

CHATT ...About



A monthly publication of the Chatt Hills Community, a citizen-run news service that connects, informs, and engages friends & neighbors of Chattahoochee Hills, GA.

Celebrating 10 Years ... of Chatt Hills

By Laurie Searle, Citizen Reporter

Ten years ago today, residents in our community ended a year-long debate, weighing the pros and cons of forming our own city.

On the “pro” side, we’d have more control over how our area developed. We could elect local representatives who could strengthen and build upon the Chattahoochee Hill Country overlay, embracing the idea of concentrating development in village nodes while preserving the rest of the area rural.

On the “con” side, there were so many unknowns. Could our meager tax base sustain basic services? Would the neighbors we elect have sufficient qualifications to start-up and run a city? Could a community of 2,150 residents do enough to preserve our rural values?

On June 19, 2007, nearly 50 percent of the 1,381 eligible voters cast their vote in the referendum to incorporate the city of Chattahoochee Hill Country. The vote carried by 569 residents voting Yes and 112 residents voting No.

In this Special Anniversary edition of the newsletter, we take a look at the civic history of Chatt Hills and the collaborative approach to building the city. Next, Mayor Tom Reed shares his perspective of the City’s 10th Anniversary and its amazing story, which he contributes to the success of its citizens working together on a shared vision. And finally we end by inviting you to participate in the planning of the City’s 10 Year Anniversary Celebrations.



2008 Birthday Bash Celebrated the first anniversary of the City of Chattahoochee Hills

A Civic History of Chattahoochee Hills

Milestones that led to the incorporation of the City of Chattahoochee Hills

Our Rural Heritage

The rural communities that are now a part of Chattahoochee Hills date back more than 175 years.

Many of the families native to this area have raised generations in the modest white frame homes that dot the countryside, and some elders, still cared for by extended families in the communities, recall life before rural electrification, paved roads, and bridges that crossed the Chattahoochee River.

The reasons that keep many families in this area – a strong sense of community, a beautiful rural setting, and a love for nature – are also the reasons that are attracting more people, and potentially damaging sprawl.



*Bill Melear Plowing the Back 40 in the "Good Ol' Days"
Permission to reprint from the Melear family*

1980-2006 - South Fulton Parkway

In the 1980s, Georgia Department of Transportation conceived a plan for the South Fulton Parkway, a 20-mile thoroughfare designed to provide access to the undeveloped area south of Atlanta. Politicians saw the Parkway as a four-lane catalyst for residential, commercial and industrial development; however, many residents saw the Parkway as a potential for bringing uncontrolled sprawl. Fortunately the slow progress of building the Parkway gave residents, potential developers, and the county an opportunity to develop a plan.

1997-1998 - Scenic Byways and Community Vision

In the fall of 1997, Fulton County began a year-long series of meetings with south Fulton residents to discuss and plan a Scenic Byway. Throughout the planning process, county facilitators encouraged residents to consider things they liked about the area, things they wanted to change and/or keep the same, and things they considered assets, such as Cochran Mill Park, tree-lined roads, open views of pasture land, farms, historic buildings, and recreational options such as hunting, fishing, and horseback riding. Using community input, Fulton County created an overlay to its land use plan to protect the assets, and they designated a Scenic Byways route.

2001-2002 - Chattahoochee Hill Country Alliance

In 2001, the Chattahoochee Hill Country Alliance (CHCA) formed as a result of major landowners in south Fulton County organizing around a common mission and vision supporting the conservation of existing greenspace, land values, and sustainable development. Through a Charrette led by the director of the School of Architecture of Washington State University, CHCA and other partners began to create a master plan for the 40,000-acre region they called the Chattahoochee Hill Country.

Throughout the late summer and fall of 2001, CHCA led a series of neighborhood meetings to explain its mission and obtain broad support from the landowners. Those in attendance were unanimous in their support of a master plan.

As progress continued in the community meetings, a master plan developed, which included neighborhood districts and land designations including three villages designated for mixed-used development, hamlets to provide small local

services to the communities, and agricultural districts designed to preserve the existing rural character and natural features of the areas.

2005 - Sandy Springs Incorporates

In December 2005, when the north Fulton community of Sandy Springs incorporated, the law changed to allow new cities to incorporate within three miles of an existing city. However, the Georgia Municipal Association announced its intentions to change the law back to its original wording after the 2006 legislative session. This meant that proposals for new cities had to be submitted by January 2005 in order to be considered.

Residents of unincorporated north Fulton submitted proposals for the new cities of Milton and Johns Creek, which prompted discussions and a proposal to incorporate Chattahoochee Hill Country and a city of South Fulton. (The city of South Fulton effort was led by a separate group.)

Jan 2006 - Senate Bill 553 to incorporate City of Chattahoochee Hill Country

In the winter of 2006, SB 553 was introduced to incorporate the City of Chattahoochee Hill Country. At the 12th hour, a state legislature decision pulled 7,000 acres of the Chattahoochee Hill Country into the new (proposed) city of South Fulton, thus removing one of three village sites in the 40,000 acre Chattahoochee Hill Country.

In March 2006, Gov. Perdue signed SB 553, allowing south Fulton residents the opportunity to vote to become the City of Chattahoochee Hill Country. The Chattahoochee Hill Country alliance held community meetings to educate the community about the referendum process:

- Community would form committees to work on the future city plan
- South Fulton registered voters would vote on the referendum in June 2007
- If the referendum passed, south Fulton registered voters would elect officials in November 2007
- The city would receive its charter in December 2007

May 2006 - Additional annexations

In May 2006, CHCA learned of an annexation request by a large land owner in the Chattahoochee Hill Country to join the city of Palmetto, thus removing the second of three village sites in the 40,000 acre Chattahoochee Hill Country. This annexation also “split” the Hill Country due to its location.

CHCA team leaders called an emergency community meeting to discuss the news and take a straw poll vote on three options:

- Request annexation of the entire Chattahoochee Hill Country into the city of Palmetto. This option provided the best chance at keeping the overlay intact.
- Proceed with the original plan to form the city of Chattahoochee Hill Country. This option provided the best chance for creating a community-based government.
- Do nothing and remain unincorporated. This option provided the most uncertainty for the future of the Chattahoochee Hill Country.

Jun 2006 - Chattahoochee Hill Country attempts annexation into Palmetto

In June 2006, residents at the community meeting voted to attempt to annex into Palmetto. In order to meet the annexation timeline specified by SB 553 the community needed signed petitions from 60 percent of land owner and 60 percent of registered voters – all within two weeks.

In a unified effort, the community set out on a door-to-door petition campaign and achieved its goals.

Only after the petitions were signed and collected did the community learn of additional requirements: to advertise in the local paper, and to set signs out for every land parcel that is being annexed. The community found a way to accomplish these goals, but then learned that the city of Palmetto would need approximately 80 hours to process all of the annexation requests. There wasn't enough time before the state deadline to meet this requirement, so the plan to annex into Palmetto was tabled.

Aug 2006 - Chattahoochee Hill Country assesses its options

In August 2006, CHCA team leaders called a community meeting to discuss the news and take a straw poll vote on three options:

- Annex into Palmetto by resolution (50 percent of vote plus 1)
Under this option, legislature would have to rescind SB 553, which would dash future hopes of becoming a city.
- Request that the legislature redraw Palmetto City's limits
- Continue to work toward becoming the city of Chattahoochee Hill Country

Sep 2006 - Future City in Chattahoochee Hills

On August 28, 2006, residents at the community meeting voted to continue their efforts towards becoming the City of Chattahoochee Hill Country. At the end of the meeting, residents signed up for committees to put their plan in place.

The Public Information taskforce volunteered to create a Web site called, **Future City in Chattahoochee Hills** to give the incorporation committee its own Web site and to distinguish its Web site from the Chattahoochee Hill Country Alliance Web site. It also suggested using the abbreviated name, **Chattahoochee Hills** to further distinguish it in text from the Chattahoochee Hill Country Alliance.

Oct 2006 - Chatt Hills Organizing Committee Forms

On October 24, 2006, the steering committee voted to incorporate the organizing committee as a Georgia nonprofit organization under the name, Chatt Hills Organizing Committee, Inc.

On December 2, 2006, the Chatt Hills Organizing Committee attended a visioning session facilitated by the Tomlinson-Graham Group. The committee developed the following statements, which were adopted by the Steering Committee on Dec 5:

Vision: A locally controlled, locally protected Chattahoochee Hill Country.

Mission: The mission of the Organizing Committee is to develop a plan which outlines revenue sources, serves provided, and other aspects of establishing the city of Chattahoochee Hill Country; and to communicate this plan to the community such that an informed electorate goes to the polls in June 2007.

On December 5, 2006, the organizing committee filed its application to incorporate as a nonprofit organization with the Georgia Secretary of State. The official name was, Chatt Hills Organizing Committee, Inc.

At the steering meeting on December 5, the committee elected officers for its nonprofit organization:

- President: Tom Reed
- Vice President: Larry Keith
- Secretary: Sandra Storrar
- Treasurer: Julie Wall

Jan - May 2007 - Information Campaign

The Chatt Hills Civic Association kicked-off its information campaign on Jan 20 with a community meeting at the Georgia Baptist Children's Home in Palmetto. It introduced the new Organizing Committee, shared the information it had to date, and talked individually with residents to collect questions and other concerns they had.

Over the next five months, the information campaign continued with a series of 20 neighborhood information meetings through the community. Simultaneously, the Organizing Committee researched questions raised by the community. It also contracted with Georgia State University to conduct a feasibility study.



When the feasibility study was finalized, it showed that the new city of Chattahoochee Hill Country could afford to operate without raising taxes, based on the projected revenues.

On May 19, 2007, the Organizing Committee had another community information meeting to share the results of the feasibility study and to show its support for incorporating the city of Chattahoochee Hill Country.

From May 19 - June 19, the Organizing Committee conducted a canvassing campaign with the goal of reaching every household in the community to inform them of the upcoming referendum.

June 19, 2007 - Referendum Passes

On June 19, 2007, nearly 50 percent of the 1,381 eligible voters cast their ballots in the referendum vote to incorporate the city of Chattahoochee Hill Country. Of the 681 who voted, 569 voted "Yes" for the new city, and 112 voted "No," for a total of 83% in favor of the city.

Nov 6, 2007 - First General Election

Between July and November 2007, a full slate of candidates ran for public office and the opportunity to be the first to serve the city of Chattahoochee Hill Country. The election resulted in a run-off for the position of mayor, and council districts 2, 3, and 5.

Candidates

Mayor:

Don Hayes (Run-off)
Tom Reed (Run-off)
Rocky Reeves

District 1:

Ruby Foster
John Taylor (elected)

District 2:

Doris Boylen
Carl Hattaway (Run-off)
Mark Prater
Mickey Tierney
Julie Wall (Run-off)

District 3:

David Hanson (Run-off)
Cleto Montelongoc
Alton Powell
Laurie Searle (Run-off)

District 4:

Faye Godwin (elected)
Wayne Straddling

District 5:

Ernie Henderson (Run-off)
Rodney Peek (Run-off)
Hugh Tyer

Dec 4, 2007 - Run-Off Election

With the run-off election on Dec 4, the city of Chattahoochee Hill Country had its first slate of locally elected officials:

Mayor: Don Hayes

Council District 1: John Taylor

Council District 2: Carl Hattaway

Council District 3: Dave Hanson

Council District 4: Faye Godwin

Council District 5: Rodney Peek

Dec 11, 2007 - City Council Inauguration

On Dec 11, 2008, the mayor and city council of Chattahoochee Hills were inaugurated.



Chattahoochee Hills First Elected Officials, left to right:
Mayor Don Hayes, Council Dist.1 John Taylor, Council Dist. 2 Carl Hattaway,
Council Dist. 3 David Hanson, Council Dist. 4 Faye Godwin, Council Dist. 5 Rodney Peek

A Collaborative Approach to Building the City

City Administration – Ch2M HILL

The newly elected officials that formed Chatt Hills' first government body had never planned to start-up city services on its own. Well before the referendum went to vote, the Chatt Hills Organizing Committee had researched contracting with Ch2M Hill, the same management company that helped start up the City of Sandy Springs.

The Council hit the ground running with the team of experts at Ch2M and very soon had set up basic city services including police, fire & rescue, court, and administration services. The Ch2M team served the City well during its start-up years, but their expertise came at a high price. As soon as the City was able, it brought those services "in-house" in order to reduce the cost of overhead.

Friends of Chatt Hills (Chatt Hills Civic Association)

In 2008, Mayor Don Hayes coordinated a community support plan to help residents align their volunteer efforts with the needs of the city. He suggested five support groups organized around city operational functions and services: citizen services, cultural activities, public safety, environment & public improvement, and business & commerce. A different council member was assigned as support to that group, which later became The Friends of Chatt Hills.

Eager to help their new City achieve success, the Friends of Chatt Hills and other community organizations partnered to raise funds for the City to purchase its parklands from Fulton County, host city celebrations, send newsletters to residents, clean up cemeteries, raise funds for public safety, research sustainable economic development, and create recycling and road clean-up programs.



In 2008, Council Rep. Dave Hanson facilitated the first meeting of the Environment Committee.

Developing a Comprehensive Plan

Perhaps the biggest collaborative effort the City undertook in its early years was in developing its Comprehensive Plan. Beginning in December of 2009, the Mayor and City Council began recruiting citizens to work on the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan was discussed at City Council and Planning Commission Meetings, information was posted on the City's website and information about the Comprehensive Plan was reported in the Weekly Reader, the weekly on-line newspaper for Chattahoochee Hills.

The Comprehensive Plan Task Force was the body that interpreted the input of the community and created the Community Agenda of the Comprehensive Plan. The task force was created through appointments from the Mayor and City Council and citizens volunteering. There were originally 45 people (fully 2% of the city's entire population) appointed to the task force.

The task force was guided by three facilitators, two of whom were professional planners (consultant and city planner), and the President of the Chattahoochee Hills Civic Association, who served as the Citizen Chair.

City staff was included in the task force for the professional knowledge they brought to the process. Four out of five of the members of the Chattahoochee Hills Planning Commission were also included.

The Community Participation Program for the Comprehensive Plan included a mail and online survey and five outreach meetings to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan reflected the full range of community values and desires. Based on the input of 432 citizens who responded to the comprehensive plan survey and 50 citizens who participated in the outreach meetings, the citizens desired the city to be preserved and maintained as closely as possible to its current rural state.



The First Chattahoochee Hills Comprehensive Plan sought to carry out the wishes of the Chattahoochee Hills community:

- Provide for the permanent preservation of a rural landscape and quality of life (“Keep it Rural”)
- Allow specific types of development concentrated in preferred areas
- Improve the city’s built aesthetics and design quality orientation



Keep it Rural!

A Message from Mayor Tom Reed



To the citizens of Chattahoochee Hills;

I wanted to share some quick thoughts on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the incorporation of our great City of Chattahoochee Hills.

It's an amazing story – one that's brought to you almost entirely by the hands of your neighbors – people who volunteered their time, energy and means to protect the unique landscape that is now our City.

We are truly blessed with natural beauty here – thousands upon thousands of acres of rural forest and farmlands, dotted with families both new and firmly rooted here, drawn and maintained by all that our city offers. We've seen everything around us – everything around Atlanta – slowly subsumed by suburban sprawl, and recognize that was likely to happen here as well. But we've intrepidly charted an alternate course, and it's starting to work.

It hasn't been easy, of course. We certainly don't fit the model of any city that I've ever seen, and in trying to break the mold for how development has always happened in the Atlanta Metro area, we've laid a firm foundation for a place that will always be beautiful and special.

But our greatest asset isn't the land that we're working so hard to protect – it's the people that have come together to do that work. I have never seen a place with the level and intensity of volunteerism that Chattahoochee Hills has. From our churches outreach programs, to our schools, our library and children's programming, our arts community, our parks and roadsides, our government – in so many ways and places – this community gives back and makes things happen. If it weren't for that activism, Chattahoochee Hills wouldn't exist. We had the conversations that shaped our unique development. We've sat through countless meetings and gone through the tireless committee research that led to our city status. We rallied to purchase our beautiful parks and fund our schools. It's all of those volunteers; those commissioners, committee members and elected officials – you – WE have made this place what it is.

And what an amazing place. In these 10 years, we've managed all of this, and we've managed it well. It's pretty phenomenal when you think about it. We stood up and equipped a fully operational Fire Department, Police Department, and Public Works Department – from scratch. We've taken over our Planning and Zoning, set up a Municipal Court, and equipped and staffed a City Hall – from the ground up.

And in spite of our incredibly limited tax base and financial resources, we've managed to turn around and stabilize our budget, and get all of the equipment needed to support our amazing staff in place. And we're constantly improving. We'll be paving more roads in the next 12 months than we have since the city's founding thanks to improved finances, along with the TSPLOST. Our new grader will have our gravel roads shipshape by the end of summer. Our parks, too, are amazing and constantly progressing, welcoming hundreds of residents every month. And soon, we'll have backup emergency medical transport – hour-long waits for an ambulance in an emergency should become a thing of the past.

Our zoning is working as well. The limited and controlled development that we have is a huge shot in the arm to our tax base, and disrupts a tiny portion of our land – especially when compared with traditional sprawling development that we see in cities and counties all around us. The path to most of our land being permanently preserved in its rural state – at least 70% or more – is clear and in sight. The fact that we are making it happen makes us totally unique in the Atlanta area, and everyone's quality of life will benefit as a result – that outcome alone makes all of the hard work worth it.

Of course, there is still much work to be done – many areas where we can improve. Your city government – elected officials and staff – are all committed to continuing that improvement, and grateful for your ongoing patience and support as we make it happen.

And as always, it will be a group effort – we couldn't do it without of the incredible community support we get! There are so many people that need to be thanked for their efforts in making this happen – but I don't possibly have enough space here to list them all. Suffice it to say, THANK YOU to all of you – to everyone who has had a hand in the creating and success of the City of Chattahoochee Hills, and continues to pitch in as we move forward. It's been an amazing ride these past 10 years, and we're committed to making the next 10 (and 100!) continually better for you. We can't do it without you!

Thanks again!

Tom

City Celebration Planning Meeting

With fall's busy schedule fast approaching some neighbors wanted to get together to plan celebration events to ensure there are plenty of opportunities to enjoy the City's 10 Year Anniversary with family, friends, and neighbors. If you would like to volunteer to help you're welcome to attend a planning meeting next week:

City Celebrations Planning Meeting:

Date: Thursday, June 22

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Location: Chatt Hills City Hall, 6505 Rico Rd

Room: Enter city hall and turn right, go past the city hall staff office, down the hall to the last room on the left just before the double doors.

If you can't attend the meeting but would like to participate in any way, contact Laurie Searle at 770.463.5169 or Lsearle@bellsouth.net.

To post an anniversary message on our Facebook, visit <https://www.facebook.com/chatthillscommunity> and make a comment on the 10 Year Anniversary Card.

