

Synopsis of Revised Changes to DCA's Minimum Standards for Local Comprehensive Planning

Draft rules at <http://www.dca.ga.gov/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/PAGES/Local/planning.asp>



The Georgia Planning Act (O.C.G.A. 50-8-2, et seq.) , passed by the General Assembly in 1989, charged the Georgia Department of Community Affairs with administering the State's comprehensive planning program. That legislation assigned DCA the responsibility of creating and maintaining administrative rules to govern the day-to-day conduct of the programs created in the Act.

In late 2010, DCA began exploring ways it could adapt its programs to most effectively respond to the important economic changes being faced by Georgia's businesses, families and local governments. In 2011 the Board of Community Affairs established a task force to research and recommend specific revisions to Department's rules for local comprehensive planning (DCA Rules 110-12-1).

In reviewing the local planning program and making recommendations for adapting it to the changing needs of Georgia's communities, the task force focused on six central themes:

- **SIMPLICITY & COST REDUCTION**
Simplifying the planning process and reducing its cost
- **FLEXIBILITY & CHOICE**
Enhancing the flexibility of each community to design and process and document that makes sense for them.
- **CUSTOMIZATION**
Varying the requirements based the specific characteristics of communities, rather than just population.
- **INCENTIVES**
Providing meaningful motivation to produce, implement, and maintain local plans.
- **CONTINUITY**
Ensuring that plans have enduring value and are implementable over time and across political administrations.
- **COORDINATION**
Communicating bi-directionally between local governments and state agencies about local priorities and shared concerns and allocating resources accordingly.

The task force felt strongly that the first three themes could be addressed by amendments to DCA's administrative rules. The others will take the collaborative efforts of a variety of state agencies and our partners. What follows is a brief overview of the regulatory changes proposed by the task force.

Synopsis of Revised Changes to DCA's Minimum Standards for Local Comprehensive Planning

Draft rules at <http://www.dca.ga.gov/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/PAGES/Local/planning.asp>



PROPOSED REVISIONS	PAGE
<p>Chapter 110-12-1-.01 The "Purpose" section is a preface to the main body of the Rules. It provides an introduction to the rules and general information about the local comprehensive planning program. The proposed revisions more clearly articulate the statewide and local benefits of comprehensive planning.</p>	1-2
<p>Chapter 110-12-1-.02 The rules currently at 110-12-1-.02, "Overview of Planning Requirements" provide a basic overview of the current two-phase/three-document planning process. They provide for variation in the "intensity" of the planning required based upon total population and the rate of population growth.</p> <p>The revisions proposed a comprehensive rewrite of this section. They include compression of the comprehensive planning into a single-phase/single-document process. The "intensity" of planning requirements will vary based upon the specific characteristics of each community engaged in the process. The revisions call for:</p>	3-5
<p>(1) Required and Optional Plan Elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three "Plan Elements" to be required for all communities <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community Goals 2. Needs & Opportunities, and 3. Community Work Program • Four elements to be required of communities with specific characteristics <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Economic Development (for communities in Georgia Job Tax Credit Tier 1) 2. Land Use (for communities with zoning or similar development regulations subject to the Zoning Procedures Act) 3. Transportation (for communities included in a Metropolitan Planning Organization) 4. Housing (for HUD CDBG entitlement communities required to have a consolidated plan) <p>Communities that have preexisting, stand-alone documents generally equivalent to the four variable elements may simply include them in the comprehensive plan by reference. There's no need to duplicate work already done—inclusion of these elements in the comprehensive plan is intended simply to encourage coordination between these interrelated processes.</p>	3-4
<p>(2) Community Involvement The requirements for what was the Community Participation Program (previously at 110-12-1-.04) has been streamlined and incorporated into the requirements for the overall plan. General guidance is provided for involving the community in the planning process.</p>	4

Synopsis of Revised Changes to DCA's Minimum Standards for Local Comprehensive Planning

Draft rules at <http://www.dca.ga.gov/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/PAGES/Local/planning.asp>



<p>(3-4) Review of the Comprehensive Plan and Official Listing of Planning Requirements and Deadlines Reference to the review process covered in detail at 110-12-1-.04. Continues DCA's practice of publishing deadlines on its website.</p>	4
<p>(5) Alternative Planning Requirements Provides enhanced flexibility for the community in consultation with the Regional Commission to develop a uniquely tailored approach to planning to fit a specific community that may have needs that were not envisioned in the rule-making process.</p>	5
<p>(6) Planning Resources and Support Outlines potential sources of resources and support to communities in preparing implementing their plans.</p>	5
<p>Chapter 110-12-3-.03 This one section, four pages in length, replaces what was previously sixteen pages found at 110-12-3-.03 – 110-12-3-.07.</p> <p>The previous rules called for two documents, the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program to be completed, submitted for review, approved by DCA. Following that approval a third document called the "Community Agenda" was to be assembled (based upon the previous two documents) and subsequently submitted for review, approved by DCA, and adopted by resolution of the local government.</p> <p>The proposed draft standards call for a single document to be completed and submitted as a consolidated unit (the "Local Comprehensive Plan") for review, DCA approval, and subsequent local adoption. Some items from the current rules have parallels in the proposed amendments while others have been eliminated entirely.</p> <p>This section provides very general guidance about the specific elements contained in the comprehensive plan:</p>	6-10
<p>(1) Community Goals This element will be required of all communities. A community will choose one or more methods of articulating the community's goals for the future. There are four ways to do this (in order from the most general to the most specifically detailed): General Vision Statement, List of Community Goals, Community Policies, and/or Character Areas and Defining Narrative. This element will be updated at the discretion of the local government.</p>	6
<p>(2) Needs and Opportunities This element will be required of all communities. Similar to a S.W.O.T. analysis, this element is a list of specific issues (positive and negative) upon which the community determines that it will take action, moving forward. This element will be updated every five years in conjunction with the Community Work Program.</p>	6-7

Synopsis of Revised Changes to DCA's Minimum Standards for Local Comprehensive Planning

Draft rules at <http://www.dca.ga.gov/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/PAGES/Local/planning.asp>



<p>(3) Community Work Program This element will be required of all communities. A detailed list of projects the community plans to initiate in the five-year planning period. It calls for a description of the specific activity, timeframe for implementation, party(ies) responsible for implementation, estimated cost (if any), and funding sources (where applicable). This element will be updated every five years in conjunction with the Community Work Program.</p>	7
<p>(4) Capital Improvements Element Georgia's "Development Impact Fee Act" (DIFA) already requires this element of the comprehensive plan for all communities that collect development impact fees. This amendment continues to implement that mandate by stating that a Capital Improvements Element (CIE) consistent with DCA rules 110-12-2 is required of communities collecting development impact fees. It is made optional for other governments that wish to intensely manage their future capital improvements planning. Annual updates of this element are mandated by DIFA.</p>	7-8
<p>(5) Economic Development Element This amendment requires communities included in Georgia's Job Tax Credit Tier 1; it is optional for all other communities. This element will present a set of actionable strategies for improving the economic vitality of the poorest of Georgia's communities. This element will be updated at the discretion of the local government. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region may be substituted by reference to satisfy this requirement.</p>	8
<p>(6) Land Use Element This element will be required for communities with zoning regulations or similar development regulations subject to the Zoning Procedures Act; it is optional for all other communities. Updates are required every five years (or more often at the discretion of the local government). Communities may choose to address this element solely by focusing on land-use segregation and/or by delineating character areas. Guidance for each approach is provided.</p>	8-10
<p>(7) Transportation Element This element will be required for communities included in a Metropolitan Planning Organization; it is optional for all other communities. The MPO's regional transportation strategy may be substituted by reference to satisfy this requirement. This element will be updated at the discretion of the local government. The proposed amendments specify several items to be addressed in a transportation element if the MPO's plan isn't used.</p>	10
<p>(8) Housing Element This element will be required for HUD CDBG entitlement communities that the federal government requires to have a Consolidated Plan; it is optional for all other communities. This element will be updated at the discretion of the local government. A number of items to be considered in preparing a housing element are provided in the proposed amendments. The community's Consolidated Plan may be substituted for this element by reference.</p>	10

Synopsis of Revised Changes to DCA's Minimum Standards for Local Comprehensive Planning

Draft rules at <http://www.dca.ga.gov/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/PAGES/Local/planning.asp>



<p>Chapter 110-12-3-.04 Previously 110-12-3-.08. The "Procedures" section of the proposed amendments focuses primarily on the planning process rather than the plan document.</p> <p>This section was significantly streamlined from the previous requirements by applying the single-phase/single-document approach to the process. Under the previous requirements, the Community Assessment and Community Participation Program were produced and processed before the Community Agenda was subsequently produced and processed. The proposed amendments condense the process and the document into one step.</p> <p>The process included in the proposed amendments eliminates all steps associated with the previous Community Assessment and Participation Program submittals. Instead, it is based wholly on the steps previously associated with the Community Agenda process from public hearings to adoption by the local government.</p> <p>The processes associated with variances, plan updates have been modified only as necessary to maintain consistency with the update requirements articulated in the proposed 110-12-3-.03.</p>	<p>11-15</p>
<p>Chapter 110-12-3-.05 Previously 110-12-3-.09. The "Definitions" section has not been significantly modified other than minor revisions necessary to maintain consistency with other sections of the amendments.</p>	<p>16-18</p>