

Transportation and Land Use Policy in Georgia

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Like Washington, Georgia has a “bottom-up” framework for land use planning based on broad state planning goals. However, Georgia’s planning approach differs by defining a stronger role for regional planning, promoting specific planning objectives that support smart growth, providing much more detailed state guidance, and targeting technical assistance to communities committed to planning. Similar to Washington, the State of Georgia does not have strong tools for addressing local land use impacts on state highways. The Georgia Department of Transportation has only an advisory role in reviewing and commenting on the impacts of proposed local land use actions on state highways. Additionally, the state’s transportation system planning practices generally react to local land use decisions rather than trying to influence them. Georgia generally has less authority to regulate access on its state highways than Washington.

The Georgia Planning Act

The [Georgia Planning Act](#) of 1989 provides a framework for local, regional and state comprehensive planning. The Act enables, but does not require, Georgia municipalities and counties to develop comprehensive plans and land use regulations. Local governments do have incentives to plan. Only qualified local governments, which have met the minimum [local planning requirements](#) established by the state, are eligible for certain state funding programs and permits. Additionally, development [impact fees](#) may only be enacted by qualified local governments that have adopted state-approved capital improvement elements.

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs establishes minimum local planning requirements. To meet the minimum requirements, each local plan must include a community assessment, participation program, and agenda. There are four levels of planning requirements (minimal, basic, intermediate and advanced) based on each local government’s population and growth rate. The Department also provides detailed [state planning recommendations](#) including an analytical framework, suggested [policies](#), a model zoning and land use [code](#), and a catalogue of [alternatives to conventional development](#). In addition, it compiles [data](#) to support local jurisdictions’ planning needs. The planning guidance provided by the Department is augmented by the Governor’s Development Council which consists of the board of the [Georgia Regional Transportation Authority](#). By [statute](#), the Governor’s Development Council coordinates state planning and ensures that local governments meet the state land use planning requirements.

Once developed, local plans are reviewed by the Department of Community Affairs for compliance with the minimum planning requirements and consistency with the state planning goals and objectives. There are six state planning goals including economic development, natural and cultural resource protection, adequate provision of community facilities and services, access to affordable housing, coordination of land use and transportation planning and intergovernmental coordination. In 1999, the Department adopted Quality Community Objectives that build on the state planning goals by identifying the particular development strategies communities must embrace. For example, the objectives include preserving regional identity, using traditional neighborhood development patterns, promoting infill development, and maintaining or developing a sense of place.



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Progress towards achieving the Quality Community Objectives is facilitated by the Department of Community Affairs and the [Georgia Quality Growth Partnership](#). More than 30 public and private entities collaborate through the Partnership to promote quality growth and provide local governments with the information and [tools](#) they need to implement it. The Department supports the Partnership by disseminating a [local assessment](#) to help cities and counties evaluate the compatibility of their existing development patterns and policies with the quality community principles. The Department also organizes [Quality Growth Resource Teams](#). These teams provide local governments with low-cost, on-site consultation by both public and private experts who suggest ways to incorporate quality growth principles into local comprehensive plans, development regulations, and day-to-day decision making. Since 2005, the Department has also been rewarding communities committed to effective local planning by selecting them to become [Georgia Signature Communities](#). The communities selected (five to seven each year) receive two years of customized technical assistance and preference for state grants, loans and programs.

Regional Development Centers

In addition to being reviewed by the state, local plans are reviewed by [regional development centers](#). Regional development centers are multi-county government agencies established by the Georgia Planning Act that develop regional comprehensive plans, provide planning assistance to local governments, and review large-scale developments for regional impacts. Each municipality and county is required by statute to be a member of and pay dues to its regional development center. Regional development centers craft regional plans based on local plans and the minimum [standards for regional planning](#) established by the state. Regional plans address inter-jurisdictional coordination, regionally important resources, and [developments of regional impact](#). Regional plans are also used as a basis for the evaluation of local plans for regional consistency. Regional plans are submitted to the State for review, and theoretically for inclusion in the state comprehensive plan although no such plan has ever been adopted.

The review of local plans by regional development centers and regional plans by the state must result in a public finding stating whether the adoption of the plan will be in the best interest of the state. Any conflicts that remain after review must be submitted to mediation. The state may decline to certify cities and counties as qualified local governments or reduce the funding for regional development centers if they fail to participate in mediation in good faith.

Transportation Planning and Access Control

The relationship between land use and transportation issues is also acknowledged by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) in its [statewide transportation plan](#). One of the goals of the plan is to promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns. GDOT addresses this goal primarily by assessing the impacts of local land use and economic development patterns on the state transportation system and planning improvements based on those impacts. On a smaller scale, GDOT's multimodal corridor studies must include land use policy recommendations and access management plans. In addition to planning tools for coordinating transportation and land use, state statute gives GDOT access control and subdivision review authority. GDOT's [access control policies](#) are based on the purchase of access rights along designated limited access roads and permit authority for commercial driveways on all state highways. GDOT can also address land development impacts by reviewing proposals for land subdivisions along state highways. Based on this review, which must consider the adequacy of the developer's plans for dedicating land for future highway expansions and providing for traffic safety, GDOT recommends approval or rejection of the proposal to the local planning body. The planning commission may overrule GDOT's recommendations.

For More Information

For more information about state transportation and land use policy, contact the WSDOT Transportation Planning Office:

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Washington State
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