

Atlanta Regional Commission



State of Georgia Rules and Responsibilities For Planning in the Atlanta Region

Full Document

February 12th, 2009

Executive Summary

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency created by the local governments in the Atlanta region pursuant to legislation passed by the Georgia General Assembly. This document primarily addresses ARC responsibilities for comprehensive planning under state law as the designated Metropolitan Area Planning and Development Commission (MAPDC). As an area of greater than 1,000,000 population, ARC has authority under state laws as both a MAPDC and Regional Commission (RC), effective June 2009, as outlined by House Bill 1216 in 2008.

In addition to being the official planning agency under state law for the 10 county region, ARC is also the transportation planning agency for the Atlanta region under federal law as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for a 18 county area. ARC provides planning staff to the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (MNGWPD), whose mission is to develop comprehensive regional and watershed-specific water resources plans for implementation by local governments. ARC also serves as the administrative agency for the Atlanta Regional Workforce Board (ARWB). Aging or senior services are provided by ARC as the Area Agency on Aging (AAA).

MAPDC

As the MAPDC under state law, ARC engages in a continuous program of research, study, and planning of matters affecting its area. ARC can engage in matters affecting its area including but not limited to:

- (1) Land use;
- (2) Transportation within the area, including highways, railroads, airports, streets, and mass transit;
- (3) The acquisition and financing of facilities for the disposal of solid waste material for the area and the means of financing such facilities;
- (4) The acquisition and financing of storm water drainage facilities for the area and the means of financing such facilities;
- (5) The acquisition and financing of suitable major parks and open spaces within and adjacent to the area;
- (6) The control and prevention of air and water pollution;
- (7) Environmental quality;
- (8) Law enforcement agencies and increased efficiency of the criminal justice systems in the area;
- (9) Planning for the provision of health facilities and services; and
- (10) The feasibility of the consolidation of common services of political subdivisions.

Planning Process

ARC as the designated MPO for transportation planning for all or parts of eighteen counties must follow federal rules of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) and the Clean Air Act (CAA). Federal laws requires the MPO to develop a long-range transportation plan

(RTP) and short-range transportation improvement program (TIP) that conform with the applicable State Implementation Plan (SIP) for air quality.

ARC must prepare and adopt a Regional Development Plan (RDP) pursuant to the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 and consistent with minimum standards and procedures for regional planning developed by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). During 2008, Georgia DCA adopted revisions to Chapter 110-12-6, Standards and Procedures for Regional Planning, "Regional Planning Requirements". The regional plan seeks to anticipate and apply comprehensive approaches to accommodate economic and population growth that will occur in the Atlanta region during the next 25 years.

Most local governments in the Atlanta region have completed new state mandated Comprehensive Plans during the past three years. ARCs regional plans seek to unify both regional and local growth policy as outlined in local governments Comprehensive Plans as well as Transportation Plans, Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) plan and other local policy.

ARC intends to develop the next RDP and RTP in a Unified Plan development process that will integrate elements of regional plans but also seek to integrate local planning as well as land use and transportation in an integrated manner. The required Assessment for the RDP and RTP to be completed in 2009 as well as forecasts and project prioritization are anticipated to be linked between RDP and RTP. Other aspects of plan development including stakeholder involvement are being developed in a coordinated manner.

The Atlanta region faces tremendous challenges to manage growth. Only through a comprehensive and integrated process can the region maintain the economy and quality of life while meeting fiscal challenges and improving health and environmental conditions.

The Comprehensive Planning Department of ARC (Research, Land Use and Transportation Divisions) will lead the Unified Planning effort. The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (MNGWPD) is currently updating regional water plans in 2008. Guidance from these plans as well as other regional plans will be used to address comprehensive RDP and RTP issues.

Local government plans and regulations will be assessed and integrated to the degree possible with regional policy. Federal and state agencies, adjacent Regional Development Centers (RDC) and non-governmental organizations will be included in the process as appropriate.

2009 ARC Board Resolution

The Unified Plan development process will begin with the adoption of a resolution in early 2009 by the ARC Board. The resolution will outline the general intent of the process for development of a Unified Plan. The Unified Plan process will meet all state and federal rules for regional planning for both the RDP and RTP. The resolution is intended to be approved by the ARC Board in February 2009.

Planning Process

ARC intends to not only meet the state and federal regulatory requirements of the RTP and RDP but also to meaningfully address other regional issues and needs. Energy, environmental, transportation, health and economic growth are issues that are linked and may be integrated in the region's plans. ARC will seek to address diverse issues and needs in the planning process to ensure that a comprehensive and forward reaching process is undertaken.

Many local governments have adopted Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) studies, developed new Comprehensive Plans to meet Georgia requirements as well as County Transportation Plans during the past few years. ARC intends to work closely with local governments to assess community issues and growth needs specifically to better integrate and improve the manner to which policy and infrastructure investments improve community design, leverage market and demographic trends and improve transportation and land use integration. ARC may also consider engaging regional or national non-profit organizations and state agency partner in new ways during the plan update process.

The Unified Growth Policy Map (UGPM) first adopted in 2006 created a stronger link between regional patterns of development and transportation needs. There is a need to better acknowledge and detail regional priorities by area type with appropriate development design for centers and corridors. Therefore during the Unified Plan process better guidance for development patterns and transportation priorities will be achieved through a more detailed and community responsive UGPM. More information on the RDP and RTP Unified Plan process will be unveiled in early 2009.

Conclusion

A more extensive document that outlines the "Rules and Responsibilities For the Planning in the Atlanta Region" beyond the information included in this Executive Summary is available from ARC. More information on ARC plans and programs is also available at www.atlantaregional.com

Atlanta Regional Commission Regional Planning Rules and Responsibilities

Overview

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency created by the local governments in the Atlanta region pursuant to legislation passed by the Georgia General Assembly. ARC is not a government, but is the forum through which officials of local governments in the Atlanta region confer to solve mutual problems and decide issues of regionwide importance.

While most of the work of ARC is in the area of planning, ARC generally does not implement plans. Home rule authority for zoning and other powers are provided to local governments under the Georgia Constitution. Power to implement regional plans often rests with local governments and state agencies. ARC does, however, provide programs, resources and incentives to implement plans through its powers associated with funding and review of local comprehensive plans or private developments that have regional impact.

This document primarily addresses ARC responsibilities for comprehensive planning under state law as the designated Metropolitan Area Planning and Development Commission (MAPDC). As an area of greater than 1,000,000 population, ARC has authority under state laws as both a MAPDC and Regional Commission (RC), effective June 2009, as outlined by House Bill 1216 in 2008. This document not only describes ARC's authority for planning under state law but also provides the rules and information related to the update of ARC's Regional Development Plan (RDP) during the 2009 to 2011 period.

All counties and municipalities in the 10 county Atlanta region have completed local comprehensive plans during the past 3 years. In addition significant planning has occurred in the areas of transportation as well as water, greenspace and land use. The RDP provides the framework to create a unified plan and strategy to coordinate local comprehensive plans as well as implement the regions land use, transportation and other important plans.

In addition to being the official planning agency under state law for the 10 county region, ARC is also the transportation planning agency for the Atlanta region under federal law as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for a 20 county area. Aging or senior services are provided by ARC as the Area Agency on Aging (AAA).

ARC provides planning support staff to the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (MNGWPD), whose mission is to develop comprehensive regional and watershed-specific water resources plans for implementation by local governments ARC also serves as the administrative agency for the Atlanta Regional Workforce Board (ARWB). The ARWB is responsible for policy development and systems oversight in

Region 3 for residents of Cherokee, Clayton, Douglas, Fayette, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties.

In addition to regional planning, ARC provides technical assistance to local governments as well as leadership programs including the Regional Leadership Institute (RLI), the LINK city-visits program and the MARC (Model Atlanta Regional Commission) youth leadership program.

ARC is the acknowledged regional resource for information and maps on wide-ranging areas of data needs. ARC maintains an extensive planning database, which includes U.S. Census information, current population estimates and demographic and economic forecasts. All information used by ARC is available to the public, and all ARC meetings are open to the public.

Plans and policies adopted by the local governments, working together through ARC, provide important guidance to the formulation of regional plans and programs and to federal funding decisions. ARC is supported by local, state and federal funds. The ARC Board is composed of 23 local elected officials, and 15 private citizens, each with an equal vote, plus one Georgia Department of Community Affairs appointee.

History

Based on a recommendation from a study commissioned by the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce in 1938, the first publicly supported multi-county planning commission in the United States was created in Atlanta in 1947 by the Georgia General Assembly. It was known as the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) and served DeKalb and Fulton counties and the City of Atlanta.

In 1957, the Georgia Legislature passed an Act allowing all counties in the balance of the state to form area planning and development commissions, or APDCs.

In 1960, the General Assembly amended the MPC legislation to expand the membership of the agency to Clayton, Cobb and Gwinnett counties, and reconstituted the structure of the agency and renamed the five-county agency the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission (ARMPC). During the decade of the sixties, however, three additional areawide planning organizations were also created: The Metropolitan Atlanta Council for Health (MACHealth), the Metropolitan Atlanta Council of Local Governments (MACLOG) and the Atlanta Area Transportation Study (AATS). Each organization had its own board of directors and work program. This fragmentation became burdensome for local officials and made coordination among the agencies difficult.

During this same decade, Congress passed the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act which stated that: (1) the welfare of the nation and of its people is directly dependent upon the sound and orderly development and the effective organization and functioning of the metropolitan areas in which two-thirds of its people live and work; (2) the continuing rapid growth of these areas makes it essential that they

prepare, keep current, and carry out comprehensive plans and programs for their orderly physical development with a view to meeting efficiently all their economic and social needs; (3) metropolitan areas are especially handicapped in this task by the complexity and scope of governmental services required in such rapidly growing areas, the multiplicity of political jurisdictions and agencies involved, and the inadequacy of the operational and administrative arrangements available for cooperation among them; and (4) present requirements for areawide planning and programming in connection with various federal programs have materially assisted in the solution of metropolitan problems, but that greater coordination of federal programs and additional participation and cooperation are needed from the states and localities in perfecting and carrying out such efforts.

In 1970, the Georgia legislature passed a law (Georgia Laws 1970, Act No. 1066) which required that by June 30, 1972, APDC boundaries in Georgia be redrawn so that every county in the state would fall within the boundary of an APDC.

In 1971, to alleviate the problems caused by the proliferation of regional agencies in the Atlanta area, special legislation was passed (Georgia Laws 1971, Act No. 5) allowing local governments to create a single new areawide planning agency which consolidated the work of the previous four. The local governments named the new agency the Atlanta Regional Commission.

In 1972, pursuant to Act 1066, the boundaries of 18 Area Planning and Development Commissions were drawn in Georgia, and the counties of Douglas and Rockdale were added to the Atlanta Regional Commission.

Effective June 15, 1989, APDC boundaries were redrawn to add Henry County and on July 1, 1991, to add Fayette. On July 1, 1993, Cherokee County became the 10th county to join the Atlanta Region.

Effective July 1, 1989, Area Planning and Development Commissions were renamed Regional Development Centers (RDCs). On July 1, 1993, the number of RDCs decreased to 17 with the closing of the Oconee RDC. On July 1, 1996, the number of RDCs were further decreased to 16 (Heart of Georgia and Altamaha Georgia Southern were combined).

With the passage of H.B. 215, or Georgia's Growth Strategies legislation in 1989, Georgia entered a new era of planned growth and development. The legislation confirms the critical importance of planning for Georgia's economic future and quality of life. It maintains home rule and local autonomy over local matters while recognizing the need for regional cooperation and planning. H.B. 215 supports planned growth and development by requiring minimum planning standards for all Georgia counties. For more detail, see H.B. 215 in the appendix.

In 1997, the Atlanta Regional Commission celebrated 50 years of regional planning and cooperation. The agency recognized a wide array of successes from its instrumental role

in passing legislation that makes the Chattahoochee River one of the most protected in the country to its role in the development of Hartsfield-Atlanta International Airport.

In 2008, HB 1216 was passed by the Georgia General Assembly which among other changes to state and regional planning, renamed Regional Development Centers (RDCs) to Regional Commission (RCs). ARC under a related state law serves as the only Metropolitan Area Planning and Development Commission (MAPDC). This designation applies to regions of 1,000,000 population or greater. Under HB 1216, MAPDCs possess all the authority and powers of an RC but the MAPDC law overrides in the event of a legal conflict.

Metropolitan Area Planning and Development Commissions (MAPDCs)

Tile 50, chapter 8, article 4 of Georgia law defines the authority of ARC as a MAPDC. As the regional planning body in an area greater than 1,000,000 population, ARC has MAPDC authority as outlined under Georgia law. In 2008, HB 1216 restated that as the MAPDC, ARC also has the authority of a Regional Commission. Pertinent sections of the law are reprinted below.

MAPDC Legislative Intent

It is in the public interest to create an agency composed of officials of political subdivisions and private citizens to coordinate planning and development within each area of this state having a population of more than 1,000,000 according to the United States decennial census of 1970 or any future such census; to designate the agency as the regional commission under Article 2 of this chapter to make the agency the official metropolitan agency for comprehensive research, study, advice, and review concerning area plans; to improve relationships between political subdivisions and public agencies within areas; and to provide policy direction for the solution of common problems through short and long-range comprehensive planning within areas.

50-8-92. Development Guides; Contents

A commission shall prepare and adopt and from time to time amend, change, or repeal, after appropriate study and such public hearings as may be deemed necessary, comprehensive development guides for its area. The development guides shall consist of policy statements, goals, standards, programs, and maps prescribing an orderly and economic development, public and private, of the area. The development guides shall be based upon and encompass physical, economic, and health needs of the area and shall take into consideration future development which may have an impact on the area including, but not limited to, such matters as land use not including zoning, water and sewerage systems, storm drainage systems, parks and open spaces, land needs and the location of airports, highways, transit facilities, hospitals, public buildings, and other community facilities and services.

50-8-93. Review of area plans; designation as official planning agency; responsibility to carry out assigned or delegated planning functions for an area

(a) It is in the public interest and it is provided by this article that:

- (1) A commission review each area plan prepared for use in an area by a political subdivision or by a public authority, commission, board, utility, or agency;
- (2) Each commission be designated as the official planning agency for all state and federal programs to be carried out in the area; and
- (3) A commission carry out such other planning functions for an area as may be assigned or delegated to the commission by other agencies or boards, public or private, and accepted by the commission.

(b) As set forth in Code Section 50-8-83, a commission shall be the planning and development commission for an area in accordance with Article 2 of this chapter.

(c) All powers, duties, obligations, and property vested in or imposed upon any metropolitan planning commission in an area are transferred to, imposed upon, and vested in the commission created by this article as the successor of such commission.

(d) A commission shall be designated for its area as the planning agency under 40 U.S.C.A. Section 461 and 40 U.S.C.A. Section 461(g), as amended, P.L. 89-117 (1965), and P.L. 90-448 (1968); 42 U.S.C.A. Section 3725, P.L. 90-351 (1968); 42 U.S.C.A. Section 246(b), P.L. 89-749, as amended, P.L. 90-174 (1967), and for comprehensive transportation studies required by 23 U.S.C.A. Sections 101, 134, P.L. 87-866 (1962); and 49 U.S.C.A. Section 1601, et seq. P.L. 88-365 (1964), as amended, and supplemented by administrative requirements of the United States Department of Transportation, and any similar law enacted before July 1, 1971. A commission is further granted all of the powers, duties, and authorities necessary to carry out its responsibilities and duties under such laws.

(e) A commission shall have power and authority to undertake such other planning functions within its area as may be assigned or delegated to the commission by other agencies or boards, public or private, and for which the commission accepts responsibility.

Planning Powers of MAPDCs

MAPDCs engage in a continuous program of research, study, and planning of matters affecting its area. A commission shall engage in a continuous program of research, study, and planning of matters affecting its area including but not limited to:

- (1) Land use;
- (2) Transportation within the area, including highways, railroads, airports, streets, and mass transit;

- (3) The acquisition and financing of facilities for the disposal of solid waste material for the area and the means of financing such facilities;
- (4) The acquisition and financing of storm water drainage facilities for the area and the means of financing such facilities;
- (5) The acquisition and financing of suitable major parks and open spaces within and adjacent to the area;
- (6) The control and prevention of air and water pollution;
- (7) Environmental quality;
- (8) Law enforcement agencies and increased efficiency of the criminal justice systems in the area;
- (9) Planning for the provision of health facilities and services; and
- (10) The feasibility of the consolidation of common services of political subdivisions.

50-8-99.1. Commission authorized to be contracting agent for certain local governments

(a) For purposes of this Code section, the term "participating affected local government" means the governing body of a political subdivision which is or will be affected by a regional public project and which agrees to authorize the commission to act on its behalf as described in this Code section.

(b) In order to more efficiently coordinate and manage the planning, development, implementation, construction, management, and operation of public projects which are regional, rather than purely local, in nature, the commission is authorized pursuant to this Code section to act as the contracting and coordinating agent for the participating affected local governments.

(c) Upon receiving written approval from each participating affected local government, the commission is authorized to act as the sponsor and coordinator of regional public projects. Upon receipt of such approval, the commission shall be authorized to enter into agreements with third parties as agent on behalf of the participating affected local governments. All agreements with third parties related to the planning, development, implementation, construction, management, or operation of the project shall be between the commission as agent for the participating affected local governments and such third parties. Upon contracting with third parties as the project sponsor, the commission shall then enter into subcontracts with the participating affected local governments in order to allocate appropriately the costs and benefits associated with the project, establish obligations and responsibilities of each of the participating affected local governments in connection therewith, delineate the relationships among the parties, and address any other

matters which may be necessary or convenient in order to assure the successful completion and operation of the project.

(d) The commission shall not have the power to tax or to incur long-term indebtedness in connection with its authority under this Code section. The commission may make arrangements for the financing of any project described in this Code section if authorized by the participating affected local governments and if any resulting debt thereby created is authorized pursuant to the laws and Constitution of this state. Any such financing or credit shall be extended directly to the participating affected local governments, which shall assume all responsibility to repay same. No debt as authorized in this subsection shall be incurred in any manner so as to be a responsibility of an affected government unless that affected government's portion of that debt is first approved by a majority of the voters of such affected government voting in an election called by the governing authority of the affected government in the manner provided for calling and holding other special elections if such debt is required to be so approved pursuant to Article IX, Section V of the Constitution.

Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) **for Regional Planning Requirements** **(Effective Date: July 1, 2009)**

Georgia DCA has developed draft rules for new regional plans that are required of RCs. These new rules outline the process and standards for regional planning, which ARC must undertake during the 2009 to 2011 period. The primary elements of the draft rules are provided below.

Purpose

The purpose of the regional planning requirements is to provide a framework for preparation of regional plans that will:

- involve all segments of the region in developing a vision for the future of the region;
- generate pride and enthusiasm about the future of the region;
- engage the interest of regional policy makers and stakeholders in implementing the plan; and
- provide a guide to everyday decision-making for use by government officials and other regional 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 region. When implemented, the resulting plan will help the region address critical issues and opportunities while moving toward realization of its unique vision for the region's future.

The planning requirements also provide technical guidance to Regional Commissions (for 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 110-12-6-.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 region'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 regional planning by all Regional Commissions in Georgia. Those standards and procedures are embodied in these regional planning requirements. In order to remain eligible for state funding programs, each Regional Commission must prepare, adopt, maintain, and implement a regional plan that meets these planning requirements. The Department may, from time to time, adopt and promulgate revisions of these requirements, pursuant to the Georgia Administrative Procedure Act.

Overview of Planning Requirements

110-12-6-.02 Overview of Planning Requirements.

(1) Plan Scope. A regional plan meeting these planning requirements must include three components: (1) a Regional Assessment, (2) a Stakeholder Involvement Program, and (3) a Regional Agenda, as described below.

(a) **Regional Assessment.** The first part of the regional plan is an objective and professional assessment of data and information about the region that is intended to be prepared without extensive direct stakeholder involvement. The Regional Assessment includes: (1) a list of potential issues and opportunities the region may wish to take action to address, (2) analysis of projected regional development patterns, including a map of desired future development patterns for the region; (3) evaluation of current policies, activities, and development patterns in the region 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 Regional Assessment must be a concise and informative report, for it will be used to inform decision-making by stakeholders during development of the Regional Agenda portion of the plan. (Specific requirements and procedures for this component of the plan are covered in more detail in Chapters 110-12-6-.03 and 110-12-6-.08)

(b) **Stakeholder Involvement Program.** The second part of the regional plan is a Stakeholder Involvement Program that describes the Regional Commission's strategy for ensuring adequate public and stakeholder involvement in the preparation of the Regional Agenda portion of the plan.

Upon completion, the Regional Commission transmits both the Stakeholder Involvement Program and the Regional Assessment to the Department for review. This transmittal must take place prior to the deadline specified in the Schedule for Regional Planning maintained by the Department. (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) **Regional Agenda.** The third part of the regional plan is the most important, for it includes the region's vision for the future as well as the strategy for achieving this vision. Because the Regional Agenda provides guidance for future decision-making about the region, it must be prepared with adequate input from stakeholders and the general public.

The Regional Agenda must include four major components:

- A Regional Vision for the future development of the region;
- A list of Regional Issues and Opportunities identified for further action;
- An Implementation Program for achieving the regional vision and for addressing the identified Regional Issues and Opportunities. The implementation program must include:
 - Guiding Principles to be utilized by all actors in making decisions affecting the future of the region;
 - Performance Standards that establish minimum and exceptional levels of performance expected of all actors in implementing the recommendations of the plan;
 - A list of Strategies that may be implemented by any actors in the region to assist with achieving the Regional Vision or addressing the Regional Issues or Opportunities;
 - A Regional Work Program listing Regional Commission responsibilities for implementing the plan.
 - An Evaluation and Monitoring plan to ensure the regional plan is accomplishing the desired results.

Development of the Regional Agenda must not be initiated until review of the Regional Assessment and Stakeholder Involvement Program is completed, since this review may include guidance or suggested revisions of these two important inputs to development of the Regional Agenda.

Upon completion, the Regional Agenda is transmitted to the Regional Commission for review, following a required public hearing. This is the portion of the plan that must be implemented once it is approved by the Department and adopted by the Regional Commission. Adoption must take place prior to the deadline specified in the Schedule for Regional Planning maintained by the Department. (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 regional planning requirements. The plan preparers and regional stakeholders must review these recommendations where referenced in the planning requirements in order to determine their applicability or helpfulness to the region's plan.

Regional Assessment

(1) Purpose. The purpose of the Regional Assessment is to present a factual and conceptual foundation upon which the rest of the regional plan is built. Preparation of the Regional Assessment is largely a staff or professional function of collecting and analyzing data and information about the region 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 Regional Agenda.

(2) Requirements. The Regional Assessment 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 region. 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 Regional Development Patterns. This must include the following two components:

1. Projected Development Patterns Map. Based on current trends and existing local regulations, a map illustrating projected land use patterns in the region must be prepared. Start with the Regionally Important Resource Map for the region (see Rules for Regionally Important Resources adopted by the Board of Community Affairs) and map projected development patterns for the 20-year planning period using the following general categories:

- Conservation: Areas to be preserved in order to protect important resources or environmentally sensitive areas of the region. Areas shown as conservation must correspond to the Regionally Important Resource Map for the region.
- Rural: Areas not expected to become urbanized or require provision of urban services during the planning period;
- Developed: Areas exhibiting urban type development patterns and where urban services (i.e., water, sewer, etc.) are already being provided at the time of plan preparation;
- Developing: Areas that will likely become urbanized and require provision of new urban services (i.e., water, sewer, etc.) during the planning period.

2. Areas Requiring Special Attention. Considering the above map of projected development patterns and other sources, evaluate the land use trends within the region to identify any areas requiring special attention, including:

- Areas identified on the Regionally Important Resources map;
- Areas where significant natural or cultural resources are likely to be impacted by development;
- Areas where rapid development or change of land uses are likely to occur, especially 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);
- Areas with significant infill development opportunities, including scattered vacant sites, large abandoned structures, or sites that may be environmentally contaminated;
- Areas of significant disinvestment, levels of poverty, and/or unemployment substantially higher than average levels for the region as a whole.

(c) Analysis of Consistency with Quality Community Objectives. Evaluate the current policies, activities, and development patterns in the region for consistency with the Quality Community Objectives (see section 110-12-6-.06(3)) using the Quality Growth Assessment tool provided on the Department's website. Use this analysis to identify additional issues and opportunities for adapting 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 projected development patterns map identified above by evaluating at a minimum the data and information listed in section 110-12-6-.07(1). The Regional Commission 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 Regional Commission may also use other information or sources of its choosing for the analyses presented in assessment (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 regional trends that need to be brought to the attention of decision-makers;
- Whether it suggests adjustment of the Projected Development Patterns Map (e.g., to avoid intrusion into environmentally sensitive areas, etc.).

Stakeholder Involvement Program

(1) Purpose. The purpose of the Stakeholder Involvement Program is to ensure that the regional plan reflects the full range of regional values and desires, by involving a diverse

spectrum of stakeholders in development of the Regional Agenda. This broad-based participation in developing the Regional Agenda will also help ensure that it will be implemented, because many in the region are involved in its development and thereby become committed to seeing it through. The Stakeholder Involvement Program is intended to supplement, not replace, the regional hearing required in section 110-12-6-.08 (2)(a).

(2) Requirements. The three required steps for developing the Stakeholder Involvement Program are listed below. The result must be a concise schedule to guide development of the Regional Agenda, including planned 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 Regional 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 for involving the selected stakeholders in the process of developing the Regional Agenda.

(c) Schedule for Completion of the Regional Agenda. Review the suggested schedules for completion of the Regional Agenda provided in the State Planning Recommendations and choose one that best fits regional needs. Adapt this schedule as necessary for unique regional circumstances, and substitute the specific participation techniques selected in the previous step at appropriate points in the schedule. This schedule must include events aimed at including the Regional Commission Council in development of the Regional Agenda, such as the Council serving as the steering committee for plan development or holding special participation events with the Council members.

Regional Agenda

(1) Purpose. The purpose of the Regional Agenda is to lay out a road map for the region's future, developed through a very public process of involving regional leaders and stakeholders in making key decisions about the future of the region. The Regional Agenda is the most important part of the plan, for it includes the region'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 Regional Agenda is intended to generate pride and enthusiasm about the future of the region, thereby making stakeholders want to ensure that the plan is implemented.

(2) Requirements. The Regional Agenda must include the four required components listed below, all prepared with adequate public and stakeholder involvement as laid out in the Stakeholder Involvement Program. The result must be a concise, user-friendly document usable for day-to-day decision-making by regional leaders as they work toward achieving the desired future of the region.

(a) Regional Vision. The Regional Vision is intended to paint a picture of what the region desires to become, providing a complete description of the development patterns to be encouraged. It includes the following components:

1. General Vision Statement. Include a general statement of the overall goals and desired future the region seeks to achieve.

2. Regional Development Map. Prepare a Regional Development Map that illustrates desired future land use patterns using the four categories identified in section 110-12-6-.03 (2) (b) 1. It must also include the Areas Requiring Special Attention. Start with the Projected Development Patterns Map and the Areas Requiring Special Attention identified in the Regional Assessment and adjust boundaries or modify the Areas Requiring Special Attention based on stakeholder perspectives about desired future development patterns.

3. Defining Narrative. While preparing the Regional Development Map, define specific strategies for managing each Area Requiring Special Attention. This defining narrative must include the following information for each of these areas shown on the Regional 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 types of land uses 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) Regional Issues and Opportunities. This is the final, agreed upon, list of issues and opportunities to be addressed in the plan. Start with the list of Potential Issues and Opportunities identified in the Regional Assessment and modify, add or subtract issues or opportunities based on stakeholder knowledge of the region and interpretation of the Regional Assessment. 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 Regional Vision and for addressing each of the Regional Issues and Opportunities. It identifies specific measures to be undertaken by the regional leaders to implement the plan and provides guidance to developers, local governments, and other public agencies for helping achieve the Regional Vision. The Implementation Program must include the following components:

1. Guiding Principles. Include any policies (such as, “New development will be encouraged to locate on infill sites closer to towns, whenever possible.”) necessary to provide ongoing guidance and direction to regional leaders for making decisions

consistent with achieving the Regional Vision or addressing Regional Issues and Opportunities. These policies should be specific enough for use by any local, state, or federal governmental agency in making decisions as to whether investments in new or upgraded public facilities would be consistent with the regional plan. These policies should include locational factors (e.g., “locate new schools within existing neighborhoods,” “no road expansions within the Wapatchee Environmental Resource Area”), as well as design and impact considerations (e.g., “architecture should reflect the regional vernacular,” “provide strong pedestrian linkages to mitigate traffic impacts”). Regional Commission’s are encouraged to categorize the guiding principles based on applicability or function. For example: guiding principles for public investments in the region or guiding principles for DRI’s.

2. Performance Standards. Establish two achievement thresholds, a Minimum Standard and an Excellence Standard, by identifying specific ordinances, programs, or requirements that may be implemented by local governments in order to realize the Regional Vision and/or address the Regional Issues and Opportunities. The Regional Commission may choose to establish multiple tiers for both the Minimum and Excellence standards in order to accommodate the varying size and capacity of local governments in the region. The Regional Commission may choose to establish a schedule for local governments to comply with these measures and may require interim product submittals from local governments to verify progress during the 3 year timeframe. The performance standards may include recommendations for fitting local character areas into the larger regional planning context, implementation measures to achieve the desired development patterns for the region, recommended new or revised local development regulations, incentives, public investments, and infrastructure improvements. Refer to the State Planning Recommendations for suggestions.

- **Minimum Standard.** Items included in the Minimum Standard must be chosen as essential activities for local governments to undertake for consistency with the regional plan. The intent is to ensure a consistent and predictable basic level of local requirements across the region. All local governments in the region will be expected to attain the Minimum Standard within three years of adoption of the regional plan, or risk losing Qualified Local Government status. Whenever a local government fails to achieve the Minimum Standard within the three year grace period, the Regional Commission must notify the Department immediately for appropriate action regarding the local government’s Qualified Local Government status. The Regional Commission and the Department will provide technical and training assistance to local governments to help them achieve this Minimum Standard.
- **Excellence Standard.** Items included in the Excellence Standard should be selected as desirable activities for local governments to undertake for consistency with the regional plan. The intent is to lay out a menu of recommended best practices for local governments to select for implementation. Each recommended best practice a local government implements will count toward achieving the Excellence Standard threshold established by the Department. Any local

government that attains this threshold will be eligible for the Regional Steward Incentives Package identified and publicized by the Department.

3. Strategies. Identify recommended activities that actors other than the Regional Commission may take to implement the regional plan. Include the following information for each listed activity:

- Brief description of the activity;
- Desired 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.

4. Regional Work Program. Identify specific activities the Regional Commission will undertake to implement the regional plan during the upcoming five year period. Refer to recommended plan implementation measures listed in the State Planning Recommendations for suggestions. Separate these implementation measures into the following categories:

- Planning and Coordination. Activities performed by the Regional Commission to assist local governments and other regional actors to act consistently with the regional plan. Actions identified in this section should include outreach, education, and technical assistance such as more detailed sub-area planning, new or revised local development regulations, incentives, public investments, infrastructure improvements, etc.
- Review. List activities by other actors in the region that require review and comment by the Regional Commission. The findings from the review are advisory in nature. This section may also include recommended enhancements to the Developments of Regional Impact program that will apply in the region. Refer to recommended guidance listed in the State Planning Recommendations for suggestions.

Include the following information for each listed implementation activity:

- Brief description of the activity;
- Timeframe for undertaking the activity;
- Estimated cost (if any) of implementing the activity; and
- Funding source(s), if applicable.

(d) Evaluation and Monitoring. Identify activities the Regional Commission will undertake to ensure that the regional plan is accomplishing the desired results. These activities must include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Conduct periodic Quality Growth Effectiveness assessments of each local government in the region, to determine if they are achieving prescribed performance standards. The Regional Commission may use the Quality Community Objectives assessment tool found on the Department's website for this purpose.

2. Survey regional leaders as to whether the Strategies identified in the plan are being implemented.

3. As part of the Report of Accomplishments included with each annual update of the Regional Work Program, survey changes and developments in the region to determine whether the plan is being effectively implemented and if it is having the desired impact on regional development patterns. Based on the results of this survey identify impediments to implementation and possible solutions or needed amendments of the regional plan.

State Planning 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 Regional Commissions to achieve, in developing and implementing their regional plan. Pursuant to sections 110-12-6-.03(2)(c) and 110-12-6-.05(a)3, Regional Commissions must evaluate policies, activities, and development patterns in the region for consistency 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 community, 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.

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 Regional 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 region, including:

- Total Population. Evaluate how the total population of the region has changed in recent years, what is projected for the future, and how the region compares, in terms of growth rate, to other areas.
- Age Distribution. Evaluate the region's age groupings and how these are projected to change over time. Identify implications for the region.
- Race and Ethnicity. Evaluate the region'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 region.
- Income. Evaluate income levels, income distribution and poverty levels in the region 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 region, including:

- Economic Base. Evaluate the various sectors or industries that constitute the region's economy in terms of their relative importance and impact, including the region's place in the larger economies of the state and the nation.
- Labor Force. Evaluate characteristics of the region'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 region's businesses and residents.
- Economic Trends. Evaluate economic trends that are ongoing in the region, 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 region.

(c) Housing. Use the following factors to evaluate the adequacy and suitability of existing housing stock to serve current and future regional needs.

- Housing Types & Mix. Evaluate the composition and quality of the region'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 region.
- Condition and Occupancy. Evaluate the age and condition of housing in the region 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 region, both for owners and renters, in terms of affordability for residents and workers in the region.
 - 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 region (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 and appropriately distributed within the region to allow people to live near where they work. 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 region. Also evaluate any barriers that may prevent a significant proportion of the region's nonresident workforce from residing in the jurisdiction, such as a lack of suitable or affordable housing, suitably zoned land, etc.

(d) Community Facilities and Services. Evaluate the following major public facilities and services. Evaluate the adequacy and useful life of these facilities and services for meeting future needs of the region and how to make the most efficient use of existing infrastructure to accommodate future development in the region. 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 region.

- 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 region, 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.

(e) Intergovernmental Coordination. Evaluate the adequacy, opportunities, suitability, and need for coordination mechanisms and processes in the region considering:

- All local governments within the region;
- 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.

(f) 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 region 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 region where mode choice is limited. Evaluate how effectively mobility needs of the region are met by these alternative transportation modes.
- 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 region 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) Mapping Requirements. The geographical information system maps that are used to produce the required maps in the regional plan must be submitted to the Department simultaneously with the regional 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 U.S. 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.

(d) Boundaries. All administrative or political boundaries on maps submitted to the Department must include the latest available boundaries from the U.S. 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 U.S. 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).

Procedural Requirements

(1) Overview of Regional Assessment and Stakeholder Involvement Program. Upon completion, the Regional Commission must submit its Regional Assessment and Stakeholder Involvement Program concurrently to the Department for review. Both of these plan components must be submitted prior to the deadline specified in the Schedule for Regional Planning maintained by the Department.

(a) Completeness Check. The Department shall determine whether the Regional Assessment and Stakeholder Involvement Program are complete, within 7 days of receipt. A Regional Assessment or Stakeholder Involvement 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 Department. The Department shall notify the Regional Commission of its findings regarding the completeness of the submittal and identify items that must be submitted, if any, prior to further processing.

(b) Notification of Interested Parties. Once the Department has determined that the Regional Assessment and Stakeholder Involvement 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 Regional Commission, the general nature of the

submittals, and a deadline by which comments must be received. At a minimum, interested parties shall include:

- Local governments located inside the region, any local governments located outside but contiguous to the region, and any other local governments that are likely to be affected by the Regional Assessment or Stakeholder Involvement Program;
- Any local authorities, special districts, or other entities identified in evaluating intergovernmental coordination mechanisms and processes (if applicable);
- Regional Commissions that are contiguous to the region or that are likely to be affected by the Regional Assessment or Stakeholder Involvement Program; and
- Affected state agencies, including the Department of Transportation, the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority, etc.

(c) Review of Regional Assessment and Stakeholder Involvement Program. The Department shall review the Regional Assessment for its adequacy at addressing the required components and identifying potential issues and opportunities to be dealt with in the subsequent portions of the plan. The Department shall review the Stakeholder Involvement Program for its adequacy in identifying specific mechanisms to ensure adequate involvement of regional stakeholders in the development of the Regional Agenda.

(d) Report of Findings and Recommendations. Within 30 days after certification of the completeness of the Regional Assessment and the Stakeholder Involvement Program, the Department must transmit a final report of its findings and recommendations to the Regional Commission. The report must include:

- Comments submitted by interested parties that reviewed the Regional Assessment;
- The Department's findings and recommendations from its review of the Regional Assessment; and
- The Department's findings and recommendations resulting from its review of the Stakeholder Involvement Program.

(e) Publicizing the Regional Assessment and Stakeholder Involvement Program. Once reviewed by the Department, the availability of the Regional Assessment and the Stakeholder Involvement Program must be publicized by the Regional Commission for public information. This requirement may be met by providing notice in the local newspapers of general circulation in the region, identifying where complete copies of the Regional Assessment and Stakeholder Involvement Program may be reviewed.

(2) Transmittal and Review of the Regional Agenda. Upon completion, the Regional Commission must submit its Regional Agenda to the Department for review. The Regional Agenda must be transmitted prior to the deadline specified in the Schedule for Regional Planning maintained by the Department.

(a) Regional Hearing. A regional hearing must be held once the Regional Agenda has been drafted and made available for public review, but prior to its transmittal to the Department for review. The purpose of this hearing is to brief the regional stakeholders

on the contents of the Regional Agenda and provide an opportunity for stakeholders to make final suggestions, additions or revisions. Once stakeholder comments have been addressed, the Regional Agenda must be transmitted to the Department by resolution of the Board.

(b) Completeness Check. The Department shall determine whether the Regional Agenda is complete, within 7 days of its receipt. A Regional 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 Department. The Department shall notify the Regional Commission of its findings regarding the completeness of the submittal and identify items that must be submitted, if any, prior to further processing.

(c) Notification of Interested Parties. Once the Department has determined that the Regional Agenda is complete, it shall immediately notify any interested parties of the availability of the Regional Agenda for review and comment, providing the name of the Regional Commission, the general nature of the Regional Agenda, and a deadline by which comments must be received. At a minimum, interested parties shall include:

- Local governments located inside the region, any local governments located outside but contiguous to the region, and any other local governments that are likely to be affected by the Regional Agenda;
- Any local authorities, special districts, or other entities identified in evaluating intergovernmental coordination mechanisms and processes (if applicable);
- Regional Commissions that are contiguous to the region or that are likely to be affected by the Regional Agenda; and
- Affected state agencies, including the Department of Transportation, the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority, etc.

(d) Review of the Regional Agenda. The Department shall review the Regional Agenda for its adequacy at addressing the required components and developing an effective implementation program for achieving the Regional Vision and address identified issues and opportunities. The Department may also offer advisory comments for improving the Regional Agenda for consideration by the Regional Commission.

(e) Final Report of Findings and Recommendations. Within 60 days after certification of the completeness of the Regional Agenda, the Department must transmit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Regional Commission. The report must include:

- Comments submitted by interested parties that reviewed the Regional Agenda;
- The Department's findings and recommendations resulting from its review of the Regional Agenda.

(f) Alternative Dispute Resolution. Alternative dispute resolution of conflicts relating to the Regional Agenda may be initiated in accordance with the Rules for Alternative Dispute Resolution adopted by the Board of Community Affairs.

(g) Adoption of the Regional Agenda. Once the Regional Agenda has been found by the Department to be in compliance with the planning requirements, the Board may adopt the Regional Agenda with or without any recommendations for improvement included in the Department's report of findings and recommendations. In order to maintain eligibility for state funding, the Regional Commission must adopt the Regional Agenda prior to the deadline specified in the Schedule for Regional Planning maintained by the Department.

(h) Notification of Adoption. Within 7 days of adoption of a Regional Agenda, the Regional Commission shall notify the Department that these documents have been adopted by the Board.

(i) Certification. Once the Department has been notified by the Regional Commission of adoption of a Regional Agenda, the Department may issue a letter certifying this Regional Commission as eligible for state funding. This certification shall automatically expire approximately five years thereafter, unless otherwise specified. To retain this certification, a Regional Commission must remain in compliance with the requirements outlined in these planning requirements and O.C.G.A. 50-8-2(a)(18).

(j) Promulgating the Regional Agenda. Once adopted, the Regional Agenda must be promulgated within the region by the Regional Commission as follows:

1. Consult with all local governments in the region to explain the contents of the Regional Agenda and to encourage each government to:

- Coordinate identification of local character areas in local comprehensive plans with the Regional Development Map for the region. Generally each of the local character areas should fit into the larger Regional Development Map for the region by being consistent in terms of allowed land uses and implementation measures to be applied to achieve desired development patterns.
- Coordinate decisions about investments in new or upgraded public facilities with the Guiding Principles.
- Follow the Performance Standards in developing and implementing their local comprehensive plan. This includes fitting local character areas into the larger regional development patterns context and adopting implementation measures (such as new or revised local development regulations, incentives, public investments, and infrastructure improvements) to achieve the desired development patterns for the region.

2. Consult with any other important regional stakeholders (such as developers, chambers of commerce, environmental protection groups) to explain the contents of the Regional Agenda and to encourage them to coordinate their activities to achieve the desired development patterns for the region.

3. Consult with staff of the Department of Transportation, Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority and other appropriate state agencies to encourage them to coordinate their activities with the Regional Agenda.

(3) Maintaining the Regional Plan. Regional Commissions are responsible for maintaining their regional plans to accurately reflect current regional conditions and the region's vision and priorities for the future. Maintenance of the plan includes plan amendments, updates of the plan, or required periodic updates of the Regional Agenda.

(a) Plan Amendments. The Regional Commission must amend the adopted plan when the annual Evaluation and Monitoring process identifies changes needed to ensure plan is accomplishing the desired results, or when required by the Department to do so as a result of changes to the planning requirements.

(b) Required Updates to the Regional Plan. At a minimum, a plan update must be completed every five years, in accordance with the Schedule for Regional Planning maintained by the Department. However, earlier than five years, regional leaders may determine that the regional plan needs to be updated, based upon the degree of change in the region. 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 regional conditions (i.e., if the data upon which the plan is based has become significantly outdated, or the region's vision has changed), an update of the regional plan may be needed.

(c) Required Periodic Updates to the Regional Work Program (RWP). At a minimum, the Regional Commission must prepare and submit annual updates to the Regional Work Program portion of the Regional Agenda. Each annual update shall include:

- A new fifth year and any changes to the work program for the other years.
- A report of plan accomplishments that must identify the current status of each activity in the previous work program. At a minimum, the Regional Commission 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 intended to be undertaken (explaining why).
- An update of the Areas Requiring Special Attention.
- An Evaluation and Monitoring Report that includes
 - A description of the monitoring activities and evaluation procedures undertaken (during the year just concluded) to measure the effectiveness of the regional plan; and
 - A report on the results of the monitoring and evaluation process, assessing the effectiveness of the regional plan and identifying any plan modifications needed to enhance its effectiveness; and
 - A list of any plan amendments required as a result of the evaluation and monitoring findings.

(d) Submittal and Review Procedures for Plan Amendments and Updates. All plan amendments and annual Regional Work Program updates must be submitted to the Department for review and shall follow the submittal and review procedures outlined in section 110-12-6-.08(2). All full plan updates must be submitted to the Department for review and shall follow the submittal and review procedures outlined in section 110-12-6-.08(1) and (2).

(4) Alternative Regional Planning Requirements. Each Regional Commission may establish alternative Regional Planning requirements from those adopted by the Department. The alternative requirements must be approved by a majority of the Regional Commission's Council, and subsequently approved by the Department.

(5) Additional Local Planning Requirements. An Regional Commission may require that local government comprehensive plans within its region address additional planning requirements along with those prescribed by the Department. Before imposing such additional requirements, the Regional Commission must incorporate these additional requirements in the Regional Plan as a supplement to the Implementation Program, get input from all local governments in the region, have its Board of Directors approve the additional planning requirements and finally obtain the Department's approval, following the procedures below.

(a) Identify the Additional Planning Requirements. Develop additional planning requirements that at least include the following:

- Purpose Statement. Specify the intent of the additional planning requirements and list the Regional Issues and Opportunities that these requirements will help address.
- Requirements. Explain what each local government must do in order to comply, including any specific considerations, planning analyses, mapping, policies or implementation strategies that must be included in the local government comprehensive plan.
- Standards for Assessing Local Compliance. Set forth the specific standards to be applied in reviewing local comprehensive plans for compliance with the additional requirements. These compliance standards should be objective and measurable, not subjective.

(b) Local Government Input. The Regional Commission must provide the draft additional requirements and any subsequent revised drafts to all local governments and interested parties within the region and allow at least 30 days for their review and comment. Prior to submittal of the additional planning requirements to the Department, the Regional Commission must hold at least one regional meeting in order to obtain input on the additional planning requirements from local governments and their constituents.

(c) Submittal for Department Approval. Once the Regional Commission's additional planning requirements are finalized, the Regional Commission's Board of Directors must approve these and authorize their submission to the Department as part of its next

required update of the Regional Plan or Regional Work Program. The Department will review the draft requirements and notify the Regional Commission of its decision to approve or disapprove as part of its Report of Findings and Recommendations on the submitted update of the Regional Plan or Regional Work Program.

(d) Review for Local Compliance. The additional planning requirements shall become effective one year after approved by the Department and adopted by the Regional Commission's Board of Directors. After that date, all local comprehensive plans submitted to the Regional Commission (following their normal recertification schedule as specified by the Department) will be reviewed for compliance with these additional requirements. The additional requirements will be treated as if fully incorporated into the Department's Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning, meaning that local government compliance therewith shall be required for maintenance of Qualified Local Government status within the Regional Commission's region. The Regional Commission shall review the local comprehensive plan and make a recommendation to the Department regarding compliance with the additional requirements. The Department reserves the right to make a final determination of local government compliance.

(e) Amendment of Adopted Additional Planning Requirements. Approved additional planning requirements may be amended by the Regional Commission by following the same procedures set forth above for the initial development, submittal, and review of additional planning requirements.

Rules of Georgia Department of Community Affairs for Regionally Important Resources **(Effective Date: July 1, 2009)**

Purpose & Overview

The Georgia Planning Act authorizes the Department of Community Affairs (the Department) to establish specific rules and procedures for the identification of Regionally Important Resources, development of a plan for protection and management of these resources, and for review of activities potentially impacting these resources. These specific rules and procedures are provided herein and are applicable to all local governments and Regional Commissions (RCs) in the State.

The intent of these rules and procedures is: (1) enhanced focus on protection and management of important natural and cultural resources throughout the state; (2) careful consideration of, and planning for, impacts of new development on these important resources; and (3) improved local, regional and state level coordination in protecting and managing of these important resources.

The rules require that:

(a) RCs involve regional stakeholders in a comprehensive effort to identify the important natural and cultural resources in the region.

(b) RCs prepare a comprehensive *Regional Resource Plan* for protection and management of the identified resources. This plan must include the following components: (1) a *Regionally Important Resource Map* for the region that includes all of the important natural and cultural resources and attempts to link these to form a continuous regional green infrastructure network; (2) *Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices* that should be utilized by developers for designing new developments to be located near Regionally Important Resources; and (3) *General Policies and Protection Measures* that should be utilized by local governments in making decisions that affect Regionally Important Resources. (Specific requirements for this plan are covered in more detail in section 110-12-4-.02(2).)

(c) The *Regional Resource Plan* is submitted for review and comment by the Department and other affected parties before it is formally adopted and implemented by the RDC. (Specific procedures for this review are covered in more detail in section 110-12-4-.02(3).)

(d) The *Regional Resource Plan* is actively promulgated by the RC in an effort to coordinate activities and planning of local governments, land trusts and conservation or environmental protection groups active in the region, and state agencies toward protection and management of the identified Regionally Important Resources. (Specific requirements for promulgating the plan are covered in more detail in section 110-12-4-.02(4).)

(e) New development projects located within one mile of any area included on the *Regionally Important Resource Map* may be subject to special regional review requirements, including lower thresholds for triggering the DRI review process required at Chapter 110-12-3-.03 and additional evaluation of project consistency with the *Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices* during the DRI review process.

Designation of Regionally Important Resources

(1) Regionally Important Resource Nominations. The RC must seek nominations from individuals, interested organizations (such as land trusts, conservation or environmental protection groups active in the region), local governments and governmental agencies for important natural or cultural resources located within the region. These nominations will be considered by the RDC in developing the Regional Important Resources Map for the region (see section 110-12-4-.02(2)(a)2. below). All nominations must include:

(a) A narrative of the resource's value and vulnerability which addresses the regional importance of the resource and indicates the degree to which the resource is threatened or endangered.

(b) A map of the recommended resource boundaries that also identifies any municipal or county boundaries falling within the proposed resource boundaries.

(2) Preparation of the Regional Resource Plan. The RC shall prepare a *Regional Resource Plan* for protection and management of the important natural and cultural resources located within the region. The RC shall seek advice from affected local governments and

stakeholders at appropriate points during development of the *Regional Resource Plan*. This plan must include the following components.

(a) Regionally Important Resources Map. Include a detailed map of the recommended resource boundaries that includes all of the important natural or cultural resources in the region. A written description of the methodology utilized to determine the boundaries must be included. Use the following guidelines in creating this map:

1. Begin by mapping all resources identified by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources as State Vital Areas. This includes Coastal Marshes, Salt Marshes, Tidal Wetlands and resources covered by the *Environmental Planning Criteria* (see definition at section 110-12-4-.03). For the resources covered by the *Environmental Planning Criteria*, map only the critical protection areas as provided in these *Criteria* (e.g., required buffer zones, jurisdictional wetlands, high pollution susceptibility groundwater recharge areas, etc.).
2. Evaluate the value and vulnerability of all resources nominated by regional stakeholders as provided at section 110-12-4-.02(1). All of these resources that the RC determines have sufficient value and vulnerability to be considered regionally important should be added to the above map.
3. Add any natural or cultural resource areas in the region that are already preserved (such as state parks, wildlife management areas, conservation easements, etc.) to the above map.
4. Add other natural or cultural resources that were not nominated, but that the RC determines should be included, to the above map. In determining other resources to be added to the *Regionally Important Resources Map*, the RDC must consider the resource identification work of state agencies and environmental protection organizations identified in the *Protection Resources Listing* maintained by the Department. This listing includes such resources as the GA Land Conservation Plan, GA Wildlife Action Plan, and the GA Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).
5. Include linkages between resources mapped above to form, to the maximum feasible extent, a continuous regional green infrastructure network (see definition in Chapter 110-12-4-.03).

(b) Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices. The *Regional Resource Plan* must include a listing of best practices to be used by developers for designing new developments to be located within one mile of any area included on the *Regionally Important Resource Map* above. This listing will also be used by the RC for reviewing Developments of Regional Impact (DRI) located within one mile of any area included on the *Regionally Important Resource Map*. Refer to recommended guidance listed in the *State Planning Recommendations* for suggestions. This guidance must also include a *DRI Threshold Reduction Factor* for determining the scale of development qualifying for DRI review when located within one mile of any area included on the *Regionally Important Resource Map*. The Reduction Factor should be expressed as a percentage, such that a 70 percent *DRI Threshold Reduction Factor* would mean that developments exceeding 0.7 times the normal DRI threshold would qualify for DRI review if located within one mile of any area included on the *Regionally Important Resource Map*.

(c) General Policies and Protection Measures. The *Regional Resource Plan* must include a list of *General Policies and Protection Measures* recommended for appropriate management of the areas included on the *Regionally Important Resources Map*. Refer to

the Environmental Protection section of the *State Planning Recommendations* for suggested policies and protection measures. These *General Policies and Protection Measures* are intended primarily as guidance for local governments in planning or decision-making that affects the Regionally Important Resources. But the RDC will also utilize the *General Policies and Protection Measures* for:

1. Reviewing local comprehensive plans for consistency with regional plans as provided in the Local Planning Requirements, Chapter 110-12-1-.08.
2. Encouraging local government in the region to adopt protection measures, policies, and enhancement activities that will promote protection of these areas included on the *Regionally Important Resource Map*, as provided at section 110-12-4-.02(4)

(3) Transmittal and Review of the Regional Resource Plan. Upon completion, the RDC must submit its *Regional Resource Plan* to the Department for review. The *Regional Resource Plan* must be transmitted prior to the deadline specified in the *Schedule for Regional Planning* maintained by the Department.

(a) Regional Hearing. A regional hearing must be held once the *Regional Resource Plan* has been drafted and made available for public review, but prior to its transmittal to the Department for review. The purpose of this hearing is to brief the regional stakeholders on the contents of the *Regional Resource Plan* and provide an opportunity for stakeholders to make final suggestions, additions or revisions. Once stakeholder comments have been addressed, the *Regional Resource Plan* must be transmitted to the Department by resolution of the Board.

(b) Completeness Check. The Department shall determine whether the *Regional Resource Plan* is complete, within 7 days of its receipt. A *Regional Resource Plan* 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 Department. The Department shall notify the RC of its findings regarding the completeness of the submittal and identify items that must be submitted, if any, prior to further processing.

(c) Notification of Interested Parties. Once the Department has determined that the *Regional Resource Plan* is complete, it shall immediately notify any affected parties of the availability of the *Regional Resource Plan* for review and comment, providing the name of the RDC, the general nature of the *Regional Resource Plan*, and a deadline by which comments must be received.

(d) Review of the Regional Resource Plan. The Department shall review the *Regional Resource Plan* for its adequacy at addressing the planning requirements and for thoroughness in identifying Regionally Important Resources and a region-wide green infrastructure network. The Department may also offer advisory comments for improving the *Regional Resource Plan* for consideration by the RC.

(e) Final Report of Findings and Recommendations. Within 60 days after certification of the completeness of the *Regional Resource Plan*, the Department must transmit a final report of its findings and recommendations to the RC. The report will include:

1. Comments submitted by interested parties that reviewed the *Regional Resource Plan*;
2. The Department's findings and recommendations resulting from its review of the *Regional Resource Plan*.

(f) Alternative Dispute Resolution. Alternative dispute resolution of conflicts relating to the *Regional Resource Plan* may be initiated in accordance with the *Rules for Alternative Dispute Resolution* adopted by the Board of Community Affairs.

(g) Adoption of the Regional Resource Plan. Once the *Regional Resource Plan* has been found by the Department to be in compliance with requirements, the Board may adopt the *Regional Resource Plan* with or without incorporating any recommendations for improvement included in the Department's report of findings and recommendations. In order to maintain eligibility for state funding, the RC must adopt the *Regional Resource Plan* prior to the deadline specified in the *Schedule for Regional Planning* maintained by the Department.

(h) Notification of Adoption. Within 7 days of adoption of a *Regional Resource Plan*, the RDC shall notify the Department that the plan has been adopted by the Board.

(i) Certification. Once notified by the RDC of adoption of a *Regional Resource Plan*, the Department may issue a letter certifying this RDC as eligible for state funding. To retain this certification, a RDC must remain in compliance with the requirements outlined in these requirements and O.C.G.A. 50-8-2(a)(18).

(4) Promulgating the Regional Resource Plan. Once adopted, the *Regional Resource Plan* must be promulgated within the region by the RDC as follows:

(a) Meet with all local governments in the region to encourage them to:

1. Include the areas on the *Regionally Important Resource Map* as conservation areas in their local comprehensive plan;
2. Adopt protection measures, policies, and enhancement activities that will promote protection of these areas; and

(b) Meet with all land trusts and conservation or environmental protection groups active in the region to encourage them to coordinate their activities to foster protection of the areas identified on the *Regionally Important Resources Map*.

(c) Meet with staff of the Governors Land Conservation Council, the Department of Natural Resources, and other appropriate state agencies to encourage them to coordinate their activities with the *Regional Resource Plan*. (For example, the Governor's Land Conservation Council could be encouraged to give higher priority for funding to the areas identified on the *Regionally Important Resources Map*.)