

# As planning guide evolves, how to describe Athens stirs debate

## 'The best' or 'great' too subjective for commission

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Is Athens the best place in the world to live, work and retire?

Many residents might think so, but the phrase doesn't belong in a document that will guide planning and policy in Athens-Clarke County for the next decade, Athens-Clarke officials say.

A tiff among Athens-Clarke commissioners, planners and some of the dozens of residents who helped write the county's new 10-year comprehensive plan prompted Mayor Heidi Davison recently to push back approval of the document about three weeks, to Feb. 21.

Some members of the nine subcommittees that worked on the plan have complained to officials that county planners, planning commissioners and county commissioners stripped language from a 48-page vision statement intended to set the tone for local government.

Among them was a phrase setting a goal to make Athens "the best place in the world to live, work and retire." Planning commissioners changed "the best" to "a great," and commissioners removed the phrase entirely. They said it was too subjective.

"We already know it's the best place in the world to live," Commissioner Alice Kinman said at a work session earlier this month.

John Rogers, a local businessman who chaired the economic development subcommittee, said he was thinking of Athens' 31 percent poverty rate when his subcommittee coined the phrase. Athens is the best place in the world for many, but not for the poor, he said.

"It was a call to action," he said.

Planners also removed several references to various tax and environmental programs because the "comp plan," as government insiders call it, shouldn't delve into specifics and should stay away from political agendas, and some of the proposals already were rejected by the commission, they said.

After the outcry from some subcommittee members, the planning commission opted to give two versions of the plan to the commission, and Davison delayed approval so the subcommittees can have one last crack at revising the plan.

"We wanted to present a plan that's as balanced and fair as we can," planning commissioner Scott Weinberg said.

Planning commissioners also added a couple of paragraphs in response to the drought calling for reducing water consumption and finding new sources of water.

Unlike the previous comprehensive plan in 1998, when officials controversially rezoned the entire county, the new plan is a tweaking of the old one and contains no major changes. Planners did introduce a new land-use category, rural-residential, which allows one house per five acres.

The comprehensive plan is available for review at the Athens-Clarke Planning Department, 120 Dougherty St., through Wednesday, and online at [www.acclanning.com](http://www.acclanning.com)

The commission is scheduled to review the plan at a Feb. 12 work session and approve it Feb. 21. After that, it goes to

the state Department of Community Affairs for review, then back the commission for final approval in June.

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