



Application for 2026 Rural Zone Designation

PLEASE BE AWARE: The application below is subject to change, should there be any changes to the Rural Zone program in the 2025 Legislative Session.

Please complete the full application using the checklist below to ensure all required items have been included.

PLEASE NOTE: The application should not be submitted unless all boxes are checked. Communities with incomplete applications will not be eligible for designation.

- One cover letter addressed to both Christopher Nunn, Commissioner of Community Affairs, and Pat Wilson, Commissioner of Economic Development which is signed by an authorized agent of the local government requesting designation.
- A feasibility study or market analysis identifying the business activities which can be supported in the proposed zone. (Submission of a leakage report alone will not be sufficient to meet the feasibility study/market analysis requirements for Rural Zone designation. Thoughtful analysis should be submitted with the leakage report, including types of businesses the community believes are viable within the downtown and existing barriers that might impede potential new businesses.)
- A master plan or strategic plan designed to guide revitalization of downtown.
- Hard copy of map showing proposed Rural Zone boundaries and tax parcels located within the zone. Map should also include street names and a title showing the jurisdiction's name.
- Map identifying tax parcels included within the proposed Rural Zone. Identify parcels containing vacant structures, vacant parcels, and blighted parcels. Please clearly mark the map to show parcels that contain no structures (Vacant Parcel), parcels that contain vacant structures (Vacant Structure – meaning there is no active business located within the structure), parcels that contain blighted structures (Blight), and parcels with historic structures (over 50 years of age). Color coding would be helpful.
- Digital GIS files detailing the proposed Rural Zone, either shapefiles (with .prj file) or geodatabase feature classes. Applicants may submit maps via thumb drive. Digital maps, at a minimum, should include individual parcel boundary polygons as listed below:
 - Parcel file (just the parcels in the Rural Zone) must include parcel ID number
 - Boundary file for the Rural Zone
- Representative sampling of photographs of proposed zone keyed to a map
- A property tax parcel table that includes parcel number, owner, address, current tax value, acreage, use and condition for each tax parcel included in the proposed zone

Applications must be hand-delivered or postmarked no later than 5:00 PM on August 15, 2025. Late applications will not be considered. Include this checklist with your original application, along with 3 additional copies of the application (for a total of 4 copies of the application) to:

Georgia Department of Community Affairs
Rural Zone Program – Attn: Tricia DePadro
Community Development & Finance Division
60 Executive Park South, NE

Atlanta, Georgia 30329-2231

If you have questions, contact Tricia DePadro at Tricia.depadro@dca.ga.gov

Answer the following questions by entering verbiage directly below the question rather than attaching additional pages. A Word version of this document is available upon request.

Applicant Information

Applicant (government entity):

Chief Elected Official Name:

Chief Elected Official Title:

Mailing address:

Application contact person:

Contact phone number:

Contact email address:

Proposed Rural Zone Eligibility

Population of applicant's community (must be less than 15,000):

Poverty rate of proposed Rural Zone (Percent). Please use the latest data from the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate (Table: S1701): %

Vacancy rate of proposed Rural Zone (Percent): %

Total number of tax parcels located within the proposed Rural Zone:

Total number of buildings located within the proposed Rural Zone:

Total number of historic commercial buildings (at least 50 years old) located within the Rural Zone. Historic buildings should make up over 50% of the proposed Rural Zone:

Applicant is in compliance with the state requirements regarding comprehensive planning and reporting, Service Delivery Strategy, Government Management Indicators (GOMI) Survey, and the Report of Local Government Finances as of October 1, 2025. Yes No

I. Community Narrative

Please answer the following questions by entering verbiage directly below the question rather than attaching additional pages. A Word version of this document is available upon request. Do not manipulate the questions or fonts. Please note: Each question may ask for various pieces of information. Be sure to read the question thoroughly in order to be sure you have sufficiently answered all points.

1. Provide a brief narrative of the community and the downtown. This should include information about the downtown area, what it was like at its most vibrant, and the current importance of the downtown area to the overall community. Please limit the answer to 1 page or less.
2. Outline what specific factors have led to the decline of the downtown and proposed Rural Zone. Include a thorough discussion of how the area has slipped into a state of economic distress.
3. Describe the blighting conditions, if any, found within the proposed Rural Zone. Applicants should describe the negative economic conditions found within the proposed Rural Zone, which may include poverty rate, vacancy rate, and blight. Applicants may reference photographs that illustrate blight within the proposed zone.
4. Explain specifically how the community foresees the Rural Zone designation assisting your community. Describe the result the community anticipates, how that result will be achieved, and what specific steps the community will take to achieve these goals. Outline specifically how the Rural Zone Team will promote the tax credits to existing businesses, as well as potential new businesses to the downtown area and describe how the designation will reduce the economic distress within the community.

II. Local Leadership and Initiatives

The success of the rural zone designation is directly related to the strength of the team. DCA requires that each team designate a team leader, who is responsible for promoting the program locally, in addition to at least 5 other individuals who are committed to supporting the implementation of your plan. It is recommended that the team leader be a local government staffer and that the rest of the team include stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Development Authority, local media, real estate brokers, etc. The team leader should have an economic development background and/or expertise in downtown development.

Team leader:

Title:

Phone Number:

Email:

Please summarize your leader's academic background and expertise with economic development or attach the Team Leaders resume.

In the following table, describe the core team members and how, specifically, they would contribute to promoting, or making use of, the Rural Zone program. Add additional rows to this table if needed.

Name	Job Title	Contribution to Rural Zone
<i>Example: John Doe</i>	<i>Editor of the local newspaper</i>	<i>Assist with promotion of the Rural Zone tax credit program by publishing informational articles describing the benefits of the program and later writing articles that highlight businesses that have utilized the tax credits</i>

III. Current Local Initiatives

In the table below, please list the **local** tools and financial resources currently in place to support downtown revitalization within your community. Please **only include** those programs that were established, funded, and are administered locally. Do not include state or federal financing programs that a community might be eligible to apply for such as DDRLF or the historic preservation tax credits. Add additional rows to this table if needed.

Resource/Program and organization who manages the program	Description of Program
<i>Example: Downtown façade grant managed by the City Main Street Program</i>	<i>Program funded by local Main Street program that provides incentives to businesses and property owners to make improvements to the exterior of historic properties and to renovate and/or rehabilitate the exterior of buildings. Will provide up to 50% of project costs up to \$1,500.</i>

IV: Strategic Plan/Master Plan

Provide page number references from within the Strategic Plan/Master Plan for the following elements. If you do not find these elements within your plan, you will need to amend your plan. Please see DCA Document entitled “Rural Zone Strategic Plan Guidance” to determine all elements that should be included within your Strategic Plan/Master Plan.

Plan Element	Page References
<i>Example: SWOT Analysis</i>	<i>Strengths – pages 14-15, Weaknesses – pages 15-17, Opportunities – pages 18-22, Threats – page 23</i>
SWOT Analysis	
Current state of downtown infrastructure (including Water/Sewer Capacity, Parking, Internet/Broadband Access, and Street/Pedestrian Connectivity). Please describe how any gaps in infrastructure (if applicable) will be addressed.	
Vision for the future of downtown (specifically what you envision your downtown will look like at the end of the 5-year Rural Zone designation)	
Potential barriers to the realization of that vision	
Identify Necessary Projects and clearly outline Actions Steps to realize vision	

V. Feasibility Study Analysis

- 1 Utilizing information gleaned from the feasibility study/market analysis, please describe the types and kinds of businesses that are practical for the community to pursue, as well as analysis of why those are good fits for the community. Outline the community's strategy for attracting these businesses.

VI. Community Strategy to Attract and Retain jobs and Investment

1. Outline the community's strategy for attracting new businesses, jobs, and associated investments into the downtown area. Identify local entities responsible for implementing this strategy. Discuss public actions/investments that will be taken to encourage private investment.
2. Outline the community's strategy for retaining existing businesses within the downtown area.
3. Identify existing barriers that may impede the addition of new businesses downtown.

VII. Project Readiness

Are there any revitalization projects ready to proceed within the proposed zone? Revitalization projects might include acquisition of property, rehabilitation of buildings, establishment of new businesses, or expansion of existing businesses. Only include those that may be eligible for funding under the Rural Zone program. Yes No

Using the table on the following page, please describe known/anticipated investment projects, as well as job creation projects, in the proposed Rural Zone geography that will be undertaken by private businesses or developers.

In order to receive maximum points, you must include attachments that prove readiness to proceed. This documentation could be in the form of architectural plans, building permits, detailed cost estimates from qualified contractors, business plans. If there are any questions about whether specific documentation will be sufficient, you may email Tricia DePadro, Rural Zone Program Manager to discuss. If there are no specific revitalization activities known at the time of the application, this should also be stated. Attach additional pages as needed. **Do not** include projects to be completed by the DDA, the city or other agencies not eligible for the Rural Zone tax credits. Also, please **do not** include projects that are already completed.

Revitalization Project Name, Address and Project Lead	Description of Project with projected completion date	Number of Jobs to be created	Description of attached documentation
<i>Example: Renovation of historic pharmacy at 126 West Main Street</i>	<i>Historic 1920s pharmacy will be renovated for use as an upscale Italian restaurant</i>	<i>3 fulltime and 15 part-time</i>	<i>Architectural Plans for renovation and cost estimates from contractor</i>