Georgia's Minimum Standards for Local Comprehensive Planning

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Slide 1

New standards for local plans

- Simpler
- More Flexible
- Custom Fit
- Continuity

Why?

Slide 2

Tools provided

- Statistical and demographic data provided by DCA for FREE, upon request
- Supplemental Planning Recommendations
- Quality Community Objectives (QCOs)

Slide 3
The Standards: Overview

- Menu of Plan Elements (Community Chooses)
- Each Element Has Only Brief, Flexible Guidance
- Only Three Elements are Required of All
- Five Elements are Required for Some Communities (depending on local conditions)
- Substitution of Existing Plans/Elements Encouraged
- No Update Required for Some Plan Elements
- Other Elements Updated Every Five Years
- RCs and communities can adapt the rules to fit local needs (e.g. plans may be significantly scaled-down for very small communities)

Planning as Priority-Setting

- Long Term
  - Community Goals
  - Community Work Program
- Immediate
  - Needs & Opportunities

Plans deal with both the immediate and the long term but pull it all together in the Work Program.
Composition of a plan

FROM THE RULES

• Required and Optional Plan Elements. Each community’s comprehensive plan must include the required plan elements specified … Each community is encouraged to go beyond these minimum required elements and supplement its comprehensive plan with other plan elements … to make the overall plan a good fit for the community.

Menu of Plan Elements

REQUIRED for all
COMMUNITY GOALS
NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES
COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM

REQUIRED for some communities
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS
TRANSPORTATION
HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES
NATURAL RESOURCES
GREENSPACE
SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT
COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY
EDUCATION
INTERGOVERNMENT COORDINATION
DISASTER RESILIENCE
PUBLIC SAFETY
INFRASTRUCTURE & FACILITIES
HUMAN SERVICES
RECREATION

OPTIONAL Elements (Examples)

COMMUNITY LAND USE
COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
TRANSPORTATION
HOUSING
ZONING
COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY
EDUCATION
EDUCATION
INTERGOVERNMENT COORDINATION
DISASTER RESILIENCE
PUBLIC SAFETY
INFRASTRUCTURE & FACILITIES
HUMAN SERVICES
RECREATION

Community Involvement a.k.a. Public Participation

FROM THE RULES

• Each element of the comprehensive plan must be prepared with opportunity for involvement and input from stakeholders and the general public, in order to ensure that the plan reflects the full range of community needs and values. The three steps are …

(a) Identifying the Stakeholders…..
(b) Identifying the Participation Techniques…..
(c) Conducting the Participation Program…..
Public Participation: Why is this important?

- Plan should reflect COMMUNITY's vision
- It's the people's plan (as in “We the people…”)
- Public ownership—investment of energy/effort
- Broad input from varied sectors—“buy in”
- Public support of the plan encourages its use by officials

Public Participation

- The submitted plan must document what the community did (ideally in an appendix)
- Report must include (at minimum):
  - list of stakeholders involved
  - steering committee composition
  - number and types of participation events
  - who attended participation events
  - show the participation in developing Community Goals
  - show that a SWOT was used to generate Needs and Opps

Menu of Plan Elements

REQUIRED
- For all
- Community Goals
- Needs & Opportunities
- Community Work Program

OPTIONAL
- Elements (Examples)
- Housing
- Solid Waste Management
- Community Sustainability
- Education
- Infrastructure & Facilities
- Human Services
- Recreation

**Visual Concept by Ozgur Basak, Perkins+Will**

LAND USE
- Natural Resources
- Green Space
- Solid Waste Management
- Infrastructure & Facilities
- Human Services
- Recreation
- Education
- Infrastructure & Facilities
- Human Services
- Recreation
- Education

REQUIRED for some communities
- Community Goals
- Needs & Opportunities
Standards & Examples

- REQUIRED FOR ALL communities
- 1 or a Combination of any of the following:
  - General Vision Statement
  - List of Community Goals
  - Community Policies
  - Character Areas & Defining Narrative

Create this element ONCE potentially drawing from previous plans.

General Vision Statement

FROM THE RULES

- "General Vision Statement... paints a picture of what the community desires to become, providing a complete description of the development patterns to be encouraged within the jurisdiction."

"We want our community to be a happy, friendly place where people want to live, play, and do business."

This is useless to the community.
Slide 16

General Vision Statement

Or, you can provide a much more detailed narrative like this. This comes from Whitfield County.

This goes on for another page and a half…..

Slide 17

Structuring the Comp Plan

Goals – Policies – Activities

- Goals articulate a set of broad, overarching ideals for which the community is working.
- Policies provide ongoing guidance and direction to local officials for making decisions that support achieving the community’s vision/goals.
- Implementation Activities are specific activities the community plans to undertake (e.g. activities, initiatives, programs, ordinances, administrative systems) in order to implement policies and achieve goals.

Slide 18

Structuring the Comp Plan

Goals – Policies – Activities

- Goal 1: Our community will employ innovative tools and processes to attract new businesses that complement our Vision and retain existing ones.
  - Policy 1:A ➔ Collaborate with the development authority….
    - Activity 1:A(1) Increase funding to existing façade restoration program….
  - Policy 1:B ➔ Ensure that review processes do not unnecessarily hamper (re)development.
    - Activity 1:B(1) Develop a simple process….
    - Activity 1:B(2) Revise our zoning ordinance to provide an “expedited review”….
List of Community Goals

FROM THE RULES
• List of Community Goals. Include a listing of the goals the community seeks to achieve.

Examples of Community Goals (DCA's QCOs)

- Economic Prosperity: ...development or expansion of businesses and industries that are suitable for the community.
- Resource Management: ...the efficient use of natural resources and ...protected environmentally sensitive areas.
- Efficient Land Use: ...maximize the use of existing infrastructure ...minimize the ...conversion of undeveloped land.
- Local Preparedness: ...put in place the prerequisites for the type of future the community seeks to achieve.
- Sense of Place: ...protect and enhance our community’s unique qualities.
- Regional Cooperation: ...cooperate with neighboring jurisdictions to address shared needs.
- Housing Options: ...provide an adequate range of safe, affordable, inclusive, and resource-efficient housing ...
- Transportation Options: ...address the transportation needs, challenges and opportunities of all ...,
- Educational Opportunities: ...make educational and training opportunities readily available ...
- Community Health: ...ensure that all community residents...have access to critical goods and services...

Using the QCOs as a Resource for Community Goals

Economic Prosperity: Encourage development or expansion of businesses and industries that are suitable for the community. Factors to consider when determining suitability include job skills required; long-term sustainability; linkages to other economic activities in the region; impact on the resources of the area; or prospects for creating job opportunities that meet the needs of a diverse local workforce.

Local Preparedness: Identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of future community seeks to achieve. These prerequisites might include infrastructure (roads, water, sewer), leadership and staff capable of responding to opportunities and managing new challenges, or undertaking an all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness and response.
Using the QCOs as a Resource for Community Goals

Economic Prosperity: Encourage development or expansion of businesses and industries that are suitable for the community. Factors to consider when determining suitability include job skills required; long-term sustainability; linkages to other economic activities in the region; impact on the resources of the area; or prospects for creating job opportunities that meet the needs of a diverse local workforce.

Local Preparedness: Identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of future the community seeks to achieve. These prerequisites might include infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) to support or direct new growth; ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired; leadership and staff capable of responding to opportunities and managing new challenges; or undertaking an all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness and response.

Community Policies

FROM THE RULES
- Community Policies. ...provide ongoing guidance and direction to local government officials for making decisions consistent with achieving the Community Goals.

Community Policies: Good Examples

- Land Use
  - Review and update our comprehensive plan on a regular basis....
  - Decisions on new development will contribute to, not take away from, our community’s character and sense of place
  - Use land efficiently to avoid the cost and problems associated with urban sprawl
  - Gateways and corridors will provide a “sense of place” for our community
  - Creation of recreation facilities and set-aside of greenspace are important
  - Commit to redeveloping and enhancing existing commercial and industrial areas within our community in preference to new development....
Character Areas

FROM THE RULES

"Character Area" means a specific geographic area or district within the community that:

- has unique or special characteristics to be preserved or enhanced.
- has potential to evolve into a unique area with more intentional guidance of future development through comprehensive planning and implementation; or
- requires special attention due to unique development issues.

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 Goals.

The Character Area Map

FROM THE RULES

- Character Areas Map and Defining Narrative. Identify and map the boundaries of existing or potential character areas (see definition in Chapter 110-1.2-1.05) covering the entire community, including existing community sub-areas, districts, or neighborhoods. Community improvement districts, tax allocation districts, Livable Centers Initiative planning areas, designated redevelopment areas and the like are good candidates for delineation as character areas.

IMPORTANT BITS TO REMEMBER

- It's a map—apply basic, cartographic, common sense
  - No blank spots,
  - Map & Legend should match,
  - Map and Text (Defining Narrative) should match.
  - At a high enough resolution to be easily read, not blurry
  *A properly oriented North-arrow is always handy

- A high-quality map can do more than simply illustrate boundaries...
Slide 28

TYBEE ISLAND

Slide 29

Town of Braselton

Slide 30

TOWN OF BRASELTON
Character Area Defining Narrative

**IMPORTANT BITS TO REMEMBER**
- Detailed discussion of EACH character area presented on the map
- Required to Include
  - Basic description with text and illustrations/photos/etc.
  - Allowable land uses
  - Implementation measures
**Slide 34**

Needs and Opportunities

- Use previous “Issues/Needs & Opportunities”, current statistical and demographic data, and the QCOs as starting points.

**Slide 35**

Needs and Opportunities

**FROM THE RULES:** Needs and Opportunities are required for all local governments

- Updates required every five years.
- Locally agreed upon list of Needs and Opportunities the community intends to address. …
- The list must be developed by involving community stakeholders in carrying out a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) or similar analysis of the community.

**Slide 36**

Stakeholder Involvement Process

**SWOT**

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats

From the community’s point of view! Involve the citizen and organizations that make up your community.
**Slide 37**

**Needs and Opportunities**

**IMPORTANT BITS TO REMEMBER**
- Should be comprehensive
- A simple list is totally acceptable—but you can be creative
- It should make sense for the community
- NOT a “to-do” list (that comes later)

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**Slide 38**

**Needs and Opportunities**

**Good Example**

**Good Example (City of Covington)**

- **From the City of Covington**

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**Slide 39**

**Needs and Opportunities**

**Other Ideas…**

- Identify observed trends or events then explain the specific needs and opportunities that may result. For example:

  **TREND**
  - Eleven percent increase in retired population since the last census.

  **NEEDS**
  - Increased access to medical services
  - Greater variety in senior-oriented recreational activities

  **OPPORTUNITIES**
  - Expanded volunteer base for local nonprofits
  - More potential daytime “neighborhood watch” members
Standards and Examples

• REQUIRED FOR ALL communities
• Update EVERY 5 YEARS with in-depth community involvement.

Community Work Program: Report of Accomplishments

IMPORTANT BITS TO REMEMBER
• Report on the status of all the projects that were included on the last work program approved by DCA
• This is REALLY simple. Don’t over-think it.
• It looks just like an STWP. Addition of columns for “Completed”, “In-Progress”, “Postponed”, “Not Accomplished/Cancelled” Try to use the standard terms:

FROM THE RULES
Community Work Program. (Required for all local governments, updates required every five years.) ...the specific activities the community plans to undertake during the next five years ...This includes any activities, initiatives, programs, ordinances, administrative systems... to be put in place to implement the plan... The Community work program must include....
Community Work Program

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

IMPORTANT BITS TO REMEMBER

- This is simple. There's a basic template—just fill in ALL the blanks.
- This is the place for specific projects/activities. Avoid “projects” that begin with words like “encourage,” “promote” and “consider.”
- Focus both on the projects that will incrementally move you toward your vision over the long-term— AND — the projects that are necessary to meet the community’s immediate needs.
- No clear responsible party, cost estimate, funding source, and/or start and end dates → Probably a policy statement or a non-specific project.

**From the City of Union City**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Project</th>
<th>Estimated Cost</th>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Funding Source</th>
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**Slide 46**

**Menu of Plan Elements**

- **REQUIRED for all:** Community Goals, Needs & Opportunities, Community Work Program
- **REQUIRED for some communities:** Land Use, Economic Development, Transportation, Housing
- **OPTIONAL elements:** Capital Improvements, Historic & Cultural Resources, Natural Resources, Solid Waste Management, Education, Transportation

**Standards & Examples**

- **REQUIRED for some communities:** Capital Improvements, Economic Development, Land Use

**Standards and Examples**

- **REQUIRED for some communities:** Capital Improvements, Economic Development, Transportation, Housing

- **REQUIRED FOR SOME:** communities charging impact fees

- **Updates required annually. SEPARATE RULES provide more detailed guidance.**
Standards and Examples

• REQUIRED FOR SOME: communities with zoning and similar development regs
• Update every 5 years
• Options:
  • Traditional Land Use Map, and/or
  • Character Area Map & Defining Narrative
  (also satisfies requirement for Community Goals element)

Land-Use Map & Narrative

IMPORTANT BITS TO REMEMBER
- No blank spots—entire community covered
- Parcel-specific, unlike a character area map
- Legend and map match!!!!
- Provide the map at a useful resolution—not blurry
- Use insets to provide better detail in dense areas
- A properly oriented North Arrow always helps
- Narrative simply explains what each land-use category is

Land-Use Map: Good Example

**From the City of Statesboro**
Standards and Examples

**REQUIRED** for some communities

- Capital Improvements Element
- Land Use
- Economic Development
- Transportation
- Housing

Economic Development Element

Pull High-Priority items from stand-alone Economic Development Plan into the Comprehensive Plan.

Goals & Policies

- From the NWGRC CEDS

Needs & Opportunities

- From the NWGRC CEDS
Economic Development Element

Pull High-Priority items from stand-alone Economic Development Plan into the Comprehensive Plan.

Specific Projects

Transportation Element

Pull High-Priority items from stand-alone Regional Transportation Plan into the Comprehensive Plan.

Goals & Policies

Specific Projects
Standards & Examples

- HOUSING ELEMENT

REQUIRED for HUD Entitlement communities

Standards & Examples

REQUIRED for qualifying communities

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS ELEMENT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

LAND USE

TRANSPORTATION

HOUSING ELEMENT

Menu of Plan Elements

REQUIRED:

- COMMUNITY
- NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES
- COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM

REQUIRED for some communities:

- HOUSING

OPTIONAL:

- HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES
- TARGET AREAS
- NATURAL RESOURCES
- GREENSPACE
- SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT
- COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY
- EDUCATION INTER-GOVERNMENT COORDINATION
- DISASTER RESILIENCE
- PUBLIC SAFETY
- INFRASTRUCTURE & FACILITIES
- HUMAN SERVICES
- RECREATION

Slide 59

Housing

Pull High-Priority items from stand-alone Local Consolidated Plan into the Comprehensive Plan.

Goals, Policies, Specific Projects

**From the City of Valdosta Consolidated Plan

Slide 60

Menu of Plan Elements
Optional Elements

- Any of the 5 “Required for Some” elements can be used as “Optional” elements for other communities.
- You can take the “Required for Some” approach with any other free-standing plans you may have: Greenspace Plans, Rec Plans, Hazard Mitigation Plans, LCIs, Water/Sewer Plans, etc.
- If you don’t have a free-standing, special purpose plan, this might be a good segue into that, or you might be able to simply wrap it into the comp planning process by just focusing very closely on it during plan development.

Submitting the Plan

- Before Approval: Certification Letter
  - Public Hearings were Conducted as Required by Law
  - Regional Water Plan was Consulted
  - “Part 5” Environmental Planning Criteria were Reviewed
- After Approval: Adoption Resolution
  - Proves the plan was officially adopted by the local government.
  - Legally grounds the plan and makes it the official foundation for future development decisions.