

# environmental CASE STUDY

## Eufaula, Alabama—Planning for the Future

Drive approximately two and a half hours southwest of Atlanta, to the shores Lake Eufaula on the Chattahoochee River, and you'll arrive in the city of Eufaula, Alabama, population 15,000. In many respects, Eufaula looks a lot like other southern towns—its large historic district is the centerpiece of downtown, while sprawl-type commercial zones, residential suburbs, agricultural fields, and industries spread outward.

Eufaula has the same environmental issues that face every other community in the United States. Its citizens generate waste, use energy, and build houses; they need good jobs and want young people to have opportunities to stay in Eufaula when they grow up. They want to live in a safe, clean, attractive, economically vibrant city.

### Eufaula as a model

Eufaula's concern for the future of the community made it the perfect place to pilot the Sustainable Communities Program. Though Eufaula is a small city by many comparisons, it can be held up as a model of what many communities face in today's pressures for economic growth, regional development, and social equity.

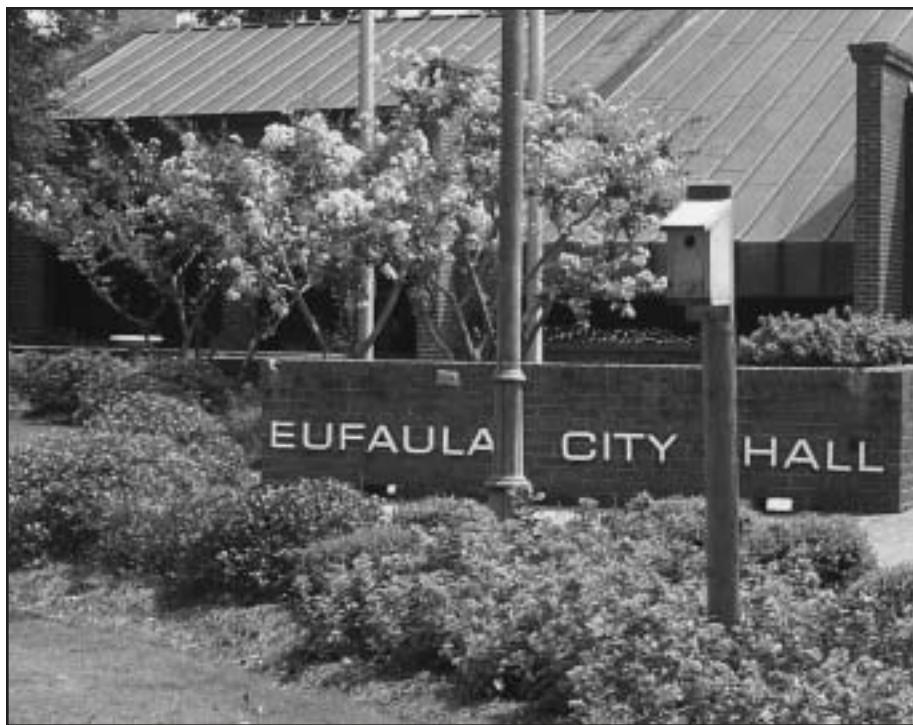
Since 1997, when Audubon International President Ronald Dodson was first invited to Eufaula, Audubon International has been assisting city government officials, citizens, businesses, and civic organizations chart Eufaula's future. Now known as *Eufaula 2020*, the initiative is the community's way of envisioning and planning for its future, using Audubon International's *Principles for Sustainable Resource Management* as a guide.

"Our work with Audubon International has galvanized community awareness, action, and strategic planning," states Eufaula's Mayor Jay Jaxon. "It has helped us chart a course toward a future that capitalizes on the best of what Eufaula offers, while addressing community problems and needs."

### City Hall recognized for environmental stewardship

On October 10, 2002, Audubon International recognized the City of Eufaula as the first *Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Community*—the first step in the Sustainable Communities Program. The designation is the result of Eufaula's efforts since 1997 to develop a demonstration site at City Hall and involve its citizens in sustainable community initiatives. Environmental practices showcased on the approximately one acre City Hall site include native landscaping, waste reduction, energy and water conservation, and community education.

"Our involvement at city hall demonstrates to Eufaula's citizens that the city is walking the walk and not just talking the talk," says Neil Yarbrough, City Horticulturist and co-chair of the Eufaula 2020 steering committee. "We are constantly getting positive feedback from citizens and employees."



The Eufaula City Hall showcases a variety of environmental stewardship practices to encourage community-wide involvement.

More important, the demonstration site at city hall has served the purpose for which it is intended: community involvement. "The success of the projects we have done over the past few years has been beyond our expectations," explains Yarbrough. "All three of our elementary schools have become certified in the ACSP, numerous homeowners have joined the backyard program, and several businesses are involved. But without a doubt the biggest success has been our city leaders' desire to have the whole city become a certified community."

### Community input culminates in strategic plan

In 2001, Eufaula formed a partnership among Audubon International, Auburn University, Goodwyn, Mills, and Cawood, Inc., and the City to create a strategic plan. The document is the culmination of countless

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R. Dodson

During one of many community meetings, Eufaula Mayor Jay Jaxon explains how “economy,” “ecology,” and “social equity” come together in sustainable communities.

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community meetings, focus group discussions, and community-wide surveys, combined with careful analysis of Eufaula’s resources. It addresses quality of government, land use planning, economic development, and quality of life issues and sets forth a plan-of-action to direct Eufaula’s future.

“Our strategic planning process has given us a specific vision of the community we want to be in the year 2020,” states Mayor Jay Jaxon. “Through the process we have gained the commitment of many citizens to work in achieving that shared vision.”

“Citizens from all walks of life, all financial levels, and all social and cultural strata have participated in the planning process,” says Dodson. “Everyone seems to realize that while we work to protect the environment of Eufaula, all citizens will benefit in the long-term as a result of these efforts.”

### Audubon International’s Sustainable Communities Program

The Sustainable Communities Program is an education program designed to help people appreciate the unique environmental, social, and economic characteristics of their community, and work to protect and enhance them through citizen-driven planning and community action. Audubon International serves as a catalyst for action and works to facilitate partnerships with governmental agencies, academic institutions, and other environmental organizations that might provide support and assistance.

#### Stages of Involvement

##### Stage I: Community Outreach, Education, and Involvement

The municipality works with Audubon International to educate citizens and organize community involvement. It assesses its resources and develops a community-wide environmental plan designed to build awareness and engage a broad spectrum of people in stewardship action. The centerpiece of this effort is the development of a demonstration center at city hall or another central location to showcase environmental stewardship efforts. At the completion of this stage, the community is recognized as a *Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Community*.

##### Stage II: Strategic Planning

After Stage I, the community may choose to develop a strategic plan as a way to direct future policy. A strategic planning steering committee is formed to host town meetings, form focus groups, and conduct surveys to gain community-wide input toward developing a vision statement and goals that integrate the community’s environmental, economic, and social priorities. These goals form the basis for a strategic plan. Audubon International confers an *Audubon Sustainable Community Award* to the community upon adoption of the plan by municipal leaders.

##### Stage III: Implementation of the Strategic Plan

During this final stage, the municipality creates an organization and a process to implement the strategic plan. Audubon International recognizes the community as a *Certified Audubon Sustainable Community* once a significant portion of the plan is implemented.