

# Planning Ahead

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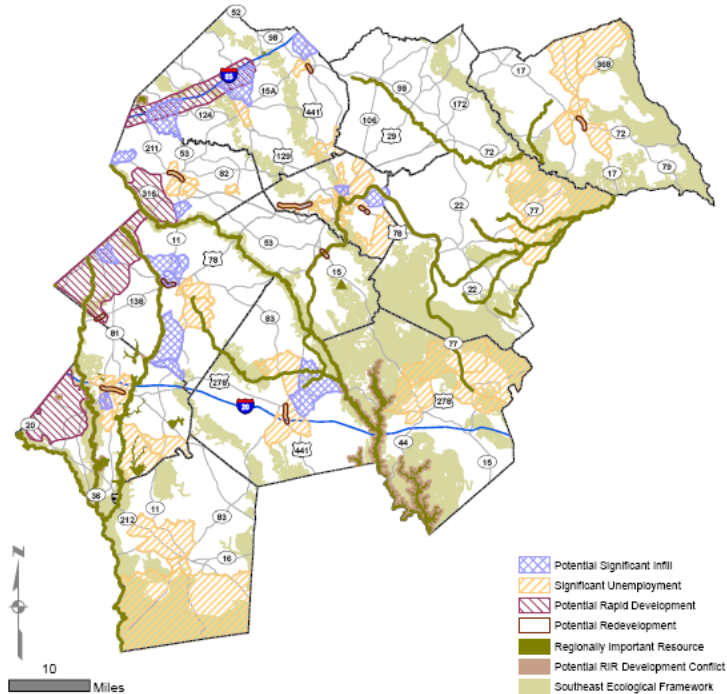
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## Northeast Georgia Plan 2035 – Regional Agenda

### Planning & Government Services (PGS) Division

The Planning & Government Services (PGS) Division's staff assists local governments in a range of services and programs related to local and regional planning, transportation, and community and economic development on a local and regional level. Information on these services and programs are provided in greater detail on our website [negrc.org](http://negrc.org).

In mid-December, the Planning and Government Services (PGS) Committee of the NEGRC Council and staff completed work on the draft Regional Agenda, which is the final component of Northeast Georgia Plan 2035, NEGRC's regional plan. The draft Agenda is available on the [NEGRC website](http://negrc.org) for public viewing and a regional hearing, required by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), took place on Wednesday, January 11th, 2012 at 11:00 a.m. at the NEGRC.

Key components of the draft include a Regional Vision, Refined Issues and Opportunities (based on stakeholder input and previous work featured in the [Regional Assessment](#) ), and an Implementation Program. Work on the draft Regional Agenda has been fundamentally based on input from stakeholders and the PGS Committee, and the document has been circulated for review by both the PGS Committee and the full NEGRC Council.

The RC Council will vote on transmitting the draft Agenda to the DCA on January 19th and on officially adopting the Agenda on April 19th.

For more information on the draft Regional Agenda, please contact John Devine, AICP, at [jdevine@negrc.org](mailto:jdevine@negrc.org).

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2009 flooding outside Atlanta.

### **Pre-Disaster Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates**

Recent events such as the drought of 2006-2009, floods of 2009, and winter storms of 2011 highlight the potential damage that disaster hazards can have on Georgia's communities. To help reduce or eliminate the risks from the natural and technological hazards that threaten the region, NEGRC's Planning and Government Services staff is currently working with several Northeast Georgia counties on completing up dated versions of their Pre-Disaster Hazard Mitigation Plans. These plans will identify potential natural and technological hazards and outline strategies and methods to prevent, reduce, and recover from their impacts. They place special emphasis on the protection of "critical facilities", which include structures and properties that, if destroyed or damaged, would likely result in the disruption of essential services. Additionally, these plans will include guidance for implementation, execution, evaluation, and monitoring.

County-level Hazard Mitigation plans serve several purposes. First, they enhance public awareness of the threats that disasters pose to their communities and potential strategies for heading off negative impacts. They also promote inter-jurisdictional coordination among officials from such diverse sectors as fire, police, emergency management, housing, energy, transportation, business, and many others likely to be involved in disaster preparedness and response. Additionally, the plans help shape and improve local mitigation policies while acting as a guide for implementation. Finally, upon plan approval by

the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), they allow local jurisdictions to remain eligible for Federal funding of disaster mitigation projects.

The planning process typically lasts between nine and eighteen months, depending on how quickly current plans are approaching their expiration dates. NEGRC staff is working with a wide variety of county- and city-level stakeholders with deep knowledge of local assets and conditions to review current plans, compile up-to-date information on critical facilities and local hazards, and develop mitigation strategies and plan implementation measures. Additionally, the planning process includes opportunities for input from county residents through public hearings and questionnaires.

For information on specific county plans, visit [www.negrc.org](http://www.negrc.org) and click on the link labeled "Planning", followed by "Pre-Disaster Mitigation Planning".

### **New Planning Meetings Required by State**

A new round of meetings between the Regional Commission and local governments is required by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). Prior to the end of the 2012 fiscal year in June, Commission staff will meet with representatives from approximately half of the jurisdictions in our region. The meetings serve two purposes; first, to review the local comprehensive plan and short term work program to determine how well they are being implemented and decide if new activities or goals should be added for the future. Second, the meetings will cover the Regionally Important Resource Plan, which addresses development patterns and their impact upon natural and historic resources.

DCA requires attendance of both elected officials and local government staff. Suggested staff participants for the meetings include public works directors, county/city managers and planning staff. In jurisdictions with joint county/city comprehensive plans, it is recommended a single meeting be held to address the plan for all affected jurisdictions. The following Counties and their respective

Cities are slated for the first round of meetings in 2012: Elbert, Greene, Jackson, Jasper, Madison and Oglethorpe. Meetings with the region's remaining jurisdictions will be completed in the 2013 fiscal year.

To schedule your local government's meeting, please contact [Dave Van De Weghe](#), Principal Planner, at (706)369-5650.

### **Zoning and How to Keep Your Local Government Out of Court**

Zoning is an important tool for protecting property values, preventing land use conflicts and promoting economic development. However, local zoning ordinances invite costly lawsuits when they conflict with state or federal law.

Sign regulations require particular attention to ensure they do not violate the First Amendment's protection of freedom of speech. The Georgia Supreme Court has ruled any sign ordinance that distinguishes between "off-premise" and "on-premise" signs violates the First Amendment. And time limits on political signs posted before or after elections are also unconstitutional.

Defining terms in the zoning ordinance is also critical. Special consideration must be paid to definitions such as "adult oriented business," "billboard," "dwelling," and "personal care home" (among other terms) to ensure the restrictions intended for each are enforceable.

Additionally, places for religious assembly must be treated under equal terms as places for non-religious assembly. Therefore, a zoning ordinance should not prohibit churches in zoning districts where private clubs and lodges are allowed. Jurisdictions that require a minimum floor area for new housing must also be careful about their standards. If the minimum area is so large that it eliminates affordable housing, it could be overruled in court.

Furthermore, the best ordinances avoid vague terms such as "may" or "should" in regard to requirements; rather, definite language such as "will" and "shall" is preferable and easier to enforce.

For technical assistance about your local zoning ordinance, please contact [Dave Van De Weghe](#), NEGRC Principal Planner for guidance or to discuss ordinance revisions.

### **Equal Employment Opportunity Office presents 2012 Title VII ADA Training Event**

**Dates:** January 26, February 23,  
April 26, May 24

**Time:** 9:00 am - 12 noon

**Location:** 600 West Peachtree St. N.W  
(Room 403) Atlanta, GA  
30308

*\*An additional session will be held on June 28, 2012 at 4499 Riverside Dr. Macon, GA 31210*

**REGISTRATION:** Please complete this [form](#) and email to [ajouett@dot.ga.gov](mailto:ajouett@dot.ga.gov) or fax to (404)631-1943.

The course provides a comprehensive overview of the Federal Highway Administration's Title VI and Environmental Justice programs and authorities, as well as how to administer the programs at the State DOT and Local Government levels.

Within the past year many of the local cities and counties have received information from the Georgia Department of Transportation Title VI. Many of you have had to sign Title VI assurance documents in order to ensure federal funding for your road construction projects. However, many may still not understand the requirements of Title VI and how it affects local governments. To that end, The Georgia Department of Transportation personnel will provide a comprehensive training class targeting Title VI and ADA roles, responsibilities and duties for federal aid sub-recipients, i.e. local governments free of charge. Since the Georgia Department of Transportation will begin auditing all sub-recipients for Title VI and ADA compliance within six to eight months following training, your attendance is required and compliance protects current and future federal funding. Please fill out the registration form to select a time that you will be available to attend and email back. Please find more information [here](#).