

# Case Study: Land Use Planning Efforts and Citizen Involvement in Lumpkin County, Georgia

By  
Ed Weber  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
School of Public Policy

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	2
Executive Summary .....	3
Introduction.....	5
Lumpkin County Overview .....	6
History.....	6
Population .....	6
Government.....	7
Economics.....	7
Demographics .....	8
The Issues and the Timeline .....	10
Why a new land use plan? .....	10
Why now? .....	10
What are the goals?.....	10
Organization.....	12
Process Review .....	13
The Experts .....	14
Funding .....	15
When things got done .....	15
Stakeholders.....	17
Who is affected by Land Use Regulations?.....	17
Citizen Involvement.....	18
Who was involved.....	18
How were they selected .....	19
Other Citizen Involvement.....	19
The Plan .....	21
The New Land Use Plan .....	21
Analysis.....	22
How well did the process work?.....	22
Was there adequate citizen involvement?.....	22
Was the effort worthwhile for those involved?.....	23
Does the solution meet with Lumpkin’s goals?.....	23
Will it work somewhere else?.....	23
Bibliography .....	24
Appendices.....	25
Graphs .....	25
Tables.....	26

*All photos and maps courtesy of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Lumpkin County and Dahlonega Georgia Websites.*

## Executive Summary

Lumpkin County, Georgia grew in population by more than 44% in the last decade. Located north, along a major highway from Atlanta, the county is feeling the pains associated with being near one of the fastest growing cities in America. With that growth come significant land use changes that are quickly changing this formerly agriculture community. With increased population comes increased economic opportunity and new problems in dealing with how the county's land will be shaped.

The newest sole Commissioner of Lumpkin County has created a citizen action group (CAG) to deal with land-use management issues facing the municipality. The group is made up of volunteers who have committed significant amounts of time to ensure that the county does not lose the character that draws so many to live within its borders. Driven by a few dedicated members, the CAG has created a process by which citizens can understand the issues facing the county and have their voices heard. The goals of the CAG include an effort to "strive to foster communication and cooperation between City Government, County Government and the Citizens of both."

The CAG was formed in April of 2001. It started by updating land use regulations associated with the gateways into the county. The CAG encouraged the Commissioner to establish a development moratorium on corridors leading into the county in order for it to accomplish its first goal. The CAG expanded its efforts to include land use regulations for the entire county. It sought outside expertise and reviewed proposals from several planning consultants. It ultimately chose a consultant, Ross and Associates, that best met their criteria.

The CAG turned to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to assist it in funding the creation of its new land use plan. The DCA's Quality Growth Grant Program has been established to help communities, like Lumpkin, promote better management of growth to enhance the quality of life. Lumpkin received two separate grants from DCA with which it was able to partially fund its efforts.

Once a plan was developed, the CAG made efforts to submit their work to the county for review and comment. The CAG organized several "Firehouse" meetings to review plans with the community. The county offered and passed a ballot referendum to gauge citizen desire for a new land use tool.

The new land use plan utilizes Compatibility Standards in order to retain the character of the county without the need for developers to always comply with specific performance standards. The Compatibility Standards plan creates "character areas" that impose fewer performance requirements for new developments that stay within the "character" of the area being developed. If new development does not conform to existing uses, more stringent standards are applied. This system encourages "like" development but allows for land use transitions under certain requirements. This plan provided a compromise between those that desired traditional zoning ordinances and those that desired purely performance based regulations.

The question of whether this new plan will work to achieve many of the goals set forth by the CAG remains to be seen. As the population of Lumpkin County continues to

swell, the new land use plan will be put to the test. However, this is not a static plan. The CAG fully expects the ordinance associated with this vision to be modified as the future unfolds.

One of the key goals of the CAG concept was “citizen involvement”. The process used by the CAG allowed for those interested to be involved. However, given the time requirements of working on the CAG, few citizens actually maintained a deep involvement with it. By comparing the makeup of Lumpkin’s CAG with similar citizen involvement in government, one can see that those in certain demographic groups tend to be engaged. Could the county have done more to involve the less traditional volunteer? Certainly, the county could have spent resources in an attempt to reach out to those who could not spend the time required to move this effort forward. There are a number of tactics that the county could have used to increase citizen involvement and input. However, no effort of this type could succeed without the dedication of a core group of citizens to shepherd the process.

Can a process like this work in other places? Those municipalities that face similar growth issues can certainly succeed as Lumpkin has. It will require the county to have a certain number of citizens “likely to be involved” and that they have some experience in working with local government. Counties can also increase the likelihood of citizen involvement by actively reaching out to include as many people as possible with today’s communication technology. Lastly, the area must have a significant portion of its population that has chosen to live in the area for its character and other attributes. It is these people that create the synergy required to make an effort like this a success.

## Introduction



**Lumpkin County Georgia**

Driving north along Georgia's Route 400, you get the sense that you are riding a wave. You can almost see the crests as they crash and lap against the shore. The remnants of past impacts are in large tracts of soil; upturned and excavated in expectation of future development. The tide is rising in this area north of Atlanta. Each successive year stretches the boundary of the Southeast's largest city further and further northward. As these waves of growth pound relentlessly against the farming communities that have inhabited this region for more than one hundred years, the inhabitants are seeing their lifestyles forever altered.

With the advent of air conditioning and Atlanta's selection as the home of the nation's busiest airport, the city has seen wave after wave of new immigrants. No, these typically are not people coming to the U.S. from some foreign land in search of a better life; they are mostly Americans from areas along the east coast and Midwest looking for jobs. Atlanta has offered them through both boom and recession. Atlanta has consistently had higher employment rates than those found nationally for more than ten years (see Figures 1 and 2). The pressure of these new residents, along with continued expansion of Georgia's interstate highway system, has sprawled Atlanta's population outward in all directions.

Lumpkin County is one municipality that is feeling the pressure of this growth. Instead of being overtaken by events, the citizens of Lumpkin County have decided to take some measure of control over the growth in their community. Through hard work and citizen involvement, this formerly rural outpost is working to keep the character of its way of life intact while making further growth manageable. As we look at the efforts the Lumpkin County has made over the past several years to take hold of their future, we will see that their efforts are both extraordinary and understandable.



**Dahlonega Gold Museum (formerly Lumpkin County Courthouse)**

# Lumpkin County Overview

## History

At the foot of the Appalachians, Lumpkin County was once the home to Native Americans. First, as part of the Mississippian culture and later as home to a portion of the Cherokee Nation, this part of North America has been the home to various human civilizations for more than a thousand years.

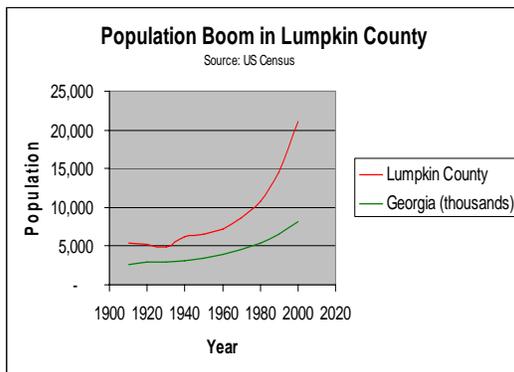
Not much is known about the history of this region before the early 1800s. Up until then, we know that the Cherokee Indians settled in this land and called it "Ta-lo-Ne-Ga", their word for yellow. This may have been in reference to the beautiful fall colors that descend on North Georgia's mountains each year. It was another kind of "yellow" that interested European Americans. Gold was discovered here in 1828. With that discovery, prospectors flooded to this region in search of fortune. With the tide of immigrants came the end of the Cherokee lifestyle. What followed for them was the Trail of Tears and permanent displacement (Dahlonge, 2003).



The new white settlers called this place Dahlonge after the Cherokee name. The city of Dahlonge is the county seat. Lumpkin county was named after Georgia Governor George Lumpkin who presided over the state in 1832. The gold rush ended less than thirty years later and the county changed from boomtown to rural farming community and stayed that way for the next one hundred and fifty years.

## Population

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Lumpkin County in 2000 was around 22,000, which may seem to some to be somewhat small given the county is nearly 300 square miles in size. This density is just over half of the state of Georgia's overall density. However, simply taking a snapshot of the population of this area does not serve us well in understanding the challenges facing the county.



Lumpkin County has experienced a true population boom in recent decades. Although the county saw steady growth in population over the first three quarters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the last thirty years has been truly remarkable. The chart here shows that although Georgia has also experienced significant growth during the last several decades, it pales in comparison to the significant changes facing Lumpkin County today.

Recent growth in the county has quickly led to the situation where those who were born in the county are far outnumbered by those who have moved there. This has important consequences for both the character of the county and its direction (see “Whose County is It?” sidebar).

## **Government**

Lumpkin County currently is organized under a single commissioner system of government. This means that the sole commissioner has great discretion over how county government will work and how county funds will be spent. Historically, this was a convenient system for a small rural county like Lumpkin. However, as Lumpkin has grown, the inherent troubles with a single commissioner system have been borne out.

With growth come greater management responsibilities for a single commissioner. It also brings larger and larger financial decisions. As the tax base broadens, increased revenues are both a blessing and a curse. More can be done within the county but the prospect of financial irregularities becomes greater. By 1996, Lumpkin had amassed a budget surplus of three million dollars

In that year, a new Commissioner was elected as the sole commissioner to a four-year term. Four years and \$17 million dollars later, Lumpkin County was in a budget crisis. By 2000, the county had \$14 million in debts due to overspending on infrastructure and other projects. The solitary nature of the sole commissioner system may have allowed much of the financial irregularities to go unnoticed by the citizens of the county until it was too late.

In 2000, the county elected Steve Gooch as Commissioner in large part on his stated desire to open up the government of Lumpkin County to more citizen involvement. However, Commissioner Gooch would go beyond campaign promises. He created a number of Citizen Action Groups (CAGs) to deal with various county issues. These committees were designed to provide both citizen involvement in county government and a new openness.

The formation of CAGs was not enough for Lumpkin County to ensure a more representative and open government. Starting in 2004, the county will switch to a five member County Commission. This will coincide with the end of Commissioner Gooch’s tenure. In the meantime, we have seen that the CAG concept has fundamentally altered how Lumpkin County will look and operate in the future with regard to its land use regulation.

## **Economics**

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) publishes economic data for all of the counties within the state. According to DCA, Lumpkin County has both a lower unemployment rate and lower wages than in the rest of the state. Only 2.7% of the county’s workers are unemployed in 2003. The average weekly wage for workers in the county is \$480 as compared to \$622 statewide.

More than a third of Lumpkin’s workers are in the service industry. The table here shows the five largest employers in 1999 according to the Georgia DCA website. If this list is any indication, it is obvious that Lumpkin County provides a diverse set of working opportunities to its citizens. From 1990 to 1999, during which time the county population grew by just 44%, there was a 62% increase in non-farm employment in the county. By 1997, nearly 30% of all businesses in the county were owned by women.

Top Employers - 1999
Aladdin Manufacturing Corp
Chestatee Regional Hospital
North Georgia College & State University
Torrington Company
Wal-Mart Associates Inc

In addition to the variety of employers, Lumpkin County has also experienced a sharp increase in corporate earnings. This general increase likely adds a degree of affluence to the country that did not exist when the county was primarily rural. Affluence may be a key indicator of how involved citizens are likely to be in local issues.



### **Demographics**

Demographically, Lumpkin County is like most northern Georgia rural counties. It is predominantly white with a median income somewhat below that of the rest of the state. According to the U.S. 2000 Census, Lumpkin County is 94% white and only 1.5% black. This stands in stark contrast to the rest of the state where nearly 29% of the state is black. These statistics are common amongst the twenty-eight counties in north Georgia where whites make up almost 90% of all citizens. This ratio of white to black populations has been historically consistent in this region. These demographics are likely the result of the fact that slavery was less economically feasible within this region and former slaves were less likely to settle in this area.

The age demographics of the county closely resemble that of the state as a whole. Less than one-tenth (9.7%) of all residents were 65 or older according to the 2000 census. Almost one quarter of residents was 18 or younger.

An interesting aspect of Lumpkin County's residents is that the mean travel time to work each day is 29.6 minutes. This is slightly longer than the state average of 27.7 minutes. Almost 43% of all residents work outside of the county. This is likely due to the large number of jobs available south along the Georgia 400 corridor. This also may indicate that the newer residents of the county, who work outside it, are interested in preserving their chosen home lifestyle and setting it apart from the hustle-bustle they experience elsewhere during the week.

Finally, the county's population is increasingly made up of individuals with higher educations. In 1990, only 6.6% of residents held a Bachelor's degree or higher. Today, almost 18% of county residents do. The town of Dahlonega has long been a center for education in this region. Founded in 1873, North Georgia College & State University, The Military College of Georgia is a state-supported, coeducational university located in Dahlonega.



## **The Issues and the Timeline**

### ***Why a new land use plan?***

Large population increases in Lumpkin County over the last two decades have certainly had an impact on life in the county. Increased industrialization along with increased traffic and housing could not have gone unnoticed. It is not entirely clear as to whether a specific event or events caused it, but in January of 2001 the county's Development Authority identified land use planning as a priority to the Commissioner. This declaration started a series of events that led to the county's new ordinance.

Initially, the effort began with a joint resolution between the Lumpkin County Development Authority and Dahlonega Downtown Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce to protect the county corridors and to explore land use planning. The county corridor most at risk of unsightly development was Hwy 60 from Georgia 400 into Dahlonega.

### ***Why now?***

The increases in population and corresponding development were a factor in the rapid changes happening in the county. The replacement in 2000 of the former county Commissioner with one more open to citizen involvement contributed to the timing of this ordinance. Finally, changes in the demographics of county citizens also were a key factor in addressing land use regulations. As more and more of Lumpkin County's residents chose to live there for the lifestyle, one would expect a greater degree of citizen concern over how that lifestyle was being changed.

### ***What are the goals?***

The goal of the new land-use ordinance is to try to preserve the character of Lumpkin County through greater control of its growth. Lumpkin County defined some specific goals to meet in any changes they adopted. Although many of these goals may be difficult to attain, they serve as guideposts for the county in its efforts to reform its land use.

According to the CAG, the county's goals include:

- ❖ Preservation of "Greenspace"/Open Space
- ❖ Protection of Natural Resources
- ❖ Protecting Agricultural Uses/Rural Character
- ❖ Encouraging "Quality" Development
- ❖ Assuring Quality Design
- ❖ Discouraging Sprawl and Encouraging Preferred Land Use
- ❖ Avoiding Undesirable Land Uses
- ❖ Ensuring Compatibility
- ❖ Providing Alternatives for Affordable Housing
- ❖ Tax Equity Based on Use

Many of these goals may appear to be contradictory (i.e. Preserving Natural Resources vs. Encouraging Development), but Lumpkin County was committed to evaluating each of these criteria before adopting a land use plan.

Preservation of Greenspace refers to the goal of keeping areas yet touched by development pristine for the purposes of scenic beauty and recreational opportunities. This is closely related to the “Protection of Natural Resources goal of keeping natural systems functioning within the county, particularly in the area of water quality.



Protecting Agricultural Uses/Rural Character is a central goal in Lumpkin’s land use efforts. Because many of those who live in the county either work in farming communities or chose the county for a more rural lifestyle, the work to ensure that the “character” of the county remains intact is critical.

The Quality Design and Quality Development goals attack a common problem faced by communities with sudden growth. The faster the growth, the more likely that slipshod effort is made to incorporate quality in new development. Of particular concern to Lumpkin County are the ways in which zoning rules affect construction and density along with the aesthetic quality of development.

Controlling sprawl and unsightly development are also important to the county. The often-witnessed “hop-scotch” development in many areas creates problems for local city service planners and residents. Also of importance is the ability to control where and when LULU (“locally undesirable land use”) developments such as landfills are placed in the county.

Having development with a goal of Ensuring Compatibility with neighbor’s uses keeps citizenry happy but does have the unfortunate consequence of limiting private use of land. Lumpkin seeks to strike a difficult balance on this issue.

Providing Alternative Affordable Housing will keep the county diverse. Without such a goal, the county runs the risk of becoming a haven for the upwardly mobile without the ability for some current residents and future residents to be able to afford to live there. This is of particular importance to those who work in Lumpkin’s growing manufacturing and service sectors.

Finally, Lumpkin has a goal of being able to plan for stable taxation. By limiting the use of certain lands, the county may be able to better stabilize assessed value of property, thereby limiting the typical assessments associated with “highest and best” use.

### **Organization**

The Commissioner created a Citizens Advisory Group on Land Use Planning after the initial action by the County Development Authority. The CAG was designed as an outreach effort to allow citizens to be more involved in the single commissioner system. Commissioner Gooch selected Jim Combs to Chair the CAG. Jim Combs, a local developer, understood many of the issues surrounding land use management.

Bill O’Lesky, who was retired from the military and had taught for ten years at North Georgia College and State University, was selected as Co-Chairman. He has been involved in community volunteer activities in the county since 1988. Kathy Duck, a local business owner, was selected as Secretary for the CAG. Her background as a member of the Development Authority and Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce brought additional experience to the group.

Several other local citizens, typically involved in other public service in one capacity or another were asked to be members of the group. This gave the CAG a significant leg up in its efforts toward getting something accomplished. Had the CAG been staffed initially by many people with no volunteer public service experience, there would have been a greater likelihood that this effort would fail. This is not to say that the group was restrictive or exclusive. In fact, the group was open to all citizens who had a desire to influence this important county issue. However, we see that such openness may not have actually resulted in citizen involvement beyond those with a history of such work.

The CAG met almost 40 times formally and conducted numerous informal meetings. A sampling of the attendance at these meetings yields interesting results. Below is a table of the names and rates of attendance of those with the most attendance at a sample of the meetings.

Attendee	Percentage Attendance	Profession
Lewy, Emily	96%	Attorney/Legislative Aide
Duck, Kathy (Sec.)	92%	Business Owner
Combs, Jim (Chair)	84%	Housing Contractor
Lewy, Gerald	84%	V.P. ABC (retired)
O’Lesky, Bill (co-Chair)	84%	Military/Educator (retired)
Faye, Bob	68%	Professional Engineer
Bailey, Cindy	64%	President Chamber of Commerce
Melvin, Glen	56%	Professional Engineer
Woody, Goldin	48%	Farmer
Fambrough, Jim	44%	Architect (retired)
Gooch, Steve	24%	Lumpkin County Commissioner

More than 60 different people attended at least one of the meetings sampled. From this list, we can see that only 11 individuals attended more than 20% of the meetings. This small group was then largely responsible for the creation of Lumpkin's plan. Nearly all of these individuals have had some volunteer experience in the community. The Group made a special effort its first meeting to try to include more "natives" in the process. However, none of those listed in the table above were born or raised in the county.

### **Process Review**

The CAG made several major steps in its efforts. First, the CAG focused on a specific land use challenge, the protection of the county's gateways. This afforded the group some experience in dealing with land use issues without diving directly into reform of the entire county. As part of this initial effort, they recommended the Commissioner adopt a development "Time Out", a moratorium on sensitive corridors, while they worked out a new ordinance. Commissioner Steve Gooch signed this rule in September of 2001.

By December of that year, the CAG had created a new Gateway Ordinance to control the growth along those byways leading into the county. The Commissioner subsequently signed it into law. During this time, the CAG also began the process of hiring an "expert" on land use management. Because none of those in the group had direct experience in this area, contracting professional services was paramount. Like all of the CAG's efforts, it approached this task in a methodical way. By February of 2002, the CAG recommended Ross and Associates to consult on the creation of a county land-use management tool. (See Experts below)

The CAG understood that hiring a professional brought a financial burden as well. Initially, the CAG considered soliciting funding from private concerns. Ultimately, it decided that the county would have to pay most of the costs directly. However, the CAG received a Georgia Department of Community Affairs Quality Growth Grant to offset some of the costs. (See Funding below)

### **CAG's Mission**

One of the first orders of business for the group was the establishment of a mission statement to guide its efforts. It stated:

"The Lumpkin County Citizens Advisory Group for Planning and Land Use Management will strive to foster communication and cooperation between City Government, County Government and the Citizens of both.

We will seek to further define and refine the vision of what Dahlonega and Lumpkin County will be. Through accomplishment of the above goals we will develop a fair and balanced long range Land Use Plan for Lumpkin County.

We will further define and refine the Land Use Regulations that will support the plan. We will offer these plans and regulations to the appropriate government authorities for adoption and implementation."

*- Lumpkin County Citizens  
Advisory Group on Land  
Use Management*

Throughout the process, the CAG kept meticulous records of each meeting. This was done as a way to keep the process moving and to keep all of those involved up to date on the CAG’s actions. An e-mail Listserv was also put in place for a larger group of interested citizens to review notes from meetings, etc.

In September of 2002, the county held a series of “Fire House” public meetings. These were designed to solicit citizen comment on aspects of the plan being developed and to increase overall support for the effort. In addition to these advertised opportunities for feedback, the county held a public forum before citizens voted on the adoption of the land-use management tools developed by the CAG.

On November 5, 2002, the citizens of Lumpkin County voted in favor of the county’s developing of a land-use management tool. This referendum passed with 58.6% of voters saying “yes”. The referendum did not specifically address the developed tool but was a gauge of public support.

By June 2003, working with their contractor, the CAG submitted a new land use ordinance to the Commissioner. In December of 2003, Commissioner Steve Gooch plans to sign the ordinance into law.

### **The Experts**

Lumpkin County’s CAG needed to hire an outside consultant to formulate the county’s new land-use management tool. The CAG elected to develop a criterion-based system under which contractors would be evaluated. The CAG group accepted proposals from four different consulting firms. The table below shows the criteria used by the CAG to evaluate each proposal.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Contractor</b>	<b>JJ&amp;G</b>	<b>Ross &amp; Assoc.</b>	<b>Town Planning &amp; Design</b>	<b>Weitz &amp; Associates</b>
<b>Cost</b>		\$257,486.00	\$84,286.00	\$127,000.00	\$76,900.00
<b>Staff Quality and Experience</b>					
<b>Project Schedule</b>					
<b>References</b>					
<b>Public Participation and Education</b>					
<b>Land Use Management Alternatives</b>					
<b>Implementation Strategies</b>					
<b>Overall Impression</b>					

Based on the selection criteria, the CAG ultimately chose Ross & Associates to help develop the new ordinance. Ross & Associates, based in Atlanta, was not the least expensive alternative available to the county. However, their strong proposal, along with their general understanding of the scope of Lumpkin County’s needs helped sway their selection.

## **Funding**

Given the potential outlay of more than \$80,000 to complete a plan, the CAG needed to find a way to fund its efforts. Beyond county funds, the CAG turned to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) in an effort to secure funding. During this process, CAG became aware of the funding mechanisms for this type of effort offered by DCA. Through DCA, the county had previously qualified for more than \$4.7 million in grants and other payments since 1982. Recently, DCA has instituted a Quality Growth Grant Program to assist communities in their efforts to maintain and improve their ways of live in the face of continual growth. DCA has distributed more than \$250,000 in sixteen grants to counties and other municipalities under this program since 2002.

The DCA website describes the grant program in this way:

*“The purpose of the Quality Growth Grant Program is to provide eligible recipients with state financial assistance for the implementation of quality growth initiatives that are outside the typical scope of other grant or loan sources. Quality growth initiatives are any activities that promote better management of growth and development so that growth enhances, rather than detracts from, the quality of life in a community.”*

Lumpkin County’s efforts to institute a land-use management plan fit well into this program. The county, through the CAG, applied for two different grants under this DCA program. The county was approved for more than \$30,000 in grants, making Lumpkin County the largest award recipient in the program to date. With these funds, the county was able to defray a significant portion of its consulting fees.

## **When things got done**

The following table (courtesy of the CAG), lists the major events that have taken place both before and since its inception with regard to land use management in Lumpkin County.

Date	Event
Jan 2001	Land Use Planning identified as a priority need by Lumpkin County Development Authority in its annual retreat
Mar 2001	Lumpkin County Development Authority and Dahlonega Downtown Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce sign joint resolution encouraging protection of County corridors and exploration of land use planning
April 2001	Commissioner implements Citizens Advisory Groups (CAG) for key issues. CAG for Long Range Land Use Planning and Management formed. Jim Combs, Chairman. Bill O’Leksy, Co-Chairman
June 2001	CAG begins to update the 1984 Gateway Ordinance to protect major roadways into the County
Sept 2001	Commissioner signs “Developmental Time Out” on corridors to provide time for the Ordinance Revision
Sept 2001 To Dec 2001	CAG interviews Potential Planning Companies
Oct 2001	Grant request submitted to DCA for partial funding of Land Use Plan
Dec 2001	Revised Ordinance submitted to Commissioner RFP designed to solicit bids, “Time Out” expires.
Jan 2002	CAG reviews proposals from Planners
Feb 2002	CAG recommends Ross & Associates to Commissioner
March 2002	Grant for \$20,000 awarded to partially fund project from DCA
April 2002	Contract Signed with Ross and Associates Consulting
June 2002	Kick-Off Meeting for Land Use Plan
September 16, 17, 18, 2002	Fire House Public Meetings
Oct. 8, 2002	Public Forum/Final before vote
Nov 5, 2002	County Vote on the Land Use Management Tools (receives 58.6% approval)
November 2002	Second grant request submitted to DCA for partial funding of Land Use Plan
Jan. 22, 2003	Public Meeting
March to June 2003	Committee Reviews Drafts of Ordinance
March 2003	Grant for \$10,000 awarded from DCA
Sept 18, 2003	Public Hearing for Future Land Use Map. Commissioner transmits intention to revise map to DCA
Nov. 20, 2003	Commissioner signs Lumpkin County Land Use Ordinance

## Stakeholders

### *Who is affected by Land Use Regulations?*

It is hard to imagine anyone in Lumpkin County who, at some point, will not be affected by a new land use plan. However, it is instructive to list groups that may be differently affected. The following list contains a synopsis of how possible land use regulation affects specific groups within and outside of Lumpkin County.

- ❖ **“Natives” (long-time residents)** – likely to be largest landowners. They may like having character of county preserved, but suffer financially because of limits to the use of their land.
- ❖ **Immigrants (newer residents)** – may benefit from regulations as land they own is already in their preferred use pattern. Changes in land use for them have occurred “under the wire”. They may play large role in crafting regulations.
- ❖ **Future residents** – will see enhanced “lifestyle” but will pay more for it. Opportunities for development will be limited, reducing their options for migrating their residence or businesses to the area.
- ❖ **Low Wage Workers** – may see higher rental rates on housing depending on how regulations affect development of multifamily units. These residents may also suffer from increased transportation costs and distance. Employment opportunities may also be affected.
- ❖ **Land Owners** – may see property values drop as restrictions on the use of their land limits opportunity. Undesirable neighbor spillovers should be curtailed.
- ❖ **Developers** – may see increased costs to specific projects that may be subject to performance standards if not “in character”. However, they may benefit from a more predictable development process.
- ❖ **Businesses** – may see higher tax rates because of market limits due to land use regulations. A free use of lands would create a larger, and less expensive, market for business land use.
- ❖ **Government** – likely to experience an increased burden of managing a more complicated land use plan and face challenges to it.
- ❖ **Environmentalists** – likely to gain as more areas are protected by land use regulations from incursion. However, increased population will still likely cause damage in the form of storm water runoff from construction and greater amounts of impervious material in watersheds. This will be mitigated by the new code.
- ❖ **Neighboring Counties** – may see increased development if their own land-use regulations are not as strict as those adopted in Lumpkin County.

## Citizen Involvement

### *Who was involved*

As we have seen, although the CAG’s organizational structure was conducive to a large and varied contingent of Lumpkin County’s citizenry, its work was conducted primarily by a core group of ten people. Should this outcome have been expected? Was the demographic breakdown of the group similar to other groups engaged in citizen action? To answer this question, we must look at studies conducted on which types of individuals tend to get involved in governance.

In a study conducted by Diana Gordon for the National Conference of State Legislatures, she found significant similarities across states in terms of the backgrounds of individuals serving in state legislatures (Gordon, 1994). Because state legislature positions tend to be part-time and relatively low paying, they serve as a good model for organizations like the CAG. The table below shows Gordon’s findings.

Occupation	Overall % of Legislators
Business owner/executive	27.7%
Attorney	16.5
Full-Time Legislator	14.9
Other Professional (e.g. architects, accountants, engineers, consultants, doctors)	10.6
Retired, Homemaker, Student	8.8
Educator	8.2
Agriculture	7.9
Government Employee	2.5
Labor Union	0.3
Other	2.7

With the exception of Labor Union and Full-Time (not possible in this context), the ten most active members of the CAG fall into one or more of these categories. This indicates that it is not surprising that the CAG is led by these individuals. In fact, it would be surprising if someone with a disparate background contributed heavily to the CAG’s work.

One important aspect of the core group’s makeup is its diversity of talent. Because the group had individuals with a variety of skills, the task of creating the land-use management plan was less formidable.

Asking the question “Who wasn’t involved?” is often more interesting than who was. In the case of the CAG, it may seem surprising that none of the contributing ten were natives to the county. This was of particular concern to Commissioner Gooch who emphasized in the very first CAG meeting that he wanted more natives of the county involved. The fact that none were speaks to the motivation of those individuals versus

those who have chosen to live in the county. Perhaps native residents are less aware of those things that contribute to the character and lifestyle within the county. Those who have chosen to live there certainly have this awareness. Even if this were the case, we should not expect many natives to take such an active role because there are actually fewer of them by comparison. With Lumpkin's meteoric growth, the percentage of those who were born, and chose to remain, within the county is increasingly smaller. (According to the 1990 Census, only 53.5% of Lumpkin county residents lived in the same house five years earlier. By the 2000 Census, this share had fallen to 47.1%, dipping below Georgia's statewide average of 49.2%.)

### ***How were they selected***

Many of the core group of active CAG members were early volunteers or were requested by the Commissioner or other members to participate. This group has significant experience in county government and volunteer efforts. It is only reasonable to assume that they would be the first to step forward or to be asked. This indicates that significant involvement in the group was primarily a function of self-selection. Regardless of the county's outreach efforts, the core group was made up of these "joiners".

Numerous (60+) individuals attended at least one meeting of the CAG. Why didn't these people stay? One answer may be that they saw the commitment required to continue and fell away. Another reason may be the expertise and leadership shown by the core group. Without such a background, newcomers to the process may have felt inadequate to the task. Finally, the fact that the group was so effective may have the effect of discouraging those who realized they weren't needed or that their concerns were already being addressed.

### ***Other Citizen Involvement***

Beyond the core group within the CAG, numerous individuals had a place at the table. The CAG made special efforts to reach out to the public (See Sidebar) and get their opinions. The CAG scheduled open meetings to discuss pending proposals and to hear the concerns of county residents. The meetings were held frequently within short period in order to draw the largest possible attendance. The CAG used flyers and formal advertising in the local paper to make citizens aware of the events. Finally, the citizens of Lumpkin County were presented a choice on the ballot as to whether they wanted to move forward or not on this issue. The referendum was designed to gauge and verify public support for this effort.

## **Calling All Lumpkinites!**

The following is the advertisement that the CAG used to encourage citizen attendance at public meetings:

The Citizen's Advisory Group for Land Use Management, organized by Commissioner Steve Gooch soon after his election in 2000, invites you to the next group of meetings on the subject. The basic agenda will be the same for all meetings, so please come to any one of them, or all, as you like. The dates, locations and times are:

September 16, 2002    Mill Creek Fire Station  
6:30pm                    125 Little Mountain Rd.

September 17, 2002    Parks & Rec. Facility  
6:30pm                    365 Riley Road

September 18, 2002    Long Branch Elem. Sch.  
6:30pm                    Lunchroom

The topic for discussion will be the tools available to us to help guide our growth in the coming years. We will look at Compatibility of Use Standards as well as Zoning ideas. Our goal is to hear from as many people as possible as we determine the best course of action.

Your input will truly make a difference in our future. Please make plans to attend a meeting.

## The Plan

### *The New Land Use Plan*

Although the purpose of this study is to identify the process used to create a land use plan in Lumpkin County, the actual contents of the new ordinance are of interest. The CAG had to choose between a few different basic land use management plans.

A number of the CAG's members wanted to utilize a performance based approach to the problem. This entailed defining specific standards that all development must meet before it is approved by the county regardless of where or what the development is.

Another portion of the CAG wanted to use traditional zoning methods for the plan. Zoning isolates like developments in order to reduce the number of performance regulations and formally structure (land use in) the regulated area.

The CAG ultimately chose a compromise solution known as "compatibility standards" or "character areas". Under this management plan, development faces either performance standards or zoning-like rules depending on the nature of the development and where it is placed. (See sidebar)

The goals of the plan were to both move forward with the compromise but also to preserve existing land-use choices and limit the restrictions on future use provided it was "in character" with existing development.

The specifics of the new ordinance and a future land use map can be found on the web at:

<http://www.lumpkincounty.gov/Land-Use%20Code%20Draft.pdf> and  
[http://www.lumpkincounty.gov/lumpkin\\_flu.pdf](http://www.lumpkincounty.gov/lumpkin_flu.pdf)

### Compatibility Standards?

According to CAG documents, Lumpkin County utilized the following description of Compatibility Standards for its land use management efforts:

"This approach is a hybrid between traditional zoning and pure performance standards. Like zoning, land use categories containing development standards are applied to areas; unlike zoning, these "districts" are applied to large areas in order to address overall land use characteristics within an area.

The use of Compatibility Standards addresses compatibility between land uses; the identified "character" of an area and sets the tone for overall performance standards. For example, a proposed gas station in a "rural residential area" may have to meet stricter compatibility standards than a new gas station in a recognized "commercial" area. Compatibility Standards are based on use-to-use compatibility, but vary by location.

Growth is encouraged to locate in preferred areas because the standards are less strict there, but not required to do so. This approach provides a direct link between a community's goals, overall infrastructure planning and service implementation, while allowing proposed changes to be considered within the context of a community's long range plans."

## Analysis

### ***How well did the process work?***

Given that the goal of the CAG was to “advise” the Commissioner on the development of land-use management, it more than succeeded. The CAG did the work necessary to create a fully functional land-use management tool ready for the Commissioner’s signature. The plan is comprehensive and has public support. Critical to the success of this effort may have been the state level funding made available by DCA. Without this funding, the effort may have been done less professionally and, ultimately, less successfully.

### ***Was there adequate citizen involvement?***

However, when discussing the success of the process, we must also look at things the county might like to have happened but did not. Although the core of the CAG was effective, the county might have liked a larger, more representative group of individuals driving the process. On the other hand, a larger group might not have been as effective at getting things done.

A more economically diverse group might have been helpful in addressing issues such as affordable housing. Native residents might have stressed other issues not contained within the new ordinance such as ridgeline protection. The process used to execute the CAG’s mandate certainly offered equal opportunity but may not have resulted in equal participation.

Could the county have done more to encourage others to participate? Certainly, the county could have made more of an outreach effort to those not involved in the process. Relatively few individuals made substantial contributions to this effort. The CAG used email as a primary mechanism to relate information about the CAG’s activities to those interested. However, technology could have been used to increase input as well. The county could have:

- ❖ Set up a website for the CAG’s activities that included a feedback form
- ❖ Created a discussion board on-line to allow for two-way exchanges of ideas from those whose schedules did not permit attendance at regular meetings
- ❖ Funded surveys of citizens short of a formal referendum on key aspects of the code as it was being formulated. This could have been handled via direct mail or over the telephone.

Admittedly, each of these ideas would have entailed additional costs to the county. (The first two ideas may also miss “low-tech” target audiences, a particular concern for low income and native residents.) However, if citizen involvement was critical to this process, relying on volunteer efforts from a few highly motivated citizens did not accomplish the goal.

### ***Was the effort worthwhile for those involved?***

In speaking with several members of the CAG, there is general agreement that the process was worthwhile. Members generally have experienced a sense of accomplishment in that they have had a meaningful impact on their community. The raw commitment that it took for these people to stay the course over the two plus years this has lasted speaks volumes to both their efforts and how important this was to them as individuals. Some core members do not think that this process could work the same way again even with the same people. The timing and personalities of the core group achieved the proverbial “lightning in a bottle”.

### ***Does the solution meet with Lumpkin’s goals?***

Given that the process of evaluating these efforts will take many years, we do not know yet whether this solution will meet with the county’s goals. However, those in the county who voted “Yes” on the referendum and the CAG members themselves think it does meet their goals at this time.

### ***Will it work somewhere else?***

The process used by Lumpkin County is likely highly replicable. Some factors in other localities that might indicate that this process will work for them may be:

- ❖ Counties where some significant percentage of the population falls within the parameters for “likely to be involved” demographically. This includes those occupations most likely to contribute significant time to such an effort.
- ❖ Counties that have some history of “citizen involvement” creating a pool of people from which to choose.
- ❖ Counties with significant population percentage that “choose” the lifestyle and are not born to it. They may have a greater appreciation of its value (Non-Endowment Effect), greater sensitivity to any changes, or greater fears of the county’s transformation.
- ❖ Counties facing increasing levels of land use transformation, typically in a suburban area abutting a growing metropolitan area.

## Bibliography

Bureau of Labor Statistics Web Site, <http://www.bls.gov>, Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

Dahlonega Georgia Website (Dahlonega), <http://www.dahlonega.org>, Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

Lumpkin County Citizen Action Group on Land Use Documents

Lumpkin County Proposed Land Use Code, <http://www.lumpkincounty.gov/Land-Use%20Code%20Draft.pdf>, Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

Lumpkin County Future Land Use Map (DRAFT),  
[http://www.lumpkincounty.gov/lumpkin\\_flu.pdf](http://www.lumpkincounty.gov/lumpkin_flu.pdf), Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

United States Census, <http://www.census.gov>, Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990, U.S. Census,  
<http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ga190090.txt>, Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

Georgia Department of Community Affairs,  
<http://www.dca.state.ga.us/snapshots/p1.asp?County=Lumpkin>, Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

Lumpkin County Website, <http://www.lumpkincounty.gov>, Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

North Georgia College and State University, <http://www.ngcsu.edu/>, Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

The Dahlonega Nugget Online, <http://www.thedahloneganugget.com/>, Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

Georgia Mountains Regional Development Center, <http://www.gmrdc.org>, Last Viewed: December 16, 2003.

Gordon, Diana, "Citizen Legislators: Alive and Well", *State Legislators*, January 1994, National Conference of State Legislators.

## Appendices

### Graphs

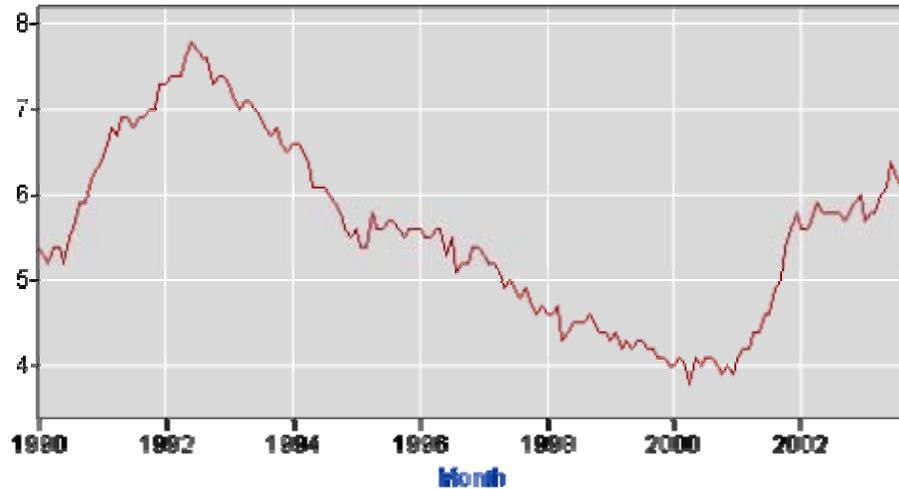


Figure 1 - Unemployment Percentage Rate Nationally 1990-2003  
(Bureau of Labor Statistics)

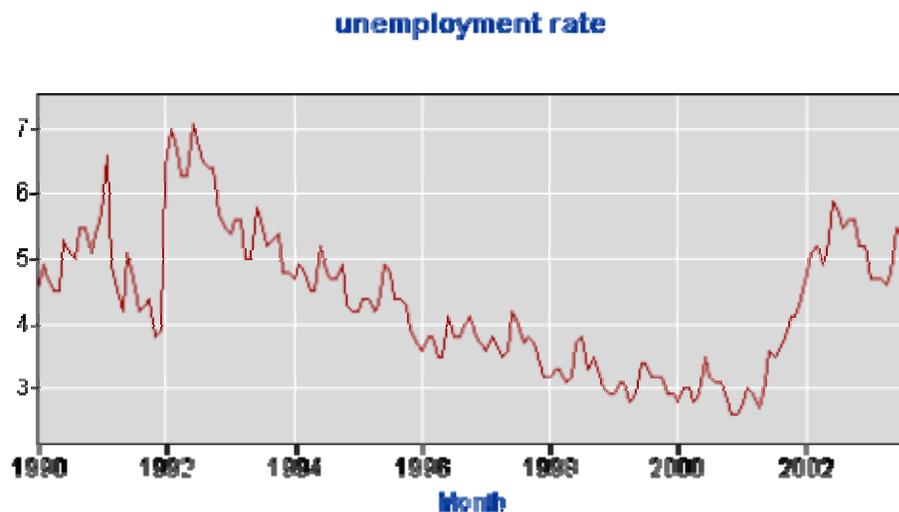


Figure 2 - Unemployment Percentage Rate in the Atlanta MSA 1990-2003  
(Bureau of Labor Statistics)

## Tables

Year	Lumpkin County	% Change	Georgia	% Change
1910	5,444	0.0%	2,609,121	0.0%
1920	5,240	-3.7%	2,895,832	11.0%
1930	4,927	-6.0%	2,908,506	0.4%
1940	6,223	26.3%	3,123,723	7.4%
1950	6,574	5.6%	3,444,578	10.3%
1960	7,241	10.1%	3,943,116	14.5%
1970	8,728	20.5%	4,589,575	16.4%
1980	10,762	23.3%	5,463,105	19.0%
1990	14,573	35.4%	6,478,216	18.6%
2000	21,016	44.2%	8,186,453	26.4%

**Table 1**  
**Population Statistics for Lumpkin County and Georgia, 1900-2000**

Recipient	Year	Award
Carroll County	2002	\$20,000.00
Columbus, City of	2003	\$17,000.00
Fulton County / Chattahoochee Hill Country Alliance	2003	\$10,000.00
Ellijay, City of	2003	\$9,000.00
Cornelia, City of	2003	\$7,100.00
Hartwell, City of	2003	\$15,000.00
Jefferson County	2002	\$14,350.00
Hinesville, City of	2002	\$20,000.00
Lumpkin County	2003	\$10,000.00
Lumpkin County	2002	\$20,650.00
Tifton, City of	2002	\$10,000.00
LaGrange, City of	2002	\$25,000.00
Walker County	2002	\$25,000.00
Social Circle, City of	2003	\$17,000.00
Dalton, City of	2003	\$15,000.00
Dalton, City of / Whitfield County	2002	\$15,000.00

**Table 2**  
**Georgia DCA Quality Growth Grant Program Awards**