



Quality Growth Resource Team Report

Commerce, Georgia

February 2 - 5, 2004

How to Use This Report

This report has been formatted for use as a workbook by your community to assist with implementing quality growth projects. Use the icon key below to find specific information as described:

ICON KEY

 Funding Sources

 Technical Assistance

 Tools

 Valuable Information

 Workbook

Community Resource Team visits and final presentation reports are coordinated and produced by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. The electronic version of this publication (PDF) may be found online at:
www.dca.state.ga.us/publications/commerce.html

CDs are available upon request.
Contact: Julie Brown
jbrown@dca.state.ga.us
phone: 404.679.0614

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Introduction

What is Quality Growth?

Quality Growth, in many ways, means returning to the way we used to build our communities and neighborhoods: places where people could walk to school or the corner drugstore, pursue recreational activities at a nearby park, or just sit on the front porch and get to know their neighbors. The following principles, adopted by DCA, embody the ideals that quality growth practices are intended to promote.



Quality Community Objectives

REGIONAL IDENTITY

Regions should promote and preserve an “identity,” defined in terms of traditional regional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.

GROWTH PREPAREDNESS

Each community should identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These might include housing and infrastructure (roads, water, sewer and telecommunications) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances to direct growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities.

APPROPRIATE BUSINESSES

The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, linkages to other economic activities in the region, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher-skill job opportunities.

C O M M E R C E

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community – to permit community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.

EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.

HERITAGE PRESERVATION

The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural features that are important to defining the community's character.

OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or quality of life of the community or region. Whenever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area should be preserved.

REGIONAL COOPERATION

Regional cooperation should be encouraged in setting priorities, identifying shared needs, and finding collaborative solutions, particularly where it is critical to success of a venture, such as protection of shared natural resources.

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives to transportation by automobile, including mass transit, bicycle routes, and pedestrian facilities, should be made available in each community. Greater use of alternate transportation should be encouraged.

SHARED SOLUTIONS

Regional solutions to needs shared by more than one local jurisdiction are preferable to separate local approaches, particularly where this will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer.

HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

Quality housing and a range of housing size, cost, and density should be provided in each community, to make it possible for all who work in the community to also live in the community.

C O M M E R C E

TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS

Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged, including use of more human scale development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity.

INFILL DEVELOPMENT

Communities should maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the conversion of undeveloped land at the urban periphery by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the downtown or traditional urban core of the community.

SENSE OF PLACE

Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment.

Does Quality Growth Matter?

Quality growth can yield a number of benefits for your community:

- Residents will enjoy an improved quality of life, more affordable housing, cleaner water and air, more walkable neighborhoods, and reduced commuting times.
- Developers will experience reduced infrastructure and land costs and more predictability in the development approval process.
- Your local government will benefit from reduced service delivery costs, increased tax revenues, and enhanced economic development potential.

C O M M E R C E

COST SAVINGS

Studies show that sprawling development costs government in terms of provision of public services like water and sewer, emergency services and transportation. Research by the Real Estate Research Corp. shows that compact growth can be as much as 70 percent cheaper for governments than in areas with more dispersed growth patterns. Comparing the costs for governments in 10 counties, the University of Kentucky found that police, fire, and school services cost less in those counties where growth was concentrated and highest in those with scattered growth. In South Carolina, a study concluded that planned development could save 12 percent in infrastructure costs that would be spent providing the same infrastructure under sprawling growth projections. The development community saves costs as well through reduced per-unit costs for power and telephone lines, small streets, and more efficient service delivery.

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Implementing quality growth principles like compact development, greenspace protection, better street connectivity, and greater opportunities for using alternative transportation lead to less urban runoff into streams to pollute our waters and less traffic exhaust to pollute our air. A 2000 study by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of three California neighborhoods suggested that the environmental benefits of quality growth are real and can be measured. A more recent study by NRDC and EPA in Nashville corroborates this study and further suggests that the combination of better transportation accessibility and a modest increase in land-use density can produce measurable benefits even in automobile-oriented suburban communities. These studies are the first to evaluate actual neighborhoods rather than conceptual models. In the Nashville study, a more densely populated neighborhood closer to downtown Nashville out performed a suburban, lower density neighborhood in terms of land consumption, water consumption, air pollutant emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, and stormwater runoff.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The quality of life offered by quality growth development is important to residents, and contributes to economic development. Corporations are more mobile than ever, and quality of life is a big location factor for business. A case in point is Hewlett Packard's decision not to construct a second office tower in the Atlanta region because of its traffic congestion and air quality. Research also shows that perceived decline in quality of life leads to lower retention of skilled workers. Recent surveys in Austin, Texas show that the more educated residents are, the more likely they are to perceive decline, and skilled residents who do perceive decline are more likely to leave the area.

PUBLIC HEALTH BENEFITS

Quality growth is an emerging issue in the public health field where significant research is starting to focus on the relationship between sprawl and obesity related diseases like diabetes and heart problems. Such research is underway now at the Centers for Disease Control and at Boston University's School of Public Health and is expected to demonstrate that better development patterns improve health on community residents. Active Living by Design, a joint program of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is devoted to issues of public health and the built environment, financing both research on the issue, and actual projects testing the impact of community design that fosters daily activity.

What is a Quality Growth Resource Team Visit?

The Quality Growth Resource Team for Commerce was brought together in February 2004 through collaboration with the City of Commerce, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the Georgia Quality Growth Partnership (GQGP), a state-wide coalition of government agencies, universities, non-profits and business groups working to provide technical assistance on “smart growth” issues to Georgia communities. The resource team focused their study on a project area that included downtown Commerce, its suburbs, and the major highway corridors into downtown.

The multidisciplinary team was made up of specialists in city planning, real estate development, urban design, historic preservation, architecture, resource conservation, and housing. Team members were chosen with the area’s particular concerns in mind, which were initially defined in a meeting with the local officials held weeks in advance of the actual team visit.

The team spent approximately a week in the project area. The visit began with a facilitated meeting involving a broad cross section of community representatives, designed to give the team members a deeper understanding of development issues and needs of the project area. During the week the team toured the project area by bus, visited area buildings, spoke with local officials, reviewed local ordinances, conducted field surveys, prepared schematic design solutions, and formulated policy recommendations. The visit culminated with a review of the team’s recommendations to the local officials on Thursday, February 5th. The team’s recommendations were then passed to DCA staff for formatting into this final report.

The team would like to thank the City of Commerce staff, elected officials and citizens for making us feel so welcome in the area. The ideas and solutions proposed here is only a beginning – intended to stimulate interest in redeveloping Commerce so that residents may enjoy living in a vibrant and beautiful area.

Why Have a Quality Growth Resource Team Visit?

A Quality Growth Resource Team Visit is an important first step toward achieving more desirable development patterns in your community. If your community is experiencing symptoms of unplanned development, a Quality Growth Resource Team can help determine why, and what factors are under your control to change. Planning commissions, other local officials, community leaders, citizens, civic organizations, and the media can use the results of this report to guide planning and decision-making that will promote more quality growth in the community.

What Resources Are Available to Implement Quality Growth Resource Team Recommendations?



Quality Growth Funding Sources

A variety of funding sources are available to assist with the implementation of quality growth best practices on the Georgia Quality Growth Partnership (GQGP) website. The link below will take you directly to the GQGP website Financial Sources Directory.

<http://www.dca.state.ga.us/toolkit/FinancialSources.asp>



Quality Growth Technical Assistance & Training Opportunities

A variety of resources are available to assist with the implementation of quality growth best practices on the Georgia Quality Growth Partnership (GQGP) website. The links below will take you directly to the GQGP website Technical Assistance Directory and Training Opportunities page.

Technical Assistance - <http://www.dca.state.ga.us/toolkit/directory.asp>

Training Opportunities - <http://www.dca.state.ga.us/toolkit/training.asp>



Quality Growth Toolkit

The Quality Growth Toolkit provides advice to local governments on tools that may be used to put quality growth principles into practice at the local level. The link below will take you directly to the Georgia Quality Growth Partnership (GQGP) website Toolkit page.

<http://www.dca.state.ga.us/toolkit/toolkit.asp>



Other Resources

Georgia's Urban Redevelopment Law

http://www.legis.state.ga.us/cgi-bin/gl_codes_detail.pl?code=36-61-1

Georgia's Housing Source

http://www/housing/HOUSING_at_DCA.pdf

Meet the Quality Growth Resource Team

Leigh Askew

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Dan Basso

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Danny Bivins

The University of Georgia

Mary Jo Bragan

US Environmental Protection Agency

Casey Bray

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Sarah Brockenbrough

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Julie Brown

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Jessica Buesching

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Jan Coyne

The University of Georgia

Steve Dempsey

The University of Georgia

Dennis Epps

The University of Georgia

John David Evans

The University of Georgia

Carmine Fischetti

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Karen J. Fite

Georgia Tech Economic Development
Institute

Jim Frederick

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Leah Gardner

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Steve Gavigan

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Kirby Glaze

4PM, Inc.

Kent Kirbow

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Zaneta Ivery

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Tyler Newman

Home Builders Association of Georgia

Dee Dee Quinnelly

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

William P. (Bill) Russell

The University of Georgia

Helen Stone

MPC Savannah

Cathy Williams

Columbus Housing Initiative, Inc.

Adriane Wood

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Annaka Woodruff

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Georgia Quality Growth Partnership



The Georgia Quality Growth Partnership (GQGP) is collaboration among diverse public and private organizations formed out of the desire to coordinate their efforts at promoting “quality growth” approaches throughout the State of Georgia. The primary purpose of the GQGP is to facilitate local government implementation of quality growth approaches by:

1. Disseminating objective information on the various approaches.
2. Developing tools for implementing these approaches.
3. Sharing of best practices learned from other places, times, and cultures.
4. Promoting acceptance of quality growth by the general public and community leaders.

Founded in March 2000, the GQGP has grown to more than forty organizations, each contributing time, in kind services, or financial resources to fostering Partnership efforts.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The GQGP members believe that fostering livable communities requires innovative solutions that:

1. Ensure equitable access for all citizens to a range of options for education, transportation, housing, employment, human services, culture, and recreation.
2. Create opportunities for citizens to learn more about community planning and actively encourage their involvement in public decision-making.
3. Respect and protect our natural resources – wildlife, land, water, air and trees.
4. Shape appealing physical environments that enhance walkability and positive social interaction.
5. Recognize that community decisions have an impact on neighboring jurisdictions and, therefore, must be made from a responsible regional and statewide perspective.
6. Incorporate practices learned from our local experience as well as from other communities and cultures.
7. Preserve and enhance our cultural and historic places for future generations.
8. Provide for the efficient and economical use of public infrastructure.
9. Employ the principles of sustainability and balance to ensure the economic viability of all communities and to enhance the state’s economic competitiveness.

COMMERCE