Executive Summary

With the ongoing support of the Georgia Power Company as Founding Sponsor, the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) has facilitated progress toward housing stability in 36 Georgia communities during its first six years. In 2011, the fifth class of communities: Brunswick, Hawkinsville, Rome, Sandersville/Tennille/Washington County, and Vienna, successfully completed the program, becoming GICH alumni. Other program support comes from Wells Fargo and a USDA RD grant.

In 2011, the freshman, sophomore and junior classes of GICH continued working to revitalize declining neighborhoods, create new affordable housing options, and provide financial and home buyer education to their residents. GICH provides a platform for teams to think of creative solutions and network ideas with housing professionals, city officials and staff, as well as community volunteers from across the state. Housing teams continued to make steady progress toward building the framework and relationships on which long term housing and community programs will be built.

The direct support of the GICH partners – the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), the University of Georgia (UGA) Housing and Demographics Research Center, and the UGA Office of the Vice President of Public Service and Outreach - included ongoing technical assistance, as well as the organization and sponsorship of retreats for the participating communities. In 2011, these retreats were hosted by Savannah and Athens, where more than 150 community housing team members came together for facilitated work sessions, targeted assistance, networking and training by housing experts. Many of the initiatives implemented in the individual communities were a direct result of information shared at the GICH retreats. Additional in-kind support was provided by Georgia EMC, the UGA Archway Partnership, and the UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

GICH communities are gaining a better understanding of their local housing needs, learning about housing and community development tools, and acquiring valuable information on available funding sources to assist them with addressing those needs. As evidenced by their accomplishments in this report, they are steadily enhancing their knowledge and effectiveness in addressing the issues in their communities. Even in the challenging housing market of 2011, communities were still able to move forward on plans to revitalize their neighborhoods by removing abandoned and dilapidated houses, obtaining grants for rehabilitation, and providing down payment assistance and counseling. (See following page). Many GICH communities formed significant new partnerships, adopted urban redevelopment plans and amended current ordinances in support of their objectives.

Since many housing challenges require more than three years to address, GICH is committed to providing ongoing technical assistance with implementing local housing plans. In 2011, the program partners held an alumni planning meeting with 32 representatives from 10 GICH communities. The main suggestion was to convene networking sessions for the alumni communities. The GICH networking listserv now has more than 550 subscribers.

The GICH partners and sponsors look for additional ways to help increase local capacity for housing and community revitalization. In 2011, five GICH community representatives received scholarships to attend the Loft Housing & Beyond summit in Madison, GA on December 14, 2011, where they learned about best practices for rebuilding cities to their original purpose – as livable centers of their communities, where citizens have access to jobs, education, recreation and commercial opportunities.
**GICH by the Numbers**

**Funds - Number of Communities: 10**
- CDBG and CHIP funds received or utilized in 2011: $1,982,793
- GEFA: $254,000
- Other DCA – Housing Activities grants: $26,184
- NSP: $1,795,000
- Other: $10,000

**Number of Units - Number of Communities: 12**
- Constructed (or under construction): 115
- Rehabilitated: 53
- Removed abandoned or dilapidated: 69
- Conducted housing assessments: 4

**Housing Counseling, Down Payment Assistance - Number of Communities: 7**
- Down Payment Assistance: 15 households
- Housing Counseling: 914 clients

**New Activities - Number of Communities: 12**

*Code or ordinances implemented or updated*
- Auburn - Commercial zoning districts amended to include multi-family
- Hawkinsville - Amended zoning ordinance to allow for loft housing downtown
- Sylvania - Adopted an Infill Assessment Plan
- Washington - Amended Land Development Regulations
- Winder - Approved rezoning to allow for senior, multi-family housing

*Positions created*
- Covington - Housing/Financial Counselor
- Winder - Filled vacant Code Enforcement Officer Position at the City

*New agencies/organizations/authorities created*
- Americus/Sumter County - Created a Land Bank Authority and drafted an Urban Redevelopment Plan
- Auburn - Adopted an Urban Redevelopment Area
- Nashville/Berrien County - Adopted an Urban Redevelopment Area and established an Opportunity Zone

*New partnerships formed*
- Auburn with tax credit developer
- Brunswick with several local stakeholders through efforts to reenergize GICH team, including Golden Isles Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Covington with health services provider in association with new supportive housing units
- Eatonton with Chamber of Commerce Leadership Team and local businesses
- Gray/Jones County with Jones Area Council on Relief and credit counseling agency as well as with Jones County People Looking Ahead, a Chamber of Commerce group
- Thomson/McDuffie County with Habitat for Humanity
- Washington with housing authority
- Winder with several area churches and local businesses
**Auburn**

In their first year, the Auburn GICH team focused on increasing high-quality rental housing options that provide live-in-place opportunities. The City won a 2011 award from the Georgia Planning Association for Outstanding Plan Implementation Small Communities, which recognizes the City’s commitment to plan in accordance with the input and desires of the community. Selected activities include:

- Researched development partners with LIHTC experience for the first phase of 100-140 apartments at Auburn Station, a pending mixed-use development. Assessed the quality of projects previously constructed by prospective builders.
- Identified another tract suitable for multi-family, senior housing.
- Adopted an Urban Redevelopment Plan as a tool to transform blighted properties and specifically to leverage improvements in the existing multi-family sites referenced previously.
- Made amendments to the Strategic Implementation Plan to include the Auburn Station site and to the Zoning Ordinance to allow mixed-use development in commercial zoning districts via Special Use Permit.

**Eatonton**

The Eatonton GICH committee decided to focus on assessing the community’s housing stock and needs, while increasing code enforcement and implementing several clean-up and beautification programs. Selected activities include:

- The GICH team has enlisted the Regional Commission to conduct a Housing Assessment for the City, which will be finished spring 2012. The information gathered will give the team insight on potential target areas.
- In collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce’s 2011 Leadership Team, the GICH team rehabilitated a house via the We Care Program. Through this effort, unsightly shrubs and brush and an old satellite dish were removed; the house was pressure washed; new shrubs were planted; and new downspouts, windows, doors and a handicap ramp were installed. This project was completed solely with volunteer hours and community donations; no city funds were expended.
- With support from City Council, the code enforcement officer has increased enforcement of current codes and ordinances, a first step in community revitalization. With the removal of more than 16 dilapidated properties, adjacent neighbors have begun to clean up their properties with no initiation from the city.
- To broaden community involvement and appreciation, as well as showcase the City’s beauty, the team members held the inaugural Christmas Decorating Contest for residents and business owners, garnering more than 30 entries. An awards ceremony was held at the Plaza Arts Center, covered by the local newspaper. This event was a tremendous success and the team plans to hold the competition again next year.
In addition to the GICH team, Eatonton Main Street and the Peoples Bank will sponsor a Community Beautification Day on March 17, 2012. Other community partners will include the Putnam County schools, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, churches and other local organizations and businesses. To encourage trash removal from homes, businesses and yards, the City has agreed to collect trash and debris for the following week free of charge. Groups have volunteered to assist property owners that need an extra hand; the use of large equipment has been donated for any demolition projects; and 20 planting and beautification projects are scheduled in the downtown. The Peoples Bank will sponsor a cookout for community volunteers and property owners.

A community housing fair is being planned. This event will help educate citizens on all aspects of housing, including owning, renting, upkeep and more.

**Nashville/Berrien County**

To address the lack of decent, safe affordable housing, Nashville/Berrien County GICH team focused on three goals: to promote and provide assistance for homeownership; to use code enforcement to eliminate blight; and to identify available resources to address the housing needs. Selected activities include:

- Partnered with the South Georgia Regional Commission to conduct a housing assessment, to complete an Urban Redevelopment Plan, and to establish an Enterprise Zone. The URA contains 38 dilapidated and 14 deteriorated structures, as well as 16 vacant parcels.
- Worked closely with City and County Code Enforcement to ensure necessary codes are being obeyed.
- Partnered with Wiregrass Technical College to provide classes for prospective first-time home buyers (to begin in 2012).
- Made a community visit to the City of Fitzgerald to learn about their redevelopment program.

**Sylvania**

The Sylvania GICH team is focused on infill and redevelopment in the City to address substandard structures and the need for affordable housing. In the first year of the program, the team focused on education, outreach, and planning. Selected activities include:

- Hosted speakers on various subjects: establishing a Land Bank, establishing a Habitat for Humanity chapter, expanding the scope of the Housing Authority, developing Low Income Housing Tax Credit housing, USDA Rural Development programs, and Urban Redevelopment Plans.
- Developed by the Coastal Regional Commission, the city adopted an Infill Assessment Plan in June. Three primary infill assessment areas are identified: Hat Street, Andrews Street, and Thompson Street neighborhoods.
- A GICH team member is currently redeveloping an old school. The front part is now a Senior Day Care and Activity Center and the classrooms behind the facility have been turned into one bedroom senior apartments. The city helped by tapping into the water lines and setting up the meter boxes.
The Washington GICH team is focused on addressing substandard housing and improving housing conditions in the City. The City has been successful in forming partnerships and developing housing programs for rehabilitation, energy efficiency, housing counseling and acquisition, demolition, and construction of homes for sale. Selected activities include:

- Using an $800,000 CDBG grant, completed Rusher Street neighborhood revitalization infrastructure, demolished 14 dilapidated structures, and permanently relocated 5 families. Affordable home construction has started to be sold to low- to moderate-income, first-time homebuyers.
- Addressed 30-35 lots that were blighted and overgrown via City Code Enforcement Officer.
- Worked to amend the City’s Land Development Regulations with the assistance of the CSRA Regional Commission.
- With a $254,000 GEFA Energy Efficiency Grant, conducted Home Performance Audits on 350 homes, implemented a $25,000 Rebate Program to financially assist homeowners in purchasing energy efficiency appliances, and provided Energy Efficiency education to 100 homeowners.
- With an $8,000 Housing Counseling Grant from DCA, provided Home Buyer Education and Financial Literacy workshops for 250 people.
- Awarded a $358,000 CDBG grant for rehabilitation, reconstruction, and land acquisition in the Norman St. target area. (To be used in 2012)
- Established a MOU with the City of Washington’s Public Housing Authority to initiate a First-Time Home Buyers program for current residents.
- A developer was approved for LIHTCs for 60, senior housing units to be built in the Urban Redevelopment Area.

Sophomores

The Americus/Sumter GICH Team developed short term solutions for their long term goals of transforming 10 defined areas, removing all dilapidated properties, and building a more productive tax base. Selected activities include:

- Created a Code Enforcement Team which consists of the Building Inspector, City Manager, Code Enforcement Manager and others.
- Created a Land Bank Authority.
- Completed the Urban Redevelopment Plan for approval by the city and the county.
- Provided flexible-term demolition financing to homeowners for removing dilapidated structures. 8 houses were demolished, half of which were voluntary and half financed by the City. None went to court.
Covington

The Covington Housing Team (CHT) continues to pursue its “Out With the Old… In With the Infill, Infill, Infill” approach. The Covington Redevelopment Authority continues to guide redevelopment of Walker’s Bend, a mixed-use, mixed income, Earth Craft community less than 2 miles from downtown. Investment to date: $10.5 million private and $4 million public. Details for 2011 include:

- Using LIHTC, Harristown Park is complete with 60 new residences for seniors 55 and over (48 apartments and 12 townhomes). 500 people on its pre-lease waiting list. The CHT is working to partner with a tax credit developer for additional senior apartments in Walker’s Bend.
- Began construction on 32 single-family residences for sale in Walker’s Bend. The Covington Cottages are market rate and down payment assistance is available through a 2010 CHIP grant. (Completion estimated for summer 2012)
- Affordable Equity Partners received LIHTC in 2010 to build 32 single-family homes for rent. Construction to begin in 2012. These homes are in The Village at Walkers Bend and are lease to purchase after 15 years.
- Secured funding for the construction of the New Leaf Center in Walker’s Bend, a mixed use development with 32 one-bedroom apartments and a job training and workforce development center. The Covington Housing Authority will own and manage the facility and will work to transition qualified tenants to market rate. (Construction to begin summer 2012)
- Secured partners and funding for New Leaf Supportive Housing, 28 units of supportive housing for homeless individuals. Partners include the Covington Housing Authority, Paces Foundation, and View Point Health Services, with funding proposed from the DCA Permanent Supportive Housing Program. (Construction to begin summer 2012)
- Developed and implemented a 16-week, 32-hour homeownership and household finance class. 67 individuals received this counseling in 2011 through the partnership between the Covington Housing Authority and the Covington Redevelopment Authority.
- Thro through code enforcement efforts, 24 dilapidated houses have been demolished and 7 have been rehabilitated in 2011.

Gray/Jones County

The Gray/Jones County GICH team continues progress on increasing affordable housing options for their citizens and learning from sister communities (Macon). Selected activities include:

- Researching the possibility of forming a Housing Authority.
- Improving a CDBG application to re-apply in April 2012.
- In partnership with Mustard Seed Ministries, re-roofed 10 owner-occupied homes with volunteers and donations.
• In partnership with the Jones Area Council on Relief and the CCCS of Macon, held 2 of 6 financial planning workshops.
• Participating in the Jones County People Looking Ahead Now, a grass roots initiative of the Chamber of Commerce. At the last quarterly benchmark breakfast, GICH team members reported on progress and discussed goals.

Thomson/McDuffie County

The Thomson/McDuffie County GICH team continues to address neighborhoods in decline, to survey existing housing stock conditions, to increase community involvement, and to work with rental property owners on code enforcement practices. Selected activities include:
• Awarded a multi-activity $800,000 CDBG grant for the Pitt Street area. This is the third CDBG grant in 3 years. With CHIP, local funds, and in-kind support, the total investment in this area will be over $4,000,000 for rebuilding infrastructure and houses. Improvements include sewer replacement and rehabilitation, updated storm water feature, and sidewalks, curbs and gutters.
• Conducted a marketing survey of residents. With 600 respondents, these data will help guide future housing activities in Thomson/McDuffie.
• Received the first piece of property in the Thomson/McDuffie Land Bank Authority and began the process of selling it.
• Established partnership through the Housing Authority that resulted in a submission of a LIHTC application for 35 single-family units.
• Spurred further development through revitalization efforts and increased code enforcement. Habitat constructed a new home, and a CHIP application will be submitted for Habitat to construct 4 additional homes in the Pitt Street area.

Winder

The Winder GICH team has made considerable progress towards building partnerships with community groups to improve housing in Winder and has received significant press on their accomplishments and the need for affordable housing. Selected activities include:
• Organized Project Winder: a community based effort to repair owner-occupied homes in identified target areas. Headed by First Baptist Church, this effort involved other area churches, the City of Winder, the Winder Housing Authority, and more than 120 community volunteers. Rehabbed 14 owner occupied homes over 4 days with the Habitat for Humanity Brush of Kindness program, funded by Jackson EMC’s Operation Round Up. The GICH team is already making plans for next year.
• Received the final Housing Assessment and Inventory report, which includes 4 neighborhoods in the target area: East Broad, East Midland, Patrick Mill, and Second Street. Working with the Winder City Council to create an Urban Redevelopment Area and establish Enterprise Zones.
• Provided by the Winder Housing Authority and Action, Inc., 16 clients took homeownership classes, increasing the eligible applicant pool for moving from tenant to ownership. One client moved from Public Housing to homeownership.
• Received City Council approval of a rezoning application for a 64 unit senior housing development. NorSouth Development received 2011 LIHTC for Stratford Court to begin construction 2012.
• Filled the vacant position of Code Enforcement Officer at the City. The Winder Police Chief held meetings for all patrol zones including areas targeted for housing improvement and also met with the GICH committee.
• Removed 4 dilapidated housing units, condemned 6 additional houses, and Habitat for Humanity built one house.

Brunswick

The City of Brunswick’s Community Housing Resource Assistance Board (CHRAB)/GICH team continues to meet monthly with the primary focus on updating and finalizing the Community Housing Assistance Plan (CHAP) and re-engaging partner organizations to enhance collaboration efforts. Selected activities include:
• Created a membership database, invited new partners, and extended a renewed invitation to previous members to participate in ongoing housing initiatives in the City. This work has resulted in greater integration with the City of Brunswick City Commission, the City’s Downtown Development Authority, the City’s Planning Department, as well as with community partners such as the Golden Isles Convention and Visitors Bureau, private real estate developers, and the Brunswick Housing Authority.
• Hosted the Golden Isles Convention and Visitors Bureau to share their rebranding and marketing campaign to promote the islands and the City of Brunswick as a desirable place to vacation and live. This addresses the long-standing concern about crime and safety within the City which creates marketing existing affordable homes difficult.
• Continued to market the City’s remaining rehabilitated NSP home.
• Rehabilitated 20 houses using CDBG and removed 19 dilapidated or abandoned houses. Habitat for Humanity built and closed on 3 homes.
• Totally Free, Inc. provided housing counseling to 450 clients and individuals throughout a 15-county service area and continues to offer credit counseling workshops on a monthly basis out of their Glynn County and Camden County locations.

Hawkinsville

The Hawkinsville GICH team continues to focus on revitalizing housing in the City. The cornerstone project of the city’s initiative is the redevelopment of the former Pillowtex Mill into a mixed-use, affordable housing development, which the city has received $1 million in funds to support through the HOPE VI and Low Income Housing Tax Credits programs in 2010. 30 units are under construction. Other activities include:
• The City received a total of $800,000 in CDBG and CHIP funding (2010) to support its owner-occupied, housing rehabilitation initiative. 6 homes were rehabilitated in 2011.
• Continued code enforcement efforts, removed dilapidated structures (33 to date) and cleared junk lots.
• Amended the zoning ordinance to allow loft housing in downtown Hawkinsville.
• Partnered with the Middle Georgia Regional Commission to hold 2 housing fairs.
• In 2012 the Hawkinsville GICH team will merge with the Urban Redevelopment Agency, established in 2007, to form one group for all housing activities.

Rome

The Rome/Floyd GICH team continues to promote the ideas on housing identified in the “Housing is for Everyone: Rome/Floyd County Housing Plan” and to build awareness about the housing needs of low income residents. The team meets regularly to network and build partnerships to attain this goal. Other activities include:

• Repaired 3 homes with CHIP funds and 10 homes with CDBG funds.
• Applied for $300,000 CHIP (2012) funds to continue moderate rehabilitation program.
• Demolished 18 homes due to code enforcement.
• Allocated down payment assistance to 12 families through the Floyd County CHIP program.
• Through the Appalachian Housing Counseling Agency, 89 clients participated in housing counseling classes.
• Mercy Housing South East constructed 77 units of senior housing through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program that is scheduled to opened March 2012.
• The local Habitat chapter constructed 3 homes and made repairs to 9 homes.

Sandersville/Tennille/Washington County

The Sandersville, Tennille, Washington County (STWC) GICH Team continues working to provide different types of housing with the use of a variety of resources and programs. Selected activities include:

• The City of Tennille received a $500,000 CDBG grant and is partnering with a for profit developer to rehabilitate a vacant school and repurpose into an assisted living facility, Memory Lane.
• Using 2009 CHIP funds, the City of Sandersville completed reconstruction of 2 homes in 2011 and the remaining funds will be used to rehabilitate owner-occupied homes in a targeted area.
• Received $500,000 CDBG award to address street flooding and drainage problems in a targeted area of Washington County.
• Developer received LIHTC award to begin phase two of Washington Estates, a single family, rental subdivision for low income individuals. The second phase will add an additional 40 homes.
• GICH team members conducted a Homebuyers Workshop with participation from USDA, Washington County UGA Cooperative Extension, local banks and other community partners.
Vienna

The Vienna Team (VICH) continues addressing their plan objectives: to improve the City’s low-income housing stock, to rid all neighborhoods of blighted properties and improve infrastructure, and to educate the public about homeownership issues and opportunities. Selected activities include:

- Using 2010 CHIP funds, rehabilitated 3 homes and started reconstruction of another.
- Submitted application for 2012 CHIP funds for rehabilitation of 6 more homes.
- Supported and assisted with a LIHTC application to rehabilitate Woodward Apartments, 36 units of multi-family housing. The developer will submit another application next year.
- A private developer completed construction and rented a duplex.
- Completed repairing and upgrading the City’s waste water treatment facility.
- Received a $284,877 CDBG grant for rehabilitation of failing sewer infrastructure in 3 neighborhoods. (Work to begin in 2012)
- Partnered with the GICH team, the City of Vienna, the City of Unadilla, and the Dooly County Communities of Opportunity to hold a Housing Information Expo to educate the public on the programs and resources available to potential and existing homeowners. (186 attendees from 6 counties and 15 vendors)
- Held 4 home buyer education workshops for 42 potential homeowners.
- Increased code enforcement is helping to move condemned property cases through the proper channels to begin nuisance abatement. Removed 4 abandoned or dilapidated houses.
- Working to develop an Infill Portfolio of vacant lots for sale. Many of these lots are included in estates and cannot be sold.
The Initiative’s Eighth Year: Looking Ahead to Progress

In November 2011, GICH selected five very qualified communities: Gainesville, Garden City, Harlem, Wadley, and Warner Robins. Joining the other 10 participating communities, these cities will convene for two retreats in 2012 in Tifton (February) and in Cartersville (September). As always, communities continue to receive technical assistance in the intervening months to ensure forward progress on designing and implementing their housing plans.

The GICH partners and sponsors continue to enhance programming to increase local knowledge about ways to address housing and community development issues. Following participant feedback, two alumni meetings are planned for 2012 in conjunction with the previously mentioned retreats for participating communities, increasing networking and cross-community sharing opportunities. Addressing another participant suggestion, an online, searchable database of GICH community housing activities and best practices will be started in 2012. In addition, follow up workshops are being planned for the Loft Housing & Beyond initiative, and GICH team representatives will again receive scholarships to attend.