

Regional Water Planning Councils: Assured Local Government Participation
Recommendations for Draft Statewide Water Management Plan
Association County Commissioners of Georgia
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Why Have Assured Local Government Participation on Regional Planning Councils?

Local elected officials will answer to the public for the success or failure of regional water plans and must be assured adequate representation on regional planning councils. As outlined in the current Draft Statewide Water Management Plan, regional water planning councils will be established within each water planning region to develop regional forecasts of water supply and needs based on current and future population, economic and employment estimates. Following water monitoring by the EPD, these regional councils will identify areas that may face water supply or water discharge challenges in the future, then recommend management practices (such as conservation measures, water supply augmentation and storm water control) to be implemented in that region to ensure that the forecasted regional water and wastewater needs can be met and the environment is protected.

While it is up to the regional councils, no matter their make-up, to develop regional plans and recommend water management practices, the draft Water Plan specifically recognizes that the majority of water management practices are to be implemented by the cities, counties and water/sewer authorities within respective regions. The Water Plan also recognizes that implementing these management practices may have significant public costs and behavior implications. Moreover, failure to implement these management practices will directly impact local government and water/sewer authorities' ability to receive water withdrawal, discharge and stormwater permits from EPD and ability to receive future loans and grants from the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority for water-related projects – all key components in providing safe and sanitary public water and sewer services.

In summary, local governments and water authorities will be charged with implementing most of the Water Plan and subject to sanctions for failing to do so. Accordingly, locally-elected officials must be adequately represented on the regional planning councils to ensure the planning bodies represent all community stakeholder interests and to provide public accountability on the councils. Such representation will further serve to guarantee that decisions on water management practices are balanced between the benefits and the costs to taxpayers.

Make up of Regional Councils in Current Draft Water Plan

The current draft plan (pages 77 and 78: Implementation Action (3)(a, b, and c)) states that regional councils shall have 18 members and be "broadly representative to include agriculture, forestry, industry, commerce, local governments, water utilities, regional development centers, tourism, recreation and the environment." Ten of these members are to be appointed by the Governor, four by the Lt. Governor, and four by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. While it is appreciated that local governments and water utilities should be among the 10

groups considered to sit on these Councils, our state's leaders are not required to appoint any local government or water utility officials.

Further Justifications for Assured Local Government Representation

The Association County Commissioners of Georgia believes that at least **half** of the voting members on each regional planning council should be local government or water utility officials as:

- Local governments and water authorities are primarily responsible for implementing the water management practices recommended in regional water plans;
- Failure of local governments to implement regional water plans will directly impact their ability to receive EPD permits and GEFA grants and loans, key components of providing public drinking water and sewer services;
- Regional water plans will, necessarily, have to be integrated with local water, sewer and water protection plans for effective and efficient long-term water, wastewater and stormwater management planning;
- Local governments are responsible for ensuring compliance with other state and federal clean water requirements, including the implementation of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs). These responsibilities will be directly impacted by management practices recommended in regional water plans;
- Local governments are responsible for land-use planning and zoning which directly impact development patterns which, in turn, significantly effect stormwater runoff and a stream's assimilative capacity – these practices are intricately entwined with successful long-term water quality management planning;
- Local governments are responsible for enacting and implementing provisions of the Georgia Planning Act, aimed at protecting our state's precious natural resources and directly linked to water quality and quantity management measures in the plan;
- Local governments are ultimately accountable through the ballot box to the communities (the public) which they represent. Accordingly, they must act on behalf of the public's interest in water planning or will have to, appropriately, answer to them at election time.
- Local governments, in partnership with the state, are charged with protecting the public health and the safety and welfare of Georgia's citizens – the first of nine guiding principles outlined in the 2004 Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Act;
- Local governments will best be able to represent their region's citizens in consultations with surrounding regional planning councils in the make up of their plans;
- Local governments and water authorities will best know what sort of water management and conservation practices they are capable of employing, and at what costs these will bear on public rate- and taxpayers;
- Local governments may likely be called on to provide additional funding for regional planning administration. They will also be key partners with the state and other water permit holders, should there be a future need, in developing a dedicated, long-term source of funding to ensure the success of the Water Plan; and
- Local governments, in short, will ensure that the public is adequately represented in making key decisions regarding water use that impact Georgia citizens and communities.