


PlanFirst Program RENEWAL Application

May 15, 2017

Introduction: The Department of Community Affairs' PlanFirst program rewards local governments that clearly demonstrate success with implementing their local comprehensive plan. To apply for PlanFirst designation, a local government must have Qualified Local Government certification and be current on required reporting to DCA. (To check status of both, please visit <http://www.georgiaplanning.com/planners/planreview/default.asp>).

A multi-agency review panel will evaluate a number of indicators of community success with plan implementation to select communities for this designation. All of these indicators are equally important, but size of the community is taken into consideration in the evaluation so that communities of various sizes are equally competitive for PlanFirst designation.

Instructions: Please answer all the following questions thoroughly, attaching additional pages where necessary, so that the reviewers have sufficient information to measure the success of your comprehensive plan implementation. Supporting documents might include: news articles, legal ads, lists of attendees, letters of support or other evidence of local involvement and commitment to successful plan implementation activities in your community. *Total application length, including supporting information and support letters, must not exceed 20 pages. Text areas will expand as needed.*

Applicant government	City of Woodstock, Georgia
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Contact person; title	Tania Celis Leyva, City Planner
Application prepared by	Tania Celis Leyva
I, the undersigned authorized representative of the applicant, certify that to the best of my knowledge the information in this application is true and correct.	
Name of authorized official signing; title	Jeff Moon, City Manager
Date	5/15/2017
Signature	

PRE-REQUISITES

A. (1) We have a consistent record of maintaining our Qualified Local Government status **and** submitting required reports to DCA, including the current Report of Local Government Finances. (To check status, please visit <http://www.georgiaplanning.com/planners/planreview/default.asp>).

QLG status:	yes	no
Local government reports:	yes	no

A. (2) We have achieved and maintained the Minimum Standard for performance as called for in our regional commission's regional comprehensive plan.

yes	no
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For each of the following indicators, fully explain how your community addresses this indicator; identifying specific examples and resulting local successes. (Each indicator will be scored 1, 3 or 5 points, except indicators j. and t. which may score up to 10 points.) Add exhibits and examples as needed to tell your story.

INDICATOR: GOALS

B. The Goals (or Vision) section of our comprehensive plan continues to be supported by the community and its leadership. How?

The vision for Woodstock set by the 2030 Comprehensive Plan is “A walkable, historic community of neighborhoods located between the mountains and Atlanta, where a mix of housing types, a diversity of employment opportunities, shopping, entertainment and greenspaces create a modern village.” City leadership and staff continue to collaboratively support and deliberately work toward this vision, as evidenced by the Woodstock City Council's recent decisions to:

- Adopt a revised Senior Housing Ordinance which grants density bonuses in exchange for affordable unit set-asides to help income restricted seniors age in place.
- Create an Innovator Space use classification that permits, by-right, a wider range of artistic, entrepreneurial, and technology oriented enterprises in appropriate locations across the City, including the Central Business District in Downtown Woodstock.
- Create an Entertainment District that encourages economic vitality and cross-pollination of shoppers and restaurant-goers in our Downtown Core during all hours of the day.
- Continue to adhere to our Comprehensive Plan's future land use map, character area development strategies, and Livable Center Initiative goals by reviewing and evaluating all zoning and variance proposals against specific criteria related to these plans as part of each public hearing process.

C. The Goals are both ambitious and achievable for the community. Please give examples of some ambitious yet achievable Goals included in your comprehensive plan.

The goals set by the 2030 Comprehensive Plan are ambitious yet achievable. An example of such a goal is the call for a “Balance between the Built and Natural Environment.” One way Council answered the call, was by funding and adopting an update to the City’s Tree Ordinance. The updates transformed the ordinance into a living document that offers more user friendly calculation methods which are more responsive to emerging land use trends, such shifts in market demands which favor infill development occurring in Woodstock’s Downtown and Form Based Code Districts. City leadership is also answering the call by encouraging exploration of alternative stormwater management practices that elevate rather than suppress local natural physical features as part of the engineering or site design process. From concept to construction, Woodstock leadership approaches biodiversity, preservation, and restoration as a complement rather than an alternative to economic or demographic growth.

Another example of an ambitious, yet achievable goal is to provide increased mobility. This goal sounds broad, but the ambition is in how we are choosing to achieve that goal. We have been working for many years to retroactively install a grid street system in the Downtown Core. So far, we have three grid streets running parallel to Main Street started. This year, we made a new connection between Paden Street and Mill Street. Woodstock is bisected by a railroad line, which has resulted in a difficult barrier stretching right through Downtown. Several years ago, we installed a major pedestrian-only railroad crossing that marries the previously disconnected east and west sides of Main Street. Another way we are providing increased mobility is with our extensive trails plan, which anticipates 60+ miles of trails in our 12 square mile city. So far, we have installed about 4.5 miles of multi-use trail, connecting Downtown to Highway 92, and connecting several neighborhoods to each other. Under construction now is a new section of trail that will connect the 30,000 Towne Lake area residents to the Downtown Core without having to get in their cars.

D. The Goals steer local decision-making on a continuous basis. Please tell us how and provide specific examples.

The Mayor and City Council carefully evaluates and votes upon all rezoning, conditional use permit, and variance cases by weighing each proposal against the Character Area implementation strategy set upon the property by the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is of such importance that all applicants seeking Council action upon any zoning-related request must meet with Planning Staff to discuss how well their proposal aligns with Comprehensive Plan objectives and supporting zoning regulations before their application deadline. Recommendations for density maximums, architectural standards for street facing elevations, and right of way donations for roadway or multimodal improvements all originate from the character area recommendations stated in the Comprehensive Plan.

E. Consistent progress is being made at achieving the Goals. Since our original designation, we have addressed the following goals:

Each year Woodstock submits a new Short Term Work Program for DCA review. Since our original designation as a Plan First Community, some significant achievements include:

1. Completed construction of the much anticipated Amphitheatre in Woodstock City Park. The first concert of the season, featuring the Charlie Daniels Band, was held on Friday, May 12, and was attended by over 10,000 people!
2. Continued the Downtown Street Grid expansion as more residential projects come online by requiring developers to install any planned street sections on their properties.
3. Adopted a new Tree Replacement and Preservation Ordinance.
4. Revised the Downtown District Ordinance to be more user friendly and to ensure continued consistency with Comprehensive Plan.
5. Revised Surety Requirements Standards to permit Council to modify the list of acceptable sureties for public infrastructure during times of economic distress.

INDICATOR: LEADERSHIP

F. We have effective planning staff or another suitable arrangement for handling community planning matters. Please tell us about your staff or suitable arrangement, including, if you wish, any degrees or certifications.

Woodstock has a very effective planning staff who manages all zoning applications; maintains and implements City codes and long-range plans; researches and proposes text amendments; and assists the public to obtain information about the status of pending cases, available data resources, and the operations of City government. Outside of typical planning duties, planning staff serves on the boards of local arts and cultural organizations, speaks at community meetings about planning related matters, and maintain regular attendance at the Atlanta Regional Commission TCC, TAQC, and LUCC meetings and quarterly Atlanta Regional Housing forums.

The Community Development Director, who also handles planning matters, is AICP certified and holds a master's degree in Public Administration. The Senior City Planner holds a master's degree in Sustainable Design, is a LEED Green Associate, and is sitting for the AICP exam this month. The City Planner holds a master's degree in City and Regional Planning, and is preparing to take the LEED Green Associate exam.

G. We have an active planning commission or similar body to steer local planning decisions. Please provide information about your commission or similar body; for instance, number of members, meeting schedule, local affiliations, etc.

Woodstock's Planning Commission consists of seven members which issues recommendations to the City Council on all zoning and variance cases and proposed text amendments. Meetings

are held on the first Thursday of each Month, with additional work sessions scheduled as needed. The Mayor and each Councilperson appoints one person to the Commission. Appointees receive an orientation from planning staff and have access to a training budget so they may attend regular trainings such as those offered by the Atlanta Regional Commission's Community Planning Academy or the Department of Community Affairs' Community Planning Institute.

H. We have a regular local plan effectiveness evaluation process (such as annual planning retreats of elected leadership). Please provide information about the most recent.

Each year Woodstock's Mayor and City Council attend a two day strategic retreat to discuss projects, policies, and priorities for the upcoming year with the City Manager, Department Directors, and a hired facilitator. The retreat serves as a time for City leadership at all levels to recommit to effective interdepartmental communication and coordination, to learn emerging best planning practices, and to revisit what needs to be done to accomplish the vision set by the Comprehensive Plan. This year's retreat occurred on February 3rd and 4th, and included a visioning session about the desired character of certain Downtown streets. The input received is informing new street design plans for certain streets which exceed the boundaries of downtown, to include appropriate designs for the transition in character between downtown and other areas of the City.

I. All local officials (both elected and appointed) involved in local planning processes have recently attended training in how to use the plan effectively. Please list who attended, which trainings and the date(s) attended. These trainings may include those from Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the Community Planning Institute, GMA or ACCG land use or planning classes, and similar courses.

Woodstock's elected and appointed officials are actively involved in planning processes and regularly attend trainings on how to use the plan effectively. The Mayor and City Council are scheduled to attend the Georgia Municipal Association Conference in Savannah in late June 2017. Each Council member and our City Manager has completed various courses offered by the Holtz Municipal Training Institute for Elected Officials. Concurrently, members of the Planning Commission participated in the ARC's Community Planning Academy: Training for Planning Officials held on November 11, 2016, the Department of Community Affairs' Community Planning Institute held on March 10, 2016, and American Planning Association Spring Conference held in Downtown Woodstock on April 19, 2017.

J. Provide up to ten of your best recent examples which have occurred since your original designation where the plan steered a key local decision, with pertinent plan references (attach additional sheets as needed). Please explain the connection between the comprehensive plan and the decision(s) made. Explain how using the comprehensive plan has enhanced or improved the quality of life for your citizens as well as governmental operations in your community. If an activity involved one or more of the incentives provided by the **PlanFirst** program please explain.

Comprehensive Plan Goals		
Project	Description	Influence
Rezoning Decisions	Solomon Development Services LLC, Neese Road Townhomes, and King Mac Ventures LLC rezoning cases were directly impacted by the Comprehensive Plan.	Context sensitive streetscapes (pg. 15), installation of portions of the Greenprints Trail System (pg. 16)
Work force Housing	City granted five variances for an underutilized property to permit the construction of a workforce housing community designed by TSW.	Promotion of a range of housing choices and diverse economic opportunities (pg. 21)
Permitted Uses Matrix Update	Expanded the number of by-right land uses across various City districts and introduced a new Entertainment District and the Innovator Space classification.	Update Zoning ordinances to allow appropriately scaled nonresidential uses (pg. 23)
Tree Ordinance Update	Streamlined replacement calculations (moved from complicated density calculations to the more simple inches per acre method), introduced new native species to permitted plantings lists, and added new landscaping and buffer best practices.	Conserves natural areas that have important recreations, ecological, and aesthetic values (pg. 12).
Downtown District Standards Update	Introduced density bonuses for desirable land use proposals, such as those including Class A office space or parking decks, in areas planned for future transit oriented and mixed used development; revised architectural standards to support integration of unique place-making elements as part of designs.	Encourages growth in areas most beneficial to the city (pg. 8); improves Development Code to maximize Comprehensive Plan implementation (pg. 11)
Sign Ordinance Implementation	Supports architectural character required in the Downtown District and Historic Overlay by prohibiting plastic content, which requires businesses and sign vendors to be more creative. We also have made some progress on implementation of our Wayfinding Signage Plan, including the addition of two branded information kiosks in Downtown.	Creates gateway features (pg. 12, pg. 15); integrates signage into Complete Street design opportunities (pg. 12)
Opening of City Amphitheater	Supports spirit of inclusiveness and opportunities for civic engagement that reinforce a sense of unique community identity. There are no gates at the amphitheater, and all concerts are free and open to the public	Accommodates different lifestyles; focuses redevelopment on Woodstock's urban core (pg. 11).
Implementation of Sustainability Initiatives	City continues to collaborate with developers to integrate best stormwater management during the site engineering and construction process. One example is our Sustainable Parking Ordinance, which has very low parking maximums. Developers can earn bonus parking spaces by providing alternative Stormwater measures or other sustainability features.	Ensures public services and facilities are provided in an efficient and cost effective manner; adheres to standards that are of environmental benefit to the City (pg. 8).
Adoption of Economic Emergency Measures	Introduces flexibility for Council to modify acceptable sureties for public infrastructure projects during times of economic distress and establishes metrics of economic stability.	Minimizes the risk of fiscal burdens on existing residents (pg. 8); supports continued improvements in sewer, water, and transportation (pg. 23)

INDICATOR: PARTICIPATION

K. Our comprehensive plan was prepared with multiple community input opportunities. Please provide information about these opportunities, including, if available, dates, agendas, other meeting materials.

The vision and underlying guiding principles which form the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan were developed through the Community Participation Program. Adopted by all parties involved in the Comprehensive Planning process, the program set the strategy for ensuring adequate public and stakeholder involvement. It also facilitated communication and coordination between the extensive citizen participation activities and the Citizen's Roundtable Committee. The latter was comprised of City of Woodstock subcommittee and appointed representatives from Cherokee County, the Board of Education, and neighboring cities of Holly Springs and Canton. Specific participation activities and strategies included:

1. County wide kick off meeting
2. Five instances of open public Community Assessment/Town Hall Issue Forums
3. Five District Plan Workshops used to identify local land use and planning issues in the form of charrettes.
4. Five supplemental Citizen RoundTable meetings.
5. Five "Plan Cherokee" educational meetings.
6. Seven briefings with elected officials from participating jurisdictions in the County.
7. Various Woodstock City Council workshops.
8. Various Woodstock Planning Commission workshops.
9. Two required Department of Community Affairs public hearings.
10. Citizen surveys and comment sheets, email blasts, print media, and web notifications.

L. The community input received during plan preparation influenced the content of the plan. How?

Community input heavily influenced the content of the plan. Throughout the planning process, data analysis and community input led stakeholders along many paths, and we adjusted original assumptions and ideas accordingly. Community input directly shaped the formation of the Community Agenda, which lists the City's Vision for the future, as well as key issues and opportunities, and the implementation program for the vision. It is filled with ambitious yet achievable objectives which continue to influence the projects, policies, and priorities implemented by Council today. One specific example is the DT-VLR (Downtown Very Low Density Residential) zoning district, which resulted from a Character Area in the Plan, which was requested by residents of the Dobbs Estates neighborhood. The intent of this district is to protect the character of this low-density neighborhood located in the heart of Downtown. The zoning district and Character Area continue to influence decisions for zoning proposals on properties directly adjacent to Dobbs Estates, including lower height limits, and prohibition of certain conflicting uses, such as Bar/Tavern without Restaurant.

M. Our steering committee that guided development of the plan included local leaders and elected officials. Please provide a list of steering committee members and their local affiliations.

The steering committee included Mayor Donnie Henriques; City Council Members Randy Brewer (Ward 1), Chris Casdia (Ward 2), Bob Mueller (Ward 3), Liz Baxter (Ward 4), Bud Leonard (Ward 5), and Steve Jarvis (Ward 6); Planning Commission Members James Drinkard, David Dyer, Jeff Wood, Judy Davila, Joe Linden, and John Szczeniak; and Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce leadership, among others.

N. We have an active, ongoing, outreach process for soliciting input on planning matters from a broad spectrum of the community, including non-traditional populations, and the resulting input is listened to by community leaders. Describe this process. How do you engage the stakeholders? Have partnerships been developed because of the planning process? This outreach process includes activities such as:

Annexation, rezoning, conditional use permits, or variances applicants are required to invite all parties located within 500 feet of the proposed development to an input meeting hosted by the applicant prior to any public hearings. Invitations must be postmarked at least 14 full calendar days before the event, make clear the exact relief or Council action being requested, and must provide a point of contact to which residents unable to attend the meeting may forward inquiries. Meeting feedback must be coalesced into a Public Input Report submitted to Staff for review. Often, conditions are added to staff recommendations based on input received from the public.

To ensure non-traditional populations are given fair opportunity to voice their concerns, no public hearing or input meeting may start earlier than 7pm and locations used for the meetings must be ADA accessible. Also, Planning Commission and City Council agendas are posted one full week in advance of the scheduled meeting dates and staff advertises ongoing cases using social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook. The social media posts typically include a map showing where the cases are located in the City so that followers can quickly and easily see if there is a case happening in their area.

O. We have active advocates for plan implementation (such as activist citizens, organizations or neighborhood groups) that are listened to by community leaders. These groups include:

The City of Woodstock enjoys strong partnerships with citizens and a diverse range of community organizations which graciously and generously lend expertise, volunteer hours, insight, and influence to help achieve the objectives set out by our Comprehensive Plan and Livable Centers Initiative Plans. These groups include but are not limited to:

- The Greenprints Alliance – A non-profit group which raises funding for and promotes the implementation of the City's Greenprints Trails Master Plan. Board members include the Director of Economic Development Brian Stockton, Councilmember David Potts, and former vice chair for the Planning Commission Colin Ake. This direct link to staff and elected officials keeps the maintenance and expansion of Woodstock's trail system at the forefront of every major planning effort.
- Elm Street Cultural Arts Village – A non-profit arts group offering theatrical and cultural performances, instruction, and exhibits year round. This organization is working hard to further Woodstock's cultural offerings and to transform the Reeves House, an historically significant farmhouse built in 1897, into a cultural arts center which will serve as the heart of the City's cultural scene.

- Woodstock Downtown Homeowners Association – An active homeowner’s organization that lends its unique on-ground perspective to make recommendations that support the successful integration of new mixed use and office proposals and context sensitive street grid system recommended by our Livable Centers Initiative Plan.

INDICATOR: IMPLEMENTATION

P. The Work Program section of our comprehensive plan consists primarily of specific action items that make it clear exactly what we intend to do to implement the plan. Please give examples of measureable action items included in your work program(s).

The Short Term Work Program updated annually by the City of Woodstock seeks to achieve measurable results. The program is used as a tool to identify funds for the construction of specific public infrastructure projects, to set aside staff time for follow-up studies that will inform strategic decision making, and to delegate responsibilities to support the successful implementation of new Council directives. Examples of measurable action items in our work program include calls to develop a small business accelerator space with local and regional partners in Downtown (completed) and to expand Senior Center Facilities (currently underway).

Q. Our Work Program action items clearly address local needs or goals identified in the plan. These local needs or goals are aligned with work program activities. For example:

All Short Term Work Program action items can be directly traced to the goals set by the Comprehensive Plan. For example, action items calling for the widening of Towne Lake Parkway from Sherwood Drive to Neese Road or the continued updates of the 5-year Capital Improvements Plan directly support the “Accommodate Growth while Creating a Sustainable Community” directive set by the community during the comprehensive planning process.

R. We have a good track record of accomplishing most of the action items included in past plan Work Programs. Our Report of Accomplishments very specifically shows our level of accomplishment, such as:

The Report of Accomplishments for the Short Term Work Program Update for 2014-2018 demonstrates Woodstock’s ongoing dedication to achieving most action items set in past Work Programs. In the most recent Short Term Work Program, for example, just two items out of eleven were dropped when it was determined staff efforts would be better utilized on implementing other actions. Woodstock prides itself on utilizing all available funds and city resources to their maximum effect, as signified by continued commitment to 82% of remaining reported items. The completion of the amphitheater was a major milestone for Woodstock, as this project was on the Short Term Work Program list for many years.

S. Our local capital budget is consistent with, and is designed to implement, the comprehensive plan. Please explain the connections between your budget and your work program.

Each year Department Heads, the City Manager, and the City Council review the Short Term Work program at their annual retreat. The program is used to establish the budget that sustains progress towards meeting objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

T. Provide up to ten of your best recent examples of important projects carried out since your original designation as a result of the plan, with the specific plan references (attach additional sheets as needed). Please explain how these activities were a result of the plan or the planning process. Consider including photographs, newspaper articles or other exhibits to elaborate on these projects. Please show how these examples have enhanced the quality of life for your citizens. If any of the listed projects involved one or more of the incentives provided by the **PlanFirst** program, please indicate which incentive, and how it was beneficial.

Project/Activity	Description	Plan Reference	Year
Wall Street Façade Improvements	Addition of sidewalks and lighting is completed. Wall Street was once a dark back-alley behind buildings facing Main Street, and now it is a much safer and more comfortable street for pedestrians.	pg. 9	2016
Amphitheatre in Woodstock City Park	Construction completed in time for debut of 2017 Summer Concert Series. The amphitheater is free for the public to use when there are no concerts scheduled, and includes large and well-maintained public restrooms that were much-needed in the walkable downtown area. (See photo below)	pg. 3	2016
Develop small business accelerator space with local and regional partners in downtown.	Innovator Space offices at The Circuit, our new co-working space and innovator lab located at Chattahoochee Tech, became available to tenants. The Circuit is a place where residents can come to be inspired, chat with other entrepreneurs, and grow their businesses. (See photo below)	pg. 4	2016
Purchase body worn cameras and storage for uniformed police officers.	Woodstock police launched body worn camera program on March 31, 2017. The program included input from local stakeholders in the form of a citizen's police advisory committee.	pg. 5	2016
Grid street implementation	Made a new grid street connection in Downtown from Paden Street to Mill Street through a new townhome development.	LCI Plan pg. 90	2017
Bike share program and system	Woodstock now has bike share! This system allows visitors and residents alike to ride bikes on our very popular trail system without having to bring their own.	LCI Plan pg. 102	2017
Review development codes to ensure consistency with Comprehensive Plan and Character Area implementation measures.	Adopted new Tree Ordinance and amended the Downtown District Ordinance and Permitted Uses Chart to better support sustainability, biodiversity, economic development, and architectural standards recommended by the Comprehensive Plan.	pg. 7	2016

U. PlanFirst designation is the result of good planning and execution of that plan by a local government. How has this designation benefitted your community?

PlanFirst designation has allowed planning staff and Planning Commissioners to engage in free training at the Community Planning Institute for the last two years. Having paid training benefits the community by allowing those funds to be spent on additional training opportunities, such as the GPA Spring Conference, which translates to better planning and zoning decisions that are more closely aligned with the Comprehensive Plan.

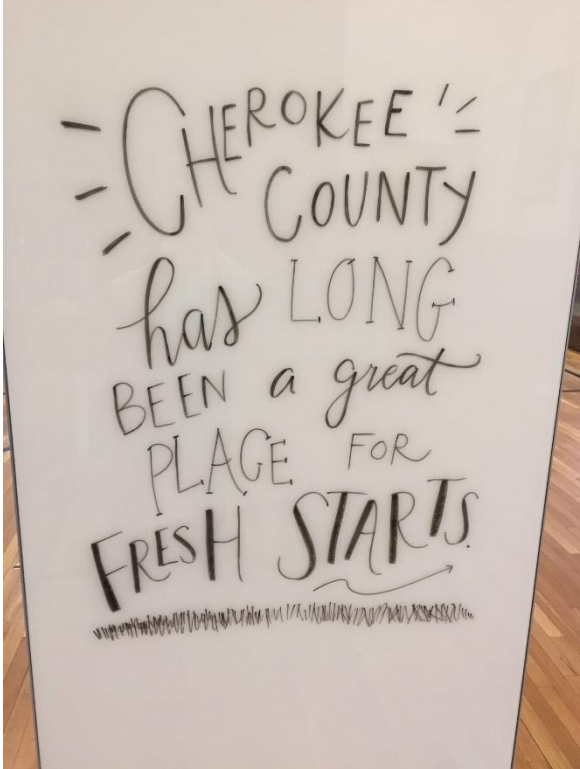
Please attach additional sheets as needed to tell your story. Application should not exceed 20 pages. Application may be electronically transmitted or printed, scanned and emailed to adriane.wood@dca.ga.gov . For more information, contact Adriane Wood.



The Circuit, a co-working space and innovation lab, was once the Woodstock Elementary School gym. Chattahoochee Technical College has renovated and now occupies the school, and has allowed the Cherokee County Economic Development and Woodstock Economic Development Departments to locate there as well. The Circuit offers rentals for start-ups, will soon have a coffee shop open to the public, and serves as the Chattahoochee Tech student center. Fresh Start Cherokee is a program centered around The Circuit, which helps the community to develop entrepreneurial skills, creating a community to belong to so that novices can learn from others who have gone before. The program offers access to classes, a mentor network, and potential connections to funding for start-ups.



The Circuit in action



The Circuit and Fresh Start Cherokee



Small business seminar at The Circuit



Woodstock's new Northside Hospital Cherokee Amphitheater located in the Woodstock City Park. Public restrooms are located in the back of the stage.



First concert of the season, the Charlie Daniels Band, with an estimated 10,000 attendees total. This photo was taken an hour before the concert started.



Ribbon cutting for Woodstock's new bike share system at the Farmer's Market.



Woodstock's new Mobile Visitor's Center.