

Winder Receives LCI Grant

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Winder receives \$96,000 grant for study that will put downtown on track for traffic and other assistance.

The Winder Town Center Study area will encompass downtown commercial, historic, residential as well as governmental areas. Completion of the study will put Winder in a position to leverage additional grant dollars as well as low-interest loans to accomplishment work the study identifies as needed.

The City of Winder has received \$96,000 of the \$596,000 which the Atlanta Regional Commission awarded Friday to six communities to promote quality growth and enhance livability.

Issued through the ARC's award-winning Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) program, the grant funds for Winder will be for a study for Winder Town Center to encourage mixed-use developments and interconnect employment centers by making the area more welcoming to pedestrian with sidewalks and multi-purpose paths.

"We are very excited about it," said Winder Mayor Chip Thompson on word of the grant. "We'll be able to do the study and, from there, qualify for some other grants and low-interest loans to do the things the study lays out."

Mayor Thompson said Winder Town Center, as ARC refers to the endeavor, will include not only the downtown area but stretch toward Holly Hill Mall on Athens Street and go south on Highway 81 toward Fort Yargo State Park. The vision ties in with the Great Rail Trail initiative already in the planning stages, said Thompson. "This study will give us some idea how to map through Winder since we can't go along Highway 8 the entire route. I will be good to bring it through downtown so that if you are on your bicycle, you can stop for lunch or dinner."

City Administrator Bob Beck said he is well pleased.

"This grant will provide the resources to bring our Vision 2020 of downtown Winder into focus," said Beck.

City Planner Barry Edgar is hopeful the study will yield the plan on which the city can begin work as soon as economic conditions improve.

"We'll be ready when things get moving again," said Edgar.

“Portions of the town center area are in need of improvements that would enhance vehicular and pedestrian mobility and encourage mixed-use development,” said the proposal, focused on the traditional town center, which got the nod for funding.

The focus of the LCI study will be on developing creative solutions and comprehensive strategies for future land use, development patterns, transportation, economic development and housing. The study area is a mixture of residential, commercial, industrial, historic properties and governmental facilities.

For Thompson, the study means Winder can get onto the business of enhancing downtown by providing a vision which can be marketed to potential businesses and investors.

“We want them to be able to see the city in a better light – the way it’s going to look,” said Thompson. “We’ll have somewhat of an overlay to see what can be there.”

Thompson said there is also renewed interest in the Granite Hotel, with a meeting set for early next week with a party considering commercial and other uses including a restaurant.

Also getting LIC grants were the cities of Atlanta, Griffin and Loganville, along with Cobb, DeKalb and Henry counties. LCI grants are designed to help the local governments design plans that will make communities or corridors more mobile, walkable, livable and connected to a range of services. Once plans are completed, the participating communities are then eligible for a larger pot of federal funding to implement their projects.

“The LCI program has been transformative for many communities across the metro region,” said ARC Chairman Sam Olens. “LCI has helped these areas become quality magnets for residents and businesses alike, acting as a catalyst for positive change all around them.”

Since the first LCI grants were awarded in 2000, more than 84,506 residential units, 20 million square feet of commercial space and 35 million square feet of office space are either planned, under construction or complete in these areas. Region-wide, 67 percent of all new office space has been built within LCI areas. And, LCI areas have attracted 8.5 percent of all new residential units and 21 percent of all new commercial development built in the region.

The goal of the LCI program, created in 1999, is to help local governments devise strategies that reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality by better connecting homes, shops and offices, enhancing streetscapes and pedestrian amenities and improving access to transit options. With this latest round of grants, LCI has assisted 96 communities with more than \$140 million in grant awards.