

**Rules of  
Georgia Department of Community Affairs**

**Chapter 110-12-6  
Standards and Procedures for Regional Planning  
“Regional Planning Requirements”**

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**CHAPTER 110-12-6-.01  
PURPOSE**

**110-12-6-.01 Purpose & Applicability**

**(l) Purpose.** These rules become effective October 1, 2017. 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, ensuring the plan is representative of the entire region;
- generate pride and enthusiasm about the future of the region;
- identify priority needs and opportunities affecting the region and customize technical assistance efforts to promote impactful change related to those needs and opportunities;
- 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 impactful, 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 a framework 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-.04(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.

## **CHAPTER 110-12-6-.02 PLANNING REQUIREMENTS**

**110-12-6-.02 Requirements.** 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.

**(1) Required Plan Elements.** At a minimum, a regional plan must include the required plan components specified in the table below. Each Regional Commission is encouraged to go beyond the minimum required and supplement its regional plan with other plan elements to make the overall plan a good fit for the region.

Plan Elements	Specifics at
Executive Summary	110-12-6-.03 (1)
Regional Goals	110-12-6-.03 (2)
Needs and Opportunities	110-12-6-.03 (3)
Implementation Program	110-12-6-.03 (4)
Appendices	110-12-6-.03(5)
SWOT Analysis	110-12-6-.03 (5)(a)
Analysis of Consistency with Quality Community Objectives	110-12-6-.03 (5)(b)
Data and Mapping Supplement	110-12-6-.03 (5)(b)
Stakeholder Involvement Report	110-12-6-.03 (5)(c)

**(2) Consideration of Regional and Statewide Plans.** During the process of preparing its regional plan, each Regional Commission must review other plans for consistency. The Regional Commission must certify as part of the required cover letter (see section 110-12-06(6)) that it has considered, at a minimum, the following plans when it transmits the regional plan to the Department for review: Georgia's Strategic Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Regional Water Plan, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Plan (as applicable), and adjacent regional commission regional plans.

**(3) Review of the Regional plan.** Upon completion, the regional plan must be transmitted to the Department for review. The Department will review the plan and respond to the Regional Commission with findings and recommendations. Once approved by the Department as being in compliance with the Minimum Standards and Procedures, the Regional Commission may adopt the plan. Specific details for this review process are covered in section 110-12-6-.06.

**(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.** A 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 Council approve the additional planning requirements and finally obtain the Department's approval.

## **CHAPTER 110-12-6-.03 PLAN ELEMENTS**

**110-12-1-.03 Plan Elements.** This chapter provides guidance for completing each element of the regional plan. Each Regional Commission is encouraged to add additional elements to their regional plan to address specific regional needs as needed.

**(1) Executive Summary.** This element provides a brief overview of the planning document, summarizing the essential parts. At a minimum it must include the following:

- Stakeholder involvement summary;
- Regional goal summary;
- Highlight regional commission priority needs and opportunities; and
- Highlight key strategies and specific actions to be pursued.

**(2) Regional Goals.** The purpose of the Regional Goals element is to lay out a road map for the region's future, developed through a participatory process involving regional leaders, key stakeholders, and the general public (following the process as defined in section 110-12-6-.03 (5)(c)). The Regional Goals are the most important part of the plan, for it includes the region's vision for the future, and are intended to generate pride and enthusiasm about the future of the region, thereby making stakeholders want to ensure that the plan is implemented. The Regional Goals must include the four required components listed below:

**(a) List of Regional Goals.** Include a list of multiple overarching regional goals that also support and are consistent with the statewide goals included in section 110-12-6-.06 which, through the Regional Commission's leadership will be addressed through the regional plan. Review the suggested goals in the Supplemental Planning Recommendations for suggestions.

**(b) Regional Policies.** 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 Commissions are encouraged to categorize the regional policies based on applicability or function. For example: regional policies for public investments in the region or regional policies for DRI's.

**(c) Regional Development Maps.** Prepare two Regional Development Maps that illustrate the desired future regional development patterns for the 20-year planning period.

**1. Regional Land Use Map.** The Regional Land Use map will identify the following three general land use categories for the entire region (if subcategories are used, the map must identify how they aggregate into the three general categories):

- **Developed.** Areas exhibiting increasingly dense development patterns and where higher levels of public services (i.e., water, sewer, etc.) are already being provided at the time of plan preparation;
- **Developing.** Areas that will exhibit increasingly dense development patterns and will require provision of new public services (i.e., water, sewer, etc.) during the planning period.
- **Rural.** Areas not expected to become developed or require increased provision of public services during the planning period.

**2. Conservation and Development Map.** Using the categories from the Regional Land Use map as a base, the Conservation and Development map will display Conservation Areas as an overlay, visualized as hatching above the Regional Land Use categories. Conservation Areas are defined below:

- **Conservation.** Areas to be preserved in order to protect important regional resources or environmentally sensitive areas of the region. At a minimum, the green infrastructure network on the Regionally Important Resources Map found in the Regional Commission’s adopted Regional Resource Plan for the region must be shown. Additionally, environmentally-sensitive areas (e.g., groundwater recharge areas, priority forest and agricultural lands, wetlands, etc.) may be included as appropriate.

**(d) Areas Requiring Special Attention Map and Defining Narrative.** While preparing the Regional Development Maps, identify areas that need targeted monitoring and mitigation due to potential development conflicts or opportunities for economic growth and define specific strategies for managing each area.

**1. Areas Requiring Special Attention Map.** Considering the Regional Development Map above and other sources, evaluate the land use trends within the region to identify and map any areas requiring special attention. At a minimum, consider the following:

- **Threatened Regionally Important Resources.** Areas identified on the Regionally Important Resources map where significant natural or cultural resources are likely to be impacted by development. At a minimum, the assessment of these areas should be informed by the following:
  - Identifying the areas identified on the Regionally Important Resource Map (Regionally Important Resources, DCA Rules Chapter 110-12-4) that overlap the “Developed” or “Developing” Areas, and

- Identifying the portions of the Conservation and Development Map where the “Conservation” Areas overlap the “Developed” or “Developing” Areas.
- **Rapid 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;
- **Redevelopment.** Areas in need of or currently experiencing redevelopment. These areas may include:
  - The need for significant improvements to aesthetics or attractiveness (e.g., strip commercial corridors, aging developments, etc.);
  - The potential for infill development (e.g., scattered vacant sites, large abandoned structures, sites that may be environmentally contaminated, etc.);
  - Levels of poverty and/or unemployment that is substantially higher than the region as a whole, indicating significant disinvestment (e.g., areas identified as Opportunity Zones, Enterprise Zones, Urban Redevelopment Areas, Revitalization Area Strategies, or similar planning documents); or
  - Other metrics identified by the Regional Commission.

**2. Defining Narrative.** The defining narrative must include the following specific strategies for managing each Area Requiring Special Attention.

- 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. Recommended development patterns listed in the Supplemental Planning Recommendations may be referred to for suggestions.
- Listing of specific types of land uses appropriate for the unique characteristics of the area.
- Identification of implementation measures, which may be undertaken by the Regional Commission and/or local government, 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. Recommended plan implementation measures listed in the Supplemental Planning Recommendations may be referred to for suggestions.

**(3) Regional Needs and Opportunities.** This element identifies regional needs and opportunities. This is the regionally agreed upon list of Needs and Opportunities the region intends to address. The list must be developed by involving regional stakeholders and by using resources (a-d) below. The agreed upon list must also denote each of the needs and opportunities identified as a Regional Commission priority for the five year planning period. Each priority need and opportunity must be followed-up with corresponding implementation measures in the Regional Work Program. (A list of typical needs and opportunities listed in the Supplemental Planning Recommendations may be referred to for suggestions.) In order to ensure a concise and readable regional plan, (a-c) below should be included as an addendum in the plan (see section 110-12-6-.03(5)).

**(a) SWOT Analysis.** Conduct a SWOT analysis (or similar analysis of the region) with regional stakeholders and identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the region.

**(b) 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-.04). Use this analysis to identify needs and opportunities for adapting activities, development patterns and implementation practices to the Quality Community Objectives.

**(c) Analysis of Data and Information.** Check for potential needs and opportunities as well as development patterns by evaluating, at a minimum, the data and information listed in section 110-12-6-.05. 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 (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 needs or opportunities identified above;
- Whether it uncovers new needs or opportunities not previously identified;
- Whether it indicates significant regional trends that need to be brought to the attention of decision-makers;

**(d) Areas Requiring Special Attention.** Consider high priority areas as a need or opportunity from section 110-12-06-.03(2)(d).

**(4) Implementation Program.** This element is the overall strategy for achieving the Regional Vision and for addressing the Regional Commission priority Needs and Opportunities. This includes any specific activities to implement the plan during the next five years. The Implementation Program must include the following two components:

**(a) 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 Goals or address the Regional Needs 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 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, infrastructure improvements, or other measures deemed appropriate by the Regional Commission. Refer to the State Planning Recommendations for suggestions.

- **Minimum Standard.** Items included in the Minimum Standard should be selected 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. The Regional Commission and the Department will provide technical and training assistance to local governments to help them achieve this Minimum Standard. Regional Commissions may utilize financial assistance in accordance with their contract with the Department for projects that help a local government attain this threshold. Once a local government achieves this threshold, Regional Commissions may utilize financial assistance in accordance with their contract with the Department for local comprehensive plan implementation projects.

- **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.

**(b) Regional Work Program.** This portion of the Implementation Program lays out the specific actions the commission plans to undertake during the next five years to address the regional commission priority Needs and Opportunities. (Note that general policy statements should not be included in the Regional Work Program, but instead should be included in the Policies section of the Regional Goals or included as a separate list of long-term action items.) The Regional Work Program must contain the following information in an easy to read table format using one of the two templates provided on the Department's website (Refer to the Supplemental Planning Recommendations):

- **Priority.** List of regional commission priority needs and opportunities.
- **Strategies.** Specific, measureable statements that support achievement of the priority.
- **Actions.** Specific actions the Regional Commission will pursue in order to meet one or more strategies.
- **Timeframe** for initiating and completing the action.
- **Partners.** List of groups needed to help implement the activity.
- **Costs.** Estimated cost (if any) of implementing the action.

**(5) Appendices.** The following elements must be included as appendices to ensure 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) SWOT Analysis.** Include the results of the SWOT analysis (or similar analysis of the region) with regional stakeholders as described in section 110-12-6-.03(3)(a).

**(b) Analysis of Consistency with Quality Community Objectives.** Include the analysis as described in section 110-12-6-.03(3)(b).

**(c) Data and Mapping Supplement.** Include data, information, maps and analysis as described in section 110-12-6-.05 and 110-12-6-.03(c).

**(d) Stakeholder Involvement Report.** Each element of the regional plan must be prepared with opportunity for involvement and input from a diverse spectrum of stakeholders to ensure that the regional plan reflects the full range of regional values and desires. This broad-based participation in developing the regional plan 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 is intended to supplement, not replace, the regional hearings required in section 110-12-6-.06. All regional plan updates must contain a Stakeholder Involvement Report documenting these standards were met before the Department will approve the plan as part of the plan review process (see section 110-12-6-.06). Documentation must include a clear list that specifically identifies the individuals and groups targeted for involvement in the planning process, steering committee members, and adequate evidence that events and activities occurred (e.g., meeting agendas, sign-in sheets, and minutes or other records of outcomes; photos of activities; advertisements for activities; screen-captures of project web-pages; copies of surveys; etc.). The three minimum required steps for developing effective stakeholder involvement are listed below.

**1. Identification of Stakeholders.** Compile a list of all stakeholders who need to have a voice in the development of the plan. Refer to the list of suggested stakeholders provided in the Supplemental Planning Recommendations for suggestions. The list should include stakeholders from local, state (must include the Department), and regional organizations, as well as, private businesses and non-profit groups. At a minimum, members of the Regional Commission council must be included among the selected stakeholders and be actively involved in plan preparation, such as serving on the steering committee that guides development of the plan. This will help ensure that the plan will be implemented, because leadership that is involved in plan development is likely to become committed to seeing it through.

**2. Identification of Participation Techniques.** Review each of the recommended community participation techniques identified in the Supplemental Planning Recommendations to select those to be used for involving the selected stakeholders in the process of developing the plan. At a minimum, include the following:

- **Steering Committee.** The Regional Commission must form a steering committee to oversee and participate in development of the plan. At a minimum, the steering committee must include the Regional Commission council members. [The Regional Commission may also form a technical advisory committee. This is a working committee of regional planners and other state, local and federal agency personnel that will serve as the primary “users/interpreters” of the plan and they can support the steering committee with important information and technical considerations to be factored into the planning process.]
- **Required Techniques.** The Regional Commission is encouraged to select as many techniques as possible to allow ample opportunity for involvement from a broad range of stakeholders, including the steering committee. At a minimum, the following techniques are required:
  - First public hearing as required in section 110-12-6-.06.
  - Hold at least three public listening sessions (e.g., workshops, charrettes, virtual meetings) in at least three different counties in the region and

including adequate notification (e.g., one to two weeks) and outreach (e.g., newspaper ads, email, website, postal mail, etc.).

- Ensure the plan process, schedule, and draft documents are easily accessible on the commission's website throughout the plan process.
- Administer a survey tool to solicit comments, opinions, and regional goals.
- Second public hearing as required in section 110-12-6-.06.

**3. Conduct Participation Program.** Invite each of the stakeholders identified in section (1) above to participate in the activities and events identified in section (2). Use these participation events to solicit specific input on the content of the plan. Hold regular meetings of the steering committee to provide input and feedback to the plan preparers as the plan is developed.

## **CHAPTER 110-12-6-.04 STATE PLANNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **110-12-6-.04 State Planning Goals and 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. This section is provided as a reference for Regional Commissions as they evaluate policies, activities, and development patterns in the region for consistency with these goals and objectives pursuant to section 110-12-6-.03(3)(b).

#### **(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) Economic Prosperity:** Encourage development or expansion of businesses and industries that are suitable for the community. Factors to consider when determining suitability include job skills required; long-term sustainability; linkages to other economic activities in the region; impact on the resources of the area; or prospects for creating job opportunities that meet the needs of a diverse local workforce.

**(b) Resource Management:** Promote the efficient use of natural resources and identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas of the community. This may be achieved by promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy generation; encouraging green building construction and renovation; utilizing appropriate waste management techniques; fostering water conservation and reuse; or setting environmentally sensitive areas aside as green space or conservation reserves.

**(c) Efficient Land Use:** Maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the costly conversion of undeveloped land at the periphery of the community. This may be achieved by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the traditional core of the community; designing new development to minimize the amount of land consumed; carefully planning expansion of public infrastructure; or maintaining open space in agricultural, forestry, or conservation uses.

**(d) Local Preparedness:** Identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of future the community seeks to achieve. These prerequisites might include infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) to support or direct new growth; ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired; leadership and staff capable of responding to opportunities and managing new challenges; or undertaking an all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness and response.

**(e) Sense of Place:** Protect and enhance the community's unique qualities. This may be achieved by maintaining the downtown as focal point of the community; fostering compact, walkable, mixed-use development; protecting and revitalizing historic areas of the community; encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community; or protecting scenic and natural features that are important to defining the community's character.

**(f) Regional Cooperation:** Cooperate with neighboring jurisdictions to address shared needs. This may be achieved by actively participating in regional organizations; identifying joint projects that will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer; or developing collaborative solutions for regional issues such as protection of shared natural resources, development of the transportation network, or creation of a tourism plan.

**(g) Housing Options:** Promote an adequate range of safe, affordable, inclusive, and resource efficient housing in the community. This may be achieved by encouraging development of a variety of housing types, sizes, costs, and densities in each neighborhood; promoting programs to provide housing for residents of all socio-economic backgrounds, including affordable mortgage finance options; instituting programs to address homelessness issues in the community; or coordinating with local economic development programs to ensure availability of adequate workforce housing in the community.

**(h) Transportation Options:** Address the transportation needs, challenges and opportunities of all community residents. This may be achieved by fostering alternatives to transportation by automobile, including walking, cycling, and transit; employing traffic calming measures throughout the community; requiring adequate connectivity between adjoining developments; or coordinating transportation and land use decision-making within the community.

**(i) Educational Opportunities:** Make educational and training opportunities readily available to enable all community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, manage their finances, or pursue life ambitions. This can be achieved by expanding and improving local educational institutions or programs; providing access to other institutions in the region; instituting programs to improve local graduation rates; expanding vocational education programs; or coordinating with local economic development programs to ensure an adequately trained and skilled workforce.

**(j) Community Health:** Ensure that all community residents, regardless of age, ability, or income, have access to critical goods and services, safe and clean neighborhoods, and good work opportunities. This may be achieved by providing services to support the basic needs of disadvantaged residents, including the disabled; instituting programs to improve public safety; promoting programs that foster better health and fitness; or otherwise providing all residents the opportunity to improve their circumstances in life and to fully participate in the community.

## **CHAPTER 110-12-6-.05 DATA AND MAPPING SPECIFICATIONS**

### **110-12-6-.05 Data and Mapping Specifications.**

**(1) Data and Information.** The following data and information items are to be used for the Analysis of Data and Information required for the Regional Plan as described in section 110-12-6-.03(3). The Regional Commission must employ a 20-year planning time frame when evaluating these data and information items, include the data and information as necessary to support the plan, and should focus on regional rather than local resources and facilities where applicable.

**(a) Population.** Identify trends and issues in population growth and significant changes in the demographic characteristics of the region, considering such factors as:

- **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, considering such factors as:

- **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.** Consider 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 level of service provision throughout the region. At a minimum, the following services should be considered: water supply and treatment, sewerage systems and wastewater treatment, fire protection, public safety, parks and recreation, storm-water management, solid waste management facilities, and broadband.

**(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 and safety.
- **Alternative Modes.** Identify bicycle corridors, pedestrian facilities and public transportation or other services for populations without automobiles, Also identify areas of the region where mode choice is limited.
- **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 Regional Development and Areas Requiring Special Attention maps must be submitted to the Department in a GIS digital vector data format once the regional plan is approved by the Department. Other 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 shapefile format, or other digital format approved by the Department, via a Department-approved exchange media or electronic transfer method.

**(b) 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.

**(c) 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.

## **CHAPTER 110-12-6-.06 PROCEDURES**

### **110-12-6-.06 Procedures.**

**(1) Preparation, Transmittal and Review of the Regional Plan.** Upon completion, the Regional Commission must submit its Regional Plan to the Department for review. The Regional Plan must be adopted prior to the deadline specified in the Schedule for Regional Planning maintained by the Department.

**(a) First Regional Hearing.** A first public hearing must be held at the inception of the

regional planning process. This hearing may be held as part of a regularly scheduled Council meeting. The purpose of this hearing is to brief the regional stakeholders on the process to be used to develop the plan, opportunities for participation in development of the plan, and to obtain input on the proposed planning process. Once stakeholder comments have been addressed, the Regional Commission may begin the process of developing the plan.

**(b) Developing the Plan – Stakeholder Involvement.** Each element of the plan must be prepared with considerable opportunity for involvement and input from stakeholders, regional leadership, and the general public, following the process specified in section 110-12-6-.03(5)(c). This will help ensure that the plan reflects the full range of regional needs and values and that the plan will be implemented, because citizens and leadership that are involved in plan development are likely to become committed to seeing it through.

**(c) Second Public Hearing.** A second public hearing must be held once the plan has been drafted and made available for public review. This hearing may be held as part of a regularly scheduled Council meeting. The purpose of this hearing is to brief the region on the contents of the plan, provide an opportunity for stakeholders to make final suggestions, additions or revisions, and notify the region of when the plan will be submitted to the Department for review. Once public comments have been addressed, the plan must be transmitted to the Department with a cover letter signed by the Regional Commission executive director or Regional Commission council chairman and in accordance with section 110-12-06-.02(2).

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

**(e) Notification of Interested Parties.** Once the Department has determined that the Regional Plan is complete, it shall immediately notify any interested parties of the availability of the Regional Plan for review and comment, providing the name of the Regional Commission, the general nature of the Regional Plan, 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 Plan;
- 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 Plan; and



- Affected state agencies, including the Department of Transportation, the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority, etc.

**(f) Review of the Regional Plan.** The Department shall review the Regional Plan 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 Plan for consideration by the Regional Commission.

**(g) Final Report of Findings and Recommendations.** Within 45 days after certification of the completeness of the Regional Plan, 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 Plan;
- The Department's findings and recommendations resulting from its review of the Regional Plan.

**(h) Regional Plan Revisions.** If the Report of Findings and Recommendations indicates that the plan is not yet in compliance with the Minimum Standards and Procedures, the Regional Commission must address any requested changes by revising the plan and resubmitting it to the Department for review. Once the plan is resubmitted for review, the Department will complete its review as soon as possible. The process of revision and review can be repeated until the plan is found to be in compliance with the Minimum Standards and Procedures.

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

**(j) Adoption of the Regional Plan.** Once the Regional Plan has been found by the Department to be in compliance with the planning requirements, the Council may adopt the Regional Plan 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 Plan prior to the deadline specified in the Schedule for Regional Planning maintained by the Department.

**(k) Notification of Adoption.** Within 7 days of adoption of a Regional Plan, the Regional Commission shall notify the Department that these documents have been adopted by the Council.

**(l) Certification.** Once the Department has been notified by the Regional Commission of adoption of a Regional Plan, 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.

**(m) Promulgating the Regional Plan.** Once adopted, the Regional Plan 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 Plan and to encourage each government to:

- Coordinate identification of local character areas or future land use designations in local comprehensive plans with the Regional Development and Areas Requiring Special Attention Maps for the region. Generally each of the local character or future land use areas should fit into the larger regional maps 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 Regional Policies.
- Follow the Performance Standards in developing and implementing their local comprehensive plan. This includes fitting local character or future land use 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 Plan 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 Plan.

**(2) 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 and regular updates of the plan.

**(a) Required Updates to the Regional Plan.** At a minimum, a plan update must be completed every five years and 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. The five-year update of the regional plan shall include all elements as described in the original plan

development at section 110-12-6-.03 and shall include the Annual Report as described at section 110-12-6-.06(2)(c-d).

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

**(c) Required Annual Report on the Implementation Program.** At a minimum, the Regional Commission must prepare, submit to the Department, and adopt a Department approved report to the Implementation Program portion of the Regional Plan. Each annual report shall be submitted in accordance with the deadline specified in the Schedule for Regional Planning maintained by the Department. Each annual report must include the following:

1. **Report of Accomplishments.** Using the regional work program table, add a column and indicate the accomplishments that the Regional Commission achieved in relation to the specific actions included in the regional work program.
2. **Local Government Performance Standards Update.** Report on the status of each local government that has not achieved the minimum performance standards (see section 110-12-06-.03(4)(a) and list the specific action steps taken to assist the local government.
3. **Regional Work Program [optional].** Submit a revised regional work program if any changes are deemed necessary to ensure the effective implementation of the regional plan.

**(d) Submittal and Review Procedures for Plan Amendments and Annual Reports.** All required five-year updates to the plan and plan amendments must be submitted to the Department for review and shall follow the submittal, review, and adoption procedures outlined in section 110-12-6-.06(1). All annual reports must be submitted to the Department for review and shall follow the submittal, review, and adoption procedures beginning in section 110-12-6-.06(1)(c).

## **CHAPTER 110-12-6-.07 DEFINITIONS**

### **110-12-6-.07 Definitions.**

**(1) General.** For the purpose of these rules, the following words shall have the meaning as contained herein unless the context does not permit such meaning. Terms not defined in these rules but defined in O.C.G.A. 50-8-1, et seq, shall have the meanings contained therein. Terms not defined in these rules, nor in O.C.G.A. 50-8-1, et seq, shall have ascribed to them the ordinary accepted meanings such as the context may imply. For the purpose of these rules, the

terms “shall” and “must” have the same meaning, are mandatory in nature, and are indicative of a requirement.

**(2) Definitions.** The following terms and definitions shall be used to guide the development and implementation of the regional plan.

**(a)** “Annual Report” means that document including the Report of Accomplishments, Local Government Performance Standards Update and optional revised regional work program required on an annual basis.

**(b)** ‘Conflict’ means any conflict, dispute, or inconsistency arising:

- Between or among local comprehensive plans, or components thereof, for any local governments, as proposed, prepared, proposed to be implemented, or implemented;
- Between or among regional plans, as proposed, prepared, proposed to be implemented, or implemented;
- Between or among local comprehensive plans, or components thereof, for any local governments and regional plans which include such local governments, as such plans are proposed, prepared, proposed to be implemented, or implemented;
- With respect to or in connection with any action proposed to be taken or taken by any local government relating to or affecting regionally important resources, as defined by the Department; or
- With respect to or in connection with any action proposed to be taken or taken by any local government relating to or affecting developments of regional impact, as defined by the Department.

**(c)** ‘Council’ means the council governing each regional commission as per O.C.G.A. 50-8-32.

**(d)** ‘Days’ means calendar days, unless otherwise specified.

**(e)** ‘Department’ means the Department of Community Affairs.

**(f)** ‘Development of Regional Impact’ means any project that exceeds the minimum thresholds established by the Department.

**(g)** ‘Green Infrastructure Network’ means a strategically planned and managed network of wilderness, parks, greenways, conservation easements, and working lands with conservation value that benefits wildlife and people, supports native species, maintains natural ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, links urban settings to rural ones, and contributes to the health and quality of life for the communities and citizens sharing this network. The network should encompass a wide range of elements, including: natural areas - such as wetlands, woodlands, waterways, and wildlife habitat; public and private conservation lands - such as nature preserves, wildlife corridors, greenways, and parks; and public and private working lands of conservation value - such as forests, farms, and ranches. It should also incorporate outdoor recreation and trail networks.

**(h)** ‘Infrastructure’ means those man-made structures which serve the common needs of the population, such as: sewage disposal systems; potable water systems; potable water wells serving

a system; solid waste disposal sites or retention areas; stormwater systems; utilities; piers; docks; wharves; breakwaters; bulkheads; seawalls; bulwarks; revetments; causeways; marinas; navigation channels; bridges; and roadways.

**(i)** ‘Local Government’ means any county, municipality, or other political subdivision of the state.

**(j)** ‘Plan Amendment’ means a change to the adopted regional plan that occurs between plan updates. Amendments of the adopted plan are appropriate when the conditions, policies, etc., on which the plan is based, have significantly changed so as to materially detract from the usefulness of the plan as a guide to decision making, or when required by the Department as a result of changes to the planning requirements.

**(k)** ‘Plan Update’ means a more or less complete re-write of the regional plan, which shall occur every five years and in accordance with the Schedule for Regional Planning maintained by the Department.

**(l)** ‘Region’ means the territorial area within the boundaries of operation of a Regional Commission.

**(m)** ‘Regional Commission’ means any commission established under O.C.G.A. 50-8-32 (effective July 1, 2009).

**(n)** ‘Regional Plan’ means the comprehensive plan for a region prepared by the Regional Commission in accordance with the requirements established by the Department.

**(o)** ‘Regional Planning Requirements’ means the standards and procedures for regional planning that shall be followed in preparation of regional plans, for implementation of regional plans, and for participation in the regional planning process.

**(p)** ‘Regional Work Program’ means that portion of the Implementation Program that lists the specific actions to be undertaken annually over the upcoming five years to implement the regional plan.

**(q)** ‘Regionally Important Resource’ means any natural or cultural resource area identified for protection by a Regional Commission following the minimum requirements established by the Department.

**(r)** ‘Supplemental Planning Recommendations’ means the supplemental guidance provided by the Department to assist Regional Commissions in preparing plans and addressing the regional planning requirements. The plan preparers and the 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.