

PlanFirst Program Application - May 15, 2015

Introduction: The Department of Community Affairs' PlanFirst Program rewards local governments that clearly demonstrate success with implementing their local comprehensive plan. To apply for PlanFirst designation, a local government must have Qualified Local Government certification and be current on required reporting to DCA. (To check status of both, please visit <http://www.georgiaplanning.com/planners/planreview/default.asp>).

A multi-agency review panel will evaluate a number of indicators of community success with plan implementation to select communities for this designation. All of these indicators are equally important, but size of the community is taken into consideration in the evaluation so that communities of various sizes are equally competitive for PlanFirst designation.

Instructions: Please answer all the following questions thoroughly, attaching additional pages where necessary, so that the reviewers have sufficient information to measure the success of your comprehensive plan implementation. Supporting documents might include: news articles, legal ads, lists of attendees, letters of support or other evidence of local involvement and commitment to successful plan implementation activities in your community. *Total application length, including supporting information and support letters, must not exceed 20 pages. Text areas will expand as needed.*

Applicant government	City of Lula, Georgia
Mailing address	PO Box 99, Lula, GA 30554
Telephone	770.869.3801
Email	bergins@windstream.net
Contact person; title	Dennis Bergin, City Manager
Application prepared by	Dennis Bergin and Adam Hazell, GMRC

I, the undersigned authorized representative of the applicant, certify that to the best of my knowledge the information in this application is true and correct.

Name of authorized official signing; title	
Date	
Signature	

PRE-REQUISITES

A. (1) We have a good track record of maintaining our Qualified Local Government status **and** submitting required reports to DCA, including the current Report of Local Government Finances. (To check status, please visit <http://www.georgiaplanning.com/planners/planreview/default.asp>).

QLG status:	<u>yes</u>	no
Local government reports:	<u>yes</u>	no

A. (2) We have attained the Minimum Standard for performance as called for in our regional commission's regional comprehensive plan.

<u>yes</u>	no
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For each of the following indicators, fully explain how your community addresses this indicator; identifying specific examples and resulting local successes. (Each indicator will be scored 1, 3 or 5 points, except indicators j. and t. which may score up to 10 points.) Add exhibits and examples as needed to tell your story.

INDICATOR: GOALS

B. The Goals (or Vision) section of our comprehensive plan is supported by the community and its leadership.

The City of Lula completed a full update of its comprehensive plan in 2013, developed in accordance with the latest standards set forth by the Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The final Vision, Goals and related objectives outlined within the resulting document were developed as part of the full planning process, complete with stakeholder input, and fully vetted and approved, unanimously, by the City Council. The themes represented within the document illustrate that Lula is first a community for and about its residents, striving to be a safe and attractive hometown seeking economic growth and to become a stronger part of growing northeastern Hall County. The City will work with Hall County as it updates its own comprehensive plan to ensure cooperative plans.

The City is now working to realize this vision in pursuit of downtown revitalization, strengthening the city's housing market, and developing improved utility services in accordance with the objectives identified throughout the plan. This included coming to agreements with recent SPLOST negotiations and affirming the City's role as a wastewater service provider within the area.

C. The Goals are both ambitious and achievable for the community.

The Vision and goals established by the City of Lula 2013 Comprehensive Plan are considered very straight forward, feasible and in line with the desires of the community. The *ambition* of Lula's planning processes can be seen in the pursuit of 3 full phases of a downtown streetscape project and Veteran's Park, utility improvements that will allow the City to serve a significant portion of the Highway 365 corridor, and the exploration of development regulations that will

hone the character of the community apart as north Hall grows. Yet the objectives and projects assumed by the City are also quite *achievable*, with the City only taking on those items that are plausible based on local budgets and known supporting resources. Lula has been successful in grant awards the past decade for several projects while retaining long-term ambition for projects that fall outside current means, as evidenced by the rescheduling of the streetscape projects based on GDOT funding. Over \$5,000,000 worth of projects have been completed since 2000, and more than \$8,000,000 worth of capital improvement projects remain scheduled from the last plan update. These showcase Lula's proactive thinking considering the community's relatively small size (2013 pop. estimate of 2,837) and the generally reserved politics of rural Georgia.

The Future Development Strategy and recommended character areas outlined for Lula identify areas targeted for change, priorities for enhancing existing neighborhoods and ways to maintain compatibility with surrounding agricultural settings. These strategies were then aligned with realistic implementation measures related to the City's land use management policies, capital improvement planning and other efforts, all of which were eventually selected based on the ability of the City to accomplish these tasks.

Similarly, the implementation measures outlined in response to the issues and opportunities were kept to plausible projects that can be done by the City or in cooperation with related partner organizations (such as the County, the GMRC, etc). To the best extent possible, the final work program outlined for the next 5 years consists of viable and measurable projects that will advance the City toward the stated vision of a stronger, healthier hometown.

D. The Goals steer local decision-making on a continuous basis.

Every year the City goes through a budgeting and planning process to outline priorities for the fiscal year. This process includes a now annual retreat for the City Council to address their objectives and issues, including a review of those within the Comprehensive Plan. During this time the City will reference the Short-Term Work Program and more from the comprehensive plan and include these items in the discussion of assignments and tasks to be undertaken. Any projects not addressed in their programmed year will be moved forward and reconsidered the following year. The City also derives its list of projects for the Hall and Banks County SPLOST votes based in part on the objectives within the comprehensive plan, most recently including utility improvements and the search for land for an industrial park.

E. Consistent progress is being made at achieving the Goals.

The City of Lula completed a Partial Plan Update in 2009, which identified 19 projects for consideration in the resulting work program. The report of Accomplishments included within the 2013 Comprehensive Plan update showed that of those 19 projects 11 (58%) were completed, 1 was ongoing and the remaining 7 were postponed. Of the items postponed 1 was due to the failure of the regional TSPLOST and two were related to impact fees for which consideration was delayed by the recession. All 7 items remain within the new work program.

Previous editions of the City's work programs show a strong track record of completing tasks.

Major accomplishments include:

- 1.) Lula Veteran Park, inception 2007, strong community support & involvement, constructed 2009 \$275,000 investment.
- 2.) Major Jenrette Park inceptions 2009, strong community involvement, constructed 2010 \$30,000 investment.
- 3.) Streetscape Development, inception 2004, strong community involvement, currently in the 3rd phase of development, \$495,000 investment.
- 4.) Wellness Park, inception 2013, strong community support, implementation 2014, \$30,000.
- 5.) New Water Reclamation Facility, inception 2004, strong community support, EPD Support joint government, Chamber support involvement, EDC support, constructed 2011, 12 million dollar investment.
- 6.) Adoption of new development regulations
- 7.) Maintaining service delivery agreements with both Hall and Banks Counties, and maintaining good relationships with the Chambers of Commerce and Development Authorities from both counties.

INDICATOR: LEADERSHIP

F. We have effective planning staff or another suitable arrangement for handling community planning matters.

With less than 3,000 people the City of Lula is a small community with limited means for full time staff. Day-to-day responsibilities are handled by the City Manager and the administrative staff, including the small number of permit applications. The City manager carries more than 2 decades of experience and has attended training workshops from multiple organizations (Carl Vinson Institute, Georgia Municipal Association) that advise principles and best practices regarding land use management and community development.

In the event of larger projects or more intensive development proposals the City works with staff from Hall or Banks County and/or the GMRC as needed. As the City grows there will be considerations made for additional staff based on resources and work load. Among the City's supporting partners:

- GMRC – Grant writing, local plan implementation monitoring, assistance with streetscape design and development regulations, historic preservation
- GHMPO – Transportation planning
- Hall County CoC, Hall County Dev. Authority, Banks County Dev. Authority – Economic Development
- Hall County Community Development, Banks County Tax Assessor – GIS services
- Hall County – Emergency services

The City Manager also has access to human resource assistance through the GMRC, regular access to the GMRC City/County Managers forums. The City has also helped maintain Service Delivery Agreements with both Counties that support Lula's ambitions for growth and the provision of water and sewer for the area.

G. We have an active Planning Committee or similar body to steer local planning decisions.

The City of Lula uses an appointed Planning Committee that meets monthly as needed to review development projects and evaluate land use issues. They review proposals for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and submit their findings to the City Council for final review and approval. There are 3 committee members for the community of <3,000 people, and they are appointed for 2 year cycles by the City Council. Any Planning Committee member not versed in planning principles or Georgia development law is sent for instruction or provided training through the GMRC or other partners.

The Planning Committee was directly involved in the development of the comprehensive plan and are instructed to be familiar with its content and participate in monitoring the implementation. Their input is requested before the annual retreat regarding objectives and projects for the coming year.

H. We have a regular local plan effectiveness evaluation process (such as annual planning retreats of elected leadership).

Every year the City goes through a budgeting and planning process to outline priorities for the fiscal year. This process includes a now annual retreat for the City Council to address their objectives and issues, including a review of those within the Comprehensive Plan. During this time the City will reference the Short-Term Work Program and more from the comprehensive plan and include these items in the discussion of assignments and tasks to be undertaken. Any projects not addressed in their programmed year will be moved forward and reconsidered the following year. The City also derives its list of projects for the Hall and Banks County SPLOST votes based in part on the objectives within the comprehensive plan, most recently including utility improvements and the search for land for an industrial park.

In addition, the City consults with the GMRC during each required plan update process to review and advise on progress with plan implementation. The City has set the goal of improving the project completion rate with each successive plan update with the hopes of someday achieving 90%.

I. All local officials (both elected and appointed) involved in local planning processes have recently attended training in how to use the plan effectively. Please indicate what trainings and the date(s) attended.

City Council members attend training as required/advised by the State and the Georgia Municipal Association, including sessions on comprehensive planning law and practice. Planning Committee members are given basic instruction in the practice of implementing the comprehensive plan and applying land use management policies. Where possible Planning Committee members are advised to attend workshops providing more detailed instruction.

J. Provide up to ten of your best recent examples where the plan steered a key local decision, with pertinent plan references (attach additional sheets as needed).

The following projects were listed within past/current comprehensive plans for the City, each targeted to address an issue or objective identified during the planning process.

- 1.) Lula Veteran Park, inception 2007, strong community support & involvement, constructed 2009 \$275,000 investment. The City lacked a focal, public space for events and around which the community could rally.
- 2.) Major Jenrette Park inceptions 2009, strong community involvement, constructed 2010 \$30,000 investment.
- 3.) Streetscape Development, inception 2004, strong community involvement, currently in the 3rd phase of development, \$495,000 investment. This is the result of public desire to retain the community's small town character.
- 4.) Wellness Park, inception 2013, strong community support, implementation 2014, \$30,000. The City has worked to expand recreation opportunities and social gathering points for area residents.
- 5.) New Water Reclamation Facility, inception 2004, strong community support, EPD Support joint government, Chamber support involvement, EDC support, constructed 2011, 12 million dollar investment.
- 6.) Adoption of new development regulations
- 7.) Maintaining service delivery agreements with both Hall and Banks Counties, and maintaining good relationships with the Chambers of Commerce and Development Authorities from both counties.

INDICATOR: PARTICIPATION

K. Our comprehensive plan was prepared with multiple community input opportunities.

The planning process for the 2013 plan update was oriented around Lula's modest size and rural nature (<3,000 people). Over the course of several months public forums included:

- 3 public hearings incorporated into traditional City Council meetings, whereby citizens were updated on the plan process and invited to comment or ask questions;
- 1 stand-alone workshop conducted by GMRC staff inviting the public to review draft plan materials and to ratify the vision and general objectives;
- A series of random field interviews conducted throughout the city on two different occasions. For these surveys GMRC staff directly interviewed 21 different people in shops, at the park and other public places to gauge their concerns, ambitions and priorities for Lula and the region.

In addition, it was announced that the GMRC would welcome input and questions at any time during the process. Promotion for the events and the planning process as a whole included flyers displayed around town, announcements on web sites and the City's Facebook account, as well as the use of local press.

The results of the public input process emphasized the desire to retain a small-town atmosphere and focus on local families and businesses. However, in recognition that growth and development was coming into the region it was also suggested that Lula should seek to serve

as the social and commercial hub of northeastern Hall County. Coordination of utilities was considered vital, as was maintaining the safe access along Highway 365, as reflected in the goals and priorities identified in the plan.

L. The community input received during plan preparation influenced the content of the plan.

The public input process identified 5 prominent themes or issues that contributed to the creation of Lula’s vision and general objectives.

Comment	Plan Products
Sense of hometown; Keep small-town character (18 comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st part of Vision statement (“A <i>quality, safe and affordable hometown where all residents can live, work and play</i>”) • Character areas for downtown • Streetscape efforts
Economic development of Hwy. 365 (15 x)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2nd part of Vision statement (“A <i>community fostering economic growth for the greater area</i>”) • Hwy 365 Character areas, Utility improvements in work program • Policy to sustain partnership with local Chambers and Dev. Authorities. • STWP item to find land for industrial park.
Maintain quality services; Work with Counties (8 x)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies to maintain SDA’s with Counties, work with GHMPO on transportation plans • Policy to work with Hall County on plans for Lula fire station
Concern for in-town traffic and pedestrian safety; Concern about rail line through downtown (6 x)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STWP item for sidewalk survey and Safe routes to School plan • STWP for downtown parking study • STWP item for report on long-term plans for the railroad • STWP item for Hwy 365 development study (to include traffic assessment)
Keep taxes/costs low (5 x)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General policy to fund capital projects through grants and aid • STWP item to explore impact fees • Policies to maintain SDA’s with Counties, work with GHMPO on transportation plans • Policy to work with Hall County on plans for Lula fire station

As discussed above, the Vision, goals and final issues and opportunities presented within the 2013 Comprehensive Plan reflect the near-term desires and ambitions of Lula residents and stakeholders consulted during the plan development process. Likewise the implementation

measures presented in the work program and the long-term policies and objectives respond directly to the issues and opportunities within the document, as approved by DCA.

M. Our steering committee that guided development of the plan included local leaders and elected officials.

The City's 3-member Planning Committee served as the steering committee for the planning process, reviewing draft material and providing comment and direction as needed. Their regular involvement in the City's general development was considered crucial to understanding the context of the rural-but-growing community. The City Council was also regularly appraised of the progress and participated directly through 3 of their regular meetings that also featured public comment opportunities on the plan update.

As part of the planning process other key stakeholders were also identified and contacted directly by GMRC staff for their input. This included City staff, representatives from local businesses such as MarJac and United Community Bank, as well as representatives from the elementary school and area churches. Throughout the process everyone was also instructed that they could comment or send questions about the planning process to the GMRC at any time.

(Need list of Planning Committee members at the time)

N. We have an active, ongoing, outreach process for soliciting input on planning matters from a broad spectrum of the community, including non-traditional populations, and the resulting input is listened to by community leaders.

Every year the City goes through a budgeting and planning process to outline priorities for the fiscal year. This process includes a now annual retreat for the City Council to address their objectives and issues, including a review of those within the Comprehensive Plan. As part of this process the City communicates with and invites comments from the general public, Hall and Banks Counties, and the local Chambers of Commerce and Development Authorities. The City uses the web and its Facebook page to promote their agenda and solicit input on key issues and opportunities, then provides for review their draft work programs and objectives for the year before official adoption.

In addition to this annual planning process, the City of Lula routinely invites all general commentary and questions about the state of the community during their Planning Committee and City Council meetings. As a smaller town in what for now remains rural Georgia, the City Hall has long maintained a strong open-door policy that encourages citizen involvement and is greatly appreciated by area residents.

The City also is part of the Gainesville-Hall County Metropolitan Planning Organization for the purposes of transportation planning, which provides an additional layer of community involvement and partnership with neighboring communities.

O. We have active advocates for plan implementation (such as activist citizens, organizations or neighborhood groups) that are listened to by community leaders.

The Planning Committee members are the primary advocates for the City's comprehensive plan. They serve as the formal advisers on all development activity with regards to compliance with the plan and progress toward achieving plan objectives. Their work, in conjunction with the

City staff, ensures the action items and policies outlined within the plan are put into practice. The annual retreat for the City Council then serves as a monitoring point toward the City's performance in implementing the plan, in conjunction with the local plan monitoring meetings carried out through the GMRC.

There are no independent organizations within Lula serving as plan advocates, however the City and its staff work to engage the public and local businesses, soliciting their input on all community development matters. There are general activist groups within Hall County that support measures for environmental protection (Keep Hall Beautiful, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper), advocate for improved education standards and more. Input from such organizations is considered welcome at any time.

INDICATOR: IMPLEMENTATION

P. The Work Program section of our comprehensive plan consists primarily of specific action items that make it clear exactly what we intend to do to implement the plan.

The City of Lula completed a Partial Plan Update in 2009, which identified 19 projects for consideration in the resulting work program. The report of Accomplishments included within the 2013 Comprehensive Plan update showed that of those 19 projects 11 (58%) were completed, 1 was ongoing and the remaining 7 were postponed. Of the items postponed 1 was due to the failure of the regional TSPLOST and two were related to impact fees for which consideration was delayed by the recession. All 7 items remain within the new work program.

Current STWP action items have all been defined as singular projects with very specific time frames.

4 Items are scheduled capital improvements

- Construction of Phase 2 New Waste Treatment Facility and main trunk line
- Expansion of Phase 3 Main Sewer Trunk Lines
- Phase III TE Streetscape project
- Phase II TE Streetscape project

2 projects involving adoption of new policies

- Adoption of Historic Preservation ordinances
- Adoption of Ordinance and/or regulation of infill development encouraging the historic component of Historic Downtown

4 studies generating information for future plans or projects

- Inventory septic systems
- Develop sidewalk/ Safe Routes to School master plan
- Neighborhood/ Housing assessment
- Parks and recreation study

12 projects involving studies to assess the potential for new policies or development ideas (samples listed)

- Consideration of Impact fees
- Survey citizens re; businesses desired in the city
- Study identifying land for future development and infill

- Pursue and consider a tree ordinance
- Hwy 365/ SR52 development strategy
- Pursue land for an Industrial Park

Q. Our Work Program action items clearly address local needs or goals identified in the plan

As discussed for Question “L,” the City’s Vision Statement, goals and objectives included within the comprehensive plan all relate to the comments and input received from the planning process. The Vision Statement captures the simple ideals and values desired most by area residents and the goals were defined based on how best to achieve that vision within the most practical manner possible for a smaller city in rural Georgia.

Further, pages 28-30 of the Community Agenda feature a matrix that lists the identified Issues and Opportunities and their corresponding recommended mitigation measures or action items. Pages 9-26 features the City’s character areas complete with a listing of implementation measures required to sustain/achieve the development patterns desired for each. All of the action items found within the Short-Term Work Program can be directly traced back to these specific implementation measures or mitigation actions listed within the Recommended Character Areas or Issues and Opportunities section of the Comprehensive Plan.

R. We have a good track record of accomplishing most of the action items included in past plan Work Programs.

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Previous editions of the City’s work programs show a strong track record of completing tasks.

S. Our local capital budget is consistent with, and is designed to implement, the comprehensive plan.

The City has recently begun using a formal capital improvements plan to schedule and budget major projects and investments for the community. This is CI plan is derived from the City’s annual retreat and budgeting process, which is in part using the comprehensive plan as guidance.

Every year the City goes through a budgeting and planning process to outline priorities for the fiscal year. This process includes a now annual retreat for the City Council to address their objectives and issues, including a review of those within the Comprehensive Plan. During this time the City will reference the Short-Term Work Program and more from the comprehensive plan and include these items in the discussion of assignments and tasks to be undertaken. Any projects not addressed in their programmed year will be moved forward and reconsidered the following year. The City also derives its list of projects for the Hall and Banks County SPLOST votes based in part on the objectives within the comprehensive plan, most recently including utility improvements and the search for land for an industrial park.

Because all the Work Program items are chosen based on their feasibility, most items accomplished and proposed thus far have been done within the normal means of the City's operating budget. Some measures are accomplished using SPLOST funds while others will require outside funding assistance, however the bulk of action items involve amending policy or prescribing specific staff actions that can be achieved within normal means.

T. Provide up to ten of your best recent examples of important projects carried out as a result of the plan, with the specific plan references (attach additional sheets as needed).

Utility expansion and improvement

This issue has been crucial to the City since the 2004 Plan. Over the past several years the City has worked hard to upgrade water and sewer service for residents and businesses in and around Lula. This includes various phases and projects that featured as 7 different line items within the City's past two Short-Term Work Programs that have been completed. Many of these projects were funded in part due to outside funding assistance achieved through the designation of the project within the Comprehensive Plan. Highlights include a new 300k gallon elevated water tank and construction of a new water reclamation facility and related trunk line that benefitted from \$8.6M in federal assistance and more than \$12 million dollars invested overall.

Veterans Park

A line item in the 2004 Plan's work program, this park was finally realized in 2009 for \$275,000. As part of the vision for improving downtown, previous versions of the Comprehensive Plan called for development of a new park. The new veterans Park was eventually realized 4 years ago with the aid of a Transportation Enhancement grant, completing a vision identified as part of past planning procedures for the City.



Downtown Streetscape Improvements

Originally envisioned in 2004 and a major part of previous plan, currently in the 3rd phase of development with more \$495,000 invested. Additionally, previous iterations of the Lula Comprehensive Plan identified several opportunities to enhance the historic downtown district. Accomplished as several small projects (also identified within the STWP), the City updated historical records of the properties, received two presentations providing development guidelines and improvement ideas, and eventually completed phase one of the streetscape plan. Funding assistance for Phases 2 and 3 have also been secured.

Project: MAINTENANCE BLOCK FACADE DESIGN
Town: LULA
Client: VARIOUS

Drawn by: S. ARNOLD
Date: 08-22-05
Scale: N.T.S.
Sheet: 1 OF 1

RECOMMENDATIONS:

While the building is eligible for the historic landmark status of Lula, the recommendations that the facade should be preserved and restored so that the building's historic character is maintained. The recommendations are also subject to the historic preservation commission's review. This will be important to ensure that the building is restored in a manner that is consistent with the historic preservation guidelines. An architectural replacement for the building is not recommended. An architectural replacement for the building is not recommended.

REMARK A

Remove all exterior siding on the 2nd story of the building. The exterior siding on the 2nd story of the building is in poor condition and should be removed. The exterior siding on the 2nd story of the building is in poor condition and should be removed.

REMARK B

Remove all exterior siding on the 1st story of the building. The exterior siding on the 1st story of the building is in poor condition and should be removed. The exterior siding on the 1st story of the building is in poor condition and should be removed.

REMARK C

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REMARK E

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Adoption of zoning ordinance

Both of the past two Plan updates have asked for continuing additions and improvements to the City's development policies in response to burgeoning growth pressures. Previous land use management measures for the City were considered out of date and insufficient for achieving the vision for the community. The City developed and adopted new regulations that reflect modern demands and will better coordinate infill with existing neighborhoods and the City's historic downtown.

Coordination with Hall and Banks Counties

An ongoing feature of the past three Plans for Lula, the information collected during the planning processes helps the City in coordinating improvement projects and utility service areas with both Hall and Banks Counties. This is vital in ensuring the city is protected against incompatible development and has the opportunity to grow and flourish the way residents desire.

Please attach additional sheets as needed to tell your story. Application should not exceed 20 pages. Application may be electronically transmitted or printed, scanned and emailed to adriane.wood@dca.ga.gov . For more information, contact Adriane Wood.



Georgia Department of
Community Affairs

PLANFIRST

PlanFirst Program Application - May 15, 2015

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Applicant government	City of Lula, Georgia
Mailing address	PO Box 99, Lula, GA 30554
Telephone	770.869.3801
Email	bergins@windstream.net
Contact person; title	Dennis Bergin, City Manager
Application prepared by	Dennis Bergin and Adam Hazell, GMRC
I, the undersigned authorized representative of the applicant, certify that to the best of my knowledge the information in this application is true and correct.	
Name of authorized official signing; title	DENNIS BERGIN
Date	MAY 14, 2015
Signature	