

Time to land a plan

Document meant to guide growth

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Between 1982 and 1997, the amount of developed land in Athens-Clarke County grew by 45 percent, while the county's population grew by just 15 percent.

That's sprawl, and state and county planners are challenging Athens residents to produce a new plan for future development that will control it.

It's time for Athens-Clarke County to update its comprehensive plan - a document that will guide everything from transportation to housing to jobs to environmental protections for the next decade - and county residents were invited to help at a public forum Thursday night at the Foundry Park Inn.

The comprehensive plan will provide a road map for avoiding uncontrolled, far-flung, car-dependent development, which no longer is sustainable, said Anneka Woodruff, a Georgia Department of Community Affairs planner.

The comprehensive plan will touch every aspect of residents' lives, Woodruff said. Land use dictates the price of housing, where people live, where they shop, where they work, and how they get back and forth, she said, as well as playing into the protection of rivers, streams, greenspace and historic buildings.

"This is the local government's chance to set the course for the future," she said. "This is your chance to say, 'This is where we want to go, and this is how we're going to get there.' "

A steering committee of 17 residents already has set the process in motion, and has asked for volunteers to form subcommittees in eight areas - population, economic development, housing, natural and cultural resources, transportation and community facilities, services and intergovernmental cooperation.

Residents also can participate by filling out response cards posted at www.acplanning.com.

As the year-long process continues, residents also will be asked to respond or distribute surveys, and to draw a "future development concept map" with descriptions of how they envision development in different neighborhoods.

The comprehensive plan was last updated in 1999. That update included a complete rezoning of the county and changes to zoning laws and categories, but this update won't be so drastic, county Planning Director Brad Griffin said.

"We're not starting over this time," he said.

Griffin said he wants to present the plan to the county commission in October 2007. DCA requires that the plan be in place by 2009.

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