

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS  
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SERIES

# WHY DO WE PLAN?

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GUIDEBOOK FOR CITIZENS  
AND LOCAL PLANNERS

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# HOW TO USE THIS SERIES

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## WHO SHOULD USE THIS?

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Anyone involved in preparing, implementing, or using comprehensive plans in Georgia can benefit from this guidebook. However, the guidebook is designed to be most useful to citizen planners, local government staff and officials with little specific training in comprehensive planning, and planners in small cities and towns or rural counties. Larger local governments will more likely have several professional planners to provide planning services that meet local needs for administering programs on a daily basis, conducting studies, and preparing comprehensive plans. It is the first situation where more help is needed. Many of Georgia's local governments are small and depend on a city or county clerk, city or county manager, building official, or citizen volunteers to prepare comprehensive plans.

In these smaller local governments, the staff person responsible for the comprehensive plan faces two situations that make it very difficult to meet planning needs. First, the staff person is typically "multi-purpose," providing a wide variety of local government services, with the result that preparing a plan is just one of many tasks to perform. In larger jurisdictions, there may be many specially trained staff members assigned to provide this service. Second is the fact that the "multi-purpose" staff person most likely does not have specific training in the planning process, particularly ways to include citizens in preparing an effective plan.

Many smaller local governments depend on the citizen planners to provide comprehensive planning services. Members of a planning commission are often providing many of the planning services that staff planners provide in larger jurisdictions. Similar to the situation that the small jurisdiction staff person faces, the citizen planner may have little specific training in the planning process.

Elected officials will benefit because they deal with planning issues when adopting the comprehensive plan in the first place, amending the comprehensive plan, and implementing the plan through day-to-day decisions. As pointed out throughout this guidebook, effective planning must include the citizens of the community in the planning process. This guidebook will help elected officials determine the best way to include their citizens in making a great community through planning.

Finally, smaller jurisdictions often rely on consultants or the Regional Development Center for planning services and the preparation of comprehensive plans. Even so, the elected officials, local staff, and citizen planners must know what makes a comprehensive plan effective, how to involve citizens in the process, and what tools and techniques are available for the planning process.

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## WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION IS PRESENTED?

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*Why Do We Plan?* covers basic topics about planning. It provides an overview of planning, what it is, and why we do it. This part explains the importance of a “plan to plan,” or development of a work program to decide what will be included in the local planning process and who will do the work. The planning process itself is explained to help the reader understand it before embarking on a planning program. It is essential that the planning process lead to a comprehensive plan that is effective. The criteria of an effective plan are described, providing further guidance on the development of a work program.



# WHY DO WE PLAN?

Among material resources, the greatest, unquestionably, is the land. Study how a society uses its land, and you can come to pretty reliable conclusions as to what its future will be.

*E.F. Schumacher*

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## WHAT IS PLANNING?

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Planning for land use and the future growth and development is an important activity for local governments. This section describes the ways that planning is a benefit to the community, along with some key information to consider before beginning the planning process.

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### PLANNING IS A BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY

One of the fundamental responsibilities of local government is planning and the preparation of plans. Planning is the word we use to describe how a community shapes and guides growth and development. Some people call this process “city planning,” “urban planning,” or sometimes “land use planning.” The results of planning are contained in documents we call “comprehensive plans” or “growth management plans.”

Effective planning ensures that future development will occur where, when, and how the community and local government wants. There are several important benefits to the entire community that result from the planning process:

- Quality of life is maintained and improved.
- There is a vision, clearly stated and shared by all, that describes the future of the community.
- Private property rights are protected.
- Economic development is encouraged and supported.
- There is more certainty about where development will occur, what it will be like, when it will happen, and how the costs of development will be met.

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## PLANNING IS BOTH “ART” AND “SCIENCE.”

Planning may be considered “science” because of our reliance on technical data, and the use of scientific information in such fields as environmental sciences, demography, and geography. We rely on technical data regarding transportation systems, utility systems, and even human behavior. Forecasts describe expected future conditions based on past trends and conditions.

On the other hand, planning may be considered “art” as we focus on the design of cities, neighborhoods, and buildings. Citizens gather to think about and envision the possible futures, apply creativity to the design of their community, and strike a balance to meet the needs of all who live, work, play, and visit their community.

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## A PLAN BELONGS TO THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

Planning is all about balance among competing interests and almost always involves difficult trade-offs. An effective plan reflects those trade-off decisions. The challenge for the local government is to capture in words, maps, and illustrations the future envisioned by the community’s citizens, as well as to make those difficult trade-off decisions along the way. This often-overwhelming challenge is made simpler when the local government systematically organizes the process.

The importance of the plan rests partially on the process of preparing the plan. A plan belongs to the whole community, and the members of the community should be part of the process to create the plan. Part 3 of this guidebook is devoted to explaining the ways that all members of the community – everyday citizens, elected and appointed officials, and the people involved in designing and building developments – can be a meaningful part of the planning process.

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## THREE QUESTIONS GUIDE THE PLANNING PROCESS.

While there is no universally accepted method for developing a plan, the planning process can be described as the response to these three questions:

- 1) What do you have?
- 2) What do you want?
- 3) How will you get it?

There are technical, political, legal, and managerial issues that will vary from one jurisdiction to the next. It is important to remember also that effective planning is actually more of a continuous loop than a single project to write a plan. Once the plan is prepared, the lessons learned as the plan is implemented will result in changes to the plan, still using the framework of the three questions. However, before embarking on the process, there is an essential preliminary step. Before you plan, you should “plan to plan.”

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BEFORE YOU START, PLAN TO PLAN.

Key factors associated with this step include the allocation of time, human resources, money, and energy to the effort. This step is too often overlooked or shortchanged. Do not assume that these factors will somehow manage themselves, or that your professional staff or consultant will handle everything. There are several questions that you should consider before initiating the planning process. The answers will guide the development of a process that will result in a plan for your community. Think about and discuss these issues:

1) Who will prepare the plan?

You have many choices – professional staff from your jurisdiction; professional staff from the regional development center; volunteers from the community; consultants hired to assist in preparing the plan; or, some combination of these individuals.

2) How long will the planning process last?

In some part, this will depend on the number of people available to prepare the plan. It will also depend on the complexity of the situations you face in your community. Thirdly, it will depend on how much you involve the citizens of your community. The process may last from several months to two years. It is best to think about this in the beginning.

3) What subject matter will be included in the plan?

There are minimum standards set by the State on the subject matter of the plan, but you may wish to include other subject matter that is particularly important to your jurisdiction. (The Local Planning Requirements are contained in Appendix A.)

4) How much money will be earmarked for the planning process?

A budget should include all of the costs of preparing the plan: printing, photographs, maps, graphics, mail, advertising, materials, and supplies for community meetings, renting meeting places, refreshments for meetings, and fees for consultants if you plan to hire consultants.

5) How will you involve all of the community's citizens?

This crucial part of the process is described in [\*Planning for Community Involvement.\*](#)

The decisions you make regarding these issues will guide you in outlining the planning process – a plan to plan. If you choose to meet the minimum requirements and no more, you may need fewer people and less money. If you choose a planning process that includes a higher degree of interaction with the local citizens and addresses a wider range of subject

matter than required, you may need a larger team and possibly more funding. However, a more interactive process and a wider range of subject matter do not necessarily mean a bigger budget. The composition of the planning team has the greatest impact on the budget. You might consider using professional planners where their expertise is the most benefit to the planning process and seeking volunteers to supplement the work effort. In any case, the preparation you do in this “plan to plan” step will pay off in a more effective planning process.

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## THE PLANNING PROCESS

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Good plans shape good decisions. That's why good planning helps to make elusive dreams come true.

*Lester Robert Bittel*

Now that you have a “plan to plan,” also called a scope of work, you are ready to embark on the planning process. The three questions that guide the process are described below.

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### WHAT DO YOU HAVE?

It is essential to have accurate, current information on the community as it is now. You will not be able to plan to maintain or change the current situation if you do not know the current situation. This information, often called “background reports” or “data and analysis,” is a crucial first step in the process. Under Georgia’s local planning requirements, this part of the plan is called the Community Assessment.

Citizens and local officials alike are often impatient to move beyond this step into “real” planning and making decisions about the future. However, you should recognize the importance of having a firm foundation of information about the community – and convey the importance of this information to the citizens who participate. It’s also important to convey this information to the citizens who participate in easily understandable form and format, such as an Executive Summary. Planning for the future requires an understanding of the past and present. Collecting information and analyzing trends provides one important basis for conclusions about the community.

The local planning requirements that guide the preparation and development of comprehensive plans in Georgia are contained in Appendix A and are available for download on the DCA Website. In addition, DCA makes a lot of data available through web-based tools such as DataViews, MapViews, and Plans Online (copies of existing comprehensive plans for selected counties and cities). (*For more information, go to the [DCA website](#) and the [Georgia Planning and Quality Growth Website](#).)*

While this foundation of data and information about the community is being prepared, you can look at the second question.

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## WHAT DO YOU WANT?

It has been said that if you do not know where you are going, any road will get you there. This is never truer than in the preparation of a plan. The contents of the plan must reflect the vision of the community, along with the strategies to achieve the vision, and the policies to direct daily decision-making leading to that vision. Who decides what you want? Everyone does.

What you want for the future of your community may be expressed as a vision, a theme, an overall goal, but should express in words and illustrations of the desired future. The expression of what you want can be developed through the use of many techniques; visioning, design charrettes, brainstorming, community forums, workshops, or focus groups are just some techniques that may work for you. The point is to provide ample opportunity for the citizens of the community to express their wishes, hopes, dreams, and expectations. Part 3 of this guidebook describes these techniques – and many more – to help you answer this important question.

As you might expect, the wishes, hopes, and dreams of the citizens will vary from group to group within the community. It is the job of the planning team to balance the competing interests that are presented, to weigh the various proposals, to evaluate what is possible, to determine what is desirable, and finally to prepare a road map that will guide the remainder of the process. This road map should encompass the preservation of what is held dear as well as the change needed to achieve an improved quality of life.

One requirement for planning in Georgia is the development of a community vision, including a Future Development Map that identifies the various character areas in the community. There are many ways to develop a vision for your community. In Georgia, the part of the plan that contains the community vision is called the Community Agenda. See [\*Planning for Community Involvement\*](#) for tools and techniques to help you, in eliciting participation in developing this vital and essential part of the plan.

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## HOW WILL YOU GET IT?

The plan will be of little value if it is not implemented. How does this happen? It begins with the vision. The vision contains the description of the future direction and the long-term goals that the citizens of your community seek to achieve. Likely, there will be maps to illustrate the vision in terms of types and locations of land uses, transportation and utility systems, and areas protected because they are fragile or important for historic or cultural reasons. One requirement for planning in Georgia is to represent the vision as a Future Development Map of character areas within the community. Your comprehensive plan is akin to having a plan for a new house. But the house won't just happen. You need construction drawings, a budget, money to fund the budget, a construction program, permits, contractors and subcontractors, landscapers, decorators, and materials.

Likewise, your community plan will need more detailed plans for systems, such as streets and sidewalks, water, wastewater, and other utilities and services. A capital budget is needed to outline when facilities will be built, where they will be built, and how they will be financed. The plan for land use will be implemented through one or several types of land development regulations, often zoning and subdivision regulations. You will need a variety of programs, such as housing rehabilitation, beautification, economic development, historic preservation, purchase of environmental lands, and others, based on the specifics of your comprehensive plan.

An important component of the Community Agenda is the preparation of a five year Short-Term Work Program (STWP) to describe actions to make the community vision a reality – to implement the plan. The STWP and other components of the implementation program are described in the local planning requirements in Appendix A.

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### **THE PLAN MUST BE EFFECTIVE**

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The truth about planning:  
You cannot be forced, even by law, to do *good* planning.

The plan should be clear, easy to read, and able to be understood by everyday citizens. But it must also be effective; that is, it must produce the desired results. During the preparation of your plan and the ongoing evaluation of your plan, consider whether it is effective as measured by the following criteria.

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#### **SIX CRITERIA OF AN EFFECTIVE PLAN**

What makes a plan effective? Certainly, you want your plan to comply with the standards from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. However, it takes more than a plan that complies with the standards to have an effective plan. These six criteria will help you determine whether your plan is effective. Your plan should be:

- Based on a vision;
- Meaningful, in terms of citizen involvement.
- Consistent;
- Realistic;
- Financially feasible; and
- Appropriate, in terms of objectives, policies, and strategies.

### *Is your plan based on a vision?*

Visioning refers to a process where citizens gather to consider how they want the community to be in the future. It describes the future condition or state of the community. A vision is similar to a goal in that it describes an end result, but it is typically more specific than a goal. It can be compared to a person saying, “When I grow up, I want to be....” The vision for a community is a road map of how or what that community will be when it is “grown up.” An effective plan is built on a vision.

An effective plan maintains or improves the quality of life as expressed in the vision. It should guide day-to-day decisions about development. The development that occurs should be based on the direction provided by the plan. An effective plan provides a strategy to achieve the changes needed to maintain or improve the quality of life and achieve the vision. These strategies may include policies or work plan items, but these will be the actions that result in change as envisioned by the plan. A plan is effective when the vision balances the supply of land, facilities, and services with the demand created by population growth. A healthy community will have enough land for living, working, recreation, and future needs. All of this is part of the vision for your community’s future.

### *Was the plan created with meaningful citizen involvement and do citizens continue to be a part of the on-going planning process?*

There are several ways to evaluate whether citizen involvement in the planning process is effective. When the planning process includes meaningful citizen involvement, citizens know about the plan and how it affects them. Citizens look to the plan for information and guidance about growth and development of their community. Most important, citizens use the plan to address concerns about their neighborhoods and the community. Whether your citizen involvement program is small or large, a successful and effective plan must be the result of citizen participation.

### *Is your plan consistent?*

All parts of a consistent plan work toward the same vision without contradicting each other. Work program items and implementing programs and regulations are based on and agree with the plan, leading to the outcomes envisioned in the plan. The maps, policies, strategies, and action plans all lead to a common vision.

### *Do you have a realistic plan?*

A plan should indicate not only what is desirable, but also what is possible, given available resources. Most plans feature a full range of objectives. A good plan will also include the ways and means to measure whether the community actually achieves what the plan calls for. In doing so, the plan becomes a vehicle for resource allocation, as well as managerial accountability. It may be tempting to limit your vision, based on concerns for funding and other resources. A realistic plan can and should include big dreams. However, the plan is the place where annual actions, ongoing strategies, and other implementation measures lead the community in a balanced and realistic manner toward the achievement of those big dreams.

### *Is your plan financially feasible?*

Simply stated, there should be funds and financing mechanisms to make sure that facilities, services, projects, and programs are provided as described in the plan.

### *Does your plan have an appropriate vision, objectives, policies, and strategies?*

The vision, policies, and strategies must continue to be effective as a guide to decision-making and implementation of the plan. One way to assess the effectiveness of the vision, policies, and strategies is to consider whether development throughout the community is consistent with them. You should also consider whether the vision and policies guide the budget process. Does your community achieve the desired results as expressed in the vision, policies, and strategies of your plan?

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## AFTER THE PLAN – IMPLEMENTATION

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Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work.  
*Peter Drucker*

The plan has been completed, the planning process has been followed, and all public meetings have been successfully conducted. How do we keep this excitement and momentum going? The best way is to first recognize that planning never ends. As soon as the plan is completed, several strategies can be used to make sure the plan is carried out or implemented. These are described in this section and include training sessions for the “users” of the plan, an assessment of the success of the public involvement program, and laying the groundwork for the next update process in 5 or 10 years.

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## HANDING OVER THE REINS

How many times have you heard that plans just gather dust on a shelf? Unfortunately, without an implementation step, that is exactly what happens to many comprehensive plans. It is important, therefore, to complete the planning process through to the point of implementation of key strategies. The plan is not the end of the process, but an essential step along the way to a great community.

This is a good time to hold a celebration. Organize a community-wide event or picnic to celebrate and announce the successful completion of the plan. Save the long speeches and technical reports for another time, but do display a future land use map, display photos of public workshops and other events, and invite key stakeholders to take some well-deserved credit for their contributions.

After everyone has recovered from the celebration, but while the work is still fresh, hold a series of training workshops to establish ownership of the new plan. Such workshops provide a hands-on way of making certain that all the parties involved in the

administration of the plan are familiar with all of the goals, objectives, and strategies contained in the plan. These workshops, led by a facilitator from the planning team, should involve elected officials, planning commission members, city and county planning staff, members of the public, volunteers, and anyone who would be considered a “user” of the plan. Don’t forget developers, real estate professionals, and neighborhood representatives. The training workshop could involve a “user’s guide” to the plan with a reference guide to the various components and sections

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#### THE PLANNING PROCESS IS A CONTINUING PROCESS

Your community will change over time. It will grow or decline. People will move in and out. New roads and utilities will be built. The economy will rise or fall. Lifestyles will change. The needs, dreams, hopes, and expectations of the citizens of your community will change. The plan should change as well.

There are two reasons to amend the plan. One is that you want to keep the overall direction represented by the plan, but you need to update the information on which the plan is based, and modify policies, strategies, or other parts of the plan as a result. On the other hand, a periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of the plan may reveal that the plan needs to be adjusted to achieve the future direction desired by the community. Revisions to the plan will result from this evaluation.

# APPENDIX

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## APPENDIX A:

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

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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 single-family 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. 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.

