

July 1, 2021

Jermaine Durham
Georgia Initiative for Community Housing
Dawson Hall
305 Sanford Drive
Athens, Georgia 30602

Dear Dr. Durham:

Please accept this letter on behalf of Baldwin County as the official declaration of intent to apply for technical assistance through the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) program.

As you may know, Baldwin County applied for inclusion in the GICH program in August 2018. Baldwin County's primary reasons for applying in 2018 are very similar to those in 2021—revitalization of neighborhoods through blight reduction. The county, through a partnership with the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Habitat for Humanity, in support of the Habitat's affiliate's efforts, sought to develop homeownership opportunities on formerly blighted properties. However, much work remains to be done to revitalize neighborhoods, especially Oconee Heights.

Unfortunately, in 2018 Baldwin County was not selected to participate in this extremely competitive, nationally recognized, one-of-kind program. After reviewing the 2018 application, the County recognizes at least two areas in which it can build upon for a stronger application in 2021. First, the Baldwin County Board of Commissions must dedicate a more robust budget toward travel and lodging expenses for housing team participation in GICH retreats and other related functions. In 2018, Baldwin County allocated \$3,000 for the entire three-year program. If selected for the 2021 application cohort, the Baldwin County Board of Commissioners is dedicated to allocating the recommended amount of \$3,000 per year. Second, the 2018 housing team only consisted of four members. Baldwin County is committed to recruiting a roster of dedicated housing team members that represent its community, including at least one elected official. Additionally, Baldwin County will recruit organizations that serve the populations most in need of housing opportunities — Overview Inc., the community action agency serving the county, the family connection collaborative, and the Cooperative Extension Service. Finally, the County must bolster relationships and collaborate with the school system and agencies that represent the business community.

Since Baldwin County last applied for the GICH program, the County has actively been working to address housing needs and bolster partnerships. Before 2018 the Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution to create a landbank. We continue to encourage the City of Milledgeville to also adopt the resolution. Therefore, a major goal for the 2021 application will be to further

develop relationships with city leaders and develop the landbank concept. Blight reduction and community revitalization continue to be a priority. As of today, Baldwin County has demolished 164 blighted structures. In 2021 the county partnered with the Georgia College Center for Health & Social Issues to further study the conditions of blight in the Oconee Heights neighborhood. A GIS survey was conducted assessing the condition of the houses in the neighborhood based on a blight index. Through this partnership, 25 severely blighted properties and 33 very blighted properties were identified in Oconee Heights. In December 2020, Baldwin County received an award from the National Association of Counties (NACo) for its blight reduction program.

The County is continuing to identify additional resources for housing assistance, as well as better understand the condition of the community's existing housing stock. Other ongoing goals of the County are to assess the lack of affordable and senior housing, work to alleviate existing blight and prevent new blight, and provide opportunities and support for first-time homebuyers.

While all these efforts represent a promising start to the community's housing efforts, Baldwin County recognizes the potential benefits that would come from targeted planning efforts. The county hopes inclusion in the GICH program will further open doors to resources and tools that will aid in its efforts to provide excellent affordable housing to the community.

Baldwin County is committed to applying before the deadline of July 30, 2021. Prior to this application, the community's point of contact will be:

NAME: Carlos Tobar
TITLE: County Manager
AFFILIATION: Baldwin County
PHONE: (478) 445-4791
EMAIL: ctobar@baldwincountyga.com

Thank you for your acceptance of this letter of intent to apply for the GICH program. Baldwin County is working closely with the Middle Georgia Regional Commission on the full application. Should you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Tobar at (478) 445-4791 or by email at ctobar@baldwincountyga.com.

Sincerely,

Henry Craig
Chairman