugahatchee Creek won’t be able to meet new requirements for phosphorus levels from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, **Cowper** said.

There are also new federal requirements for the disposal of solid waste from sewer treatment plants. “Factors like that are expensive,” he said. Infiltration of rain water into sewer lines is also another problem in some parts of the system, **Cowper** said. The storm water causes the sewer system to overflow. The department has approximately \$17 million of improvements it needs to make in the next five years, Koon said. About \$10.1 million of the work would occur at the HC Morgan Water Pollution Control Facility, including revitalization and improvements. The risk of delaying the improvements would be the associated costs of incompliance, **Cowper** said. “At some point, we will find ourselves in violation of state and federal regulations having to deal with the consequences of that,” **Cowper** said.

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Auburn Plainsman
November 18, 2010

Comprehensive Plan maps future of Auburn

Author: Abby Townson

The city of Auburn will present its new Comprehensive Plan 2030 to the City Council in a public hearing in April. Until then, citizens can learn more about the plan and participate by giving their input at public meetings. “Cities don’t just happen,” said **Kevin Cowper**, assistant city manager. “They have to be planned.” **Cowper** said one of the things people enjoy about Auburn is the quality of life. The new plan, he said, will enable taken-for-granted functions of the city, like traffic, economics and utilities, to be improved. “The comprehensive plan is the long-range planning document for the city,” said Forrest Cotten, Auburn’s planning director. “It’s a guide for future growth and future good growth.”

The plan, which is designed to provide guidelines on controlling and organizing land use and development, has been in the developmental stage for approximately two years. “What you’re seeing now over this last stretch is really the culmination of all of that work,” Cotten said. Cotten said it is unlikely that there will be any problems getting the plan approved by the Council. “Effectively, what will happen is the plan will get adopted, and then we begin a fairly involved process, probably an 18- to 24-month effort where we actually amend the zoning ordinance to correspond with the future land-use plan.”

The 2030 plan is not the first developed by the city. The 2000 and 2020 plans did not emphasize land-use planning. “The plan that we had in place previously was a little general, maybe a little bit too general to be practically applied,” Cotten said. Cotten said one of the primary benefits of the 2030 plan is that it will give people a feeling of predictability about future developments in the city. Cotten said the 2030 plan is a working plan, which the city will monitor and update every five years after it is passed. “It’s sort of a rolling stone,” said Warren McCord, a member of the planning commission.

McCord is a former Auburn faculty member and a part of the nine-member commission appointed by the Council to develop the plan. “Basically, you’re supposed to look at planning issues on a nonpolitical basis,” McCord said. The commission has worked for months with the city’s planning department to refine and modify the plan. “We’ve had about 10 work sessions with the planning commission dating back to May,” Cotten said. In addition, public hearings have been held to gain citizen input. “Anybody who’s a resident of the city of Auburn, I think, has a vested interest in not only knowing what Auburn’s like today, but how we as a government are saying Auburn is going to be like 20 years from now,” Cotten said.

McCord said one difficulty in the development of a comprehensive plan is that everyone has a stake in the results and different ideas on how things should be done. “Planning is something that is difficult to do in detail without some emotion,” McCord said. “It’s a complex, fascinating civic

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process.” McCord said the plan, if implemented correctly, would have many beneficial effects on the quality of Auburn as a city. If done wrong, he said, it could have some negative results. McCord said cities either change for the better or the worse.

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Auburn Villager, The
September 22, 2010

City doesn't want visitors to get lost

Author: Aaron Burns

Drivers at the intersection of Magnolia and College streets in Auburn have gotten accustomed to seeing toilet paper covering the oaks at Toomer's Corner after the Tigers win football games. Because of the city's desire to keep people from getting lost, drivers now will see something new at the corner: Illuminated street signs.

According to **Kevin Cowper**, assistant city manager, the city is seeking to improve the visibility of street signs to aid motorists in finding their destinations. "We've installed them at Magnolia and College, as well as Magnolia and Gay," **Cowper** said of the LED signs, which cost about \$1,800 each. "Toomer's Corner is a landmark intersection in Auburn, and we wanted backlit signs to make it as visible as possible," **Cowper** said.

Cowper said the signs' navy blue color scheme was specially made for the city to identify with Auburn University's navy blue. The company that produces the signs, Temple Inc., typically makes them in light blue or traditional green. **Cowper** said one of the primary reasons for the experiment is the desire to help non-residents find their way on the road without missing a turn. "As many guests as we have here on game days, and just regular days, it does help," he said. "We're looking throughout the city to help people navigate themselves around."

The city hasn't currently budgeted funds to construct more LED street signs, but there is the possibility of downtown expansion. The energy-efficient signs became an attractive option in part because they are low-maintenance, **Cowper** said. "With the new ones we've put out, the lights have a life span of about 12 years, and we don't want to take on something (like sign structure) that comes with more than a bit of maintenance," he added.

Both signs have been out for about a month, **Cowper** said, just in time for the start of the school year and the expected traffic onslaught football season brings to Auburn. "We just want to see if they're worth the expense, and if they are, we would like to install them at some more key intersections throughout the downtown area," **Cowper** said.

He added that the recent addition of larger street signs at intersections such as University and Samford should also aid in the effort to promote visibility for motorists unsure of their whereabouts when in town. In just a month's time, the signs have earned a good reception among those who see them most frequently. "Downtown merchants have given positive feedback," **Cowper** said. "When people notice what we've done with them and like it, that's good for us."

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McClatchy-Tribune Regional News (USA)
September 4, 2008

Auburn responds to Indian Hill suit

Author: Katie Stallcup

The City of Auburn has filed a motion to dismiss a lawsuit appealing the city council's decision to shorten Indian Hill Road, blocking a developer from connecting a mixed-use development to the city's road. In the motion, the city says it obeyed the laws and followed procedure and that the move was legal. The developer's suit "fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted," the city's motion says. "Therefore, it is due to be dismissed ..." The developer, SLABCO, LLC, filed the suit in circuit court as an appeal to the city council's July decision to vacate the right of way at the end of Indian Hill Road and giving it to adjoining property owners, in essence shortening the road.

When they found out developer David Scott's company had plans to connect an access road from a development to their residential street, homeowners expressed concerns about increased traffic and safety. Indian Hills subdivision is in the City of Auburn, but the road dead-ends at the Auburn-Opelika city limits. The planned development is in Opelika.

Scott has said connecting to Indian Hill Road is the only feasible option for an access road on that side of the development, as other possibilities are either too costly or too dangerous. **Kevin Cowper**, assistant city manager, said Auburn is in no doubt of its position. "We're confident that the city council followed the proper protocol in vacating the right of way and they acted within the confines of the law," **Cowper** said. Developer David Scott of SLABCO did not return phone calls.

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Opelika-Auburn News (AL)
February 28, 2008

Residents worried about impact of apartment complex

Author: *Katie Stallcup*

More than 50 people gathered in the City of Auburn's community meeting room Thursday to ask questions and express concerns about an apartment complex planned in the northern part of the city. Developers plan to build Charleston Square, a 247-unit apartment complex with 900 bedrooms likely to be student housing, on DeKalb Street. Most of those who attended Thursday's meeting lived in surrounding neighborhoods. Their concerns included a higher traffic volume, noise, children's safety and possible environmental impacts. Some residents said they thought the city was putting the students and the University before Auburn families.

Assistant City Manager **Kevin Cowper** said even if it wanted to, the city couldn't do much to prevent the developers from building the complex. Being in a Comprehensive Development District, "it is their right to build this project if it complies with city rules and regulations," **Cowper** said.

The development would connect North and South DeKalb streets, a move that has been in the city's street plan for many years, he said. When some residents voiced concerns about DeKalb Street becoming a throughway between East University Drive and Opelika Road, **Cowper** said only the city council could change the city's master street plan. Resident Grace Oswald asked how much of a buffer would be required between her and the complex.

City Planning Director Forrest Cotten said a solid fence at least six feet high would be required. Oswald asked how tall the building would be and was told three stories with a height of 42 feet at the eaves. The fence wasn't worth much, she said. "There goes privacy," Oswald said. "They can see in my backyard."

Paul Froede, a resident on Tulane Road, voiced his frustration about potential problems the complex might cause. "You put all these people on DeKalb, and you have a huge traffic problem," Froede said. "And it will probably decrease property value because nobody wants to live in the neighborhood from hell."

City Engineer Jeff Ramsey said a traffic study has been done and the city would be happy to install traffic-calming devices where needed. A development agreement between the developers and the city outlining the details of installing off-site improvements, such as traffic lights, is on the agenda for Tuesday's city council meeting, **Cowper** said. The city council will meet at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the council chambers at 141 N. Ross St.

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Mobile Register (AL)
January 14, 2001

Zoning vote for Magnolia Springs nears

Author: LEE DAVIDSON

MAGNOLIA SPRINGS - Local residents and county officials met in Magnolia Springs last week to discuss planning and zoning in the riverside community and to try to alleviate concerns of those who oppose new laws there. A referendum on planning and zoning in Magnolia Springs is set for Feb. 6 at the Magnolia Springs Wesleyan Church. One resident at last week's meeting asked, if zoning passes, whether the county would restrict the color the door on someone's house could be painted. "No" was the answer from County Planner **Kevin Cowper**, who fielded the questions at an informational meeting at the Magnolia Springs Volunteer Fire Department last week.

Other residents wanted to know if there would be restrictions on signs they placed in their yards or whether a person could run a business out of his home. To those two questions, **Cowper** gave a conditional "no." The issue of zoning is a complex one, **Cowper** said, and there was rarely an easy answer to any specific question. For example, if zoning laws are enacted in the community, the county would regulate location and size of a sign in someone's yard, but not its content. And there are existing regulations that place restrictions on certain kinds of businesses operated from people's homes, **Cowper** explained. "We're talking about historic preservation of the area and the preservation of the Magnolia River itself. This is about planning first - not zoning. Zoning is merely a regulatory tool helpful in implementing that process," **Cowper** told the 30 or so residents at the meeting.

Magnolia Springs resident Harold Sherman, who opposes zoning and attended the meeting last week, said **Cowper** did too much editorializing and not enough explaining. Sherman said **Cowper** emphasized the benefits of being part of the county's overall planning process and downplayed the term "zoning" because of the negative implications it has with some Magnolia Springs residents. Sherman said **Cowper's** responses were accurate based on the current zoning rules in other parts of the county, but that those guidelines would be subject to change in Magnolia Springs. **Cowper** said if zoning passes, a five-person advisory panel of local residents would be created to work with the county in determining specific rules for the community's zoning. And it is "the unknown" that people are concerned with, Sherman said, expressing interest in serving on the advisory panel. "Absolutely, I'd want to be on the panel," Sherman said. "But if it's a five-person committee appointed by your elected officials, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know there will be three in favor and two will be against it."

Sherman said it was not the existing rulebook that Magnolia Springs residents would be voting to approve, but rather the decision to let five people determine the zoning rules of the entire area. "Just because it's not in the book now doesn't mean it can't be put in it later on. If they (advisory board members) decide you can't paint your door yellow, then that's what will happen," Sherman

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said. If the majority of affected residents in Magnolia Springs vote for zoning, **Cowper** said it would take as much as a year for the select panel of residents to work with county officials to create its own regulations, unique to the area. Development may continue in the area until the zoning regulations are in place and adopted by the Baldwin County Commission. "There is the possibility of condos here that you don't see now," **Cowper** said.

County Commissioner Mary Frances Stanford of Magnolia Springs said she supports zoning and will vote for the process in February. "I think the opposition knows I'm for zoning. This is a wonderful place to live, and I want to keep it that way. **Kevin (Cowper)** provided good information and I hope he reached everyone here tonight," Stanford said after the Thursday night meeting. Since the process was created by the state Legislature in 1991, nine of Baldwin County's 32 planning districts have voted to create zoning ordinances. Magnolia Springs' Planning District 20 is the only area where citizens opposed being placed under the county's zoning laws when a referendum was held, **Cowper** said.

In 1996, citizens from Magnolia Springs petitioned for a referendum for District 20, but zoning was defeated 461-174. To be brought under the county's zoning and planning ordinance jurisdiction, a majority of citizens in a district must approve the action in a referendum. That zoning vote - which will be Feb. 6 - is set up only after a petition shows at least 10 percent of affected residents support it, **Cowper** said.

In October, the county reduced the size of Planning District 20 by about two-thirds. Zoning supporters believe that has cut out most residents who oppose zoning. Zoning districts can be altered at the discretion of the County Commission. The section up for the vote includes the 2-square-mile Magnolia Springs Historic Preservation District and most of the Magnolia River area. "If you want Magnolia Springs to stay like it is, zoning is a good option to consider," **Cowper** said. If the referendum fails, zoning advocates will have to wait another year before petitioning the county for another vote, he added.

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Mobile Register (AL)
January 10, 2001

Commissioners bid Cowper farewell

Author: LEE DAVIDSON

BAY MINETTE - As one county official prepares to leave Baldwin for another job, the unfilled positions of two other top spots in county government were discussed on Tuesday. County Planner **Kevin Cowper** received a standing ovation from Baldwin County commissioners, staffers and friends Tuesday in Bay Minette when commissioners recognized him for service to the county and its residents. **Cowper** will become director of planning and neighborhood development for the city of Pensacola if he signs a work contract there. His last day in Baldwin's Planning and Zoning Department is Friday. "I want to be the first to say that our loss is Pensacola's gain. There's no doubt about that," said Commissioner Mary Frances Stanford of Magnolia Springs.

In the resolution read by Commission Aide David Brewer, **Cowper** was honored for his dedication to the county since 1995 when he was hired as county planner. **Cowper** was credited with establishing the zoning department, creating zoning and subdivision regulations for the county and devising an overall master plan to chart the county's growth and development, according to the resolution. "I've benefited personally and professionally from working in Baldwin County. ... It's been an honor to work for the county," **Cowper** said.

Also during the informal work session Tuesday in Bay Minette, commissioners discussed filling the open, funded positions of county administrator and solid waste director. **Cowper** remained a finalist in the search for a county administrator on Wednesday, according to Personnel Director Susan Lovett. But after lengthy discussion, commissioners decided Tuesday to interview only their top three of the 20 or so serious contenders for the post, Lovett said. The three candidates selected are from Florida and Georgia - which means **Cowper**, who lives in Daphne, was not among the top three choices. Interviews for the county administrator post may begin as early as Thursday, if scheduling for all parties involved works out, Lovett said.

Also on Tuesday, commissioners discussed re-advertising the open, funded position of the development and environmental director, formerly called the solid waste director. Lovett said she will rewrite the advertisement, adding new language to emphasize the importance of landfill management experience. Of the 18 applications Lovett had received as of Tuesday, she said only one person met requirements of the post as it had formerly been advertised. All personnel plans discussed on Tuesday will likely be formally approved in commissioners' general meeting next week, Lovett said.

In other business, commissioners informally discussed:

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*How to handle an open invitation from IPSCO representatives for commissioners to visit a similar plant in Dallas. Chairman Joe Faust of Fairhope expressed concern over whether four or more of them visiting the plant would constitute an infraction of the state's open-meetings law. Commissioners did not reach a consensus Tuesday as to how to handle the invitation, which included a one-day trip to Dallas. Faust said he wanted more information on when they would go before he made a decision.

In early December, four of seven commissioners had lunch with IPSCO officials at the Mobile County mill and discussed the steelmaker's concerns about meeting state environmental regulations. No public meeting notice was given by the commission. At the time, Baldwin County District Attorney David Whetstone said the gathering was only a technical violation of the state's sunshine law.

*The level of response from county department heads and elected officials who were asked to justify the use of their county cars and trucks.

As of Tuesday, Lovett said that seven departments had responded to the commission's unanimous decision to have all personnel who drive county vehicles home at night say in writing why the cars or trucks are needed. The deadline for the other officials involved to respond to the commission's request is Feb. 1. QUOTE: "I've benefited personally and professionally from working in Baldwin County. ... It's been an honor to work for the county." — **Kevin Cowper**, county planner

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Mobile Register (AL)
December 22, 2000

County planner poised to take new job in Pensacola Cowper's exit would be 'big loss for the county'

Author: LEE DAVIDSON

BAY MINETTE - Attracted to a larger market and more metropolitan setting, County Planner **Kevin Cowper** said he will probably leave his Baldwin post for a similar job in Pensacola. For five years, **Cowper** has worked for the Baldwin County Commission, running its Planning and Zoning Department, which is based in Bay Minette. Beginning Jan. 22, **Cowper** will work for the City of Pensacola as director of planning and neighborhood development, if **Cowper** signs a contract with the city, he said Thursday.

Last week **Cowper** verbally accepted the Pensacola job and submitted a letter of resignation - effective Jan. 15 - to Baldwin County officials. While in Baldwin, **Cowper** said he has watched the county's landscape change, as officials worked to handle new growth and a steadily increasing population. He said he has experienced lawsuits filed against the county, citizens protesting changes to their way of life, and developers seeking exemptions from the county's zoning rules.

Cowper said his Baldwin experience has been rewarding, professionally and personally. He said he would miss the friends he has made in Baldwin County the most. If he signs the necessary paperwork with Pensacola, **Cowper** said his family - wife, Jenny, and two daughters, Emily, 4, and Carolyn, 2 - will relocate to Pensacola within six months. The **Cowpers** are members of Spanish Fort United Methodist Church.

A native of Saraland, **Cowper** started working for Baldwin County Nov. 1, 1995, earning about \$40,000 a year as the lead zoning officer in the county. Prior to his that, he had been a planner in Birmingham's Shelby County since 1991. **Cowper** earned a master's degree in city and regional planning from the University of Memphis in 1991, and a bachelor's degree in geography from the University of South Alabama in 1988. County officials who worked with **Cowper** said they want him to stay in Baldwin County, maybe as the county's administrator. "I very much hope that we will be able to keep **Kevin** here," Personnel Director Susan Lovett said. "He has applied for the county administrator's job. ... I don't know what will happen with that. I certainly think that **Kevin** is an asset to Baldwin County. He's built the planning department from the ground up."

Lovett said she has more than 40 resumes from applicants seeking the county administrator job. **Cowper** now makes \$56,000 a year, Lovett said. The administrator position has a salary range of \$65,000 to \$93,000 a year, she said. **Cowper** declined to comment specifically on his interest in the county administrator position. Commissioners will soon begin narrowing their pool of

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candidates for that job, Lovett said, adding that she was unable to estimate when a list of finalists would be ready.

Will Brantley, an environmental planner who has worked with **Cowper** in the planning office for three years, said **Cowper** would be greatly missed. "It would be a big loss for the county. He's been a great person to work with," Brantley said. "How would I describe him? He's very level-headed. And that's a good attribute to have given his job responsibilities."

Pensacola City Manager Tom Bonfield said Thursday that if **Cowper** officially accepts the city's job offer, he would oversee a staff of about 10 in the combined offices of planning and neighborhood development. Bonfield said city leaders are impressed with **Cowper's** experience, poise and tranquility under pressure. Working in Pensacola, a city of about 60,000 people, would bring different challenges to **Cowper**, Bonfield said. "We're more urban," he said. "The jobs are similar but different because we have re-development issues, where in Baldwin County you have more new developments."

Bonfield said about 50 people initially applied for the planning post, which city leaders offered to **Cowper** last week. "It was no trouble narrowing down that list," Bonfield said. "He (**Cowper**) has the experience, and he is highly thought of in Baldwin County. We brought him over for interviews and were very impressed." Added Bonfield, "I can understand why Baldwin would want to keep him."

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Mobile Register (AL)
December 4, 2000

Public meeting on flood management plan tonight

Author: GUY BUSBY

FOLEY - From Tensaw Delta, down Mobile Bay, along the Gulf Coast and up Perdido Bay to the Perdido and Styx rivers, water is one of the attractions that has made Baldwin County one of the fastest-growing regions in Alabama. But the inherent conflict between development and the forces of nature also has contributed to millions of dollars in flood damage over the last several years, according to a hazard-management plan to be considered by the County Commission.

Tonight, county residents will have a final chance to discuss the Flood Hazard Management Plan intended to guide development in areas prone to flooding and to reduce damage to buildings and the environment caused by flooding and growth, said **Kevin Cowper**, county planning director. The public hearing will begin at 7 p.m. in the Foley Civic Center "The plan is designed to lessen flood hazard so that when there is a flood event, the damage will be reduced," **Cowper** said Friday. He said the plan includes land-use regulations, education and conservation programs and other efforts to reduce the areas vulnerability to future floods.

During the meeting, residents will have a chance to hear reports on the plan from the officials who prepared the report and then comment on the proposal, **Cowper** said. Under the National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System, county's with developed flood-prone areas must adopt management plans. The county's first five-year Flood Hazard Management Plan was adopted in April 1996.

The programs earn home and business owners a discount of 5 percent to 10 percent off their flood insurance costs, according to **Cowper**. The plans must continue to be updated in order to continue the discounts. **Cowper** said the new plan will be presented to the County Commission on Tuesday. After the commissioners have had two weeks to study the plan, they are scheduled to vote on the proposal Dec. 19. **Cowper** said the plan continues efforts to reduce the risk of flooding in developed areas and to eliminate environmental damage caused by growth in or near the flood plains.

One of the proposals in the plan includes removing or moving buildings in flood-prone areas. Since 1997, six buildings have been acquired and removed in Baldwin County under the Federal Emergency Management Agency Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. Under the same program, the elevation of 24 buildings was increased to put the structures less vulnerable to rising waters.

FEMA pays 75 percent of the acquisition and elevation program costs, with 25 percent coming from local public funds. The program is intended to save money over time by reducing the number of repeated insurance payments that have to be made to repair structures in flood-prone

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areas, according to the report. The report also lists 37 bridges that are have become completely or partially covered during heavy rains.

FYI: WHAT Public meeting on flooding WHEN 7 p.m. today WHERE Foley Civic Center
INFO 580-1655 QUOTE: "The plan is designed to lessen flood hazard so that when there is a
flood event, the damage will be reduced."- **Kevin Cowper**, county planning director

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Mobile Register (AL)
August 1, 2000

Annexation wars in south Baldwin
Author: CHRISTMAS McGAUGHEY

ORANGE BEACH - Southeast Baldwin County has become the site of municipal land wars worthy of the strategy game Risk. Some cities are making aggressive moves to take in new territory, while other areas have been fortifying their positions:

* Foley's foray to the shores of Wolf Bay through annexation of property totally disconnected from its city limits has Miflin residents ready to join forces with the town of Elberta. When Foley took in the neighborhoods in 1998 - giving the city its first waterfront property - it was seen as a precursor for annexing Miflin.

* Surrounded by water and Gulf State Park, Orange Beach has been growing the only way it can: moving north across the Intracoastal Waterway.

Just last month, the Orange Beach City Council annexed 50 acres around the northern landing of the Foley Beach Express toll bridge and reasserted its planning control into the Josephine community, despite that area's efforts to control its own future through zoning. "It's getting confusing in the south end of the county because the city limits are moving so quickly," said **Kevin Cowper**, Baldwin County's planning director, who has been acting as a sort of referee between the clashing cities and communities. "Especially Foley, Orange Beach, Gulf Shores and now Elberta."

So why the scramble for annexation? More land means more money and more control for each municipality. The more taxable property, the bigger the tax revenue coming into the city, explained **Cowper**. Also, municipalities control zoning and planning within their boundaries, which means expanding towns and cities can control growth around them. Each city's officials have their own goals and objectives, and it's not easy to get them to agree on where to draw the line, **Cowper** said. Most of the moves have been concentrated in the unincorporated and little-developed area east of Alabama 59 and just north of the Intracoastal Waterway. "Now is the time you've got to get your boundaries," said Steve Kirkpatrick, a member of the Elberta Town Council and a proponent of the town's expansion.

State Rep. Steve McMillan, R-Bay Minette, agreed that boundary lines are getting confusing, and the state may need to step in sometime this fall. "We need to sit down with city leaders in all municipalities and determine reasonable boundaries for (annexing) unincorporated areas," McMillan said. "The time to settle boundaries is before there is a dispute." He added that the Alabama Legislature would wait until after the September vote concerning Miflin's annexation into Elberta before having such a pow-wow.

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Miflin and Wolf Bay area residents will vote Sept. 19 on whether they will be annexed into the Elberta town limits, said Kirkpatrick, who grew up in Elberta and is active with city planning, annexation, utility and fire departments. If the annexation passes, the town's population of about 600 would nearly double. "They didn't want to be a part of Foley," he said, referring to residents of Miflin and Elberta. "They figured it was the lesser of two evils." The Miflin annexation would benefit both sides, Kirkpatrick said, simply by protecting Miflin and Elberta from being overwhelmed by Foley's growing jurisdiction lines.

Cowper agreed that the bigger cities seem eager to gobble up pieces of unincorporated communities. The battle definitely accelerated in the last couple of years, he said, as cities outgrowing their borders looked for new elbow room - particularly in the form of valuable waterfront property. Another catalyst occurred June 30 with the opening of the new route through the southeast Baldwin battleground. "The Foley Beach Express and the bridge have accelerated annexations that may have eventually occurred sooner or later," **Cowper** said.

While Miflin residents have rejected Foley's advances, Josephine might be ready to run into that city's arms. Perched north of Orange Beach across Bay La Launch, Josephine is a quiet community of shady streets and deepwater bayous, where 300 households want to maintain control of their destiny. But events may force them to give up their independence. The skirmish began two years ago, when Orange Beach expressed interest in annexing the unincorporated community. The Josephine Homeowners Association went to the state Legislature, which added an amendment to Alabama's Constitution to protect the community from unwanted annexation.

The amendment passed in November 1998 prevents a city from annexing land either separated by a body of water or an interstate highway, or not connected by a toll-free bridge, without the consent of voters who live in the area. The legislation could prove to be a major barrier to Orange Beach, because so far only a private toll bridge has been proposed to connect the city to Josephine. And that idea, pitched by milk magnate George Barber Jr., has been stalled for the last four years.

Josephine community leaders said they are looking at all their options concerning future annexation, since the community determined in a study that it does not have the tax base, businesses or population to seek incorporation. "We are not for or against a certain city at this point," said Van McCamish, president of the Josephine Homeowners Association for the past two years. "Our main concern is that we want to remain a cul-de-sac." About half of Josephine's households in Josephine are permanent residents, said McCamish. "We don't want to become another Orange Beach or a Foley," he said. "We prefer to remain a community, unique in our own way."

He has spoken with Foley Mayor Tim Russell and town leaders in Elberta and said he'll also speak to Orange Beach officials about what Josephine residents could expect if they became part of those municipalities. "Elberta basically told us they couldn't afford us," McCamish said.

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Russell came to the association's annual meeting in June to discuss what life would be like if Josephine became part of Foley, McCamish said.

He said he will invite Orange Beach Mayor Steve Russo to discuss annexation next but that Josephine residents do not want a bridge connecting them to Orange Beach. "We don't want a four-lane highway coming through our community," McCamish said. "We want to remain at the end of the road." But growth is inevitable, he said. "We have several subdivisions being developed, and we will need the services of a larger community. We will probably have to seek annexation in the future."

The July 18 vote by council members to reassert Orange Beach's planning jurisdiction 1 1/2 miles north of the city limits - taking in part of Josephine - has Josephine leaders on alert again. Russo said there had been discussions "on and off" about the city partnering with a property owner to build a bridge connecting the two areas in an effort to overcome the legislative restrictions. But there has been "no concerted effort" by Orange Beach, he said. "We are not attempting to annex Josephine," Russo said. Still, if property owners approached him about annexation, Orange Beach would be "in favor" of such a proposition, Russo said. "We're still waiting for the county to turn over planning jurisdiction to us," said Russo, adding that he has received no word since the city voted to extend jurisdiction lines on July 18.

In 1995, the Josephine community voted to come under Baldwin County planning and zoning regulations. But following Orange Beach's recent action, property owners and developers will have to deal with both county and city rules. "Orange Beach's planning jurisdiction deals with subdivision regulations," **Cowper** said. For example, a homebuilder in that overlapping area would need to get zoning changes and building plans approved by the county but also would need city approval to subdivide the property - a common first step in development plans. Orange Beach has made a bolder move into the new frontier to its north.

At that July 18 meeting, the City Council annexed 50 acres north of the Intracoastal Waterway on either side of the new Foley Beach Express and its toll bridge, including about 20 acres it purchased from the Wilbur Bradford Trust earlier in July. Almost half of the property belonged to Bradley, who asked the city to include his land within city limits, Russo said. "We're only interested in annexing those who want to be annexed," he said the day after the annexation was announced. Elberta's Kirkpatrick said much of the public seems to be in the dark about how annexation works or how boundary lines are changing.

There are three ways to annex an unincorporated area: a landowner petition to a municipality; a referendum or vote of area residents; and legislative procedure, in which the state steps in and issues annexation approval. Although it is not mandatory, McMillan said, it is his policy to have a vote of residents showing their approval before he makes annexation decisions. That is the method that was used by Foley to take in Wolf Bay Pines, Bay Forest Estates and Graham Creek Estates near Wolf Bay. Annexation carries a lot of positives, Russo said, such as city police, fire and rescue services and the protection of zoning regulations: "Some people want that." But

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others who don't want to be annexed could be pulled against their will into a city's control, Kirkpatrick said. "If larger landowners petition to have their land annexed, the city doesn't need other people to come in," he said, citing George Barber and the Lawrenz family as two major property owners who collectively own approximately 12,000 acres just across Bay La Launch.

David Lawrenz and Barber could not be reached for comment. Barber's attorney, Danny Blackburn, said Barber had no comment about future annexation plans. QUOTE "It's getting confusing in the south end of the county because the city limits are moving so quickly – especially Foley, Orange Beach, Gulf Shores and now Elberta." **Kevin Cowper**, Baldwin County's planning director

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Mobile Register (AL)
July 9, 2000

County panel recommends turning down rezoning bid

Author: LEE DAVIDSON

FORT MORGAN - The county Planning and Zoning Commission has recommended denial of a request to increase zoning density to allow construction of four 20-story condos near the recently approved Beach Club West in Fort Morgan. Owners of Gulf Highlands Development, 117 acres that lie south of Fort Morgan Road just west of the Beach Club West, were denied zoning board approval or staff support from County Planner **Kevin Cowper** last week.

The Baldwin County Commission will have final say on the developers' request and will vote on the matter Aug. 1, **Cowper** said. If the County Commission denies the dual request, developers will have to wait a year before renewing their proposal with the county's zoning panel, **Cowper** said. Developers wanted about four acres rezoned as multi-family housing rather than its current single-family designation and another 20 acres to be rezoned as multi-family housing instead of outdoor recreation. That request failed 3-2.

In addition, developers requested that the entire 117-acre tract be categorized as a Planned Residential Development, which would allow developers to build a condo and resort area similar to the Beach Club West, **Cowper** said. The PRD request failed 4-1 with Dorothy Watts of Rabun casting the lone vote in favor of the proposal. "Being fair to developers" swayed Watts' vote, she said. "After we approved the recommendation for the Beach Club West, I felt we owed these people the same chance." **Cowper** was first to address the audience at the county zoning board's regular monthly meeting in the Loxley Town Hall Wednesday night.

In 1998, the Baldwin County Commission increased the number of units that could be built in Gulf Highlands - from 400 to 500 - by rezoning part of the property, including 17 of 37 acres of a private beach, **Cowper** said. It was "not appropriate" to rezone a recreational area to a multi-family dwelling area, **Cowper** said Wednesday night. "Rezoning recreational property to R-6 is not right," he said. Dan Blackburn, an attorney representing the developers, said they promised to donate about 50 acres to the county to remain as open space as a criteria of the commission-approved partial zoning and density increase in 1998.

Wednesday night, Blackburn requested an increase from 500 to 704 units with the buildings to be clustered on the southeast section of the site. By clustering the units into four 20-story condo towers, about 95 of the 117 acres would remain untouched, Blackburn said. He compared the site to the recently approved Beach Club West, calling his proposal "virtually identical in density, site coverage and overall land use."

Ed Hand, an engineer with Volkert and Associates, later spoke in favor of the proposal. "It's not that often that we're that far apart on what should and should not be approved," Hand said of

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Cowper's recommendation for denial. The proposed condos are about 200 feet farther from the beach than the original Beach Club, which sits about 530 feet off the shoreline, Hand said, while discussing other selling points of the project. Many residents who had protested the Beach Club West also spoke against the Gulf Highlands proposal Wednesday night. "The people down there are not against development, but we're against unwise development that affects our wetlands and causes erosion," said Bonnie Prescott Lowry of Fort Morgan. "It's not all a matter of money," she continued. "Think about hurricane evacuation time and how we're all going to get out of there on Fort Morgan Road. ... You must consider more than the almighty dollar."

The zoning panel's recommendation was not influenced by the residents' recent outcry against condos on Fort Morgan, **Cowper** said. The Beach Club West, a \$70 million development, received Baldwin County Commission approval June 20 despite continued opposition from neighbors. The two 20-story condos are part of a development that includes single-family housing, businesses and a planned conservation easement that may become a county park.

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Mobile Register (AL)
February 14, 2000

Protecting the environment

Author: JOEY BUNCH

WEEKS BAY - Staying ahead of Baldwin County's fast growth requires taking the first step toward a solution and gathering momentum, several speakers on a variety of environmental topics said Saturday during a five-hour summit at Weeks Bay. That first step means identifying the problems by talking through the issues, said Chuck Browdy of Fort Morgan, chairman of the Baldwin County Environmental Advisory Board. With fact-finding and determination, regular citizens and elected leaders can make meaningful progress in planning for growth and conserving the environment, he said. "You have to start somewhere. You have to have some persistence, but eventually you'll get there," Browdy said in response to a challenge from the audience on whether elected leaders have the political will to stand up for the environment.

The advisory board's annual meeting drew about 70 environmentally conscious citizens, elected decision-makers and representatives of agencies and organizations. The summit had its largest crowd in its four-year history to discuss environmental work done by the county, as well as issues and projects on the horizon. The board, made up of unpaid appointees, advises the County Commission on environmental policies, providing research and other volunteer work at no charge. The panel draws expertise from professionals with backgrounds that include environmental law, geology, forestry, solid-waste management, farming, property development, civil engineering, corporate management and environmental writing and publishing.

"The Baldwin County Environmental Advisory Board has certainly made a difference in getting our eyes focused on what the problems are," County Commission Chairman Frank Burt of Bay Minette said of the 7-year-old board. Burt said that when he joined the County Commission 11 years ago, leaders reacted to growth rather than plan for it. He said the work and input of all county residents will continue to be vital in planning for and preserving Baldwin's quality of life as the population spirals upward. Said Commissioner Dean Hansen of Gulf Shores: "This county is growing, and if we don't prepare for it, we're just spinning our wheels."

Planning for growth County Planning Director **Kevin Cowper** said that Baldwin's population could reach 250,000 by the year 2010. Census Bureau estimates put the county's population at about 130,000 in 1998. Largely because of that looming growth, county planners are beginning a three-year process to flesh out a master growth plan to serve as a policy guide for decision-makers. The first plank of that plan will deal with the environment. "I think the environmental element will set the stage for the rest of the plan," **Cowper** told the audience. The county will hold a series of public meetings to gather input from county residents and local organizations.

Though only a handful of areas outside municipalities have zoning, **Cowper** said elected leaders have a number of other tools at their disposal to manage growth. As examples, he listed

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subdivision rules, flood-hazard regulations and "where you choose to spend money" on infrastructure to support property development. Advisory Board member Peter Wiese of Fairhope pressed **Cowper** on whether any rules that exist now or when the plan is finished would prevent a person from putting in a hog farm in a residential area where there is no zoning.

Cowper said that there may be some environmental rules that would apply, but "for the most part, if it's outside a zoned area, pretty much anything goes." George Roberds of Fairhope, the chairman of the county Planning and Zoning Commission, said county commissioners were to be congratulated for the strides in growth planning over the past five years. He said they had showed great political fortitude. "I think the ones we owe a lot of thanks to are the county commissioners, who adopt and implement the rules," Roberds said in reference to the strides in county planning. "A lot of times, it's a very difficult thing to do."

Sewerage proposal Commissioner Hansen said that private sewerage companies were meeting a need in rural areas that have been feeling the pinch of residential sprawl in recent years. But, he said the commission needs to get a handle on the sewer companies that use county rights of way and sign up customers in new homes that are required to hook up to available sewer service under the Baldwin's subdivision rules adopted last year. Hansen said there's little or no meaningful regulation over how and where sewer companies extend lines. The Alabama Department of Environmental Management oversees sewage-treatment plants, but not sewer lines, he said. Hansen also is concerned about the private companies' rates, which are unregulated. "Once you're hooked onto them, you're hooked on forever," Hansen said of the private companies' lines. "It's against the law to unhook from them." At their meeting Tuesday, commissioners will appoint a blue-ribbon panel of engineers and other professionals to draft regulations that should apply, Hansen said. The panel will submit the recommendations to the County Commission before April 1. The commission will forward the recommendations to Baldwin's legislative delegation in hopes of gaining the authority to enforce them, he said.

Hazardous material

Some of the county's environmental threats may be the products of convenience and neglect by everyday people. Used motor oil, car batteries, cleaning solvents, gardening chemicals, half-empty paint cans and the like often are discarded with the household trash, eventually winding up in landfills, said Advisory Board member Ron Heveran of Fairhope.

Or worse, such chemicals are poured down the gutter, he said. The materials pose a risk to drinking water supplies, wetlands and waterways, according to experts. Dumping chemicals can kill livestock, fish and other aquatic life, and cause cleanups that cost taxpayers - or the culprits - potentially into the millions of dollars, according to chemical dumping cases in other parts of the country. "This is important because this is the type of material that, if it gets into the environment, can be very damaging and expensive to deal with," said Heveran, the past chairman of the Environmental Advisory Board. Heveran has worked for months on a way for the public to get rid of such hazardous chemicals at no cost in a way that's safe for the environment. The

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Alabama Coastal Foundation, based in Fairhope, has offered to help raise the money and administer the finances for the program. The Baldwin panel and the Coastal Fountain have set Oct. 19 and 20 for residents of Baldwin and Mobile counties to take their hazardous materials to public landfills. In 1993 and 1994, The Alabama Coastal Foundation and eight co-sponsors conducted a hazardous-materials collection drive at landfills in Baldwin and Mobile counties, but discontinued the program after that. The project cost about \$100,000 a year to pay a hazardous-materials company to collect the material, analyze it and dispose of it, said Lisa Adams, the Coastal Foundation's executive director, adding that she estimates it will cost \$250,000 this time around. The Coastal Foundation will try to raise the money from local government, state and federal agencies and corporations that offer environmental grants, she said. The foundation will conduct a survey of area residents to see how likely they will be to take advantage of the disposal program. "There are a lot of venues to pursue as far as funding sources, and that would be the role of the Coastal Foundation," she said.

Fairhope Earth Day Advisory Board member Eleanore Scott of Fairhope said that work is under way for this year's Earth Day celebration in Fairhope, April 16 from noon until 5 p.m. at the Fairhope Municipal Pier. Browdy told the audience, "Eleanore is Earth Day, if you're not already aware of that." Near the end of Saturday's presentations, Scott spoke about the advances in environmental awareness since she and others founded the Fairhope Earth Day celebration. Two years ago, she was named the Alabama Environmental Council's statewide volunteer of the year. "Ten years ago when I got involved working in the environmental movement, 'environmentalist' was a dirty word," she told the audience at the environmental summit. "We were known as 'wild-eyed tree-huggers,' among the nicer expressions." She said that for the progress to continue, those interested in the environment need to get involved and get their friends involved. She encouraged them to study issues and collect data on topics they are interested in and to contact elected officials and environmental agencies. "You can help make others aware that there is a cost-savings" to environmental programs, she said. "The start-up costs are not the bottom line.

You see these comments in Sound Off about 'how they're wasting money,' but in the long run, the things we do for the environment create a savings." Scott said that anyone interested in volunteering or setting up a booth at Earth Day is welcome to call her at 928-5730. QUOTE "This county is growing, and if we don't prepare for it, we're just spinning our wheels." County Commissioner Dean Hansen

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Mobile Register (AL)
January 26, 2000

Master plan takes center stage

Author: JOEY BUNCH

BAY MINETTE - An audience of more than 100 filled the Baldwin County Commission chambers Monday night, but no one spoke directly about the issue at hand - the proposed framework for the county's master growth plan. Instead, some at the public hearing spoke about the need for long-range planning to deal with Baldwin's fast growth, while others - including real-estate professionals, school leaders and farmers - said that they wanted to be part of the process. "We are concerned about the development because we live and work here," said Cathy Stapleton, president of the Baldwin County Association of Realtors.

Ms. Stapleton said the association has an obligation to inform the 650 Realtors and approximately 6,000 property owners it represents about changes that might affect them, as well as represent their interests. County Planning Director **Kevin Cowper** said the public will have every opportunity to stay abreast of the progress of the plan and express their views during every step. "If you're concerned about public input, don't be concerned," **Cowper** told the audience, "because we invite everyone's input in this process."

The plan will be the product of a series of public meetings over the next two or three years, **Cowper** said. Once complete, it will serve as a policy guide for leaders to decide where the development of homes and businesses is suitable in unincorporated areas. In theory, officials will consult the plan when they decide where to allow rezonings - in zoned areas of the county - or infrastructure that could spark growth in some areas or discourage it in others. "There are some that will view this planning effort as just another attempt by local government to infringe on the rights of individuals and property owners," said Jerry Knaebel of the Elberta area. "I believe those views are misguided, and in fact see this as a way to preserve those values that make Baldwin County such a desirable place and to protect its residents from the excessive cost of growth." The master plan is required by law under the 1992 legislation that allowed the commissioners to carve the county up into 32 planning districts. Residents in each of the planning districts can vote on whether to establish zoning. So far, only nine have.

In 1993, the county established a strategic plan to comply with the legislation. Critics, though, have said the strategic plan did little or nothing to guide land use, but instead set a course for the development of county services to handle growth. The master plan's framework has six parts that will be dealt with individually until the plan is complete - the environment; transportation; parks and recreation; utilities; agriculture, industry and tourism; and growth and development. The first part of the plan to be developed will be the environment. "We feel the quality of life in Baldwin County is tied very closely to the health of the environment," **Cowper** said.

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David Lawrenz of Gulf Shores, the former chairman of the Alabama Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce, suggested regional alliances to deal with some of the growth issues that affect the environment. Lawrenz said that what happens in Mobile and Pensacola has a direct impact on Baldwin's air quality and water quality. "So many of their problems become our problems," he said. Baldwin's growth also is putting a strain on its schools, said William Callender, Baldwin County's division superintendent of capital planning, construction, maintenance and transportation.

Callender urged officials to include long-range planning for schools in their deliberations of other growth issues. "We're going to look to you to advise and help us," he told commissioners. Callendar said the stress of growth is compounded by Gov. Don Siegelman's order to get rid of portable classrooms, as well as the Equity Funding Act of 1995 that could cost Baldwin County \$13 million next year. The act allows the state to hold back money from school systems with higher property values, such as Baldwin, and give that money to poorer counties. Callendar noted that Baldwin County has built 17 schools and 16 additions to existing schools since 1986 to keep up with the county's dramatic growth.

Howard Harris, who lives near Gulf Shores, said county officials need to think about sidewalks and bike paths in the growth plan. Harris said that while the Board of Education has built a lot of schools, the county hasn't provided sidewalks so that children who live nearby can walk or ride their bicycles there. "I think that's crazy," he said, adding the walking and cycling trails would help attract tourists.

Commissioners said they were pleased with the capacity crowd in the meeting chambers Monday night. Commission Chairman Frank Burt of Bay Minette said he couldn't recall a larger audience showing up for such a meeting. "It just shows me that when you have a good subject - and certainly Baldwin County is - and you're planning for the future of Baldwin County, people will come out and give their input," Burt said. The audience included a number of decision-makers from across the county, including state Sen. Albert Lipscomb, R-Magnolia Springs; state Rep. Steve McMillan, R-Bay Minette; Mayor Harry Brown and Councilwoman Nell Gustavson from Daphne; and Mayor Ray Carter and Councilman Joe Thomas from Spanish Fort.

The hearing also drew representatives from the Baldwin County Planning and Zoning Commission, the Baldwin County Health Department and the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission. "Together, this is what it's all about," Commissioner Joe Faust of Fairhope told the large, audience. "This is how we build Baldwin County."

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Mobile Register (AL)
November 7, 1999

Growth plan gets quiet introduction

Author: JOEY BUNCH

LOXLEY - Little was said when Baldwin County's proposed master plan cleared its first hurdle last week, but planners expect a lot of talk before final adoption of the blueprint for two decades of growth and development. After county Planning Director **Kevin Cowper** finished a 10-minute presentation Wednesday night to the county Planning and Zoning Commission on the proposed framework for the plan, no one had questions or comments.

Joe Godwin of Magnolia Springs, the vice chairman of the planning commission, called for comments from the audience of about 40 people, who seemed to be at the meeting for other issues on the agenda. "This is a very detailed, very long-range plan that will steer this county for many years to come," said Godwin, trying to coax opinions from his fellow board members and the audience at Loxley Town Hall. But like a pebble plunking into a pond, the comprehensive growth plan's presence will have a ripple effect.

The master plan could determine where growth is suitable, thereby defining where subdivisions, businesses and industries should be encouraged and which areas should be set aside as parks or farmland. The framework, as it stands now, has six parts, or "chapters," as **Cowper** called them: the environment; transportation; parks and recreation; utilities; agriculture, industry and tourism; and growth and development. "The bottom line is that this is a policy guide," **Cowper** told the planning commission Wednesday night. "This plan will be used as a guide for the growth and development in unincorporated Baldwin County."

Commissioners will vote on the framework at their meeting in Bay Minette on Dec. 21, when **Cowper** formally brings them the unanimous recommendation of the planning board and the results of a public hearing some time earlier in the month. **Cowper** said Thursday that within a few days he'll schedule a weeknight public hearing in the meeting chambers of the County Administration Building in Bay Minette. He said he hopes to have the hearing taped so that it can be broadcast on cable stations' local government and education channel throughout the county.

The public hearing can't be held, however, until it's advertised, as required by law, in local newspapers. Commissioner Hilo Middleton of Loxley said Thursday that whether he supports or opposes the plan will depend on what's in the proposal by the planning commission. "It's like anything else, there's some good in just about anything you do, but there's going to be some stuff the people can't go along with," said Middleton. Middleton said he felt strongly about measures that would help keep Baldwin's farming communities from being overtaken by growth. "That's the one thing that I feel is the most important thing that most people overlook" in terms of the impact of growth, Middleton said. "Every time you look around, a family farm is going out and they're putting in a new subdivision."

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Two years ago, the County Commission instructed **Cowper's** staff and the county planning board to get to work on a comprehensive growth plan for the unincorporated areas. If the County Commission adopts the framework for the plan in December, planners and interested citizens will tackle each issue individually, **Cowper** said.

In the coming months, the County Commission will schedule a series of public meetings and make information about the work on the plan as available as possible to the public, he said. Besides individual residents and neighborhoods, the county also will pursue input from groups such as the county Home Builders Association, chambers of commerce, the county Historical Development Commission and environmental organizations.

Once work on one chapter, or issue, is complete, the planning department will move on to another, **Cowper** said. Environment will be the first stop in the process to create the master plan, which **Cowper** expects to take between two and three years to complete. "My vision is that we begin with the environment and conservation areas that will serve as the basis for everything else," he said.

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Mobile Register (AL)
November 3, 1999

County puts limitation on development

Author: LEE DAVIDSON

BAY MINETTE - A new toll bridge corridor through southeast Baldwin can't become a congested clone of Alabama 59 or it would defeat the goal of offering time savings to motorists, developers and county officials have said. On Tuesday, in the first test of that resolve, county commissioners voted unanimously to:

*Table one property owner's request to change the zoning designation for 38 acres near the Foley Beach Express from "rural agriculture" to "general business," which would have opened the door for a variety of businesses.

*Approve a rezoning to "general business" for 25 acres in the median of the new corridor to allow development there as an official tie-in with the project.

The latter decision was made against the recommendation of the county's planner and Planning Commission. But commissioners agreed with the bridge project's point man that they were contractually bound to allow it. When the expressway opens in July, beach-bound motorists can divert off of Alabama 59 just north of Foley, bypassing that city on its east side and crossing the Intracoastal Waterway via a toll bridge to reach Gulf Shores and Orange Beach.

To protect its attractiveness as a shortcut, and its viability as a hurricane-evacuation route, the developers and county and city officials have said they want to limit the numbers of businesses and driveways along the road. The commission on Tuesday tabled the rezoning request of Bill Dyess, whose 38 acres are adjacent to the Foley Beach Express at Brinks-Willis Road. Dyess wasn't at Tuesday's meeting, but commissioners told county Planning Director **Kevin Cowper** to contact him and urge him to withdraw his application. If they had voted simply to reject the request, Dyess would have had to wait a year before asking for another zoning change.

Commissioners then approved a rezoning sought by Tim James, one of the three sons of former Gov. Fob James who are involved in building the road-and-bridge project. The business-zoning designation was given to 25 acres in three "plazas" in the median of the roadway, from Brinks-Willis Road to Baldwin County 4. With five lots per plaza, that will allow for a total of 15 businesses - such as fast-food restaurants, banks or gasoline stations - between the northbound and southbound lanes, James said Tuesday. "It'll look good," James said. "It won't be excessive, and we'd like to move forward with it."

Cowper said he and the Planning Commission recommended denial of James' request because no one from the Baldwin Bridge Co. was present to explain the project when the panel considered it and "not enough information was available. "We want to be cautious," said

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Cowper, who had also recommended rejection of the Dyess request. "We want to hold off on rezoning until we can form a land-development plan and correlate with the affected cities to design the use of the corridor."

James told commissioners that he was duck hunting in Canada when the Planning Commission had held its meeting. **Cowper** plans to meet with officials from Foley, Elberta, Gulf Shores and Orange Beach to discuss the management of business growth and development along the Foley Beach Express. James said, however, that the original three-part agreement among his company, Foley and Baldwin County called for construction of the three plazas. "The plazas have been in the plans because they are in the confines of a right of way," said County Attorney Bob Wills. "That's been an integral part from the beginning." James told commissioners he did not realize until recently that he needed rezoning in addition to the contract agreement.

Commissioner Dean Hansen of Gulf Shores said the plaza-area acreage is "encompassed by the road and should be treated differently from property adjacent to the road." Reached at home Tuesday afternoon, Dyess said he had not yet been contacted by **Cowper** about voluntarily withdrawing his application. Dyess said he might submit a new zoning request, this time to allow medium-income housing, but it was "too soon to know for sure," he said. "I just want it to be equitable," Dyess said. "I don't know what I'll do with the property now. I don't see how they can keep new businesses out of that area." Register graphic Corridor controls. Rezoning was approved Tuesday to allow for construction of businesses linked to the toll bridge in south Baldwin County. County leaders denied rezoning to adjoining property in an effort to control business development along the route to Gulf beaches.

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Mobile Register (AL)
October 20, 1999

Residents try to keep out big business

Author: LEE DAVIDSON

BAY MINETTE - Montrose area residents have stopped one prospective buyer from establishing an automobile shop in their backyard. But residents and Realtors agree: Growth in Baldwin County will be hard to prevent in the long run. After almost three months of discussion, the county voted to deny a B-3 general business rezoning request that would have allowed an automobile sales shop to be established at the northwest corner of U.S. 98 and Graham Street.

Commissioners accepted the zoning board and the county staff's recommendation to deny the request, although county planners said the zoning laws in place should be looked at in order to avoid similar issues surfacing throughout zoned areas of the county. The county adopted a uniform zoning ordinance in April, combining the zoning codes for the nine districts where residents since 1993 have voted to create zoning regulations.

There are 22 other planning districts that haven't petitioned to create zoning for their communities, and Magnolia Springs residents rejected zoning in a 1995 vote. "Any time you try to make rules apply to nine different areas, you are going to have some problems," said **Kevin Cowper**, the county planning director. "We're still working out those problems." The unified zoning ordinance needs modification, **Cowper** said. An amendment to the county's zoning ordinance will be discussed at a Planning and Zoning Commission workshop at 3 p.m. Thursday at the Foley satellite courthouse, said **Cowper**.

The property in question - about three-fourths of an acre - may be free of an "upscale" automobile shop now, but real-estate agent Starke Irvine, who petitioned the county to rezone the property, said denying his intended buyer's request will open the door to buyers who may have less-tasteful plans for the property. The vacant lot is situated among business and residential sites in an area of rapid growth, like most stretches of U.S. 98 between Daphne and Fairhope. It is a B-2 local business district, zoned for areas of limited retail convenience goods and personal service establishments. In other words, stores where lights do not burn 24 hours a day and noise is kept to a minimum, such as private businesses and specialty stores.

Automobile repair shops are included in B-2 zones. This inclusion seems to contradict the criteria for B-2 zoning, **Cowper** said. "An automobile repair shop can go there under the current zone and they can't stop it," Irvine said. He agreed with **Cowper**; the county's zoning ordinance should be amended to exclude automobile repair shops in B-2 zoning. Irvine said the property should be rezoned as a B-3 general commercial district - for businesses that generate higher levels of traffic and noise and have a need for outdoor storage. Opponents said B-3 businesses would be a nuisance to nearby residents. Fast-food restaurants, service stations and car dealerships fall into this category, **Cowper** said.

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Irvine said his buyer would work with neighboring residents through a "good-faith contract" and promise to keep noise levels low and limit hours of operation. Opponents said there was no guarantee the business would be a successful venture or remain under current ownership. If the zoning is changed, another buyer could establish any other B-3 business on the site. It was a risk some residents did not want to take. Montrose Woods resident Carlton Niemeyer said he did not want a zoning change, but saw Irvine's proposal as "the only way to have something nice, as opposed to something objectionable," he said. "I'm against B-3 ... but I'd rather roll the dice and have a 50-50 chance of having them put something nice there."

Cowper said, "If we change this, we'd set a trend to change the whole area. We need to decide if we want it to be a local business area or a general business area." Both Irvine and **Cowper** said re-evaluating or amending zoning ordinances was worth looking into because automobile repair shops are classified B-2, and automobile sales shops are B-3. "If this applicant (Irvine) is turned down, a used-car repair station could buy the property and set up shop without any problems," Commissioner Dean Hansen of Gulf Shores said during Tuesday's public hearing.

The ordinance also needs investigating because of the number of businesses that are not in compliance with current zones but are grandfathered in by law. If those businesses closed or received more than 50 percent of their worth in damage, they could not rebuild or reopen, according to the current zoning ordinance, said Commission Chairman Frank Burt of Bay Minette.

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Mobile Register (AL)
February 7, 1999

Planners revise proposed code

Planners revise proposed code Subdivision regulations are growth tool Despite earlier opposition, few attend as planning commission makes adjustments By JOEY BUNCH Staff Reporter LOXLEY - Developers, landowners and other real estate professionals gained some allowances on lot sizes in the latest draft of the amendments to the county subdivision regulations, the main tool of growth management in Baldwin's unzoned, unincorporated areas. But among about 50 recommended changes from the real-estate community the county Planning and Zoning Commission stood by two strong and controversial changes to the subdivision regulations:

- Adding mobile home parks to the subdivision code.
- Removing an exemption on subdividing 3-acre parcels.

At a public hearing on Jan. 25, an audience of about 100 developers, Realtors, homebuilders, surveyors and landowners convinced county commissioners to send the proposed regulations back to the planning board for revisions. The 12-member planning commission last week made numerous changes from the previous draft - as insignificant as dropping a few unneeded words and phrases to cutting in half the allowable lots sizes in areas without water and sewer service.

The board voted unanimously to resubmit the subdivision regulations to the County Commission, which will schedule at least one public hearing within about six to 10 weeks, then vote on the amendments in a regular commission meeting after that, said **Kevin Cowper**, the county planning director. Because his office is in the process of moving from Foley to Bay Minette, **Cowper** said it would be several weeks before his staff can publish the latest version of the proposed 89-page subdivision code. Copies will cost \$5 each to cover printing and handling costs. The subdivision regulations, last amended in May 1997, tell developers and property owners how big their lots have to be and what type roads, drainage and utilities are required at that size.

The subdivision code is the county's primary tool for managing the density of developments and channeling growth away from flood-prone areas, particularly in unzoned areas. Affordable concerns The main knock against the rules before the latest revisions is that they will make building and buying homes in Baldwin County more expensive because of the added infrastructure and larger lots. **Cowper** told planning commission members that the county's long-range plan has two important planks in it: to protect the environment by managing development and to provide affordable housing. ``The hard thing to do is balance economic development with

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environmental preservation," **Cowper** told the planning commission. "The goal here (with the regulations) is to provide adequate infrastructure and still be able to provide affordable housing."

Before the latest revisions, opponents had said the new infrastructure and larger lot requirements would drive up the cost of homes in rural areas. Under current regulations, the smallest lot a developer can carve out is 8,000 square feet with 80 feet of road frontage, if the lot has water and sewer service available. The planning commission Wednesday night added an amendment that would reduce the lot size to 7,500 square feet with 60 feet of road frontage.

Planning commission member Art Dyas of Fairhope said the board should come up with a plan for developments with such small lots to encourage clustered housing with ample green spaces for landscaping and to benefit the environment. The board also spelled out that sidewalks would not be required in mobile home parks, as they are in other such condensed subdivisions. Mobile home parks aren't currently regulated in the subdivision code. The proposed rules would apply to any development with five or more manufactured homes, restricting lots for single-width trailers to 5,000 square feet and double-wides at 6,500.

Planning commission members did not back off of regulating the mobile home parks and stuck to the lot sizes called for in the previous draft. The planning commission reduced the minimum lot size for a subdivision without public water and sewer services from two acres in the previous draft to one acre in the proposal county commissioners now will consider. Currently, a half-acre lot can be sold in an area without water or sewerage if its septic tank is approved by the Baldwin County Health Department. The proposed amendments to the subdivision code would allow a half-acre lot if either public water or sewer is available. The planning commission, though, held to its position to do away with an exemption from the subdivision rules for property divisions of less than three acres that have 210 feet of road frontage.

Joe Godwin of Magnolia Springs, the vice chairman of the planning commission, said developers and landowners have repeatedly taken advantage of the exemption to the detriment of the environment and those who buy lots in the small subdivisions. "This three-acre thing has been a problem for us for years," he said of the exemption. "It's been abused in every shape and form out there." Richard Thompson of Fairhope, who buys and sells property in Baldwin County, said the planning commission is trying to regulate areas that don't need such far-reaching government management. "They want everybody on everything to come see them," Thompson said of the planning commission.

Small turnout

Though about 100 people attended the County Commission's Jan. 25 hearing, many seeking to have more input on revisions, only three people sat through the planning commission's Wednesday night discussion. The small audience raised only a few questions and no strong objections. Fran Faust Slade of Fairhope, who spoke on behalf of the delegation of Realtors on

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Jan. 25, said on Thursday she didn't attend the planning commission meeting because she had not been notified that the board would be taking up the regulations so soon.

The Realtors submitted a detailed list of questions and concerns and were told by commissioners that they would have the chance to meet directly with county staff to work through the list over the next few months, she said. Thompson said he also was not aware that the subdivision regulations would be taken up Wednesday night, even though he said he asked planning commission staff that day if anything interesting was coming up at the meeting. They didn't mention the subdivision regulations, he said. Other real-estate professionals he had talked to also had not been aware of the meeting, and that's why turnout was so low, Thompson said. Thompson said he expects the same opposition that was at the Jan. 25 public hearing to show up at future public hearings. "My opinion, and that of the people I've talked to, is outrage because of the way they've handled this thing," Thompson said of the planning commission's handling of the regulations.

The planning commission's meeting agenda was published in Tuesday's Baldwin Register, including that the board would discuss public comments on the subdivision regulations. **Cowper** said on Thursday that he and other county officials had talked extensively with the Realtors, Thompson and others about the proposed amendments. Their concerns, including the Realtors' submitted list of questions and objections, were a big part of the revisions made Wednesday night.

Before the Jan. 25 public hearing, **Cowper**, George Roberds of Fairhope, a homebuilder who is chairman of the planning commission, and other county officials met with Realtors and developers in a four-hour meeting. Roberds said adjustments made by the county staff after the meetings and public hearings were suitable without "going down a checklist" blindly accepting every requested change. "We try to make decisions that are in the best interest of Baldwin County, and that's where we're coming from," Roberds said Wednesday night, "but many of the comments they made were real good."

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Mobile Register (AL)
October 26, 1998

County staff records growth and progress

Author: *JOEY BUNCH; Staff Reporter*

BAY MINETTE Growth within the Baldwin County Planning Department has meant growth in environmental initiatives, judging from director **Kevin Cowper's** annual report presented to county commissioners last week. **Cowper** pointed to numerous gains Baldwin has made in the past year to manage the steady growth in population and brace the environment for the continued onslaught of new homes, businesses and infrastructure. "Planning so often takes a lot of time months and years to see what we do," **Cowper** told the commissioners.

On Earth Day last April, Baldwin County's Planning Department was named the best local government operation in the region by the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, an initiative to sustain the health of the Bay's watershed. Among numerous environmental projects, **Cowper** and Environmental Planner Ed Polasek are currently working with Commissioner Joe Faust of Fairhope and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on a pilot program to build retention reservoirs in the Fairhope and Foley watershed.

The reservoirs will curb flooding and siltation in the Fish and Bon Secour rivers, as well as connected waterways, and could be duplicated countywide, officials hope. In addition to overseeing nine zoning districts in the county and countywide subdivision regulations, the department assists the county Planning Commission and several local boards of adjustment. **Cowper** and his staff also work with citizens groups, such as the County Commission's Environmental Advisory Board, the Baldwin County Water and Sewer District, the Perdido Ecosystem Restoration Group and the Weeks Bay Watershed Management Committee.

The planning department also is the county's liaison to state and federal agencies, such as the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Census Bureau. The department also has helped draft planning projects for roads and bridges, parks and other recreation, a Gulf Coast birding trail, as well as housing and economic development programs.

Between October 1997 and the end of that fiscal year, the department processed applications for 98 subdivisions throughout the county, 674 land-use certificates in the nine zoning districts, 19 rezonings, 60 zoning variances and 17 zoning enforcement cases, among a list of procedural functions. The County Commission started the planning department in 1996, branching it off from the building department.

Cowper was hired as the sole county planner in October 1995. Last year, the commission hired Polasek as the county's first environmental planner and engineer George Davis as a subdivision planner and inspector. Nancy Mackey is the county's zoning coordinator. The department will

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add Will Brantley as a wetlands expert and environmental planner later this year, once he completes a federally funded wetlands delineation and mapping project for the Alabama Department of Environmental Management.

Cowper's annual budget is \$280,000 including \$45,000 in fees and other revenue generated by the department. In compiling the fiscal year's budget, which took effect on Oct. 1, commissioners chose not to renew a \$36,000 annual environmental consulting contract with Tom Hutchings, who had worked the past 15 months.

Commission Chairman Frank Burt of Bay Minette said the county might use Hutchings on future projects and pay him on an hourly basis. Before commissioners decided not to renew his annual contract, Hutchings offered the commission an optional rate of \$75 an hour plus expenses. Also at last Tuesday's meeting, commissioners awarded service pins to employees who collectively have worked 460 years for the county. Commissioners led a standing ovation for the group after county personnel specialist Susan Lovett said, "I'd like for you to join me in honoring the finest employees anywhere for 460 years."

The honorees were:

[Article shortened – no further reference was made to Mr. **Cowper**]

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Mobile Register (AL)
April 21, 1998

Groups honored for work

Author: *JOEY BUNCH; Staff Reporter*

Those who do good things for the environment got their moment in the sun at the Alabama Environmental Council's Earth Day/Bay Day celebration Sunday in Fairhope. The award winners and more than 70 Mobile Bay National Estuary Program volunteers including top scientists, corporate officials and regular citizens will be honored at a reception Wednesday night. "They're the silent rank," Lisa Mills, the scientific program coordinator for the NEP, said of the volunteers.

The goal of the awards handed out Sunday is to attract attention to the people and organizations who exemplify responsible stewardship and to encourage others to follow suit. "The awards also seek to enhance relationships and create partnership opportunities while illustrating the role each of us have in our daily lives on the future of Mobile Bay and the (Mobile-Tensaw) Delta," according to a statement from the NEP office in Fairhope. Friends of the Tensaw chairman Neil Robison of Spanish Fort accepted the best environmental organization award, presented by U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Mobile. Since 1995, Robison and Davida Hastie of Stockton have waged a campaign against state regulators and corporations to protect the water quality of the river that feeds the Delta and Mobile Bay.

The organization has a lot of sympathizers but no official members. The Baldwin County Commission has backed the cause. Robison and Mrs. Hastie initially sought to have the 35-mile river classified as an Outstanding National Resource Water, which provides the toughest federal protection for a body of water. Industrial groups such as Alabama Power and paper companies that use the river waged a strong campaign in Montgomery to kill the ONRW petition, claiming it would significantly impede their efforts to do business in the Delta.

Working with their opponents, however, Robison and Mrs. Hastie helped draft the Tensaw River Initiative, a protection plan that calls on the Alabama Department of Environmental Management to designate the river as an Outstanding Alabama Water. Though the Baldwin County Commission made the request for the state's best water-quality status more than a year ago, a decision on the designation has grown stagnant in ADEM's office, said Tom Hutchings, the County Commission's environmental consultant. Hutchings and a delegation of commissioners and county residents plan to meet with ADEM Director Jim Warr in Montgomery on Thursday to press for a ruling on the protective status for the Tensaw.

Planning Director **Kevin Cowper** accepted the Stewardship Award as the best local government board on behalf of the county, with Hutchings and commissioners Joe Faust of Fairhope and Allen Perdue of Daphne in the audience. Since **Cowper** joined the county staff in 1995, commissioners have updated and strengthened subdivision regulations and other growth-

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management measures. Last summer, the commission hired Ed Polasek as the county's first environmental planner.

The county also has developed a \$3.2 million Geographic Information System computer and assisted coordinator Will Brantley in developing the Advanced Wetlands Identification Project to map out sensitive areas south of Interstate 10. **Cowper** currently is working on a uniform zoning ordinance for the entire county, which may encourage residents in areas not currently zoned to consider land-use controls to shield themselves from residential and industrial growth and to protect the environment. Though residents in planning districts would still have to vote on whether to adopt a local zoning ordinance, **Cowper's** draft would allow voters to see exactly what regulations might apply to their property before they vote. The vagueness of possible zoning regulations in the past has worried some residents and given fuel to those who campaign against land-use regulations, planning officials have said.

Cowper and his staff also have been conservative on granting allowances to developers in environmentally sensitive areas, particularly where resorts and golf courses are beginning to crowd shorelines and wetlands, especially along Fort Morgan Peninsula. "They have succeeded in raising the environmental awareness of local officials, developers and citizens throughout the county," said Russ Wimberly, the director of the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission, a member of the nominating committee.

Other members of the nominating committee were Debbie Jessup of the Baldwin County Environmental Advisory Board; Cathy Schimmel of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs coastal programs office; Danny Calametti of the NEP staff; Kay Friedlander, the co-chair of the NEP's citizens advisory board; and Tina Sanchez of the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission.

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Mobile Register (AL)
October 6, 1996

Residents want sign regulations

Community meetings on county planning draw few participants

Author: DAMON COX

Regulations that limit the number, size and design of signs along Baldwin County roadways and biking trails were a pair of suggestions residents offered county officials this week at a community meeting. Some residents were concerned that as Baldwin County becomes increasingly commercialized, signs will clutter the view along the county's roads and make the area less attractive if left totally unchecked. Most municipalities in the county have sign ordinances, but areas outside the city limits, where much of the county's growth is occurring, don't have the same measure of aesthetic protection.

About 20 people Thursday night attended the last of a series of community meetings held across the county to offer residents a voice in updating the county's long-range plan. Most of those who did attend the meeting in Daphne at Knights of Columbus Hall were either county officials or members of Baldwin County United, the citizens' organization sponsoring the meetings. A network of biking trails in the county would provide an alternative way to enjoying Baldwin County outdoors, enhancing the quality of life, said Teko Wiseman, president of Baldwin County Trailblazers. The Trailblazers is a citizens organization pursuing such trails.

The Baldwin County Commission this summer rejected a request that the county put up matching funds for a hiking and biking trail along Scenic 98 through Montrose if the project earned a federal grant. But Mrs. Wiseman urged county officials at Thursday's meeting not to abandon the trails concept all-together. She said that when the county builds new roads, widens roads, or resurfaces them, county officials should make it a routine procedure to see if building a parallel path for cyclists would be feasible. It could be easily done in many cases, she said, all that's needed is some forethought.

Instead of paving the entire 8-foot shoulder along the roads with rough gravel-like material that most shoulders are made of, only the 4 feet closest to the road's edge would be paved with the rough material while the outside 4 feet would be paved with smooth asphalt creating a trail for cyclists, Mrs. Wiseman said. "We found a way to do them with no new cost to anyone," Mrs. Wiseman said. "We hope to sell the idea to the County Commission."

Janice Boudreau of Baldwin County United said the suggestions in Daphne were just the type of input planners and county officials are looking for. "A sign ordinance and biking trails are certainly good ideas," Mrs. Boudreau said. "The Daphne meeting was the first in which those specific items were brought up, and they're consistent with the concerns were heard all over the county. Growth management is at the top of the list." If and how those suggestions should be implemented will be the County Commission's decision in coming months.

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Growth management is the challenge of providing services, such as adequate roads, to accommodate an exploding population, while preserving the environment and overall quality of life that is drawing people to the area in the first place, Mrs. Boudreau said.

The county's strategic plan, one of only five such county plans in the state, is the best way of ensuring that happens, she said. With such high stakes though, attendance at the community meetings were generally disappointing, Mrs. Boudreau said. But she and other participants in the meetings, still consider the sessions productive. "Getting public input has been a top priority of this entire project since its inception," **Kevin Cowper**, county planner, said.

Work on the initial strategic plan began in 1992. "We've got to assemble all the comments from the meetings, and organize them into any new action steps," **Cowper** said. "I anticipate there will be some new policy decisions the County Commission will have to make based on the public input we received." The commission is expected to adopt a revised strategic plan in coming months. When county government's actions, or lack of action, directly affect residents they've shown they're not shy about speaking up. But attendance at the latest series of Baldwin County United meetings shows growth management is not yet a hot-button issue.

The difficulty in getting better public participation is that long-range planning doesn't carry a sense of immediacy that ignites residents' passions, meeting participants said. "I think these meetings are tremendously important," Mrs. Wiseman said. "But it seems that it takes an issue that's really close to somebody in their backyard to get them to participate in the process. Then they come out in the hundreds."

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Birmingham News (AL)
February 8, 1995

JUST A CHAT

"I get on my soapbox when dealing with narrow-minded people," **Kevin Cowper**

Occupation: Planner, Shelby County Department of Planning and Development.

Residence: Helena.

Age: 30.

If I didn't have this job, I'd want to be: The boss.

My favorite TV shows are: Seinfeld and Melrose Place.

My favorite movie is: Most recently, Forrest Gump.

My favorite comic strip is: Believe it or not, I never read the comics.

My favorite junk foods are: French fries and chocolate.

My idea of a great evening is: Spending it with my wife.

What most people don't know about me is: I'm a British citizen.

The best advice my parents ever gave me was: Get an education.

My favorite childhood memory is: The Christmas I got my first bicycle.

My first job was: Working at my uncle's convenience store.

My biggest accomplishment has been: Earning a master's degree.

I really hate it when: People park in fire lanes and handicapped spaces at the grocery store.

I worry too much about: Getting my job done.

It would take an act of Congress to get me to: Drink iced tea.

My dream car is: A Mercedes-Benz.

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Birmingham News (AL)
January 31, 1994

COMMISSION PROBES HOME PLUMBING COMPANY

Author: *Kent Faulk News staff writer*

The Shelby County Planning Commission may take legal action against a man who is operating a plumbing company out of his house in North Shelby. The commission voted recently to have the planning staff look into possible legal action against Kelly T. Lewis, who operates Lewis Plumbing out of his South Shades Crest Road house. Lewis was operating the business there when zoning regulations went into effect in Beat 5, and that area of South Shades Crest Road was zoned for residential use in 1991.

Lewis' property was ""grandfathered" in as a non-conforming use, which means he could continue to operate the business as long as he made no changes to the property. Planning commissioners decided to pursue enforcement action against Lewis after denying a request from him to rezone the property for business use. Lewis said he wants to move out of the house and make improvements to make the business appear more appealing to the community.

About 40 residents who came to last week's meeting presented a petition signed by 158 people opposing the rezoning and clapped after the commission voted to deny the zoning change and to look into taking legal action. The residents said the property was an eyesore, the business was noisy and employee parking and truck deliveries created traffic problems.

They also complained that Lewis' business was expanding, said Jeff Pruitt, director of the county Planning Department, and the planning staff began trying to enforce the zoning ordinance. Lewis said he has not expanded his business and nothing has changed in re-cent years. He said he still has the same number of trucks, and the number of people he employs has decreased from 49 two years ago to 32 now.

Kevin Cowper, a county planner, said last week that the staff is preparing a case to present to the Shelby County Commission for possible legal action. The commission could ask a judge to order Lewis to comply with the zoning regulations, meaning he would have to go back to the level of operations he had in 1991 and remove any business-related improvements to the property since then.

Besides residents' complaints, the planning staff has seen the site and believes Lewis has added storage space and employee parking, **Cowper** said. Whether he has made changes would be a point of contention if the case goes to court.

However, the planning staff is trying to find a solution to the problem ""because we don't want to waste the taxpayers' money," **Cowper** said.

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Wanted rezoning

Lewis had promised improvements to the property if he were granted the rezoning. But the planning staff recommended against rezoning the property and expressed concerns that giving Lewis commercial zoning could bring more businesses into the area.

Lewis said he didn't attend the meeting because he thought the planning department already had denied his request based on a letter he received. ""That's the reason I wasn't there . . . I thought it had already been denied," he said.

Lewis said the only time there is an unusual amount of traffic from the house is when his 13 trucks leave each morning and return each afternoon.

Research Compiled by: Levon Little & Lynelle Klein
 Colin Baenziger & Associates