

Introduction

The comprehensive plan is organized around a framework of government policy which is used to guide the growth of the community. The comprehensive plan is one part of an ongoing planning process that seeks to insure the provision of adequate facilities and services to support anticipated growth. Updating plans for transportation, economic development, community facilities, natural and historic resources, housing, land use and intergovernmental coordination are an integral part of the comprehensive plan.

The first step in building the framework of government policy is the preparation of a vision statement for Albany-Dougherty County. The vision is supported by a series of goals and policies organized around eight planning elements: population, economic development, natural and historic resources, community facilities and services, housing, land use, transportation, and intergovernmental coordination. A series of public workshops are used in the preparation of the vision, goals, and policies. The vision, goals, and policies serve to provide the future direction for the city-county and its inhabitants. Recommendations for Albany-Dougherty County's future development are based on the citizens' vision of the city-county in which they wish to live.

This document is the Albany-Dougherty County 2005-2025 Comprehensive Plan. In addition to the community vision, goals and policies, the plan provides an assessment of existing conditions and future needs. These needs are translated into recommendations for use by public and private decision makers in managing anticipated growth for the benefit of the health, safety, and welfare of present and future residents. The intent of the plan is to guide and encourage the location, amount, type and timing of future development and supporting facilities in a manner tailored to the needs and limitations of Albany-Dougherty County.

Legislative Background

In 1989, the Georgia General Assembly passed the Georgia Planning Act, which established a coordinated planning program for the State of Georgia. This program provides local governments with opportunities to plan for their future and to improve communication with their neighboring governments. The Georgia Planning Act also assigns local governments certain minimum responsibilities to maintain "Qualified Local Government" (QLG) status and, thus, be eligible to receive certain state funding.

Local Comprehensive Planning & Qualified Local Government Status

The cornerstone of the coordinated planning program is the preparation of a long-range comprehensive plan by each local government in the state. This plan is intended to highlight community goals and objectives as well as determine how the government proposes to achieve those goals and objectives. It is intended that the comprehensive

plan be used to guide local government decision-making on a daily basis. With the passage of the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, all of Georgia's 159 counties and 529 cities were designated "Qualified Local Governments." Each of these local governments must maintain that status in order to remain eligible for a range of state and federal assistance programs. The Official Code of Georgia (O.C.G.A.) Section 50-8-2(G)(18) defines "Qualified Local Government" as a county or municipality which:

- Has a comprehensive plan in conformity with the minimum standards and procedures;
- Has established regulations consistent with its comprehensive plan and with the minimum standards and procedures; and
- Has not failed to participate in the Department of Community Affairs' mediation or other means of resolving conflicts in a manner which, in the judgment of the department, reflects a good faith effort to resolve any conflict.

A variety of state assistance programs are available to cities and counties that maintain their Qualified Local Government (QLG) status under the Georgia Planning Act. Conversely, if a city or county loses its QLG status, it is not eligible to receive assistance from these state programs. All local governments in Georgia will need to prepare a complete update to their comprehensive plan sometime during the period of 2004-2008. Every local government has been given a specific deadline by which time their plan update must be submitted, reviewed and approved by the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), and adopted by the local government in order to maintain their QLG status. Albany-Dougherty County's recertification deadline is June 30, 2006.

Local Comprehensive Plan under the Georgia Planning Act of 1989

The Comprehensive Plan is a 20-year plan by a local government covering all aspects of its jurisdiction. The Comprehensive Plan must include 1) an inventory of existing conditions; 2) an assessment of current and future needs; 3) maps depicting current and future conditions; 4) a community vision; 5) goals, policies, and strategies; and 6) an implementation program. The aspects of the comprehensive plan are to apply to the community as a whole but also to eight specific plan elements, which are population, economic development, natural & cultural resources, community facilities & services, housing, land use, transportation, and intergovernmental coordination. Additionally, the Comprehensive Plan must be prepared or updated according to a publicized Planning Process (see Appendix A) and offer adequate public involvement. Opportunities for public involvement are described in the Citizen Participation and Involvement Plan (Appendix B).

Part of the implementation program of the Comprehensive Plan is the Short Term Work Program (STWP) which sets out the specific actions the local government intends to take during the next five years to further the community vision, goals, and policies. The

STWP assigns time frames, cost estimates, and responsible parties to the identified actions. The STWP must be updated every five years and may be updated annually.