

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SERIES

PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

GUIDEBOOK FOR CITIZENS
AND LOCAL PLANNERS

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STATE OF GEORGIA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
60 Executive Park South, NE
Atlanta, Georgia 30329-2231
(404) 679-4940
www.dca.state.ga.us

HOW MUCH INVOLVEMENT IS ENOUGH?

We do make a difference – one way or the other.
Stephen Covey

Much like the planning process itself, the level of public involvement and participation is dependent on several factors. The amount and allocation of time, human resources, and budget are certainly important in helping to define how much community participation is feasible. Beyond this, however, the public participation efforts should, more than anything, provide meaningful and real opportunities for anyone in the community affected by the plan to participate in creating the plan.

Successful public involvement is not simply measured by the number of people who attend a meeting or by how many post cards are mailed or by how many residents visited the community's website. The quality of the input and the ways in which the valuable opinions and concerns are incorporated into the plan will live on long after the meetings are over. This evaluation of success will only be possible after the plan is adopted and only if the citizens who contributed to writing the plan regularly consult and use the plan to improve the quality of life in their community.

As each community is faced with a different set of planning issues and challenges, also each community will need to determine the most appropriate level of public involvement. The number of public meetings, the existence and size of a steering committee, and number of stakeholder interviews are not a standard one-size-fits-all formula.

WHO NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED?

Who are the individuals and groups that need to be specifically targeted for involvement in the planning process? An important way to identify who should be involved in developing the plan is by identifying "stakeholders." Stakeholders are individuals or groups affected by plan recommendations and policies. They have a specific interest in the development of the plan and the impact of the final plan on the community. Stakeholders include landowners, government agencies, businesses, private individuals, and special interest groups.

Prior to identifying these representatives of agencies and groups, however, it is important to make sure that "every day folks" have an opportunity to be involved. Although an individual citizen may not be a member of a group or have a defined interest, his or her voice is very important in shaping the future of the community called home.

The people who will prepare the comprehensive plan, whether staff, consultants, volunteers, or some combination are called the planning team. This is the group that will prepare a "plan to plan" for public involvement, or Community Participation Program. There are two primary ways to identify the stakeholders to include in the program.

The first way to organize the program is based on geographic locations throughout the community. In this approach, stakeholders are invited to events or participation activities based on neighborhood, political district, ward, or other geographic unit.

In a second approach, involvement is organized based on interest groups. What are interest groups?

Consider the following checklist of suggested stakeholders:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Local elected officials
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local appointed officials and boards, such as the planning commission
<input type="checkbox"/>	Board of Education
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local government planning, engineering, and building inspections staff
<input type="checkbox"/>	Utility authority staff, including water and sewer authorities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Homeowners' and neighborhood associations
<input type="checkbox"/>	Major landowners
<input type="checkbox"/>	Major employers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Agricultural groups, such as farmers, extension agents and the Farm Bureau
<input type="checkbox"/>	Development community, including builders, engineers, surveyors, land planners, and contractors
<input type="checkbox"/>	Realtors
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chamber of commerce
<input type="checkbox"/>	Industrial development authority
<input type="checkbox"/>	Environmental groups
<input type="checkbox"/>	Health department
<input type="checkbox"/>	Housing agencies
<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-profit groups
<input type="checkbox"/>	Civic, service, and business groups
<input type="checkbox"/>	Churches and faith-based organizations
<input type="checkbox"/>	University and college representatives
<input type="checkbox"/>	Military base representatives
<input type="checkbox"/>	Historic, museum, and heritage groups
<input type="checkbox"/>	Senior citizens' groups and retirement community residents
<input type="checkbox"/>	Youth groups and students

Of course, these methods are not mutually exclusive; there may be significant overlap between them. By way of example, let's consider the chamber of commerce. The chamber of commerce would be identified as a "business" interest group, as the key player in the

“Economic Development” analysis, and likely very important in some geographic sections of the community, such as the central business district, industrial park, or any economic opportunity zones..

Now that you know who will be involved, the next question is how much involvement is enough. There is a range of involvement levels, but in order to meet DCA’s minimum planning requirements, the two required public hearings must be supplemented by a Community Participation Program identifying stakeholders, techniques for involvement, and a schedule for completion of the Community Agenda. At one end of the range is a program that includes only the “bare-bones” necessities of public involvement. At the other end of the spectrum is a highly interactive, multi-faceted public involvement process that provides for numerous public meetings in a wide range of formats and topics. In practice, most communities in Georgia will likely adopt a Community Participation Program somewhere in between these two extremes. The next section provides an illustrative series of public involvement scenarios as a starting point.

CHOOSING THE DEGREE OF INVOLVEMENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Building once again on the “plan to plan” discussed in Part 2, take into account the resources available – people, budget, and time - to decide how much public involvement is appropriate for your community. For a planning process in a smaller community managed primarily by volunteers without professional planners, the level of involvement will often be closer to the “minimum” range. For a large urbanized jurisdiction with a hired team of planning consultants and a one- to two-year planning process, the activities included in the “maximum” level of involvement are often more feasible and appropriate. In the latter situation, there are more resources to devote to public involvement. However, a smaller community may see higher rates of participation even with more limited resources to carry out the involvement program.

To best depict this range of public involvement programs, there are three degrees of involvement described below; low, moderate, and maximum. A low level is appropriate when resources are limited, but some form of meaningful involvement is desirable. Moderate involvement is appropriate where time, money, and staff make it possible to do even more, and a high level is for those situations where there is a high level of interest on the part of the citizens of the community.

Across the top of the matrix in the center of the table are the three levels of involvement. The relative level of expense and complexity is indicated in the three right columns. In the far left column are various activities that might make up the community participation program. Each community should select the activities based on relative expense and complexity to custom design the level of involvement best suited to its needs and available resources.

Activity	Level of Involvement			Relative Expense and Complexity		
	Low	Mod.	High.	Low	Mod.	High
Two (2) Public Hearings	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Stakeholder Interviews	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Kiosk/Lobby Displays	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Technical Advisory Committee	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Community Preferences Meetings	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Website – Information only	✓			✓		
Website – Response Capability (email)	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Website – Interactive with Surveys and Customized Features		✓	✓			✓
Intergovernmental Partnership Meetings	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Steering Committee		✓	✓	✓		
Kick-Off Public Information Meeting		✓	✓		✓	
Vision and Implementation Strategies Meetings		✓	✓		✓	
Printed Public Information		✓	✓		✓	
Direct Mail Surveys		✓	✓			✓
Design Charrettes		✓	✓			✓
Media Plan - Press Releases		✓	✓	✓		
Student Program		✓	✓		✓	
E-mail “blast” – Database			✓		✓	
Cable TV Information			✓		✓	
Speakers Bureau			✓		✓	

Brief descriptions of each of the “Activities” that are listed in the table are provided below. The sections entitled “Committees to Consider” and “A Toolbox of Techniques”

feature more detailed explanations of some of these activities, as well as additional exercises and strategies.

Two (2) Public Hearings – The minimum number of public hearings as established by DCA’s local planning requirements, with one hearing held to approve the completed draft Community Assessment and Community Participation Program for transmission to the Regional Development Center for review and one held to approve the completed draft Community Agenda to the RDC for review.

Stakeholder Interviews – One-on-one interviews with key community leaders using a standardized series of questions, designed to gather more detailed information about stakeholders’ area of expertise.

Kiosk/Lobby Displays – Posting maps, photos, and alternative plans in a prominent location in the city hall, the county courthouse, or the public library. These displays provide information to visitors to view at their leisure and outside of a formal public meeting.

Technical Advisory Committee – A working committee of city or county planners and other key employees from public safety, the board of education, utility authorities, and constitutional officers. As primary “users” of the plan, they have a stake in the outcome of the comprehensive plan.

Community Preference Meetings – An evaluation of a series of visual images categorized by housing types and styles, streetscape appearance, open space, commercial areas, and other design or use types. Participants are asked to state a preference as images showing alternative designs are displayed side by side. Results are tabulated by the planning team for presentation in later meetings.

Website – Information only – A page on the community’s website used for periodic updates on the planning process. Information should include schedules, announcements, draft goals and objectives, preliminary recommendations, and maps.

Website – Response Capability – A page on the community’s website with information and one or more “contact the planning team” buttons to send email to the planners working on the comprehensive plan.

Website – Interactive with Surveys – In addition to providing information on the community’s website, provide interactive feedback opportunities with online surveys, questionnaires, and e-mail.

Intergovernmental Partnership Meetings – “Planning summit” meetings held by the elected officials with groups interested in the comprehensive plan, such as the board of education, appointed boards and commissions, other city and county government representatives, utility providers, state agencies and departments, and regional planning entities.

Steering Committee – Established to provide feedback, advise the planning team, and shape the overall planning process. The Steering Committee is typically comprised of representatives from local authorities, the business community, key non-profit agencies, and citizen groups.

Kick-Off Public Information Meeting – An event to announce the beginning of the Community Agenda planning process to the citizens and other stakeholders and provide opportunity to view a presentation covering the project purpose and general plan approach. Initial opinion surveys and volunteer sign up forms are available at this meeting.

Vision and Implementation Strategies Meetings – Facilitated meetings to discover the community vision and address the three key planning questions – “What do you have?” “What do you want?” and “How will you get it?”

Printed Public Information – Flyers, newspaper inserts, brochures, or newsletters providing information on the progress of the plan, proposed maps, and announcement of future public meeting opportunities. This information may be mailed, made available at public locations, such as libraries or city hall, or both.

Direct Mail Surveys – A questionnaire soliciting comments, opinions, and community goals via a printed, mail survey sent to a certain number of residents in the community.

Design Charrettes – Highly interactive meetings where attendees work in groups to draw maps, develop goals and policies, and design their community.

Media Plan and Press Releases – A plan to develop a relationship with a local newspaper or other reporter and editor by providing newsworthy information and public meeting notices on a regular basis throughout the planning process.

Student Program – Direct involvement of students from local schools, through such efforts as poster contents, essay contests, appointing high school student representatives to committees, or sponsoring a “city planning” study unit, such as “Box City.” (See the resource list for information about student programs and Box City.)

E-mail “blast” Database – Periodic mass mailings by email to provide important notices and other information. At public meetings, offer the option of attendees providing their e-mail addresses on the sign in sheet. Create a database and send periodic progress e-mails and future meeting announcements to the distribution list.

Cable TV Information – Work with the local cable television provider to provide public service announcements or a 30-minute cable show describing the planning process and opportunities for public involvement.

Speakers Bureau – The planning team – staff, consultants and volunteers – offers to make an introductory presentation on the planning process to civic clubs, business groups and schools.

CONSIDER THESE COMMITTEES

A community is like a ship: everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.
Henrik Ibsen

As the planning process and community vision move forward, it is not always possible to communicate every intermediate product, benchmark, or draft document at a public meeting. Likewise, it may not be feasible to inform and involve the elected officials of the community at the completion of each individual task or subtask of the planning process. To bridge this potential information and reporting gap between the planning team and ultimate users of the completed planning document, two important committees should be appointed, the Technical Advisory Committee (staff) and the Steering Committee (stakeholders).

In smaller communities where the planning process may have a limited budget and rely on volunteers rather than professional planning staff or consultants, appointing formal committees may not be practical. Committees require invitations, agendas, minutes, meeting locations, and other forms of “care and maintenance” that simply may be beyond the resources of the community. Even so, special consideration should be made to coordinate the planning process with some of the likely members of these committees, perhaps through one-on-one meetings, or through the use of brief written reports and few meetings.

THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Another strategy to encourage and support community based planning is the formation of a Steering Committee. This group should be nominated by and appointed during a meeting of the city council or board of commissioners to establish the important role of the Steering Committee in guiding the planning process. The Steering Committee is charged with providing feedback, advising the consultant planning team, and shaping the overall planning process. The committee should hold regularly scheduled meetings, perhaps every other month or quarterly. The Steering Committee can be any size, but 7 to 15 members are the most workable. It should be comprised of representatives from local authorities, the business community, key non-profit agencies, and citizens groups. Commonly meeting in advance of major public meetings, the Steering Committee has the ability to assist with keeping the project on schedule, review the preliminary data and findings, provide a

“reality check” to the staff and planning team, and to serve as a political barometer for plan recommendations.

The Steering Committee also provides a great opportunity to involve the local entities whose efforts need to be coordinated with the comprehensive plan. Examples include the board of education, other boards and authorities, city and county government representatives, elected officials and utility providers. In many cases, state departments and regional entities are more than willing to participate on a Steering Committee, bringing a broad perspective of planning activities from nearby jurisdictions.

THE STAFF TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

When a consultant or outside group is preparing the plan, it is important to maintain close coordination with the staff of the local government. This is also true if the planning team is made up of volunteers or a combination of consultant, staff, and volunteers. The staff is an important source of information and coordination during the planning process. It is also important to maintain coordination between a county and the municipalities within the county during the planning process.

One good idea is to establish a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) made up of city and county planners and other key employees or representatives from public safety, the board of education, utility authorities, and constitutional officers. As primary “users” of the plan, they have a stake in the outcome of the comprehensive plan. The TAC could meet monthly or quarterly with the planning team for project updates, progress reports, and coordination of the schedule. Another important role of the TAC is to serve as a liaison between the planning team and the agencies they represent. Members of the TAC are important sources of data crucial to the planning process.

SPECIAL PURPOSE SUBCOMMITTEES

In the course of the planning process, topics are likely to arise that could best be addressed by an ad hoc or special purpose subcommittee. These subcommittees might be organized to meet only once or twice to deal with one specific topic in a concentrated effort. The topic could be based on a single issue such as affordable housing, involving a group of stakeholders interested in insuring that the plan includes adequate provision for housing for low- and moderate-income residents. Another subcommittee might address one specific geographic area of the community, such as development in the vicinity of an environmentally sensitive stream. Subcommittees can be formed for any important topic, but should not be overused, especially in small communities where the pool of volunteers to serve on committees is small.

Special purpose subcommittees are also an effective way of dealing with “hot topics” or key issues. As an alternative to the Steering Committee getting bogged down on one issue, referring these topics to a subcommittee insures that the overall planning process moves

forward and that the “hot topic” receives special attention and consideration by those most knowledgeable on the issue.

DETAILS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Whatever failures I have known, whatever errors I have committed, whatever follies I have witnessed in private and public life have been the consequence of action without thought.

Bernard Baruch

Perhaps nothing will undermine the success of the public involvement program more quickly than being poorly prepared for the events, meetings, hearings, presentations, and other public program activities in the process. You can be sure that effective meetings do not happen by accident. Just as the planning process starts with the “plan to plan” and the public involvement program starts with a written plan, so, too, must you plan carefully for the events that occur throughout the process. Details do make a significant difference.

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS DON'T JUST HAPPEN

What kind of meeting should we hold?

At a minimum, there will be two public hearings. Many local governments will choose at least a low level of public involvement, which means committee meetings and public meetings. It is important to think about the purpose of the meeting. The format must be matched to the purpose. What do you want to accomplish?

1) Provide information

In this meeting, the primary purpose is for the planning team to tell the participants facts and provide information. The room should be set up for viewing slides, video, PowerPoint, or display boards. Handouts should be plentiful. Careful attention to lighting and sound will help ensure a successful meeting.

2) Solicit information and opinions

This is an interactive meeting, where the planning team will provide information or ask questions and participants will complete survey forms, ask questions, or verbally provide feedback to the team. The room should be set for two purposes: to view information and provide a comfortable setting for audience members to speak

or provide written responses. Tables should be arranged to allow people to easily view displays and also to interact with others at the table.

3) Cooperative problem solving

When physical design is an issue, a charrette should be held to allow participants to engage in mapping, drawing, or other activities to design the physical spaces and buildings that make up the community. The room should have all of the equipment and materials necessary to allow such design activities to take place. This includes base maps, drawing materials, and resource documents.

Other problem solving events may focus on goal setting, consensus building, or choosing among several courses of action. A workshop is the most appropriate meeting format for problem solving. The room should be arranged to allow presentations, possible small group interaction, and feedback by individuals and the entire group of participants.

4) Public hearings

A hearing is a formal meeting of the elected body where the public may comment or provide testimony on the matter presented for voting. This is used during approval of the completed draft Community Assessment and the Community Participation Program for transmittal to the RDC for review and again during approval of the completed draft Community Agenda for transmittal to the RDC for review. The chambers of the elected body are best for the public hearing.

5) Open house

It is often desirable to have an event where participants may drop in at their convenience and stay as little or as long as they wish. The purpose is to allow the public to view maps, photographs, or charts; receive information such as flyers, brochures, or fact sheets; and provide responses to printed survey forms. Sign-up sheets allow participants to select a degree of involvement for further activities. This is particularly effective as a “kick-off” meeting, for neighborhood gatherings, and at the end of the process prior to adoption public hearings. Large spaces, tables, and a few chairs are essential to allow people to move about freely, sit when tired, and have access to all of the information available.

6) Conduct committee business

This is less formal than a public hearing, but should be consistently structured to conduct business. It will include presentations, feedback, consensus building, and possibly voting on future courses of action. Conference-style rooms work well for these meetings.

The fundamental issue for the planning team is the decision about the purpose, selecting a format that meets the purpose, and attending to the details described in this section. Your meeting may have overlapping purposes; combine some of the above meeting purposes to achieve your specific goal.

Presentation materials are important.

Think about the following points when designing presentation materials and preparing the materials for use at a meeting:

- 1) Slides and PowerPoint presentations should be clear and have simple formats for ease of reading and understanding the information. Do not put too much information on each slide. Especially do not use complex charts, graphs, or maps that cannot be read as part of a slide program. Use another presentation format for such materials.
- 2) Flip charts should be used only for small groups, as the written material cannot be clearly seen from a great distance. When previously prepared material is presented on display boards or flip charts follow the same guidelines as for slides. Do not put too much information on each page or board. Simplify the information, especially maps.
- 3) It is probably best to have maps mounted on a wall for people to view before and after a meeting. It is often difficult to print maps large enough to be seen from a great distance. Consider breaking the geographic area into smaller units, so that the area can be “blown up” large enough to see clearly. Simplify the information so that the maps are not too “busy” to understand.
- 4) Charts, graphs, maps, tables, and summaries of data are good as handouts. Again, information should be simplified and summarized for presentations. Those people who want the details can sign up for copies of the background reports or other more detailed data.
- 5) All presentation material should indicate the source of the information and have a date. This makes it easy for the reader to keep track when more up to date information is provided and to follow up when more information is needed.

Think about the meeting format and the presentation materials as a package deal.

The presentation materials that you choose should match the meeting format in terms of degree of formality and purpose of the meeting. The meeting format and the materials together present a complete event for participants. A good format with poor materials is not a good meeting. A poor format with good materials is not a good meeting. Effective meetings will not just happen. Attention to proper format, good materials, and the following details will enhance the planning process.

SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS RESULT FROM ATTENTION TO DETAIL

The format for the meeting has been decided. The planning team is ready to welcome the public. How do you ensure that the meeting will be an interactive, successful exchange of ideas, comments, and suggestions? By incorporating a series of details - each planned and prepared in advance - the planning team and volunteers will be better equipped to

deliver an organized and professional meeting. These details are described in this section; sample forms and documents are provided in the Appendix.

Arriving at the meeting

See the section “A Toolbox of Techniques - Getting the Word Out,” which suggests ways to provide advance notice of public meetings. Once the public arrives at the meeting location, there should be clear directional signs pointing the way to the meeting room. These signs can be placed at the roadway to suggest where to park and also posted on the building entrance to guide attendees into the meeting room. Volunteers and staff should also periodically check the parking area and outside the building for those folks who may be in the right place but unsure of the exact location.

Staffing the meeting

Well before the meeting starts, the planning team should hold a strategy session to assign tasks and responsibilities for the smooth operation of the public meeting. The number of staff and volunteers depends on the expected attendance at the meeting. Encourage a team approach with a mix of local government staff, volunteers, and consultants. One person should be designated as the lead person for the meeting, providing a central point of contact for any issues that may arise during the course of the meeting. If the format calls for breakout group exercises, each group needs at least one facilitator and ideally one “scribe” or note-taker. During the meeting, it is important that staff be located strategically around the room to answer questions, replenish supplies, and monitor the volume and view of the presentations.

All staff should be available to welcome the attendees near the front entrance of the meeting room. A table should be set up at the main entrance with one or two staff to assist with the process of signing in, writing name tags, passing out agendas, and other administrative matters. This table also serves as the “headquarters” of the meeting and should be staffed throughout the meeting to provide directions to the restrooms and assistance to folks who arrive late or leave early.

Sign-in sheets

As mentioned above, several important activities take place at the meeting headquarters table. The first activity is the invitation for all attendees to sign in. Provide a form with spaces for name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and affiliation or organization. The sign-in sheet should identify the date of the meeting or hearing, the place, and the time. This sign-in process records the attendance at the meeting and the geographic areas represented. It also enables the planning team to develop a database of contact names and information for sending future meeting notices and planning project updates.

It is a good idea to have two or more sets of sign in sheets on clipboards to allow several people all arriving at the same time to sign in and get into the meeting room without a backup.

Name tags

To keep everyone on an even playing field during the meeting, name tags are an important public meeting detail. After folks are greeted at the door and sign in, their next step at the headquarters table should be to write their name on their own name tag. Members of the planning team, elected officials, staff, volunteers, and the public all should have the same style of name tag. They serve as a great icebreaker for neighbors to meet each other and also help the planning team to call folks by their names helping to make them feel a part of the meeting. The name tags can be effective with simple, inexpensive adhesive labels or the packaged “Hello my name is” style tags.

Agenda

Every meeting should have an agenda. The agenda contains the list of the topics, the order in which such topics will be discussed, and may also include guidelines for the conduct of the meeting, the availability of equipment or devices to meet special needs (hearing devices, for example). It is a good idea to have a standard agenda format, which is followed every time. This standardized format makes it easy to follow, keeps everyone on topic, and also helps ensure that no items are inadvertently omitted.

Well-run meetings occur because of good preparation. Whether the agenda is prepared by staff, volunteers, or by the planning team, it should be available in advance of the meeting to the public. In addition to a list of topics, the agenda should also identify the date of the meeting or hearing, the place, and the time. Include the names of the speakers since the audience will likely associate the person speaking or facilitating with the topic being discussed. There must be enough copies available for the audience. Depending on the community, consider the need for providing the agenda in languages other than English. Finally, avoid jargon, acronyms, or other special terms that are not readily understood by the public.

In preparing an agenda, always respect the attendee’s time by limiting the duration of the meeting. Establish reasonable time limits for individual comments (for longer presentations, encourage the speaker to fill out a comment form as described below), clearly state the time that the meeting will end and stick to it, and offer to stay after the meeting, if necessary, to discuss a specific point with an individual or small group.

Comment forms

Not everyone is comfortable speaking in a public meeting format. Even though people have made the effort to attend the meeting, those that do not speak up in public do not get their views heard. Providing comment forms at the beginning of the meeting is a strategy to make sure these ideas are captured and considered in the planning process. The form could have a list of plan issues to check off or rank in importance. There could be a few open-ended questions to encourage a longer response. Finally, the form could simply provide space for any comment that attendees wish to make. The forms may be collected at the end of the meeting or provide the option of mailing or faxing the forms back, allowing more time for addressing the issues. When designing the comment forms, it is important to include contact information for the planning team, and a mailing address or fax number to send comments after the meeting.

Handouts

One strategy to reduce the amount of time spent on presentations as well as to reinforce information critical to the topics to be discussed at the meeting is to distribute handouts. Clear, easy to read handouts provide just enough information to introduce the topics, but not so much as to result in participants spending the entire meeting reading long passages of text. Handouts may contain planning data, summary points, or checklist of key issues. If maps are distributed, they should be at a scale that is meaningful with clear dimensions, scale, points of reference and directions, including a north arrow. As with the wording of the agenda, avoid jargon, acronyms, or other special terms that are not readily understood by the public. Handouts not only convey information during the meeting but also provide a “take away” item for attendees to keep as a record of the meeting.

Food

Providing food at a public meeting can help to achieve several important meeting objectives. Depending on budget considerations and the length of the meeting, the food can be simple snack items - cookies and drinks - or could involve a box lunch or catered meal. The time spent around the food table provides a great opportunity for informal discussions between the planning team and residents. Also, a jolt of energy at a strategic break point can help keep the participants fresh and engaged in the meeting. Food is also a kind of reward for the public attending a meeting, particularly a longer meeting.

Meeting supplies

Make sure that there are supplies of pencils, pens, markers (in several colors), white board markers, note pads, easels, tape, and any other items that participants may need during the meeting. Depending on the room configuration, these items are usually placed on the tables or in the chairs. You should have an ample supply of all materials. Also consider a supply box with useful items, such as a stapler, paper clips, tacks or push pins, folders, and large manila envelopes. These materials can help staff organize materials and meet unexpected requests.

WHERE SHOULD WE MEET?

There is an old saying in the real estate business that the three most important factors in land development are “location, location, and location.” Where to hold a public meeting may be thought of in the very same way. Wherever possible try to hold community planning activities physically in the area being planned. This makes it much easier for everyone to bridge the gap from planning concepts to the reality of the area or neighborhood where they live, work, and play. Some suggested sites include schools, community centers, senior centers, libraries, and churches. With advance notice, most of these facilities can accommodate a large public meeting, at little or no cost.

A common solution is to hold the meeting in city hall chambers or the county courthouse. While these buildings are usually centrally located, there may be a feeling of intimidation for some in attending a meeting in such an imposing, governmental setting. Public meetings held to discuss planning and community vision seek to engage the public in their opinions – positive and negative. Some attendees may feel less comfortable expressing their views in the formal chambers where the elected officials make policy and

enact ordinances. If a public meeting must be held at the government building, try to hold the meeting in a large conference room or other less formal room. Public meetings and workshops tend to be more informal than an official council meeting; brainstorming, group interaction, and creativity will be enhanced in a more informal setting.

ROOM SET UP

The meeting room should be comfortable, well lighted, have sufficient seating, and be arranged in such a manner as to encourage participation by all parties. While it is sometimes difficult to predict exactly how many folks will show up for a particular meeting, the planning team should determine the likely attendance and plan accordingly. There are many options for configuring the seats in the room, from classroom-style, to theatre-style, to chairs at tables, to no seats at all for an open house meeting. In fact, some meetings may first have a presentation in theatre style seating, followed by small group exercises at tables set up in another section of the meeting room. Plan adequate time prior to the meeting to arrange or rearrange the room to the configuration most appropriate for the meeting. Don't assume that someone else arranged the room as you requested.

Establish a focal point or front of the room. As everyone enters the room, it should be clear where the facilitator or presenter will stand. That way, folks who might not hear or see as clearly, will be able to reserve a seat near the front. (Conversely, those attendees who hope to "hide out" in the back of the room also know where to sit!). This focal point is where the graphics, whether flip charts or high-tech computer projection, will originate. Attention to room lighting will dictate location of presentation screens, flip charts, and boards. Consider the room lighting by paying attention to location and brilliance of light fixtures as well as windows. When there is a choice of meeting spaces, choose a space where the lighting can be controlled. Bright light on a projection screen makes it impossible to see the images. Dim light in the audience makes it difficult to take notes. It may not be possible to strike a balance to meet all needs, but advance attention to this detail will help minimize the problem.

Make every effort to place flip charts and boards in a spot that all members of the audience can see. Remember, the purpose of the graphics is to support or illustrate the verbal presentation. Consider the location of support posts, columns, and other features that block views. If overhead projectors are used, the projector must be placed to avoid blocking audience views of the board and the screen. This is especially problematic when a person must place transparencies on the glass, which means that the person may also block views. It is particularly difficult for a presenter to handle the projector, transparencies, and make the presentation. Careful attention to the room arrangement and placement of an overhead projector will minimize any interference with views by the projector and its operator.

Increasingly, computer-aided presentations are used in meetings and hearings. The computer and associated projector can often be operated by remote control. The equipment itself is smaller than most overhead projectors. However, placement is still an important issue. Often the presenter needs to be able to see the computer screen rather than the

projection screen. As with other graphics and graphic devices, careful attention in advance will ensure minimal disruption due to the equipment.

Furthermore, it is important to consider electrical outlets and extension cords to provide power for computers and projection equipment. It may be difficult to ensure an appropriate location to meet viewer needs while still ensuring adequate power. Extension cords can pose a safety hazard. All of these things should be considered when setting up the room.

A member of the planning team should be assigned as the note-taker to record the meeting. Flip charts with markers are a good way to summarize the discussions, but more detailed notes should also be captured. In some cases, the public meeting could be audio recorded, although this is usually reserved for more formal meetings. As mentioned earlier, public meetings and workshops tend to be more informal than an official hearing or council meeting; the presence of recording equipment may have a stifling affect on the level of participation. The main purpose for keeping minutes of the public meeting is to record and document the results of the meeting, making a special note of next steps and follow up activities.

GOOD MEETINGS NEED GOOD LEADERSHIP

Several factors should be considered to ensure that good leadership results in a good meeting. The role of the meeting leader is to facilitate the meeting, keep track of the agenda topics, manage the time so that all topics are covered and the meeting ends on time, introduce speakers, field questions, and recognize audience members who wish to speak. Good humor, high energy, belief in the importance of participation, and a commitment to a well-run meeting all contribute to successful leadership.

A meeting should have a beginning, middle, and an end. Although this seems obvious, who has not attended a meeting that seemingly would never end? An important responsibility of the facilitator is to lead the meeting, setting the tone at the beginning, and maintaining order and timeliness until the end. This means that all items on the agenda are addressed, in order, and that items are moved to conclusion.

The facilitator sets the tone of the meeting. The tone set by the facilitator will affect the orderliness of the meeting. This means that the facilitator should convey a sense of professionalism, order, and appropriate attitude, thus providing an example for the public to also participate appropriately and maintain order. The facilitator should not be weak or unfocused in the conduct of the meeting. On the other hand, the facilitator should not be too strong or intimidating. Continue to strive to be upbeat and positive, fair and courteous. It is always good to convey an attitude of working with the public rather than talking down to the audience. After all, the meeting is being held to discuss the future of their community.

The facilitator should make sure everyone has a chance to be heard, while still maintaining a timely meeting through enforcing time limits. During presentations, it may be necessary to maintain the tone by quickly quelling outbursts, personal attacks, or other rude behavior. Establish reasonable time limits for individual comments (for longer

presentations, encourage the speaker to fill out a comment form as described earlier), clearly state the time that the meeting will end and stick to it, and offer to stay after the meeting, if necessary, to discuss a specific point with an individual or small group.

These tips for effective meeting management will help encourage the public to remain engaged in the planning process, fully participate in the discussions, and leave the meeting with a feeling that their views have truly been heard.

A TOOLBOX OF TECHNIQUES

It's not the plan that's important, it's the planning.
Dr. Gramme Edwards

You have made decisions about level of involvement, types of meetings, presentation materials, meeting organization and leadership. Now you need specific information about the tools and techniques that work well in each of your meetings, accomplish the purpose of the meeting, and engage the members of the public who have given up their time to participate. This toolbox includes techniques for interviews, working with small groups in a meeting, getting information out to the public and special purpose events, such as planning festivals and design charrettes.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

One-on-one interviews with key community leaders enable a greater exchange of information than would occur at a public meeting. The interviews, usually between 30 minutes to an hour in duration, are designed to gather more detailed information about a particular area of expertise. Starting with a standardized series of questions (see sample in Appendix), the interviewer should make sure the main issues are covered, but should be comfortable in varying the order of questions.

The stakeholders are representatives of the various organizations, such as representatives from fire and police departments, neighborhood homeowners' associations, faith-based organizations, civic associations, advocacy groups, realtors, conservationists, housing, hospital and transportation authorities and others. The information collected during the stakeholder interview assists in the development of the goals, objectives, and strategies for the comprehensive planning process.

As a courtesy, it is good practice to type the results of the interview and send a copy of the notes to the person interviewed. This gives them a chance to make sure all of the points discussed were understood and documented properly.

CONSENSUS BUILDING IN SMALL GROUPS

You need effective methods to help people with different views work together in a small group. Small groups may be formed to address a particular issue or problem and work toward a solution that will be acceptable to all. Consensus means that the group members can accept the decision, abide by the decision, and support the decision, even if it isn't the first choice for each member. It is not a matter of "majority rules." There is no voting per se. It may be difficult to reach consensus, since it often means continuing to search for solutions until all in the group can agree – or at least cease to disagree.

Several methods are available for building consensus. After brainstorming ideas and some initial discussion of the alternatives, an exercise is used to determine "votes" for the views of the members of the group. Color sticky dots placed on a map or on a chart could be used, with the highest concentration of dots indicating the collective view. Ranking ideas on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being "strongly disagree" and 10 being "strongly agree," is one popular way to determine an overall ranking of an idea. Another option is a vote on priorities with each participant allowed, say, three votes, to be used as they see fit. This allows a participant to place more emphasis on strongly held positions. Even though there is an aspect of voting in these processes, the final outcome must be a consensus of the group. There are no minority opinions. Sometimes one participant will simply state that he or she cannot support any of the most likely outcomes of the discussion. That person may withdraw from the final step in determining consensus, so that the remaining group will be in agreement.

Whichever method is used to determine the individual views, the facilitator should moderate a discussion on the results of the "votes" to arrive at an agreed upon opinion of the group, representing the consensus.

COGNITIVE MAPPING

A cognitive map, or mental map, is a map drawn by a person to record geographically his or her memories, ideas, and perspectives of a particular place. Cognitive mapping is a planning tool also used to determine desired future development. Since cognitive maps are based on individual's preferences and opinions, there are no "right" or "wrong" maps. Cognitive maps are used to identify geographic areas of a community that people like, dislike, frequently visit, feel are important, travel through regularly, feel safe, and so on.

At the workshop, participants are provided base maps of the community. On one map, folks are asked to create an "Attitude Map" to express their ideas about what areas of the community are attractive and unattractive. These maps may also indicate important local travel routes and places that have special meaning (i.e. natural areas, business districts, residential neighborhoods).

On a second map, the participants outline those areas where they would like to see new commercial/industrial development, new residential development, new recreation areas, protected open space, and other features. This is a "Futures Map."

A Composite Map is then prepared that will show consistent patterns and ideas represented on the individual maps prepared by participants. Depending on the number of

participants, this exercise may be completed individually, or in groups of two or three people. More people will make it difficult to reach agreement on the items that should be depicted on a map.

The information gained from the cognitive maps will be very useful when developing the future land use plan map for the comprehensive plan.

INVOLVEMENT WITHOUT MEETINGS

The planning team may solicit comments, seek opinions, and begin to identify community goals by using surveys of residents in the community. Survey questions could be printed and mailed to a representative sample of residents in the community, included as an insert in the newspaper, sent with a regular mailing by the jurisdiction (such as a water bill), or administered by telephone. Questionnaires may be available at an information table in city hall, the county courthouse, or an information kiosk at a mall.

Another way to distribute the questionnaires and receive responses is through the local government Website. As discussed earlier, with the increased accessibility to the Internet, citizens are better able to provide interactive feedback via online surveys and e-mail responses. The convenience and potential for an instant acknowledgement provided through a link on a website encourages the public to contribute written comments on the components of the plan as it is prepared as well as to provide information at the beginning of the process.

COMMUNITY PLANNING FESTIVALS

There are several reasons to hold a festival, many points in the process where a festival would be effective, and different types of festivals. A festival at the beginning of the process can serve to “kick-off” the process and/or create a vision to guide the process. At a milestone during the process, the festival is a good way to celebrate the success and prepare for the remainder of the process. Exercises and small group processes, together with an unveiling of work to date, can generate excitement. At the end, a city-wide celebration brings everyone together who may have participated or watched from afar.

One excellent tool for a festival is the “Box City” program. In this event, participants have boxes to design as different types of buildings – homes, stores, offices, community centers, plants, and more – together with a base with natural features (water bodies, hills, etc.) also in three-dimensions. Through group discussions and consensus building, decisions are made about where to place roads, sewage plants, landfills, neighborhoods, shopping, and all of the components of a city. As participants plan and build a city, they learn about land uses, compatibility, consensus-building, and the difficult trade-offs involved in planning their community. Planning becomes real rather than theoretical. (See the section on “more information” for a Website with details about Box City and other programs.)

Design Charrette

A charrette is a highly interactive meeting where participants work in groups to draw maps, develop planning goals and policies, and design their community. The focus of a charrette is physical design of one or several neighborhoods and not policies or strategies. Ranging in duration from one to several days, a charrette is a meeting format which involves all the various interest groups, allows interim feedback on the working plans, and most importantly, results in an end product that represents a consensus view of all participants. Facilitation by qualified planners and design professionals is important to the timely progress of this format of workshop. The charrette process itself often involves a series of steps including site visits, vision exercises, preliminary plans, input and feedback on the preliminary plans, refinements of plans, more feedback and discussion, leading to eventual consensus and adoption of the plans or policies by the group.

Community Preference Surveys

The participants in preference surveys evaluate a series of visual images categorized by development types and styles, housing types and styles, streetscape appearance, open space, commercial areas, etc. These images are usually a mix of photographs from the community and several images from other communities. This helps expand the choices beyond what is already in the community. It may also introduce some innovative planning techniques to the participants. The participants choose one image from a pair of images that feature different design solutions to one aspect of the community, such as roads with landscaped medians or roads with no median at all. The participants mark their preferences on a score sheet. Planning team members compile the rankings from all of the score sheets and report the overall preference of the group. This tool is focused on physical features, such as building placement and height, landscaping, design of signs, density, open space, and more. It guides the planning team in preparing goals, policies, and strategies to achieve the designs most preferred by the group.

Community Visioning

Visioning is a process by which participants imagine their future community. It must be shared and represent what the community should become. The end result of a visioning process is a formal statement that describes the future community.

A visioning process may include charrettes, preference surveys, questionnaires, and festivals designed around a program such as “Box City.” The essential feature of visioning is the focus on questions about what people treasure, what people want to change, and what the future community should be.

A visioning process can focus on creating scenarios to describe different future communities and then selecting among the scenarios. This works well with large numbers of participants that are divided into smaller groups to focus on different scenarios.

Another way to approach visioning is to start with brainstorming sessions following by consensus-building activities to narrow the lists of value statements (what people treasure)

and reach agreement on what should be changed. The final step is the focus on what people want the community to become, again determined through consensus-building exercises.

The planning team should spend time determining the approach to be used, crafting questions, and planning the meetings or festivals where visioning will be carried out.

Photographic Journals

As the saying goes, “A picture is worth 1,000 words.” Photographic surveys or journals are an effective way to help establish goals and priorities for a community. Citizens can be asked to take photographs depicting places in their own community that they cherish, places in other communities that they want to be like, and places in their own community that they want to change. The planning team can lead groups of the public, or provide the photos in advance, to identify places, development types and styles and landscapes. These photos should depict those features that folks like and would prefer be retained as well as those features that are negative or should be removed over time. Once the photos are assembled, they should be sorted and arranged into groups, establishing community preferences. The selected photos could be mounted on a board or table based on similar themes. After the exercise, the summary results are presented and used to develop the goals and objectives for the plan.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

No matter how well-planned and well-organized you think the meetings are, beware of the falling into the trap of “Build it and they will come.” If the community is not aware of the planning process and not reminded in many ways about the meetings, chances are attendance at the meetings will suffer. Remember to give careful thought to how the planning team will provide adequate advance notice of the meetings to the public.

Minimum notice requirements are often not enough. Meeting minimum requirements involves placing a notice in the legal advertisements section of the newspaper. Many citizens do not make a regular habit of seeking out these legal advertisements. Therefore, it is important to do more so that the public will learn about meetings, events, and the availability of information. A wide range of strategies is available to the planning team. Depending on budget and resource availability, several of these methods could be used throughout the project.

Learn the names of **local reporters** and regularly supply them with news and facts for articles throughout the planning process. Journalists are always looking for newsworthy items about the local community. A word of caution: news is more than announcing an event. Include information about invited speakers or a hot topic to be discussed.

If the newspaper is the main format to let the public know about upcoming meetings, consider a **display advertisement**. If the budget allows, seek professional assistance in designing the advertisement. At least use techniques such as a border around text,

designed to set the advertisement off from articles and formal legal notices. Placement is important. The advertising department of the newspaper will assist you in deciding where to place the ad to increase the likelihood that it will be seen by your intended audience.

In just the last couple of years, access to and even daily **use of the Internet** has become widespread. Most local governments in Georgia have their own website providing directory information for department contacts, meeting agendas and minutes, listings of special events, and more. Recognizing that the Internet has become a popular way to provide information to the public, consider dedicating a section of the local government website to the planning process. The planning team will be able to distribute information and draft reports, conduct on-line surveys, display photographs, and share land use maps. Instant feedback provided through an e-mail link on the website encourages the public to contribute written comments on the components of the plan.

Beyond the use of newspapers and the Internet for notification, there are many other alternatives for getting the word out. **Newsletters** of community groups and neighborhood associations are a great way to target information of interest in a particular geographic area or to specific interest groups. One word of caution is to respect very early deadlines for printing of newsletters, which can be as much as a month earlier than the date of distribution. **Announcement flyers** could be printed and then posted – with permission – in high traffic areas such as libraries, shopping areas, schools, and colleges.

Most city halls and county courthouses feature a lobby area, central gathering area, or reception area. One way to put this space to good use is to **set up a display** of photographs, maps, and planning features for all visitors to the building to visit. That way, when a citizen comes to renew a drivers' license, pay a permit fee, or seek information, there is an opportunity to learn about the comprehensive plan and the planning process. This same approach can be used to feature information in displays at libraries, other civic buildings, or a shopping center.

When the budget is available to support additional notifications, there are several approaches to consider. **Special printed newspaper inserts** have been used to present an overview of the planning process and to provide planning-related information in a tabloid format. These inserts should be well-designed, colorful, and easy to read.

Another way to reach a large number of households is through a program or **announcement on the cable television** government or local access channel. This may involve significant video production costs, but once developed, the program can be repeated at different times and on different days. Many cable companies will run public service announcements.

Consider creating a **dedicated telephone line** with a recorded message and a menu of options for citizens to record their own messages about planning issues.

School teachers and students represent a great resource for generating interest in the community and the how the planning process works. The planning team can provide planning process information for a government or civics lesson for use at any grade level. The local government can sponsor a poster contest to generate student interest and participation. Poster contests work at every grade level. Consider essay contests for

middle and high school students. One benefit to introducing students to planning is that they carry the message home to their parents, thus getting them interested as well.

An effective strategy is to take the message to the public through **presentations at meetings and civic events**. A speaker's bureau comprised of the planning team – government staff, consultants, and volunteers – offers introductory presentations on the planning process to civic clubs, business groups, neighborhood associations, and schools. These presentations should be about 15 to 20 minutes in length. Advance preparation and a good script will ensure that speakers focus on points of interest to the group. Handouts or flyers provide contact information and an overview of the process.

Whichever forms of public notification are selected for a particular community, remember to always include a contact person with a phone number and e-mail address on the notice. The reader of the notice may have questions, desire more information, or may simply want to speak with someone about the planning process.

MORE TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Specific sources of information on tools and techniques can be found at the following websites and in the books listed below:

1. Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) www.dca.state.ga.us
2. The Georgia Regional Development Centers (RDC's) that serve your geographic area each have a Website. The listing is available through DCA website above.
3. Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) www.gmanet.com/home/default.asp
4. Association of County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), www.accg.org
5. American Planning Association (APA), www.planning.org
6. Georgia Planning Association (GPA), www.georgiaplanning.org
7. Georgia Institute of Technology, City and Regional Planning Program, www.coa.gatech.edu/crp
8. University of Georgia, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, www.cviog.uga.edu
9. The National Charrette Institute, www.charretteinstitute.org
10. State of Maryland, Office of Smart Growth, www.smartgrowth.state.md.us
11. State of Colorado, Department of Local Affairs, Office of Smart Growth www.dola.state.co.us/SmartGrowth/Documents/CitizenInvolvement
12. State of Arizona, Department of Commerce, Community Assistance Division

www.commerce.state.az.us/pdf/commasst/cqiss06.pdf

13. Hillsborough City-County Planning Commission www.theplanningcommission.org
(neighborhood planning)
14. Civic Strategies, Inc., www.civic-strategies.com
15. 3M Meeting Network, www.3M.com/meetingnetwork
16. Center for Urban Built Environment (Box City), www.cubekc.org
17. Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi State University
www.srdc.msstate.edu

Print resources:

Successful Public Meetings, by Elaine Cogan, available from APA Planners Press, Chicago

The Community Planning Handbook, edited by Nick Wates, available from Earthscan Publications Ltd., London

Youth Participation in Community Planning, by Ramona Mullahey, Yve Susskind, and Barry Checkoway, available from the Planning Advisory Service at APA, Chicago

HOW DID WE DO?

The process is not complete until you assess the effectiveness of community involvement process. Revisit the Public Involvement Plan and ask some key questions: Did we do what we said we would do? What worked particularly well? What should we have done differently? How will we amend the involvement plan for future planning efforts?

Look for proof that the planning team listened to people who took the time to participate. Though not every suggestion can be included, suggestions can be included on lists for future planning programs.

Planning is an ongoing process. The end of one process is really the beginning of the next process. A plan is frequently referred to as a living document, one which is revisited as the community experiences growth and identifies new challenges and opportunities. Be sure you continue to learn from each experience, maintain the good will established with the public, and ensure that the people are in the plan.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

MINIMUM STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES FOR LOCAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING, CHAPTER 110-12-1, RULES OF THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Rules of
Georgia Department of Community Affairs
Chapter 110-12-1
Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning
“Local Planning Requirements”
(Effective Date: May 1, 2005)

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Chapter 110-12-1-.01 Purpose, Applicability & Effective Date

110-12-1-.01 Purpose, Applicability & Effective Date

(I) Purpose. The purpose of the local planning requirements is to provide a framework for preparation of local comprehensive plans that will:

- involve all segments of the community in developing a vision for the community’s future;
- generate local pride and enthusiasm about the future of the community;
- engage the interest of citizens in implementing the plan; and
- provide a guide to everyday decision-making for use by local government officials and other community leaders.

To this end, the planning requirements emphasize involvement of stakeholders and the general public in preparation of plans that include an exciting, well-conceived, and achievable vision for the future of the community. When implemented, the resulting plan will help the community address critical issues and opportunities while moving toward realization of its unique vision for the community’s future.

The planning requirements also provide technical guidance to communities in advancing the state’s planning goals of:

- a growing and balanced economy;
- protection of environmental, natural and cultural resources;
- provision of infrastructure and services to support efficient growth and development patterns;
- access to adequate and affordable housing for all residents;
- coordination of land use planning and transportation planning to support sustainable economic development, protection of natural and cultural resources and provision of adequate and affordable housing; and

□ coordination of local planning efforts with other local service providers and authorities, neighboring communities and state and regional plans.

The state goals are further elaborated in the Department's Quality Community Objectives (section 110-12-1-.06(3)), which provide a starting point for communities to assess compatibility of their existing development patterns and policies with these planning goals. The Quality Community Objectives may also be employed to evaluate the community's vision for the future for consistency with state planning goals.

(2) Applicability. O.C.G.A. 50-8-1 et seq gives the Department authority to establish standards and procedures for appropriate and timely comprehensive planning by all local governments in Georgia. Those standards and procedures are embodied in these local planning requirements. In order to maintain qualified local government certification, and thereby remain eligible for several state funding and permitting programs, each local government must prepare, adopt, maintain, and implement a comprehensive plan that meets these planning requirements. The requirements incorporate by reference the Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria prepared pursuant to O.C.G.A. 12-2-8. The Department may, from time to time, adopt and promulgate revisions of these requirements, pursuant to the Georgia Administrative Procedure Act.

(3) Effective Date. These requirements shall become effective on May 1, 2005. However, local comprehensive plans or comprehensive plan updates already substantially underway on that date may be prepared and reviewed under the rules previously adopted by the Department. The previously adopted rules shall be repealed on May 1, 2006, and any plans submitted to the regional development center for review on or after May 1, 2006, must be prepared under these rules.

(4) Definitions. Key terms used throughout these requirements are defined in Chapter 110-12- 1-.09.

Chapter 110-12-1-.02 Overview of Planning Requirements

110-12-1-.02 Overview of Planning Requirements

(1) Plan Scope. A comprehensive plan meeting these planning requirements must include three components: (1) a Community Assessment, (2) a Community Participation Program, and (3) a Community Agenda, as described below.

(a) Community Assessment. The first part of the comprehensive plan is an objective and professional assessment of data and information about the community that is intended to be prepared without extensive direct public participation. The Community Assessment includes: (1) a list of potential issues and opportunities the community may wish to take action to address, (2) analysis of existing development patterns, including a map of recommended character areas for consideration in developing an overall vision for future development of the community; (3) evaluation of current community policies, activities, and development patterns for consistency with the Quality Community Objectives; and (4) analysis of data and information to check the validity of the above evaluations and the potential issues and opportunities. The product of the Community Assessment must be a concise and informative report (such as an executive summary), for it will be used to inform decision-making by stakeholders during development of the Community Agenda portion of the plan. (Specific requirements and procedures for this component of the plan are covered in more detail in Chapters 110-12-1-.03 and 110-12-1-.08)

(b) Community Participation Program. The second part of the comprehensive plan is a Community Participation Program that describes the local government's strategy for ensuring adequate public and stakeholder involvement in the preparation of the Community Agenda portion of the plan. Upon completion, the local government transmits both the Participation Program and the Community Assessment to the regional development center for review, after holding a first required public hearing. This transmittal must take place well in advance of a local government's recertification date in order to allow adequate time for preparation and adoption of the Community Agenda prior to the local government's recertification deadline. (Specific requirements and procedures for this component of the plan are covered in more detail in Chapters 110-12-1-.04 and 110-12-1 .08)

(c) Community Agenda. The third part of the comprehensive plan is the most important, for it includes the community's vision for the future as well as its strategy for achieving this vision. Because the Community Agenda provides guidance for future decision-making about the community, it must be prepared with adequate input from stakeholders and the general public.

The Community Agenda must include three major components:

- a community vision for the future physical development of the community, expressed in the form of a map indicating unique character areas, each with its own strategy for guiding future development patterns;
- a list of issues and opportunities identified by the community for further action; and

an implementation program for achieving the community's vision for the future and addressing the identified issues and opportunities.

Development of the Community Agenda must not be initiated until review of the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program is completed, since this review may include guidance or suggested revisions of these two important inputs to development of the Community Agenda.

Upon completion, the Community Agenda is transmitted to the regional development center for review, following a second required public hearing. This is the portion of the plan that must be implemented by the local government, once approved by the Department as being in compliance with the planning requirements. Adoption must take place prior to the local government's recertification date. (Specific requirements and procedures for this component of the plan are covered in more detail in Chapters 110-12-1-.05 and 110-12-1-.08)

(2) State Planning Recommendations. The State Planning Recommendations provide supplemental guidance to assist communities in preparing plans and addressing the local planning requirements. The plan preparers and the community must review these recommendations where referenced in the planning requirements in order to determine their applicability or helpfulness to the community's plan.

(3) Levels of Planning Requirements. Cities and counties across the state are diverse in terms of size, growth rate, economic base, and environmental and geographic conditions, and their needs, concerns and goals for the future differ dramatically. Accordingly, the planning standards have been adjusted to provide four levels of planning requirements (Minimal, Basic, Intermediate and Advanced) for different local governments. In addition, each level contains sufficient flexibility to allow all communities to address the range and variety of situations they face.

(a) Minimal Planning Level. In order to reduce unnecessary burdens of data collection or analysis, a Minimal Planning Level has been established for very small municipalities that fall within the following thresholds:

- A population of less than 500 with an average annual growth rate of less than 2.50% for the previous decade; or
- A population of less than 300.

Minimal Planning Level plans must include the following components: An updated Community Vision and an updated Short Term Work Program.

(b) Basic Planning Level. A Basic Planning Level applies to Georgia counties and each municipality located within counties that fall within the following thresholds:

- A population of 15,000 to 19,999 with an average annual growth rate of less than 2.50% for the previous decade; or
- A population of less than 15,000.

Basic Planning Level plans must include the following components: (1) A Community Assessment that includes recommended issues and opportunities, evaluation of existing development patterns, analysis of consistency with the Quality Community Objectives, and supporting data and maps where applicable; (2) A Community Participation Program providing for adequate participation by citizens in the planning process; and (3) A Community Agenda that includes a vision, a list of issues and opportunities the community wishes to address and an implementation program that addresses issues and opportunities and implements the community vision.

(c) Intermediate Planning Level. An Intermediate Planning Level applies to Georgia counties and each municipality located within counties that fall within the following thresholds:

- A population of 25,000 to 49,999 with an average annual growth rate of less than 1.50% for the previous decade; or
- A population of 20,000 to 24,999 with ANY average annual growth rate for the previous decade; or
- A population of 15,000 to 19,999 with an average annual growth rate of 2.50% or higher for the previous decade.

Intermediate Planning Level plans must include the same components as those for the Basic Planning Level; however, additional data and maps are suggested for inclusion in the Community Assessment.

(d) Advanced Planning Level. An Advanced Planning Level applies to Georgia counties and each municipality located within counties that fall within the following thresholds:

- A population of 50,000 or above; or
- A population of 25,000 to 49,999 with an average annual growth rate of 1.50% or higher for the previous decade.

Advanced Planning Level plans must include the same components as those for the Intermediate Planning Level; however, additional data and maps must be included in the Community Assessment, including a detailed evaluation of the local transportation system.

(e) Application of Planning Level Designation to Counties and Municipalities. The

Department maintains and makes available on the DCA Website a recertification schedule identifying the recertification dates for all counties and municipalities and a list of local governments with their designated planning

level, based upon data from the most recent Census of Population and Housing. Municipalities located within more than one county have received the designation of the county with which they share a common recertification date for update of their comprehensive plans (typically this is the county within which most of the municipality's population resides). Municipalities that differ substantially from their county in terms of size or growth rate may apply to the Department for a variance to plan at a lower planning level (see section 110-12-1-.08(4) for variance procedures.)

Chapter 110-12-1-.03 Community Assessment

110-12-1-.03 Community Assessment.

(1) Purpose. The purpose of the Community Assessment is to present a factual and conceptual foundation upon which the rest of the comprehensive plan is built. Preparation of the Community Assessment is largely a staff or professional function of collecting and analyzing data and information about the community and presenting the results in a concise, easily understood format, such as an executive summary, for consideration by the public and decision-makers involved in subsequent development of the Community Agenda.

(2) Requirements. The Community Assessment is required for Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced planning levels. It must include the four required components listed below:

(a) Identification of Potential Issues and Opportunities. Review the list of typical issues and opportunities provided in the State Planning Recommendations and select those that may be applicable for the community. This initial step is intended to yield an all-inclusive list of potential issues and opportunities for further study, which may be modified through additional analysis below in sections (b) through (d).

(b) Analysis of Existing Development Patterns. This must include the following three components:

(i) Existing Land Use Map. Assemble this map using either land use classification scheme described in section 110-12-1-.07(2).

(ii) Areas Requiring Special Attention. Evaluate the existing land use patterns and trends within the jurisdiction of the local government (including areas that are likely to be annexed within the planning period) to identify any areas requiring special attention, including:

- Areas of significant natural or cultural resources, particularly where these are likely to be intruded upon or otherwise impacted by development;
- Areas where rapid development or change of land uses is likely to occur;
- Areas where the pace of development has and/or may outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation;
- Areas in need of redevelopment and/or significant improvements to aesthetics or attractiveness (including strip commercial corridors);
- Large abandoned structures or sites, including those that may be environmentally contaminated;
- Areas with significant infill development opportunities (scattered vacant sites);
- Areas of significant disinvestment, levels of poverty, and/or unemployment substantially higher than average levels for the community as a whole.

(iii) Recommended Character Areas. Identify recommended boundaries of existing or potential character areas (see definition in Chapter 110-12-1-.09) covering the entire community, including the areas requiring special attention identified above and existing community sub-areas for which plans have already been prepared. Refer to the list of recommended character areas provided in the State Planning Recommendations for suggestions. The recommended character areas may be represented either as a separate map or as an overlay on the Existing Land Use Map.

(c) Analysis of Consistency with Quality Community Objectives. Evaluate the community's current policies, activities, and development patterns for consistency with the Quality Community Objectives (see section 110-12-1-.06(3)). An assessment tool useful for this purpose is provided on the Department's website. Use this analysis to identify additional issues and opportunities for adapting local activities, development patterns and implementation practices to the Quality Community Objectives, and add these to the above list of potential issues and opportunities.

(d) Supporting Analysis of Data and Information. Check the validity of potential issues and opportunities and recommended character areas identified above by evaluating the data and information listed in section 110-12-1-.07(1). All of the items listed in section 110-12-1-.07(1) must be evaluated by communities planning at the Advanced Planning Level. Intermediate Planning Level communities are strongly encouraged to evaluate all of these items, but must evaluate items specifically indicated as required. Basic Planning Level communities are also encouraged to evaluate all of these items and must evaluate items specifically indicated as required. All communities

must employ a 20-year planning time frame when evaluating these data and information items. Many of the listed data and maps are provided on the Department's website, but the community may also use other information or sources of its choosing (e.g., regionally compiled data or forecasts, regional plans, transportation data contained in approved plans of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, etc.).

When evaluating this data and information, focus on:

- Whether it verifies potential issues or opportunities identified above;
- Whether it uncovers new issues or opportunities not previously identified;
- Whether it indicates significant local trends that need to be brought to the attention of decision-makers;
- Whether it suggests adjustment of recommended character areas (e.g., to avoid intrusion into environmentally sensitive areas, etc.).

In order to ensure a concise and readable Community Assessment report, only include the evaluations, data, or maps necessary to substantiate or illustrate potential issues or opportunities, to document significant trends affecting the community, or to support character area delineation.

All other evaluations, data, and maps (such as those required for the Advance Planning Level communities and encouraged for other communities) that are determined not to be essential for substantiating potential issues or opportunities, documenting significant trends, or supporting character area delineation must be relegated to a separate appendix to the Community Assessment report.

Chapter 110-12-1-.04 Community Participation Program

110-12-1-.04 Community Participation Program.

(1) Purpose. The purpose of the Community Participation Program is to ensure that the local comprehensive plan reflects the full range of community values and desires, by involving a diverse spectrum of stakeholders in development of the Community Agenda. This broad-based participation in developing the Community Agenda will also help ensure that it will be implemented, because many in the community are involved in its development and thereby become committed to seeing it through. The Community Participation Program is intended to supplement, not replace, the two public hearings required in sections 110-12-1-.08(1)(a) and (2)(a).

(2) Requirements. The Community Participation Program is required for Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced planning levels. The three required steps for developing the Community Participation Program are listed below. The result must be a concise schedule to guide development of the Community Agenda, including planned community participation events or meetings at key points during this process.

(a) Identification of Stakeholders. Compile a list of all stakeholders who need to have a voice in the development of the Community Agenda. Refer to the list of suggested stakeholders provided in the State Planning Recommendations for suggestions.

(b) Identification of Participation Techniques. Review each of the recommended community participation techniques identified in the State Planning Recommendations to select those to be used locally for involving the selected stakeholders in the process of developing the Community Agenda.

(c) Schedule for Completion of the Community Agenda. Review the suggested schedules for completion of the Community Agenda provided in the State Planning Recommendations and choose one that best fits local needs. Adapt this schedule as necessary for unique local circumstances, and substitute the specific participation techniques selected in the previous step at appropriate points in the schedule.

Chapter 110-12-1-.05 Community Agenda

110-12-1-.05 Community Agenda.

(1) Purpose. The purpose of the Community Agenda is to lay out a road map for the community's future, developed through a very public process of involving community leaders and stakeholders in making key decisions about the future of the community. The Community Agenda is the most important part of the plan, for it includes the community's vision for the future, key issues and opportunities it chooses to address during the planning period, and its implementation program for achieving this vision and addressing the identified issues and opportunities. The Community Agenda is intended to generate local pride and enthusiasm about the future of the community, thereby making citizens wish to ensure that the plan is implemented.

(2) Requirements. The Community Agenda is required for Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced planning levels. It must include the three required components listed below, all prepared with adequate public and stakeholder involvement as laid out in the Community Participation Program. The result must be a concise, user-friendly document usable for day-to-day decision making by community leaders as they work toward achieving the desired future of the community.

(a) Community Vision. The Community Vision is intended to paint a picture of what the community desires to become, providing a complete description of the development patterns to be encouraged within the jurisdiction. It includes the following components:

(i) General Vision Statement (optional). Include a general statement of the overall goals and desired future the community seeks to achieve.

(ii) Future Development Map (required). Prepare a Future Development Map for the community by delineating boundaries of major character areas (see definition in Chapter 110-12-1-.09) covering the entire community. Start with the Recommended Character Areas identified in the Community Assessment and adjust boundaries, modify, add or subtract character areas based on stakeholder perspectives about desired future development patterns.

If desired, the Future Development Map may be augmented with a future land use map that uses conventional categories or classifications to depict the location of specific future land uses. If this option is chosen, prepare the future land use map using either of the land use classification schemes described in section 110-12-1-.07(2), and show the character area boundaries from the Future Development Map as an overlay on this map.

(iii) Defining Narrative (required). While preparing the Future Development Map, carefully define a specific vision for each character area. This defining narrative must include the following information for each character area shown on the Future Development Map:

- Written description, pictures, and/or illustrations that make it clear what types, forms, styles, and patterns of development are to be encouraged in the area. Refer to recommended development patterns listed in the State Planning Recommendations for suggestions.
- Listing of specific land uses or (if appropriate for the jurisdiction) zoning categories to be allowed in the area.
- Listing of the Quality Community Objectives that will be pursued in the area.
- Identification of implementation measures to achieve the desired development patterns for the area, including more detailed sub-area planning, new or revised local development regulations, incentives, public investments, and infrastructure improvements. Refer to recommended plan implementation measures listed in the State Planning Recommendations for suggestions.

(b) Community Issues and Opportunities. This is the final, locally agreed upon, list of issues and opportunities the community intends to address. Start with the potential issues and opportunities identified in the Community Assessment and modify, add or subtract issues or opportunities based on stakeholder knowledge of the community and interpretation of the

Community Assessment report. Each of these issues or opportunities must be followed-up with corresponding implementation measures in the Implementation Program.

(c) Implementation Program. The implementation program is the overall strategy for achieving the Community Vision and for addressing each of the Community Issues and Opportunities. It identifies specific measures to be undertaken by the community to implement the plan. Refer to recommended plan implementation measures listed in the State Planning Recommendations to identify implementation measures that may be suitable for the community.

The Implementation Program includes the following components:

(i) Short Term Work Program (required). Identify specific implementation actions the local government, or other entities, intend to take during the first five-year time frame of the planning period. This includes any ordinances, administrative systems (such as site plan review, design review, etc.), community improvements or investments, financing arrangements, or other programs or initiatives to be put in place to implement the plan. The Short Term Work Program must include the following information for each listed activity:

- Brief description of the activity;
- Timeframe for undertaking the activity;
- Responsible party for implementing the activity;
- Estimated cost (if any) of implementing the activity; and
- Funding source(s), if applicable.

A tool useful for developing the Short Term Work Program is provided on the Department's website.

(ii) Long-Term and Ongoing Activities (optional). Identify specific long-term or ongoing implementation activities to be undertaken beyond the first five-year time frame of the planning period.

(iii) Policies (required). Include any policies (such as, “New development will be encouraged to locate on infill sites closer to town, whenever possible.”) the local government will adopt to provide ongoing guidance and direction to local government officials for making decisions consistent with achieving the Community Vision or addressing Community Issues and Opportunities. Refer to recommended policies listed in the State Planning Recommendations for suggestions.

(iv) Supplemental Plans (optional). Include or incorporate by reference any supplemental plans that focus on special areas, situations or issues of importance to the community, such as plans for conservation or management of natural or cultural resources, redevelopment plans for particular areas of the community, master plans for downtown development, neighborhood plans, corridor plans, gateway plans, rural preservation plans, recreation plans, or the community’s required solid waste management plan (see definition in Chapter 110-12-1-.09).

Chapter 110-12-1-.06 State Planning Goals and Objectives

110-12-1-.06 State Planning Goals and Objectives.

(1) General. The Department has established statewide goals and a number of Quality Community Objectives that further elaborate the state goals, based on growth and development issues identified in local and regional plans, throughout the state. These goals and objectives are intended to provide guidance, or targets for local governments to achieve, in developing and implementing their comprehensive plan. Pursuant to sections 110-12-1-.03(2)(c) and 110-12-1-.05(a)(iii), local governments in the Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced planning levels must evaluate the consistency of their policies, activities, and development patterns with these goals and objectives.

(2) Statewide Planning Goals.

(a) Economic Development Goal: To achieve a growing and balanced economy, consistent with the prudent management of the state’s resources, that equitably benefits all segments of the population.

(b) Natural and Cultural Resources Goal: To conserve and protect the environmental, natural and cultural resources of Georgia’s communities, regions and the state.

(c) Community Facilities and Services Goal: To ensure the provision of community facilities and services throughout the state to support efficient growth and development patterns that will protect and enhance the quality of life of Georgia’s residents.

(d) Housing Goal: To ensure that all residents of the state have access to adequate and affordable housing.

(e) Land Use and Transportation Goal: To ensure the coordination of land use planning and transportation planning throughout the state in support of efficient growth and development patterns that will promote sustainable economic development, protection of natural and cultural resources and provision of adequate and affordable housing.

(f) Intergovernmental Coordination: To ensure the coordination of local planning efforts with other local service providers and authorities, with neighboring communities and with state and regional plans and programs.

(3) Quality Community Objectives.

(a) Regional Identity Objective: Regions should promote and preserve an “identity,” defined in terms of traditional regional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.

(b) Growth Preparedness Objective: Each community should identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These may include housing and infrastructure (roads, water, sewer and telecommunications) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances to direct growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities.

(c) Appropriate Businesses Objective: The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, linkages to other economic activities in the region, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher-skill job opportunities.

(d) Educational Opportunities Objective: Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community – to permit community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.

(e) Employment Options Objective: A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.

(f) Heritage Preservation Objective: The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with

the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural features that are important to defining the community's character.

(g) Open Space Preservation Objective: New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors.

(h) Environmental Protection Objective: Air quality and environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development. Environmentally sensitive areas deserve special protection, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or quality of life of the community or region. Whenever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area should be preserved.

(i) Regional Cooperation Objective: Regional cooperation should be encouraged in setting priorities, identifying shared needs, and finding collaborative solutions, particularly where it is critical to success of a venture, such as protection of shared natural resources.

(j) Transportation Alternatives Objective: Alternatives to transportation by automobile, including mass transit, bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities, should be made available in each community. Greater use of alternate transportation should be encouraged.

(k) Regional Solutions Objective: Regional solutions to needs shared by more than one local jurisdiction are preferable to separate local approaches, particularly where this will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer.

(l) Housing Opportunities Objective: Quality housing and a range of housing size, cost, and density should be provided in each community, to make it possible for all who work in the community to also live in the community.

(m) Traditional Neighborhood Objective: Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged, including use of more human scale development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity.

(n) Infill Development Objective: Communities should maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the conversion of undeveloped land at the urban periphery by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the downtown or traditional urban core of the community.

(o) Sense of Place Objective: Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment.

Chapter 110-12-1-.07 Data and Mapping Specifications

110-12-1-.07 Data and Mapping Specifications.

(1) Data and Information. The following data and information items are to be used for the Supporting Analysis of Data and Information required for the Community Assessment as described in section 110-12-1-.03(2)(d).

(a) Population. Identify trends and issues in population growth and significant changes in the demographic characteristics of the community, including:

- Total Population.** Evaluate how the total population of the community has changed in recent years, what is projected for the future, and how the community compares, in terms of growth rate, to other areas.
- Age Distribution.** Evaluate the community's age groupings and how these are projected to change over time. Identify implications for the community.
- Race and Ethnicity.** Evaluate the community's racial and ethnic composition, how it is changing, and how it compares to neighboring communities. Identify implications these future trends will have for the community.
- Income.** Evaluate income levels, income distribution and poverty levels in the community and how these have changed and are expected to change over time.

(b) Economic Development. Identify trends and issues relating to the economic characteristics of the community, including:

- Economic Base.** Evaluate the various sectors or industries that constitute the community's economy in terms of their relative importance and impact, including the community's place in the larger economies of the state and the nation.
- Labor Force.** Evaluate characteristics of the community's labor force, including employment status, occupations, personal income, wages and commuting patterns.

- **Economic Resources.** Evaluate the development agencies, programs, tools, education, training and other economic resources available to the community's businesses and residents.
- **Economic Trends.** Evaluate economic trends that are ongoing in the community, including which sectors, industries or employers are declining and which are growing.
Also evaluate any unique economic situations, major employers and important new developments for their impact on the community.
- (c) Housing.** Use the following factors to evaluate the adequacy and suitability of existing housing stock to serve current and future community needs. If applicable, check for consistency with the Consolidated Plan prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
 - **Housing Types & Mix.** Evaluate the composition and quality of the community's housing stock, how it has changed over time, recent trends in the types of housing being provided, and whether there is a good mix of types (including modular, mobile or stick built), sizes, and multi-family vs. single family throughout the community.
 - **Condition and Occupancy.** Evaluate the age and condition of housing in the community as well as the proportion of units that are owner-occupied and renter occupied, plus vacancy rates for owners and renter units.
 - **Cost of Housing.** Evaluate the cost of housing in the community, both for owners and renters, in terms of affordability for residents and workers in the community.
 - **Cost-Burdened Households.** Evaluate the needs of households that are cost-burdened (paying 30% or more of net income on total housing costs) and severely cost-burdened (paying 50% or more of net income on total housing costs). Also evaluate the relationship of local housing costs and availability to the socioeconomic characteristics of these households, including income, income from social security or public assistance, employment status, occupation, household type, age of householder, household size, race, and unit type.
 - **Special Housing Needs.** Evaluate special housing needs in the community (e.g., housing needs of residents who are elderly; homeless; victims of domestic violence; migrant farm workers; persons with mental, physical, or developmental disabilities; persons with HIV/AIDS; and persons recovering from substance abuse) using information obtained from local service providers on caseloads, waiting lists, etc.
 - **Jobs-Housing Balance.** Evaluate housing costs compared to wages and household incomes of the resident and nonresident workforce to determine whether sufficient affordable housing is available within the community to allow those who work in the community to also live in the community. Data on the commuting patterns of the resident and nonresident workforce may assist in determining whether there is a jobs-housing balance issue in the community. Also evaluate any barriers that may prevent a significant proportion of the community's nonresident workforce from residing in the jurisdiction, such as a lack of suitable or affordable housing, suitably zoned land, etc.
- (d) Natural and Cultural Resources.** Map locations of the following resources. Evaluate how new development is likely to impact these resources and identify needed regulations or policies for their protection or management.
 - **Environmental Planning Criteria (required).** Identify local resources defined in the Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria (water supply watersheds, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, protected rivers and protected mountains). Indicate the status of the community's compliance with the requirements of the Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria through adoption of locally enforceable ordinances.
 - **Other Environmentally Sensitive Areas.** Identify any public water supply sources, steep slopes, coastal resources, flood plains, soils, plant and animal habitats, or any other sensitive areas that are of significance to the community.
 - **Significant Natural Resources.** Identify any scenic areas, prime agricultural or forest land, major parks, recreation and conservation areas or any other resources that are of significance to the community.
 - **Significant Cultural Resources.** Identify any rural, residential, commercial, industrial, institutional or transportation resources, and community landmarks of historic, cultural or archeological significance. Also identify generalized locations of any archaeological sites identified as significant by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.
- (e) Community Facilities and Services.** Map the service areas and/or levels of services for the following major public facilities and services. Evaluate the adequacy and useful life of these facilities and services for meeting future needs of the community and how to make the most efficient use of existing infrastructure to accommodate future development in the community. Also evaluate how service areas or levels of service are likely to influence future development patterns or impact natural or cultural resources, and identify how these facilities may be used to appropriately direct development patterns of the community.

- Water Supply and Treatment.** Identify both distribution and treatment systems, whether publicly or privately operated;
 - Sewerage System and Wastewater Treatment.** Identify both collection and treatment systems, whether publicly or privately operated. Also evaluate the use of onsite septic systems within the community, especially where their widespread use may have adverse environmental impacts; and
 - Other Facilities and Services.** Identify fire protection, public safety, parks and recreation, stormwater management, and solid waste management facilities.
 - Consistency with Service Delivery Strategy (required).** Check service areas and service providers for all of the above services, plus the transportation system (section 110-12-1.07(1) (g)), for consistency with the countywide service delivery strategy (see definition in Chapter 110-12-1-.09). Identify any inconsistencies that need to be resolved in the plan or the service delivery strategy.
- (f) Intergovernmental Coordination.** Identify existing coordination mechanisms and processes with the following governments and entities. These may include intergovernmental agreements, the countywide service delivery strategy (see definition in Chapter 110-12-1-.09), joint planning and service agreements, special legislation, or joint meetings or work groups for the purpose of coordination. Also identify the party/parties or offices within the local government with primary responsibility for coordination. Evaluate the adequacy and suitability of the coordination mechanisms and processes.
- Adjacent local governments;
 - Independent special authorities and districts, such as water and sewer authorities and districts;
 - School boards;
 - Independent development authorities and districts, such as industrial or downtown development authorities; and
 - Any federal, state, or regional programs and activities that relate to local planning, such as the Coastal Management Program, the Appalachian Regional Commission's Program, strategies for air-quality non-attainment areas, sub-state regional water supply and/or water quality protection plans, greenspace programs, and regional transportation plans.
- (g) Transportation System.** Map the service areas and/or levels of services for the following major components of the local transportation system. Evaluate the adequacy these components for serving needs of the community throughout the planning period.
- Road Network.** Identify roads, highways and bridges. Also identify any significant issues with the road network, including connectivity, signalized intersections or inadequate signage.
 - Alternative Modes.** Identify bicycle, pedestrian facilities and public transportation or other services for populations without automobiles,. Also identify areas of the community where mode choice is limited. Evaluate how effectively mobility needs of the community are met by these alternative transportation modes.
 - Parking.** Identify areas with insufficient parking or inadequate parking facilities (e.g., downtowns, busy commercial areas), excess or obsolete surface parking facilities in need of retrofitting or redevelopment.
 - Railroads, Trucking, Port Facilities and Airports.** Identify freight and passenger rail lines, major rail intermodal facilities, non-rail freight operations, seaports, harbors, and commercial and general purpose air terminals. Evaluate the impact of these on the overall transportation network.
 - Transportation and Land Use Connection.** Identify areas of the community experiencing significant traffic congestion or having significantly underutilized transportation facilities. Evaluate the role of land use (e.g., scale of development, inefficient development patterns) in this mismatch of facility capacity and demand.
- (2) Land Use Categories and Classification Systems.** Land use categories used in the Existing Land Use Map and the optional Future Land Use Map must be consistent with either of the following classification schemes.
- (a) Standard Categories.** More detailed categories used by communities must be able to be grouped into one of the following standard categories:
- Residential.** The predominant use of land within the residential category is for singlefamily and multi-family dwelling units organized into general categories of net densities.
 - Commercial.** This category is for land dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, office, service and entertainment facilities, organized into general categories of intensities. Commercial uses may be located as a single use in one building or grouped together in a shopping center or office building. Communities may elect to separate office uses from other commercial uses, such as retail, service or entertainment facilities.
 - Industrial.** This category is for land dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction activities, or other similar uses.

□ **Public/Institutional.** This category includes certain state, federal or local government uses, and institutional land uses. Government uses include city halls and government building complexes, police and fire stations, libraries, prisons, post offices, schools, military installations, etc. Examples of institutional land uses include colleges, churches, cemeteries, hospitals, etc. Do not include facilities that are publicly owned, but would be classified more accurately in another land use category. For example, include publicly owned parks and/or recreational facilities in the Park/Recreation/Conservation category; include landfills in the Industrial category; and include general office buildings containing government offices in the Commercial category.

□ **Transportation/Communication/Utilities.** This category includes such uses as major transportation routes, public transit stations, power generation plants, railroad facilities, radio towers, telephone switching stations, airports, port facilities or other similar uses.

□ **Park/Recreation/Conservation.** This category is for land dedicated to active or passive recreational uses. These areas may be either publicly or privately owned and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, golf courses, recreation centers or similar uses.

□ **Agriculture/Forestry.** This category is for land dedicated to farming (fields, lots, pastures, farmsteads, specialty farms, livestock production, etc.), agriculture, or commercial timber or pulpwood harvesting.

□ **Undeveloped/Vacant.** This category is for lots or tracts of land that are served by typical urban public services (water, sewer, etc.) but have not been developed for a specific use or were developed for a specific use that has since been abandoned.

□ **Mixed Use.** For a detailed, fine-grained mixed land use, or one in which land uses are more evenly balanced, Mixed Land Use categories may be created and applied at the discretion of the community. If used, Mixed Land Use categories must be clearly defined, including the types of land uses allowed, the percentage distribution among the mix of uses (or other objective measure of the combination), and the allowable density of each use. Additional guidelines on application of the Standard Categories (e.g., typical net density ranges for residential land uses) are available from the Department.

(b) Land Based Classification Standards (LBCS). As an alternative to the standard classification system, local governments may, at their discretion, utilize the LBCS developed by the American Planning Association (See <http://www.planning.org/lbcs>). The full implementation of this alternative system includes five dimensions to describe land uses, including Activity, Function, Site Development Character, Structural Character, and Ownership. Local governments electing to employ this system must at a minimum identify the Function dimension of land uses in the analyses, assessments, mapping, and other land use requirements of this chapter.

(3) Mapping Requirements. The geographical information system maps that are used to produce the required maps in the comprehensive plan must be submitted to the Department simultaneously with the comprehensive plan. To facilitate the preparation of these and other maps that may be included in the plan, the Department makes available for download on its website most of the necessary base maps, including boundaries, community facilities, transportation, hydrography, protected natural resources, etc. It is recommended that plan preparers use these maps, but if other maps are used, they must meet the following requirements:

(a) Digital Format. Maps submitted in digital form must be provided as digital vector map products, using the Spatial Data Transfer Standard (SDTS), or other digital format approved by the Department, via a Department-approved exchange media or electronic transfer method.

(b) Non-Digital Maps. If hand-drawn maps are used and submitted with the plan, they must be prepared either directly on US Bureau of the Census block maps or as a direct overlay to this hardcopy map series for the jurisdiction, or on other maps displaying real world map coordinates, as described in (c) below, at the map area corners or at four or more widely dispersed registration points.

(c) Base Maps. Base or reference maps must equal or exceed the scale, accuracy, precision, and feature content of the equivalent map made available by the Department. They must use the Georgia Coordinate System of 1985 as defined in the Official Code of Georgia 44-4-20 through 44-4-31, or use Latitude and Longitude coordinates based on the North American Datum of 1983.

Boundaries. All administrative or political boundaries on maps submitted to the Department must include the latest available boundaries from the US Bureau of the Census. In the event that the U.S. Census boundary map provided on the Department's website does not represent current municipal boundaries, due to recent annexations or de-annexations that have not yet been reported through the official US Bureau of the Census Boundary and Annexation Survey update process, the plan preparer must use the most accurate representation of boundaries available.

However, in cases where it is necessary to submit such alternate boundaries to the Department, the affected municipality is advised that O.C.G.A. 36-36-3 requires cities to report all annexations to the Department.

Consequently, the municipality will be expected to participate in the next annual Boundary and Annexation Survey

to reconcile these differences in their boundary map (see the Annexation section at <http://www.GeorgiaPlanning.com> for detailed instructions).

Chapter 110-12-1-.08 Procedural Requirements

110-12-1-.08 Procedural Requirements.

(1) Transmittal and Review of Community Assessment and Community Participation Program. Upon completion, the local government must submit its Community Assessment and Community Participation Program concurrently to the regional development center for review.

Both of these plan components must be completed well in advance of the local government's recertification date, in order to allow adequate time for their review prior to initiation of the Community Agenda.

(a) First Required Public Hearing. The first required public hearing must be held once the draft Community Assessment and Community Participation Program have been drafted and made available for public review, but prior to their transmittal to the regional development center. The purpose of this hearing is to brief the community on the potential issues and opportunities identified through the Community Assessment, obtain input on the proposed Community Participation Program, and notify the community of when these plan components will be transmitted to the regional development center. Once public comments have been addressed, the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program must be transmitted to the regional development center by resolution of the governing body.

(b) Completeness Check. The regional development center shall determine whether the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program are complete, within seven days of receipt. A Community Assessment or Community Participation Program that does not meet the standard for completeness (as determined by the Department) shall be deemed incomplete and shall not be accepted for further review by the regional development center or be forwarded to the Department for review. The regional development center shall notify the local government of its findings regarding the completeness of the submittal and identify items that must be submitted, if any, prior to further processing. The regional development center shall forward a complete submittal to the Department immediately upon making the completeness finding.

(c) Notification of Interested Parties. Once the regional development center has determined that the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program are complete, it shall immediately notify any interested parties of the availability of these submittals for review and comment, providing the name of the local government, the general nature of the submittals, and a deadline by which comments must be received. At a minimum, interested parties shall include:

- Local governments inside or outside the regional development center's region that are contiguous to the submitting local government, and other local governments that are likely to be affected by the Community Assessment or Community Participation Program;
- Any local authorities, special districts, or other entities identified in evaluating intergovernmental coordination mechanisms and processes (if applicable);
- Regional development centers that are contiguous to the local government or that are likely to be affected by the Community Assessment or Community Participation Program; and
- Affected state agencies (including the Department of Transportation, the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority, etc.) and the Department.

(d) Review of Community Assessment. The regional development center shall review the Community Assessment for its adequacy in identifying potential issues and opportunities to be dealt with in the subsequent portions of the plan. The regional development center shall also review the Community Assessment to identify potential opportunities for inter-jurisdictional/regional solutions to common issues.

(e) Review of Community Participation Program. The Department shall review the Community Participation Program for its adequacy in identifying specific mechanisms to ensure adequate involvement of the community in the development of the Community Agenda. The Department shall transmit a complete report of its findings and recommendations for addressing such findings to the regional development center for inclusion in the Report of Findings and Recommendations.

(f) Report of Findings and Recommendations. Within 30 days after certification of the completeness of the Community Assessment and the Community Participation Program, the regional development center must transmit a

final report of its findings and recommendations to the local government and to the Department. The report must include:

- Comments submitted by interested parties that reviewed the Community Assessment;
- The regional development center's findings and recommendations from its review of the Community Assessment; and
- A copy of the Department's findings and recommendations resulting from its review of the Community Participation Program.

(g) Publicizing the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program. Once reviewed by the regional development center and the Department, the availability of the Community Assessment and the Community Participation Program must be publicized by the local government for public information. This requirement may be met by providing notice in a local newspaper of general circulation identifying where complete copies of the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program may be reviewed.

(2) Transmittal and Review of Community Agenda. Upon completion, the local government must submit its Community Agenda to the regional development center for review. The mandatory review period for the Community Agenda is 60 days. However, in order to ensure adequate time for review, revision, and adoption, the Department recommends that the local government submit the Community Agenda for review no less than 120 days prior to the recertification date.

(a) Second Public Hearing. The second required public hearing must be held once the Community Agenda has been drafted and made available for public review, but prior to its transmittal to the regional development center for review. The purpose of this hearing is to brief the community on the contents of the Community Agenda, provide an opportunity for residents to make final suggestions, additions or revisions, and notify the community of when the Community Agenda will be submitted to the regional development center for review. Once public comments have been addressed, the Community Agenda must be transmitted to the regional development center by resolution of the governing body.

(b) Completeness Check. The regional development center shall determine whether the Community Agenda is complete, within seven days of its receipt. A Community Agenda that does not meet the standard for completeness (as determined by the Department) shall be deemed incomplete and shall not be accepted for further review by the regional development center or be forwarded to the Department for review. The regional development center shall notify the local government of its findings regarding the completeness of the submittal and identify items that must be submitted, if any, prior to further processing. The regional development center shall forward a complete submittal to the Department immediately upon making the completeness finding.

(c) Notification of Interested Parties. Once the regional development center has determined that the Community Agenda is complete, it shall immediately notify any interested parties of the availability of the Community Agenda for review and comment, providing the name of the local government, the general nature of the Community Agenda, and a deadline by which comments must be received. At a minimum, interested parties shall include:

- Local governments inside or outside the regional development center's region that are contiguous to the submitting local government, and other local governments that are likely to be affected by the Community Agenda;
- Any local authorities, special districts, or other entities identified in evaluating intergovernmental coordination mechanisms and processes (if applicable);
- Regional development centers that are contiguous to the local government or that are likely to be affected by the Community Agenda; and
- Affected state agencies (including the Department of Transportation, the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority, etc.) and the Department.

(d) Regional Hearing. Within 25 days after certification of the completeness of the Community Agenda, the regional development center may (at its sole discretion) conduct a hearing at which any local government, regional development center or other local, regional, or state agency may present its views on the Community Agenda. The rules for conducting such hearings must be adopted by the board of directors of the regional development center and approved by the Department.

(e) Regional Development Center Review. The regional development center shall review the Community Agenda for potential conflicts with plans of neighboring jurisdictions, opportunities for inter-jurisdictional/regional solutions to common issues, and consistency with the adopted Regional Agenda for the regional development center's region.

(f) Department Review. The Department shall review the Community Agenda for compliance with the planning requirements. This review may result in identification of deficiencies that must be satisfactorily resolved by the community in order for the Community Agenda to be found "in compliance" with the planning requirements. The

Department may also offer advisory comments for improving the Community Agenda for consideration by the local government. The Department's findings and recommendations resulting from its review, including advisory comments, shall be transmitted to the regional development center for inclusion in the final report within 35 days after certification of the completeness of the Community Agenda.

(g) Final Report of Findings and Recommendations. Within 40 days after certification of the completeness of the Community Agenda, the regional development center must transmit a final report of its findings and recommendations to the local government and to the Department. The report must include:

- Comments submitted by interested parties that reviewed the Community Agenda and (if applicable) a summary of the regional review hearing, detailing any significant issues raised at the hearing;
- The regional development center's findings from its Intergovernmental and Consistency review of the Community Agenda and its recommendations for addressing such findings; and
- A copy of the Department's findings and recommendations resulting from its review of the Community Agenda.

(h) Petition for Reconsideration. Within ten days after the regional development center's findings and recommendations are made public, a submitting local government that disagrees with the recommendations may petition the regional development center for a "reconsideration hearing." This hearing shall be scheduled and held by the regional development center within 15 days after receipt of such a request. Within 10 days after the reconsideration hearing, the Department and the regional development center shall either continue or modify the original findings and recommendations and provide written notice of the decision to the submitting local government.

(i) Conflict Mediation. Informal or formal mediation of conflicts relating to the Community Agenda may be initiated in accordance with the Rules for Mediation of Interjurisdictional Conflicts adopted by the Board of Community Affairs.

(j) Adoption of Community Agenda. Once the Community Agenda has been found by the Department to be in compliance with the planning requirements, the governing body may adopt the Community Agenda with or without any recommendations for improvement included in the Final Report of Findings and Recommendations. However, in no event shall a local government take any official action to adopt a Community Agenda prepared in accordance with the planning requirements until 60 days after the Community Agenda has been certified by the regional development center as complete. If the local government has petitioned for reconsideration, this mandatory review period shall be 90 days. In order to maintain Qualified Local Government certification, the local government must adopt the approved Community Agenda prior to its recertification date, but in no case later than one year after completion of the mandatory review period for the Community Agenda.

(k) Notification of Local Adoption. Within seven days of local adoption of a Community Agenda that has been found by the Department to comply with planning requirements, the local government shall notify the regional development center in writing. Within seven days of receipt of this written notice, the regional development center shall notify the Department that the Community Agenda found in compliance with planning requirements has been adopted by the local government.

(l) Qualified Local Government Certification. Once the Department has been notified by the regional development center that a local government has adopted a Community Agenda that complies with the planning requirements, the Department may issue a letter certifying this local government as a Qualified Local Government. Qualified Local Government certification shall automatically expire approximately five years from the previous recertification date, unless otherwise specified. To retain Qualified Local Government certification, a local government must remain in compliance with the requirements outlined in these planning requirements and O.C.G.A. 50-8-2(a) (18).

(m) Publicizing the Community Agenda. Once adopted by the local government, the availability of the Community Agenda must be publicized by the local government for public information. This requirement may be met by providing notice in a local newspaper of general circulation identifying where a complete copy of the Community Agenda may be reviewed.

(3) Maintaining the Comprehensive Plan. Local governments are responsible for maintaining their comprehensive plans to accurately reflect current community conditions and the community's vision and priorities for the future. Maintenance of the plan includes major and minor plan amendments, updates of the plan, or required periodic updates of the Community Agenda.

(a) Plan Amendments. The local government must amend the adopted plan when the conditions, policies, etc., on which the plan is based, have significantly changed so as to materially detract from the usefulness of the plan as a guide to local decision-making or when required by the Department to do so as a result of changes to the planning requirements. Changes to an adopted comprehensive plan shall be considered major amendments if they alter the

basic tenets of the overall plan or a significant portion of the plan or if they have the potential to affect another local government. Changes to a local comprehensive plan that are purely local in nature and do not qualify as major amendments shall be considered minor amendments. Examples of changes that would typically qualify as major amendments include, but are not limited to:

- Changes of 10% or greater in the population (increase or decrease) on which the plan is based;
- Changes to the Future Development Map that propose more intense or dense uses that are located adjacent to or in close proximity to another local government;
- A cumulative increase in the total land area of a local government jurisdiction of greater than 100 acres;
- Changes in the planned siting of new or improved water, sewer or transportation facilities to “new” areas not previously projected to receive such facilities or improvements.

The local government, in consultation with its regional development center, shall determine whether a proposed amendment is a major or minor amendment. If they agree, the local government shall proceed according to the agreement. If they do not agree, the regional development center must forward available information relating to the proposed amendment to the Department for a determination. Within 20 days of receipt of the information, the Department, after consultation with both parties, shall make a final determination as to the classification of the proposed amendment. The Department shall convey its findings to both the local government and the regional development center.

(b) Required Updates to the Comprehensive Plan. At a minimum, a plan update must be completed every ten years, in accordance with the Local Comprehensive Plan Recertification Schedule maintained by the Department. However, after five years, community leaders may determine that the comprehensive plan needs to be updated, based upon the degree of change in the community. If only minor changes have taken place, then revisions to the plan may be sufficient, in the form of plan amendments. If significant changes have occurred in community conditions (i.e., if the data upon which the plan is based has become significantly outdated, or the community’s vision has changed), an update of the comprehensive plan or a major plan amendment may be needed.

(c) Required Periodic Updates to the Short Term Work Program. At a minimum, the local government must prepare and submit annual updates or five-year updates to the Short-Term Work Program portion of the Community Agenda.

(i) Annual Short Term Work Program Update Option. Each annual update shall include a new fifth year and any changes to the work program for the other years. The regional development center shall maintain a file of annual updates submitted by local governments and shall make this file available to interested parties upon request. At least 30 days prior to the date a local government’s Qualified Local Government certification is due to expire, the regional development center shall notify the Department that the local government has updated its Short-Term Work Program in accordance with the requirements for annual Short-Term Work Program updates contained in these planning requirements.

(ii) Five-Year Short Term Work Program Update Option. Local governments may prepare and submit an update to their STWP every five years. A five-year Short Term Work Program update shall include:

- A new STWP covering the subsequent five-year period.
- A report of plan accomplishments that must identify the current status of each activity in the previous STWP. At a minimum, local governments must indicate activities that:
 - Have been completed;
 - Are currently underway (including a projected completion date);
 - Have been postponed (explaining why); or
 - Have not been accomplished and are no longer activities the local government intends to undertake (explaining why).

(d) Submittal and Review Procedures for Major Amendments and Updates. All major plan amendments, updates and annual or five-year STWP updates must be submitted to the regional development center for review and shall follow the submittal and review procedures outlined in section 110-12-1-.08(2). Major amendments to the plan must be submitted for review within six months from the date the local government experiences or decides to pursue a change that would qualify as a major amendment. Minor amendments to the plan are not required to be submitted for review.

(4) Variances. A request for a variance must be submitted to the Department in writing by the local government, with a copy provided to the regional development center, and must provide sufficient documentation to substantiate the request. The Department may consult with the regional development center in determining whether a variance

will be granted. Generally, lack of professional assistance for plan preparation will not justify a variance. The following two types of variances are available to local governments:

(a) Time Extensions for Recertification. Variance requests for time extensions to complete comprehensive plans or plan updates will be granted at the sole discretion of the Department only under the following conditions:

(i) If the local government agrees, as part of the time extension, to significantly exceed the minimum planning requirements;

(ii) If the preparation of a plan or major plan update is substantially complete at the time revised planning requirements take effect and the local government desires to change its plan or major plan update to conform to the new requirements. Generally, such variance will only be granted if the local government's recertification date falls within 12 months after the effective date for the revised planning requirements;

(iii) If events beyond the local government's control have occurred (e.g., a natural disaster that affects all, or a large portion of the local government's jurisdiction or a fire that destroys, or substantially damages, the local government's planning or administrative offices, etc.) and the local government is under extraordinary stress in coping with this compelling situation.

(b) Permission to Plan at a Lower Planning Level. Variance requests for permission to plan at a lower level than the designated planning level will be granted at the sole discretion of the Department. The criteria used in determining whether to grant such a variance shall include, but not be limited to: If the local government is a small municipality that has a substantially different growth rate or development pressures than the county in which it is located.

Chapter 110-12-1-.09 Definitions

110-12-1-.09 Definitions.

(1) General. For the purpose of these rules, the following words shall have the meaning as contained herein unless the context does not permit such meaning. Terms not defined in these rules but defined in O.C.G.A. 50-8-1, et seq, shall have the meanings contained therein. Terms not defined in these rules, nor in O.C.G.A. 50-8-1, et seq, shall have ascribed to them the ordinary accepted meanings such as the context may imply. For the purpose of these rules, the terms "shall" and "must" have the same meaning, are mandatory in nature, and are indicative of a requirement.

(2) Definitions. The following terms and definitions shall be used to guide the implementation of the comprehensive planning process.

(a) 'Character Area' means a specific geographic area within the community that:

has unique or special characteristics to be preserved or enhanced (such as a downtown, a historic district, a neighborhood, or a transportation corridor);

has potential to evolve into a unique area with more intentional guidance of future development through adequate planning and implementation (such as a strip commercial corridor that could be revitalized into a more attractive village development pattern); or

requires special attention due to unique development issues (rapid change of development patterns, economic decline, etc.).

Each character area is a planning sub-area within the community where more detailed, small-area planning and implementation of certain policies, investments, incentives, or regulations may be applied in order to preserve, improve, or otherwise influence its future development patterns in a manner consistent with the community vision.

(b) 'Community' means the local jurisdiction (county or municipality) or group of local jurisdictions (in the case of a joint comprehensive plan) that are preparing a local comprehensive plan.

(c) 'Community Agenda' means the portion of the comprehensive plan that provides guidance for future decision-making about the community, prepared with adequate input from stakeholders and the general public. It includes: (1) a community vision for the future physical development of the community, expressed in the form of a map indicating unique character areas, each with its own strategy for guiding future development patterns; (2) a list of issues and opportunities identified by the community for further action, and (3) an implementation program that will help the community realize its vision for the future and address the identified issues and opportunities.

(d) 'Community Assessment' means the portion of the comprehensive plan that is an objective and professional assessment of data and information about the community prepared without extensive direct public participation. It includes: (1) a list of potential issues and opportunities the community may wish to take action to address, (2) evaluation of community policies, activities, and development patterns for consistency with the Quality Community Objectives, (3) analysis of existing development patterns, including a map of recommended character areas for

consideration in developing an overall vision for future development of the community; and (4) data and information to substantiate these evaluations and the potential issues and opportunities.

The product of the Community Assessment must be a concise and informative report (such as an executive summary), to be used to inform decision-making by stakeholders during development of the Community Agenda portion of the plan.

(e) 'Community Participation Program' means the portion of the comprehensive plan that describes the local government's program for ensuring adequate public and stakeholder involvement in the preparation of the Community Agenda portion of the plan.

(f) 'Community Vision' means the part of the Community Agenda that is intended to paint a picture of what the community desires to become, providing a complete description of the development patterns to be encouraged within the jurisdiction. It includes: (1) an optional general vision statement of the overall goals and desired future the community seeks to achieve; (2) a future development map delineating boundaries of major character areas throughout the community; and (3) a defining narrative that provides a specific vision and implementation strategy for each character area.

(g) 'Comprehensive Plan' means a 20-year plan by a county or municipality covering such county or municipality and including three components: a Community Assessment, a Community Participation Program, and a Community Agenda. The comprehensive plan must be prepared pursuant to the local planning requirements for preparation of comprehensive plans and for implementation of comprehensive plans, established by the Department in accordance with O.C.G.A. 50-8-7.1(b) and 50-8-7.2.

(h) 'Comprehensive Planning Process' means planning by counties or municipalities in accordance with the local planning requirements.

(i) 'Conflict' means any conflict, dispute, or inconsistency arising:

Between or among comprehensive plans, or components thereof, for any counties or municipalities, as proposed, prepared, proposed to be implemented, or implemented;

Between or among comprehensive plans for any regions, as proposed, prepared, proposed to be implemented, or implemented;

Between or among comprehensive plans, or components thereof, for any counties or municipalities and comprehensive plans for the region which include such counties or municipalities, as such plans are proposed, prepared, proposed to be implemented, or implemented;

With respect to or in connection with any action proposed to be taken or taken by any county, municipality, or other local government relating to or affecting regionally important resources, as defined by the Department; or

With respect to or in connection with any action proposed to be taken or taken by any county, municipality, or other local government relating to or affecting developments of regional impact, as defined by the Department.

(j) 'County' means any county of this state.

(k) 'Days' means calendar days, unless otherwise specified.

(l) 'Density' means an objective measurement of the number of people or residential units allowed per unit of land, such as dwelling units per acre.

(m) 'Governing Body' means the board of commissioners of a county, sole commissioner of a county, council, commissioners, or other governing authority of a county or municipality.

(n) 'Implementation Program' means the narrative description counties and municipalities must submit describing how they intend to implement their comprehensive plan, including a listing of public actions to be undertaken by the community toward implementation of the comprehensive plan and the related costs of such actions.

(o) 'Infrastructure' means those man-made structures which serve the common needs of the population, such as: sewage disposal systems; potable water systems; potable water wells serving a system; solid waste disposal sites or retention areas; stormwater systems; utilities; piers; docks; wharves; breakwaters; bulkheads; seawalls; bulwarks; revetments; causeways; marinas; navigation channels; bridges; and roadways.

(p) 'Local Government' means any county, municipality, or other political subdivision of the state.

(q) 'Local planning requirements' means the standards and procedures for local comprehensive planning that shall be followed in preparation of local comprehensive plans, for implementation of local comprehensive plans, and for participation in the comprehensive planning process.

(r) 'Mediation' means the process to be employed by the Department and regional development centers for resolving conflicts which may arise from time to time in the comprehensive planning process. Procedures and guidelines to govern mediation are as established by the Department pursuant to O.C.G.A. 50-8-7. 1(d).

(s) ‘Municipality’ means any municipal corporation of the state and any consolidated city-county government of the state.

(t) ‘Plan’ means the comprehensive plan for any county or municipality.

(u) ‘Plan amendment’ means a change to the adopted comprehensive plan that occurs between plan updates. Amendments of the adopted plan are appropriate when the conditions, policies, etc., on which the plan is based, have significantly changed so as to materially detract from the usefulness of the plan as a guide to local decision making, or when required by the Department as a result of changes to the planning requirements.

(v) ‘Plan update’ means a more or less complete re-write of the comprehensive plan, which shall occur approximately every ten years, in accordance with the Local Comprehensive Plan Recertification Schedule maintained by the Department.

(w) ‘Planning’ means the process of determining actions which state agencies, regional development centers, and local governments propose to take.

(x) ‘Qualified Local Government’ means a county or municipality that:

- Adopts and maintains a comprehensive plan in conformity with the local planning requirements;
- Establishes regulations consistent with its comprehensive plan and with the local planning requirements; and
- Does not fail to participate in the Department's mediation or other means of resolving conflicts in a manner in which, in the judgment of the Department, reflects a good faith effort to resolve any conflict.

(y) ‘Regional Development Center’ means a regional development center established under O.C.G.A. 50-8-32.

(z) ‘Regional Plan’ means the comprehensive plan for a region prepared by the regional development center in accordance with the standards and procedures established by the Department.

(aa) ‘Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria’ means those standards and procedures with respect to natural resources, the environment, and vital areas of the state established and administered by the Department of Natural Resources pursuant to O.C.G.A. 12-2-8, including, but not limited to, criteria for the protection of water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, protected mountains and protected river corridors.

(bb) ‘Service Delivery Strategy’ means the intergovernmental arrangement among city governments, the county government, and other affected entities within the same county for delivery of community services, developed in accordance with the Service Delivery Strategy law. A local government’s existing Strategy must be updated concurrent with the comprehensive plan update. To ensure consistency between the comprehensive plan and the agreed upon Strategy: (1) the services to be provided by the local government, as identified in the comprehensive plan, cannot exceed those identified in the agreed upon strategy and (2) the service areas identified for individual services that will be provided by the local government must be consistent between the plan and Strategy.

(cc) ‘Short-Term Work Program’ means that portion of the Implementation Program that lists the specific actions to be undertaken annually by the local government over the upcoming five years to implement the comprehensive plan.

(dd) ‘Solid Waste Management Plan’ means a plan prepared in accordance with the Georgia Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Act, following all requirements outlined in the Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures for Solid Waste Management. These requirements may be met within the Community Facilities Element of the comprehensive plan or may be prepared in a separate solid waste management plan.

(ee) ‘State Planning Recommendations’ means the supplemental guidance provided by the Department to assist communities in preparing plans and addressing the local planning requirements. The plan preparers and the community must review these recommendations where referenced in the planning requirements in order to determine their applicability or helpfulness to the community’s plan.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

(sample)

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
FOR
CITY/COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
<date>

- A. Introduction
- B. List of Suggested Stakeholders
- C. List of Participation Techniques
- D. Plan Development Timeline

A. Introduction

The preparation of the Community Participation Program is an important first step in obtaining citizen participation and involvement in the Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of the Community Participation Program of the <city/county> Comprehensive Plan is to insure that citizens and other stakeholders are aware of the planning process and are provided opportunities to comment on the local plan, individual plan components, or plan amendments. More importantly, citizens should have the ability to participate actively in the process of defining the community's vision, values, goals, policies, priorities, and implementation strategies.

B. List of Suggested Stakeholders

The <elected body>, planning commission, staff, consultants, and <identify others preparing the plan> will work together to identify those individuals and groups that have a special interest in the development of the community agenda for <city/county>. The stakeholders are comprised of representatives of the various organizations as listed in the table below. As the planning process moves forward, additional stakeholders are likely to be identified and will be added as appropriate.

Stakeholders will be interviewed and will be asked to serve on focus group committees that are scheduled to meet at important benchmarks throughout the Comprehensive planning process. The stakeholder and focus groups will be called upon to assist with the development of the community assessment leading to the goals and objectives and reviewing and recommending strategies developed for the community agenda.

<City/County> Stakeholder Listing

Staff
County Administrator/City Manager
Public Works Director
City/County Engineer
Zoning Administrator
Utilities Department/Water and Sewer Superintendent
Health Department Official
Development Community
Residential Developers, Builders, Contractors
Commercial Developers, Builders, Contractors
Civil Engineering Firms, Specializing in Land Development and Subdivisions
Surveyors
Land Planners
Environmental Scientists
Major Landowners
Other Groups
Planning Commission Chairman and Members of Planning Commission
Board of Education, Superintendent and Key Staff
Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Staff
Chamber of Commerce
Development Authority
Housing Authority
Regional Development Center (RDC) Staff Planners
Representatives of Agricultural Groups, such as Extension Service, Farm Bureau, and Agricultural Council
<name> State University representative
<name> Military Base representative

C. List of Participation Techniques

The <City/County> will guide the citizen participation and coordination efforts associated with the plan. A series of meetings will be facilitated to build consensus through a collaborative planning process that serves to create an open, inclusive, and interactive forum.

The Community Participation Program tasks are derived from the essential need to educate the public and media regarding the Comprehensive Plan and ensure a broad participatory base. A specific emphasis on the views of all segments of the community will also include representation from the low and moderate income and minority populations identified in the planning process. The following tasks will aid the planning, assessment, evaluation, and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

1. Steering Committee

The <elected body> shall appoint a Steering Committee composed of representatives from the following authorities, the business community, and citizens to direct, advise, and help shape the Community Agenda and overall Comprehensive Plan Process.

Representatives (Example)	Number
○ Citizens (Two from each electoral district)	(10)
○ Planning Commission	(2)
○ Cities (Alpha and Beta)	(2)
○ Board Of Education	(1)
○ Development Authority	(1)
○ Chamber of Commerce	(1)
○ Water and Sewerage Authority	(1)
○ Hospital Authority	(1)
○ Senior Citizens Council	(1)

2. Kick-Off Public Meeting

<City/County> will host a kick-off meeting to announce officially the planning process to the citizens and other stakeholders. Government officials will be invited to introduce the process and the community will participate in the viewing of presentations covering the project purpose and general plan approach. Initial opinion surveys and volunteer sign up forms will be available at this meeting.

3. Steering Committee Meetings

The Steering Committee will provide guidance and feedback throughout the planning process. Meetings will be scheduled at appropriate benchmarks to coincide with project deliverables and in advance of all public meetings.

4. Monthly Staff Meetings

Monthly meetings will be scheduled to maintain the desired timelines, benchmarks, and overall direction of the plan process.

5. Stakeholder Interviews

The purpose of stakeholder interviews is to identify major community issues and develop a complete understanding of the public opinions, comments, and concerns, including potential sources of conflict, and anticipated barriers impeding effective implementation. The team will use prepared survey questions. The results will be incorporated into the development of the community vision and the Comprehensive Plan and used to illustrate the impact that the feedback has had on the progress of the plan.

6. Community Agenda Preference Survey Workshops

The visioning process will be accomplished through preference surveys in workshops conducted geographically. Results will be announced through the use of print media and the <City/County> website. These workshops will use a photograph preference exercise to draw out citizens opinions based on the community issues outlined in the plan and participants will complete a corresponding questionnaire. The results will be tabulated and issued as a summary report.

7. Open House

An open house presentation of the Draft Comprehensive Plan Update will be scheduled near the end of the planning process.

8. Maintain Project Website

<City/County> will have a special link on the home page of the <City/County> website that will provide information on the progress of the planning process. Throughout the process, information will be updated and questionnaires will be continually revised to solicit well-focused comments. A dedicated e-mail address will be assigned to the Comprehensive Plan project and will be managed by <City/County> staff.

9. Public Information Outreach Plan

The <City/County> Public Information Officer will coordinate the development of an effective media plan to publicize information on the planning process to its citizens and other stakeholders. The following tactics will be used to inform the citizens and media about the plan progress.

- **Media Education** – Media outlets (e.g. print, radio, or television) will be educated about the plan using briefings, brown-bag lunches, and media tours. The development of creative press releases, feature stories, columns, and interviews will be used to better inform the public.
- **Public Information Materials** – Outreach materials will be created and used to help the public understand the Comprehensive Plan. These materials will be distributed at public meetings and other geographical locations to educate and establish visible, continuous public feedback (for example: fact sheets, comment forms, newsletters, displays, flyers, notices, and stakeholder database for mass mailing).

10. Required Public Hearings

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE MEETING DOCUMENTS

Sample Roster for Steering Committee

Georgia County	
Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee	
Commission District	Steering Committee Members
Chairman	Two members
District 1	Two members
District 2	Two members
District 3	Two members
District 4	Two members
Appointments	
Planning Commission	Two members
City of <name>	One member
City of <name>	One member
Board of Education	Superintendent or one representative
Neighborhood Associations	Two members
Major Employers	Two members
Agricultural	One member
Building and Development	Two members
Engineering & Land Planning	Two members
Chamber of Commerce	One member
Development Authority	One member
Environmental	One member
Non-Profit Organizations	One member
Senior Citizens, Retirement Community	One member

Sample Roster for Stakeholder Interviews

County Staff
County Administrator
Public Works Director
County Engineer
Zoning Administrator
Utilities Department/Water and Sewer Superintendent
Health Department Official
Development Community
Residential Developers or Builders
Commercial Developers or Builders
Civil Engineering Firms, specializing in land development and subdivisions
Surveyors
Land Planners
Environmental Scientists
Major Landowners
Other Groups
Planning Commission Chairman and members of planning commission
Board of Education, superintendent and key staff
Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) staff
Chamber of Commerce
Development Authority
Housing Authority
Regional Development Center (RDC) Staff Planners
Representatives of agricultural groups, such as Extension Service, Farm Bureau, and Agricultural Council
<name>State University representative
<name> Military Base representative

Stakeholder Interview Notes Sheet

**City/County Stakeholder Interviews
<date of interview>**

1. List three (3) specific planning concepts or policies that work well and should be retained as we revise the comprehensive plan.

2. Identify the three (3) most critical problems with the current planning policies and implementation procedures.

3. If you could identify one (1) thing that is missing from the comprehensive plan in order to achieve the kind of development you want, what would you add?

4. Please list any other information you think is helpful as we revise the comprehensive plan.

Please return by <deadline date> to (Name) via Fax: <insert number>.

Consultant/Planning Team Contact Information:

Name
Address
Phone
E-mail

Thank you!

Sample Public Meeting Newspaper Advertisement

**<City/County> Comprehensive Plan
Kick-Off Meeting
<date>
<time>.
<location>**

You are invited to participate in planning process for the future of City/County.

This planning process will ensure quality growth, assist City/County to prioritize expenditure of funds and coordinate future development efforts. The plan will focus on population, economic development, housing, natural and cultural resources, community facilities, land use, intergovernmental coordination, and transportation. It is anticipated that a draft will be ready for public comment in <month> of this year.

This is your opportunity to share ideas, voice concerns, and describe your vision for City/County over the next ten years. In addition, the <planning staff> will be present to introduce the planning process and highlight the main issues that the Steering Committee has identified.

City/County encourages all interested parties to take part in this process. The Kick-Off meeting will take place on <date and time>. It will be held in the <location and address>.

Citizens who are unable to attend but would like to provide comments regarding the plan can contact Polly Planner, Planning Director, by phone at (555) 555-1000 or by e-mail at email@georgiacounty.net. Comments can also be mailed to Ms. Planner's attention at P.O. Box 200, Alpha, Georgia 30000.

Sample Public Meeting Notification Mailer

**City/County Comprehensive Plan
Kick-Off Meeting**

<date and time>

<location>

You are invited to participate in planning process for the future of City/County.

This is your opportunity to share ideas, voice concerns, and describe your vision for City/County over the next ten years. In addition, the planning staff will be present to introduce the planning process and highlight the main issues that the Steering Committee has identified.

City/County encourages all interested parties to take part in this process. The Kick-Off meeting will take place on <date and time>. It will be held in the <location and address>.

Contact Polly Planner, Planning Director, by phone at (555) 555-1000 or by e-mail at email@georgiacounty.net. Comments can also be mailed to Ms. Planner's attention at P.O. Box 200, Alpha, Georgia 30000.

Georgia County
P.O. Box 200
Alpha, Georgia 30000



37 USA

Resident
444 Maple Street
Alpha, Georgia 30000

Sample Public Meeting Agenda

CITY/COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN KICK-OFF MEETING

<DATE>

<TIME>

AGENDA

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Discussion of Project Schedule and Planning Process
- III. Community Participation Program framework
- IV. Discussion of Community Character
 - a. Small Group Exercise
 - b. Small Group Reports
- V. Public Comments
- VI. Next Steps
- VII. Adjourn

Thank You!

Consultant/Planning Team Contact Information:

Name
Address
Phone
E-mail

Sample Community Vision Comment Form

CITY/COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
PUBLIC MEETING

<DATE>

What are the things you like most about Georgia County?

What things would you change in Georgia County?

What would you like Georgia County to be like in 10 years?

Thank You!

Consultant/Planning Team Contact Information:

- Name
- Address
- Phone
- E-mail

Sample Planning Topics Comment Form

**CITY/COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
PUBLIC MEETING
<DATE>**

Step 1: Please place the number 1 through 8 in each box to rank each planning topic in order of importance to you.

Step 2: Write your specific issues and suggestions for each topic in the space provided.

Population

Community Facilities (Water, Sewer, and Solid Waste)

Economic Development

Land Use

Housing

Intergovernmental Coordination

Natural and Cultural Resources

Transportation

Consultant/Planning Team Contact Information:

Name
Address
Phone
E-mail

Sample Public Involvement Newsletter



GET INVOLVED NEWSLETTER

Headlines:

Latest Progress:

Next Public Meetings:

Planning Schedule:

Consultant/Planning Team Contact Information:

Name
Address
Phone
E-mail

Sample Community Participation Summary Report Outline

PROGRESS REPORT #2 <DATE OR DATE RANGE>

Community Participation milestones accomplished

- ◆ Item
- ◆ Item
- ◆ Item

Items anticipated for next progress report

- ◆ Item
- ◆ Item
- ◆ Item

Status of Community Participation Program

- ◆ Percent Complete
- ◆ Item
- ◆ Item

Outstanding issues that need to be addressed

- ◆ Item
- ◆ Item
- ◆ Item

APPENDIX D: EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

1. Henry County Community Preference Survey

In 2004, Henry County completed an update to its Comprehensive Plan. The County, with the assistance of its consultants, prepared a comprehensive guide to the citizen participation and coordination efforts associated with the Plan. A large number of meetings were facilitated to build consensus through a collaborative planning process that served to create an open, inclusive, and interactive forum.

Within the structure of the overall Citizen Participation and Involvement Plan, the most innovative technique was the use of a Community Preference Survey. The Plan also incorporated a Steering Committee, stakeholder interviews, regular website updates, public hearings, and 24 public workshops.

The Community Preference Survey was noteworthy for several reasons. First, the format of the workshops utilized a power-point slide presentation technique. The audience was asked to evaluate a series of visual images categorized around elements of the built environment, such as housing types and styles, streetscape appearance, etc. Participants were asked to select “preferences” as images are displayed side by side. The duration of the survey was approximately thirty (30) minutes and included over 100 images.

Second, the survey presented some images that were examples of “smart growth” as well as some images of development that did not represent the best in community planning. The images that were presented at the workshop were a combination of familiar Henry County examples mixed with images from other areas of Georgia. The advantage of this technique was that survey participants could also evaluate types and scales of development that were not currently present in the County.

Finally, the Community Preference Workshops were offered in eight (8) geographic locations within the County: Hampton, McDonough, Locust Grove, Stockbridge, Ola, Luella, Fairview, and Kellytown. The County discovered that “taking the workshop on the road” resulted in greater attendance at each meeting and diverse survey results for different parts of the County. Those citizens that participated in the workshops truly felt their opinions had an impact on the Plan.

The Community Preference Workshops were the instrumental first step in the development of a vision for the future development of Henry County. This vision subsequently resulted in a series of goals, objectives, and action strategies that formed the basis of the Comprehensive Plan.

Contact: **Julius Ross, AICP**
Phone: **770-954-2457**
E-Mail: **jross@co.henry.ga.us**

2. Community Resource Teams

To assist Georgia's communities with incorporating "smart growth" best practices, the Georgia Quality Growth Partnership (GQGP), working through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), can make available "resource teams," comprised of volunteers who are experts in key fields. These teams will visit an area upon request and give special attention to whatever growth and development issues are needed.

The resource team typically spends a week in the community, working intensively to develop ideas and solutions for improving the community through implementing innovative planning practices and "smart growth" concepts. Team recommendations are presented to local officials at the end of the visit.

To be selected for a resource team visit, a community must demonstrate strong leadership, commitment, and resources to implement smart growth solutions. Recent resource team visits have included Dublin, Dalton/Whitfield County, and the Georgia Highway 400 Corridor. So far, the visits are producing "real world" successes, as communities are following through on ideas generated by the teams.

DCA coordinates the team visits for the GQGP, handling logistics and preparation of the final report. DCA staff meets with local officials about two months prior to each visit to find out what is needed in a particular community. Team members are then recruited in order to achieve an ideal mix of skills for addressing local issues. The typical resource team is composed of ten to twelve volunteers from the various GQGP organizations, the state university system, and public or private sector planning, design or development organizations. Work with a community does not end with the resource team visit. GQGP organizations stay in touch with the communities, offering follow up assistance and encouragement.

Typical issues addressed during a resource team visit include:

- Review of local development regulations for barriers to smart growth;
- Improving walkability in the community;
- Finding opportunities for mixed use and traditional neighborhood development;
- Upgrading the appearance of strip commercial corridors;
- Reducing public incentives that promote sprawl-type development;
- Taking advantage of local amenities to foster balanced economic growth;
- Encouraging revitalization of the downtown and older intown neighborhoods; and
- Finding opportunities for infill development and reuse of under-utilized structures.
- The community's costs for hosting a resource team visit are minimal:
- Team members are not paid, but meals, accommodations, and hospitality for the visit are typically provided by the community. DCA or other GQGP organizations cover all other expenses, including travel costs of team members.
- The community is asked to provide meeting facilities for the visit, including a work space for the team (with phones and copy machine) and locations for a stakeholder input meeting and the final presentation to the public.
- In return, the community receives free consultant services from some of the leading planning and growth management experts in the state. The resource team

recommendations are compiled into a final report, provided to the community approximately six weeks after the visit.

Contact: **Jim Frederick**
Phone: **404-679-3105**
E-Mail: **jfrederi@dca.state.ga.us**

In addition to these above examples, two additional Georgia communities should be mentioned.

3. **Lumpkin County (lumpkincounty.gov)**

The web site for Lumpkin County has plenty of information for citizens regarding planning. In addition to providing the land use code and Future Land Use Map on the web site, there is also a list of current projects. This helps citizens see how plans are implemented through projects. There is also a feedback form, an excellent way for citizens to provide information to the County.

4. **Dawson County (dawsoncounty.org)**

The web site for Dawson County has a flyer about the visioning process the County implemented as part of the planning process. Of particular interest is the Power Point slide show that makes a wide range of information available for all citizens.

