



PlanFirst Program Application – Due May 15, 2026

Introduction: The Department of Community Affairs' PlanFirst program recognizes local governments that clearly demonstrate success with implementing their Local Comprehensive Plan. To apply for the PlanFirst designation, a local government must have participated in at least two Local Comprehensive Plan update cycles, and must also have Qualified Local Government certification and be current on required reporting to DCA. *Before you begin the application process, you **must inquire with the Office of Planning at planning@dca.ga.gov regarding your historic performance status and prerequisites by April 15, 2026.*** Simply email, "I'm checking on the eligibility for PlanFirst for my community of (XXXXXX)." to planning@dca.ga.gov

A multi-agency review panel will evaluate a number of indicators of community success with plan implementation to select communities for this designation. All of these indicators are equally important, but size of the community is taken into consideration in the evaluation so that communities of various sizes are equally competitive for PlanFirst designation.

Instructions: Please answer all the following questions thoroughly, attach additional pages where necessary, so that reviewers have sufficient information to measure the success of your Local Comprehensive Plan implementation. Supporting documents might include: news articles, legal ads, lists of attendees, letters of support or other evidence of local involvement and commitment to successful plan implementation activities in your community. *Total application length, including supporting information and support letters, must not exceed 22 pages. Text areas will expand as needed.* Please send your application as one document, not to exceed 22 pages. Please do not send separate files.

Applicant government	
Mailing address	
Telephone	
Email	
Contact person; title	
Application prepared by	
I, the undersigned authorized representative of the applicant, certify that to the best of my knowledge the information in this application is true and correct.	
Name of authorized official signing	
Title of authorized official signing	
Date	
Signature	

PREREQUISITES

(to be filled out and determined by DCA staff only)

1. Applicant has participated in at least two Local Comprehensive Plan update cycles.
Yes No

2. Applicant has a consistent record of maintaining their Qualified Local Government status **and** submitting required reports associated with their QLG status to DCA, including the current Report of Local Government Finances. *(Within ten years, the applicant cannot lose status more than twice and/or not more than 45 days collectively).*
 - a. QLG status: Yes No
 - b. Local government reports: Yes No

3. The Applicant has attained the Minimum Standard for performance as called for in their Regional Commission's Regional Comprehensive Plan.
Yes No

4. The Work Programs included in the Local Comprehensive Plans consist primarily of specific action items that make it clear exactly what the community intends to do to implement their Local Comprehensive Plan.
Yes No

5. The Applicant is consistently among the top performing local governments within the state for implementation of projects listed in your Local Comprehensive Plan's Community Work Program.
Yes No

6. The Applicant has either a zoning ordinance or other district-based development regulations.
Yes No

Additional instructions for filling out application: There are four major indicators listed in the application. They are:

1. **Goals:** The Goals Element details the over-arching concepts envisioned in the Local Comprehensive Plan and carried out in the action and implementation elements of the Plan.
2. **Leadership:** Leadership guides the Local Comprehensive Planning process, and they also ensure that the plan is implemented by guiding day-to-day decision making.
3. **Participation:** Each element of the Local Comprehensive Plan must be prepared with opportunity for involvement and input from stakeholders and the general public, ensuring that the plan reflects community needs and values.
4. **Implementation:** Your Local Comprehensive Plan should lay out specific activities that the community plans to undertake following adoption.

Answer the indicators below. Each indicator will be scored based on a scale from 0-5 points, except indicator R, which may score up to 10 points. Add exhibits, examples, and photographs as needed to tell your story. Do not exceed 22 pages. **FONT SIZE MUST BE 11 POINTS. Do not manipulate questions font, size, or margins. Answers must begin on page 3.**

INDICATOR: GOALS

Responses in this section should draw upon information in the Goals Element of your current and previous comprehensive plan/updates.

- A.** Explain how the Goals (or Vision) Element of our Local Comprehensive Plan is supported by the community and its leadership.

- B.** Discuss ways in which the Goals and Vision articulated in your Local Comprehensive Plan are used by your local elected body, appointed bodies, and staff, in making policy decisions affecting the long-term direction of your community on a continual basis.

- C.** Give examples from the Goals and Vision Element in your Local Comprehensive Plan that demonstrate how your Goals are ambitious for your community's size, character, and resources.

- D.** Discuss the progress you've made towards achieving/implementing the Goals and Vision Element in your Local Comprehensive Plan.

INDICATOR: LEADERSHIP

- E.** Describe your staffing arrangement (local government staff or contracted relationship) for handling community planning issues. Explain why that is the most appropriate arrangement for your community dynamics. Include the number of staff devoted to planning, staff qualifications, continuing education, and organizational structure.

- F.** Demonstrate that you have an active planning Commission or similar body to steer local planning decisions. State why each member's input is valued. Include the meeting schedule, a list of members, their affiliations, title, and background information that is pertinent to their role. If you do not have a planning Commission, please address how current land use decisions are made.

- G.** Show that you regularly evaluate the effectiveness of your work to implement your Local Comprehensive Plan. Examples may include: annual planning retreats of elected/appointed leadership, monthly staff interdepartmental planning meetings, and/or a regular update of your Community Work Program with a Report of Accomplishments. Also provide documentation for your ongoing processes for accomplishing this, which may include but not be limited to agendas, surveys, photos, or articles in the local media.

- H.** Within the table below, list local elected and appointed officials (not including hired or contracted staff) involved in local planning processes, who have recently (within the last 5 years)

attended training on how to use the Local Comprehensive Plan effectively. These trainings may include those from DCA’s Community Planning Institute, the Georgia Academy, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, Regional Commission, GAZA, GMA or ACCG or other professional organizations that specifically address land use or planning topics. Add more rows and an explanation if necessary.

Elected/Appointed Official, Name & Title	Course Name	Event Sponsor	Dates

I. Discuss your leadership’s effort to build collaborative partnerships that will achieve shared Goals, Needs and Opportunities, and/or projects listed in your Community Work Program that have been identified in your Local Comprehensive Plan. Partners may include but are not limited to: The Chamber of Commerce, Regional Commission, or Development Authority. Include references and page numbers to be used as documentation from your current or previous Local Comprehensive Plan. You may also attach letters of support from your partnering organizations, providing specific examples of collaborative efforts.

J. DCA encourages the coordination of local comprehensive planning and implementation between neighboring communities (municipal and county governments). Discuss your leadership’s effort to build collaborative partnerships that will achieve shared Goals, Needs and Opportunities, and/or projects listed in your Community Work Program that have been identified in your Local Comprehensive Plan. Include references and page numbers to be used as documentation from your current or previous Local Comprehensive Plan. You may also attach letters of support from your partnering organizations, providing specific examples of collaborative efforts.

INDICATOR: PARTICIPATION

Responses in this section should draw upon information in the Goals Element, Needs and Opportunities Element, and Community Work Program element of your current and previous comprehensive plan/updates.

K. Share how community input was received and incorporated into the following Local Comprehensive Plan Elements: Goals, Needs and Opportunities, and the Community Work Program. The response should demonstrate how your Local Comprehensive Plan was prepared with multiple creative engagement opportunities (e.g. visioning workshops, SWOT exercises, charettes, social media, virtual meetings, etc.) that went beyond the two legally mandated public hearings and required steering committee. Provide information and/or documentation that illustrates your public participation process. Examples of documentation include: agendas, sign-in sheets, photos, survey results, and other meeting materials.

L. Specify the members of your Local Comprehensive Plan's steering committee and their role in the community (e.g. Planning Commissioner, school board member, neighborhood association, or business owner). Also, please share how the steering committee contributed to the development of the Local Comprehensive Plan, including how many times they met throughout the process.

M. How do you ensure that your planning outreach and engagement activities are responsive to stakeholders representing all demographic and socio-economic backgrounds? Give specific details about your efforts to engage hard to reach populations and underrepresented groups and voices. Provide examples from your previous comprehensive planning processes.

N. After adoption of your Local Comprehensive Plan, what active, ongoing, outreach processes have you used to solicit input on planning matters from a cross-section of the community?

O. List any active advocates you have for Local Comprehensive Plan implementation (such as activist citizens, organizations or neighborhood groups) that affect decisions made by community leaders. How have they affected these decisions?

INDICATOR: IMPLEMENTATION

Responses in this section should draw upon information in the Community Work Program, Goals Element, and the Needs and Opportunities Element of your current/previous comprehensive plan (updates).

P. Demonstrate how individual projects/activities in your Community Work Program advance items discussed in both your Goals Element and Needs and Opportunities Element. Examples should clearly illustrate the linkage of the different plan Elements.

Q. Describe how your Community Work Program drives your community's resource allocation decisions (i.e. annual budget, capital budget, staff resources, facilities, etc.). Provide examples.

R. Provide ten of your best recent examples of projects/activities carried out as a direct result of your community's current or previous Local Comprehensive Plan. Provide references (section and page number from your current or previous plan). Explain how these projects/activities were a result of the plan or the planning process. You may also include photographs, newspaper articles or other exhibits to elaborate on these examples.

Please attach additional sheets as needed to tell your story. Your application must not exceed 22 pages. Your application should be saved/scanned as a PDF document and emailed to planning@dca.ga.gov no later than May 15, 2026. For more information, contact us at planning@dca.ga.gov.