

Summary of Georgia's Urban Redevelopment Act (O.C.G.A 36-61-1)

Purpose:

- Gives cities broad powers to redevelop blighted or threatened areas of the community.
- Allows communities to use eminent domain to buy and assemble property for revitalization and resale.
- Does not require a referendum.
- The required Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) is fairly easy and inexpensive to prepare and amend.
- Can be implemented either by a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) or a Redevelopment Authority appointed by the city.
- Encourages involvement of private enterprise/public private partnerships to redevelop neglected areas of the community.
- Permits use of tax exempt bonds for redevelopment purposes. These may be secured by loans and grants.
- Lets the public know what is being planned for the redevelopment area.
- Guides City investments in infrastructure to support redevelopment.
- Allows the City to negotiate variances and waive many requirements of its existing zoning and development requirements in order to achieve the optimum economic and aesthetic results in the redevelopment area.

Process:

- Draft the Urban Redevelopment Plan.
- Hold a public hearing.
- Adopt the plan.
- Appoint an organization (urban redevelopment authority or DDA, city redevelopment agency) to implement the plan.
- Implement the plan.

What is an Urban Redevelopment Plan?

- A general blueprint for redevelopment and targeting of public investments in the redevelopment area.
- Required components of the Urban Redevelopment Plan:
 - Statement that the URP is consistent with the city's comprehensive plan.
 - Clearly defined boundaries of the redevelopment area (need not be contiguous).
 - Explanation of negative conditions in the area necessitating redevelopment.
 - The city's land use objectives for the area (types of uses, building requirements, zoning changes, and development densities).
 - Description of land parcels to be acquired and structures to be demolished or rehabilitated.
 - A workable plan for leveraging private resources to redevelop the area.
 - A strategy for relocating any displaced residents.
 - Any covenants or restrictions to be placed on properties in the redevelopment area in order to implement the plan.
 - Public infrastructure to be provided – transportation, water, sewer, sidewalks, lighting, streetscapes, public recreational space, parking, etc. to support redevelopment of the area.
 - A workable financial strategy for implementing the plan.

Suggested Land Development Regulations

Required site plan review: Require each new development or subdivision to undergo detailed site plan review to ensure that it meets all local regulations (like those suggested below) and that the development plan is pedestrian friendly, protects environmentally sensitive areas, includes roadway interconnections with adjoining properties, etc. This requirement is critical to successful implementation of other regulations suggested herein.

Innovative subdivision regulations: Appropriate subdivision regulations will be needed to ensure that new developments follow the principles of conservation subdivisions and traditional neighborhood developments recommended throughout this report. These include elements such as connective grid street patterns, mixing of uses, smaller street widths, lot sizes and building setbacks.

Sign & billboard regulations.

Architectural design standards: Standards should be based on analysis of historic structures throughout the region to identify patterns that define the “regional vernacular” architecture. Professional assistance from an architecture/planning firm will probably be necessary to develop a good set of standards, customized for each separate character area. Properly enforced, the resulting design requirements will prevent spread of “Generica” by ensuring that new development is compatible with the regional vernacular.

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) or Transfer of Development Rights (TDR): Both of these are incentive approaches for reducing development pressure in areas best set aside from development for reasons of environmental conservation or farmland protection.

Tree preservation requirements for new developments: Site clearance restrictions may be included in a general tree preservation ordinance designed to save the maximum possible number of native trees on all development sites.

Design codes for intown neighborhoods and historic districts to ensure that new development is compatible with traditional neighborhood character. Criteria to consider for adoption include:

- Maximum square footages for commercial uses to maintain human scale and encourage pedestrian access.
- Wide sidewalk requirements in front of store fronts to encourage street-side pedestrian activity.
- Adequate lighting requirements to help ensure pedestrian safety.
- Build-to-lines to bring the buildings close to sidewalks.
- Maximum and minimum building height requirements to help ensure pedestrian scale (Minimum height 18 feet; Maximum height 35 feet).
- Planting strip and street tree requirements along street curb to provide shade and help protect pedestrians from vehicles.
- Inter-parcel access and alley requirements to limit curb cuts.
- Limit sign size to pedestrian scale and orientation.
- Store fronts with clear display windows required. No blank walls.
- Primary pedestrian entrance directly off public street sidewalks.
- Encourage on-street parking, where possible.
- Lower minimum parking requirements and/or shared parking requirements to minimize land areas dedicated to parking.
- Off-street parking located behind or beside structures.
- Permit zero-lot line residential development and low density multi-family residential.
- Require new gas stations to place building at corner (zero lot line) with pumps in rear.

Large lot zoning: This is an appropriate tool for protecting farmland, undeveloped forested areas, and critical riparian areas from development pressures, provided the minimum lot size is set high enough (larger than 10 acres suggested).

Recommended Streetscape Improvements

- Construct, repair or replace sidewalks.
- Sidewalks adjacent to residential development must be 2-5 feet from back of curb without street trees and a minimum of 8 feet with street trees. Sidewalks should be 5-8 feet in width.
- Sidewalks in commercial areas should have a 15-20 feet minimum width from edge of building with street trees planted every 30 feet in 8x5 tree wells
- Plant street trees (hardwoods).
- Install attractive street lights.
- Relocate utilities off the street frontage or underground (see the toolkit topic “Utility Relocation” at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com)
- Hang street banners from lightposts.
- Provide benches and trash receptacles.
- Improve signage design and limiting the size and number of signs.
- Create 10 foot landscaped buffers to shield parking lots from view.
- Install traffic calming devices, such as raised pedestrian crossings, on-street parking, or landscaped medians, in high-speed areas to increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Note: Consult with the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) during the process of planning and designing these streetscape improvements.