Sumter County Works to Revitalize Fairgrounds
Prepared by: Barbara Grogan, Matt Bishop & Anna Ferguson

In early 2009, the Sumter County Board of Commissioners purchased the local fairground property formerly owned by the Fairgrounds Association, with the intent of maintaining the property as a public use space. With fairs, carnivals, trade shows, community meetings and family reunions hosted there each year, the fairgrounds have become a longstanding, historical part of Sumter County. The property also represents the available public meeting space in Sumter County’s Comprehensive Plan as required by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Through collaboration with the University of Georgia Archway Partnership in Spring 2009, the College of Environment and Design participated in a Charrette -- collaborative sessions during which a group of designers draft design solutions for future planning -- to develop a conceptual site plan for use of the facility and grounds. The site plan consists of more than 22 acres, with building space of 18,000-plus square feet, as well as a covered pavilion.

Many community groups participated in the Charrette, sharing the history of the facility and the community activities that have occurred, as well as giving voice and visuals to the time-honored traditions of the fairground facility. The Charrette team developed a design plan to revitalize the property, while holding true to the site’s important history.

The design plan takes into account structural needs for dealing with both indoor and outdoor water flow, and includes plans for patios and raised walking paths. As well, the concept plan identifies plant designs to incorporate the excess water flow and provide connectivity to the various aspects of the property.

For indoor portions of the facility, the plans calls for adding windows to make use of natural light, and calls for the renovation of food preparation areas to make the facility more appealing. The final design plan has been delivered to the Sumter County Board of Commissioners and the Sumter County Parks and Recreation Department who will manage the facility.

The next step of the revitalization process is to develop a strategic business plan. The Leonard Leadership Scholars Program of the Terry College of Business is currently developing a strategic business plan. This plan will cover all aspects of facility and business management for the fairgrounds, including a local and regional marketing strategy, contract development, insurance needs, and local ordinances. Additionally, the group is developing a fee schedule for facility usage that considers the needed revenue to cover operational expenses such as utilities. The students will also research construction costs and sources of funding for renovation based on the design plan created by the Charrette team.

During the on-going efforts of strategic business plan creation, the Sumter County Archway Partnership has facilitated a meeting between the Sumter County Board of Commissioners and the local Department of Community Affairs Regional Commission and the USDA representative to discuss funding for this project. With the design plan and strategic business plan in hand, the Sumter County Board of Commissioners is better prepared to obtain funding for this project.

Advancing Community Priorities: The Sumter County Fairgrounds project is coming to fruition as the Charrette Team has completed their design plan, and the Leonard Leadership Scholars Program is creating a strategic business plan. Primarily, this site provides needed, desirable meeting space available to all citizens, and fulfills the requirement of public meeting space as stated in the comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plans calls for having adequate, affordable public meeting space available for citizens, which is a key Archway priority for Sumter County.