



March 30, 2023

Georgia Southern Students Complete Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS) Research Project in Collaboration with the City of Sylvania, Downtown Development Authority and Screven County Development Authority, GA

Georgia Southern University students in the Department of Geology and Geography, in the College of Science and Mathematics, will present the results of their 2022-2023 Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS) research project at a community meeting on Wednesday April 19, 2023, in Sylvania, GA. Kelsie Floyd and Austin Abarr, Master of Science in Applied Geography (MSAG) students and Rebecca Neely, undergraduate BA Geography major have been working on a community-engaged research project in collaboration with the city of Sylvania, the city's Downtown Development Authority, Screven County Development Authority, and the Planning and Urban Studies (PLUS) program at the University of New Orleans (UNO). Under the guidance of Dr. Michelle Thompson (UNO), Dr. Rob Yarbrough (GS), Dr. Munshi Rahman (GS), Dr. Amy Potter (GS) and PhD in Urban Studies student Jennie Garcia (UNO), the overarching goals of this PPGIS project are to provide Geographic Information Systems (GIS) services to these community partners, in collaboration with municipal leaders, local business owners, and the broader communities in Sylvania and Screven County. These GIS services are an invaluable component of Sylvania's Downtown Strategic Plan and for achieving the city and county's overall economic development objectives.

The collaboration has reciprocal benefits, as Georgia Southern students engage in experiential learning, work closely with community partners, and apply geographic concepts and techniques they learned in the classroom to real-world scenarios. As Dr. Rob Yarbrough, Interim Chair of the Department of Geology and Geography explains, "The research on student success demonstrates that high impact practices like capstone experiences and internships provide unparalleled real-world exposure for our graduate and undergraduate students, while one of Georgia Southern's designated research focus areas is Community Engagement. So, when Dr. Thompson (Planning and Urban Studies, University of New Orleans) reached out to us about a potential collaboration, I knew we couldn't let this opportunity pass us by." The GS MSAG students created an app-based field survey to capture images and evaluate property conditions for potential (re)development of historic buildings, for example. Stacy Mathis, Sylvania City Manager, stated that "Mayor Preston Dees encouraged the students to share their findings beyond the report so the greater Sylvania community learns how we support businesses and are planning for immediate and long-term economic success." Providing pro bono GIS services for the Sylvania Downtown Strategic Plan was just the starting point. "After launching the first ever MSAG Capstone, students modeled their work plan after our NOLA-based WhoData PPGIS methodology. The data developed will be used to expand the Main Street, evaluate Qualified Opportunity Zone investment, and shine more light on what Sylvania offers in a new way," says Thompson. The Downtown Development Authority and newly hired DDA Director, Kylie Forehand, seeks Community input on the draft Downtown Strategic Plan and Business Survey by May, 2023.



The PPGIS presentation and community meeting will take place from 6:00 – 7:30PM on Wednesday/April 19, 2023 at the Screven County Recreation Department Community Center (1605 Millen Hwy, Sylvania, GA 30467). The event is co-hosted by the City of Sylvania and the Georgia Southern Department of Geology and Geography. Refreshments by 4&20 Bakers. All are welcome to attend.

For More Information Please Contact:

Kylie Forehand, Executive Director of the Sylvania Downtown Development Authority (DDA), at sylvaniagadowntown@gmail.com. A copy of the Downtown Strategic Plan overview will be available on the DDA website: <https://sylvaniagadowntown.com/>.

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Interim Department Chair, Geology and Geography at ryarbrough@georgiasouthern.edu for a copy of the *City of Sylvania/Screven County & Downtown Development Authority Public Participation Geographic Information Systems Report*. A link to the report will be available after May 15, 2023 on the GS Geology and Geography Department website: <https://cosm.georgiasouthern.edu/geo/>.

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