DRAFT

2026 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

GROWING TOGETHER FOR 2050: METRO ATL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



Atlanta Regional Commission

One Great Region. A unified vision for a thriving region through collaborative, data-informed planning and investments.

ARC STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The 2026 Regional Development Plan has been developed to align with ARC's Strategic Framework and fulfill our vision of creating One Great Region, where all residents have the opportunity to thrive. To get there, our region must work harder and make smart, strategic investments, driven by the data.

Vision

ONE great REGION

Mission

Foster thriving communities for all within the Atlanta region through collaborative, data-informed planning and investments.

Goals

Healthy, safe, livable communities in the Atlanta Metro area.

Strategic investments in people, infrastructure, mobility, and preserving natural resources.

Regional services delivered with **operational excellence** and **efficiency**.

Diverse stakeholders engage and take a regional approach to solve local issues.

A competitive economy that is inclusive, innovative, and resilient.

Values

Excellence – A commitment to doing our best and going above and beyond in every facet of our work allowing for innovative practices and actions to be created while ensuring our agency's and our colleagues' success.

Integrity – In our conduct, communication, and collaboration with each other and the region's residents, we will act with consistency, honesty, transparency, fairness, and accountability within and across each of our responsibilities and functions.

Equity – We represent a belief that there are some things which people should have, that there are basic needs that should be fulfilled, that burdens and rewards should not be spread too divergently across the community, and that policy should be directed with impartiality, fairness, and justice towards these ends.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the many people, inside and outside of the Atlanta Regional Commission, who generously gave their time and shared their deep knowledge of metro Atlanta to help create this plan.

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ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION

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CANYONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

GROWING TOGETHER FOR 2050

THE ATLANTA REGION IS AT AN INFLECTION POINT

Projected to grow from 5.3 million residents today to nearly 8 million by 2050, the 11-county region faces decisions that will define its character and competitiveness for a generation. The infrastructure built, the housing policies adopted, the transportation systems funded, and the natural resources protected in the next decade will determine whether the region's growth creates shared prosperity or deepens existing divides.

This is the Atlanta Regional Commission's plan for managing that growth. It is built on a straightforward conviction: that the region's future will be shaped by the quality of the decisions its governments, institutions, and communities make together. ARC's role is to provide the framework, the data, the technical assistance, and the regional coordination that make better decisions possible across all 11 counties and 76 municipalities.

The 2026 Regional Development Plan — Growing Together for 2050 — defines what ARC and its local government partners will work toward over the next 25 years. It serves as a legal requirement under Georgia law, a practical guide for local decision-making, and a statement of the region's shared values and commitments.







The Region at a Glance



5.29M
Residents Today



8M
Projected by 2050



11
Counties



76
Municipalities



25 Years
Planning Horizon



45%
of Renters Cost-Burdened



50th
of 50 Metros for Economic Mobility



25 Years
Life Expectancy Gap across ZIP Codes



$168B
in planned Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) investments



126+
LCI communities across region

HOW THIS PLAN WAS BUILT

The 2026 RDP reflects the deepest community engagement in ARC's history for a Regional Development Plan. Over two years, ARC connected with residents, elected officials, local government staff, business leaders, and community organizations across all 11 counties.

4,000+	125+	11	5	2	1,000+
Residents surveyed via Metro Atlanta Speaks	Elected officials at Regional Assembly	County outreach sessions with local planning staff	Board of Directors touchpoints, 2025–2026	Formal public hearing per DCA requirements	Unique visits to project website

Engagement methods included county and municipal planning forums, the Metro Atlanta Speaks public survey, the online project portal at atlantaregional.org/regional-development-plan, Regional Assembly convening of elected officials, the RDP Internal and External Advisory Committees, and two formal public hearings.



WHAT THE REGION TOLD US — PRIORITY NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Four interconnected themes emerged from every engagement activity — all pointing to the same underlying challenge: that access to opportunity is unevenly distributed across the region.

Housing and Stability

Residents across the region identified affordable housing as their top priority. With a median home price exceeding $400,000 and 45% of renters cost-burdened, displacement is accelerating in urban and suburban communities alike. Missing-middle housing, anti-displacement policy, and workforce housing near jobs were the most frequently requested solutions.

Connectivity and Mobility

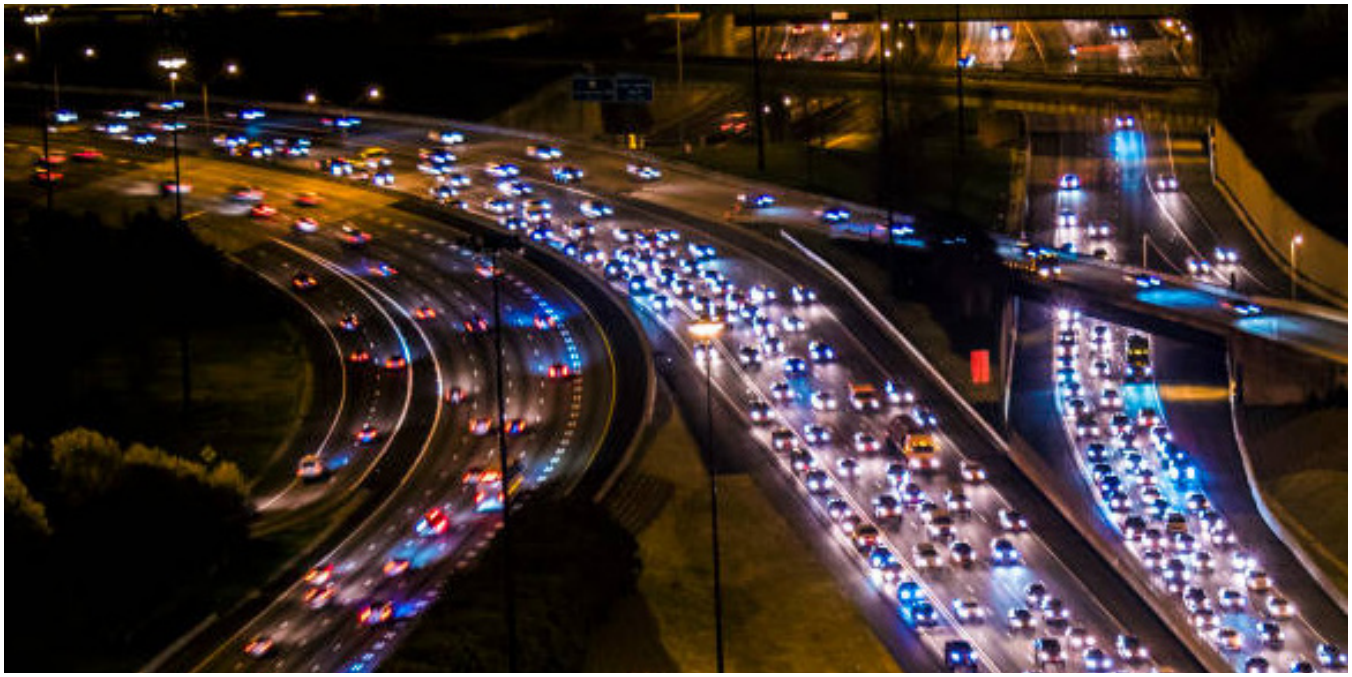
Getting from where residents live to where they work, learn, and access services remains the region's most common daily frustration. Only 2 of 11 counties are served by heavy rail transit. Half of all workers commute across county lines. Pedestrian safety gaps are widespread. Residents want more transit, safer streets, and better first-last mile connections.

Economic Opportunity

Atlanta ranks last among the 50 largest U.S. metros for economic mobility. Nearly 187,000 youth live in poverty across the 11-county area. Residents identified the need for career pathways, workforce training, and investment in historically underserved communities — not just economic growth at the aggregate level, but growth that reaches everyone.

Community Assets

Residents love what makes their communities distinctive — downtowns, parks, trails, cultural institutions, rural character — and fear losing it to rapid growth. Development pressure is accelerating tree canopy loss in outer suburban areas. The rise of data centers is creating significant new demands on water and energy infrastructure. Protection of community identity and natural systems was a consistent priority across all 11 counties.



KEY CONDITIONS SHAPING THE PLAN:

Condition Category	Details & Metrics
Population Growth	3M+ additional residents expected by 2050, requiring trillions in new infrastructure
Housing Affordability	Housing costs have outpaced income growth in all 11 counties since 2015
Safety & Vision Zero*	600 traffic deaths per year; Atlanta ranks among the most dangerous metros for pedestrians
Economic Equity	187,000 youth in poverty; minority firm revenues 30–50% below peers
Environmental Quality	Tree canopy declining in rapidly developing suburban areas
Infrastructure Demand	Data center proliferation creating new water and energy demands
Aging Population	Population aged 65+ projected to nearly double by 2050
Economic Assets	15+ Fortune 500 HQs; world's busiest airport; $168B in MTP investments

* A data-driven strategy aimed at eliminating all traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries across the 11-county region by prioritizing safe roadway design and equitable transportation planning

THE PLAN'S SEVEN GOALS

The 2026 RDP is organized around seven planning categories, each with a set of goals and policies that guide regional and local decision-making through 2050. Economic mobility and access to opportunity run through all seven as foundational commitments.

1	**Economy & Workforce**	A top global metro for prosperity, innovation, and workforce opportunity — with economic mobility as an agency priority.
2	**Water Resources**	Protect the region's river systems and water supply, manage demand growth, and sustain a six-basin green infrastructure network.
3	**Transportation & Mobility**	A safe, multimodal network that connects every resident to opportunity — Vision Zero, transit expansion, and technology-enabled mobility.
4	**Housing & Community**	Affordable, diverse, and stable housing near jobs and services, with anti-displacement as an explicit regional commitment.
5	**Land Use & Development**	Growth directed to the right places through the UGPM [1] — compact centers, LCI communities, and protection of rural and natural lands.
6	**Environment & Natural Sys.**	Urban tree canopy protection, parks and greenspace access, and climate resilience — net-zero by 2050 through MACAP.[2]
7	**Access, Opportunity & Resilience**	Close the 25-year life expectancy gap. Build community resilience. Ensure every resident can participate in the region's future.

1 Urban Growth Policy Map (UGPM)

2 Metro Atlanta Climate Action Plan (MACAP)

KEY STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS — WHAT ARC WILL DO: 2027–2031

Chapter 5 of the plan contains ARC's Five-Year Work Program — 28 specific projects organized by ARC's five Strategic Framework goals. The following are the highest-priority actions for the 2027–2031 period.

Our Strategic Goals



Fostering healthy, safe, livable communities throughout the Atlanta region

Great communities don't happen by accident. It takes careful planning to create the kind of places we want to live — places with wide sidewalks, lush green spaces, connected bike lanes, and bustling town centers. Places with cleaner air and a secure water supply. And places that work for people of all ages and abilities, so residents can "age in place" in their own communities.



Making strategic investments in people, infrastructure, and mobility

The Atlanta region must make the investments needed to improve our roads, highways, transit and bike-ped network. But it also means modernizing our infrastructure so we're more resilient to extreme weather events. And it means investing in our residents, such as providing essential services to older adults and offering workforce resources and training.

We take pride that all of these investments are carefully guided by the data and insights provided by our industry leading research and analytics team.



Delivering regional services with operational excellence and efficiency

This goal involves our entire organization, from the people who work on major programs and initiatives to the dedicated experts in HR, legal, IT, and finance departments who perform the critically important, behind-the-scenes work that keeps the agency moving.



Bringing together diverse stakeholders to engage and take a regional approach to solve local issues

ARC regularly brings diverse people to the regional table to tackle the big challenges our region faces, from transportation and education to housing and workforce.



Ensuring that we have a competitive economy that is inclusive, innovative, and resilient

This goal is woven throughout ARC, from the workforce development team that helps people find good jobs and get the training they need to find a meaningful career to the transportation planners and community development professionals who help local governments prepare for growth.

Livable Communities

- Adopt and implement the Regional Housing Strategy
- Launch Local Housing Studies for member jurisdictions
- Develop a Regional Homelessness Strategy
- Expand the LCI Pilot Implementation Program

Strategic Investments

- Update the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (adopt 2028)
- Develop a Transportation Resilience Plan
- Support Aerotropolis economic development
- Advance Chattahoochee RiverLands implementation

Competitive Economy

- Update the CEDS* (2026–2027)
- Develop an Economic Mobility Strategy
- Advance Building Georgia Initiative
- Support Aerotropolis economic development

Stakeholder Engagement & Operations

- Convene Regional Assembly and Metro ATL Speaks annually
- Coordinate 2030 Census preparation
- Monitor federal policy changes affecting regional funding
- Develop 2027–2031 ARC Strategic Plan

* Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

What Local Governments Are Asked to Do

Chapter 6 establishes 33 Local Performance Standards — specific, surveyable planning actions that every local government in the region is expected to have in place by December 2029 to be considered consistent with the 2026 RDP. Standards are organized by the plan's seven planning categories and scaled to jurisdiction size (Track A for all counties and municipalities over 10,000; Track B for smaller municipalities). A voluntary menu of 22 Regional Leadership Practices recognizes communities that go further. ARC will survey all 87 jurisdictions annually and publish results each January.



THE ROAD AHEAD

AUG 2026
Final Adoption
ARC Board adopts the 2026 RDP following DCA approval

2026–27
Work Program Launch
Housing Strategy, CEDS update, and Economic Mobility Strategy initiated

JAN 2028
First Annual Report
Baseline compliance survey published; local government status documented

DEC 2029
Foundation Deadline
All 87 jurisdictions expected to meet Local Performance Standards

2028
MTP Update Adopted
Next Metropolitan Transportation Plan adopted, programming investments to 2055

One Great Region is not an aspiration for a distant future. It is the standard against which the decisions made in the next five years will be measured. This plan is ARC's commitment to lead that work with clarity, transparency, and genuine partnership across all 11 counties and 76 municipalities.

Full plan: **atlantaregional.org/regional-development-plan** | Questions: community@atlantaregional.org




ONE great REGION

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

One Great Region

The Atlanta region is one of the most consequential metropolitan areas in the United States — a global logistics hub, a center of corporate headquarters and innovation, a mosaic of communities representing nearly every corner of the world, and one of the fastest-growing regions of its size anywhere in the country. Its strengths are real, and its trajectory is remarkable. And yet, the region is also defined by a more complicated truth: that for too many of its residents, the promise of Atlanta has not been equally shared. The gap between its wealthiest and poorest communities — measured in incomes, in health outcomes, in access to opportunity, and even in life expectancy — is among the largest of any major metropolitan area in the nation.

This document is the Atlanta Regional Commission's Regional Development Plan — the plan for the Atlanta region's future. It has been developed to address both of these realities: to build on the extraordinary assets that make this region competitive and livable, and to confront the challenges that will determine whether the next quarter century represents progress for all 5.3 million residents or continued prosperity for some alongside persistent exclusion for others.

The Atlanta Regional Commission's vision is *One Great Region* — a place where all residents have the opportunity to thrive, where growth is managed wisely, and where the decisions made today create lasting value for generations to come.



WHAT IS THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Regional Development Plan (RDP) is ARC's primary planning document for the 11-county Atlanta region. It establishes the shared vision, goals, policies, and strategies that will guide regional decision-making over the next 25 years. It is, at once, a legal requirement, a practical tool, and a statement of regional values.

Under Georgia law — specifically the Georgia Planning Act (O.C.G.A. 50-8-1 et seq.) and the Department of Community Affairs' Standards and Procedures for Regional Planning (Chapter 110-12-6) — each of Georgia's twelve Regional Commissions is required to prepare, adopt, maintain, and implement a Regional Plan that is updated at minimum every five years. The RDP fulfills this requirement for the Atlanta region. To remain eligible for key state funding programs and to retain the ability to review and advise on Developments of Regional Impact (DRIs), ARC, and the local governments it serves depend on an adopted, current, and DCA-approved plan.

But compliance is the floor, not the ceiling. This plan is designed to do more than satisfy a statutory requirement. It is meant to be used by county commissioners and city council members making land use decisions, by transportation planners programming infrastructure investments, by economic development officials evaluating business attraction strategies, by housing advocates seeking policy tools, and by community members who want to understand the forces shaping their neighborhoods and who want a voice in what comes next.

DCA REGIONAL PLANNING REQUIREMENTS: WHAT A REGIONAL PLAN MUST DO

Under Chapter 110-12-6 of the Georgia Administrative Code, a Regional Plan is required to:

DCA Regional Planning Requirements: What a Regional Plan Must Do

Under Chapter 110-12-6 of the Georgia Administrative Code, a Regional Plan is required to:

- Involve all segments of the region in developing a shared vision for the future, ensuring the plan is representative of the entire region
- Identify priority needs and opportunities affecting the region and customize ARC's technical assistance to promote impactful change
- Engage regional policymakers and stakeholders as active participants in implementation, not merely as plan reviewers
- Provide a guide for everyday decision-making by government officials and other regional leaders across the planning horizon
- Advance the state's planning goals: coordination of land use and transportation; protection of natural and cultural resources; provision of adequate and affordable housing; and coordination of local plans with regional and state plans

WHO IS THIS PLAN FOR

The Regional Development Plan is written for everyone who has a stake in the Atlanta region's future — which is to say, everyone who lives, works, learns, or does business here. But it is designed with specific audiences in mind.

For elected officials and local government staff — county commissioners, mayors, planning directors, public works administrators — this plan is a resource for navigating the choices that shape communities. It provides the regional context within which local decisions sit, and it articulates the goals and policies that ARC will use when reviewing proposed developments, allocating federal transportation funding, and providing technical assistance. Jurisdictions whose local plans and actions are consistent with the RDP are better positioned to access state and federal resources and to work effectively with ARC and neighboring communities.

For regional and state partners — the Georgia Department of Transportation, the ATL Authority, the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and a wide range of state agencies — this plan articulates ARC's framework for investment and coordination, and identifies the areas where intergovernmental alignment is most critical to achieving regional outcomes.

For the business community, developers, and economic development stakeholders, this plan identifies the region's growth framework, development priorities, and the types of investment and partnership that will be most valued over the planning horizon. Understanding where the region is directing growth — and where it is seeking to protect natural systems, agricultural lands, and established neighborhoods — is essential information for long-range investment decisions.

For community members, advocacy organizations, and the residents whose daily lives are most directly shaped by regional planning decisions, this plan is an accountability document. It records the commitments the region is making — to equitable investment, to environmental stewardship, to housing affordability, to transportation access — and creates a basis for holding ARC and its partners to those commitments over time.



WHY THIS PLAN, WHY NOW?

The Atlanta region is approaching a pivotal moment. The decisions made in the next decade will shape the region's character, competitiveness, and resilience for a generation. Several converging forces make this moment both urgent and consequential.

The region is projected to grow from approximately 5.29 million residents today to nearly 8 million by 2050. That growth — slightly less than 3 million additional people — will require trillions of dollars in housing, transportation, water, and community infrastructure. The question is not whether growth will come, but how the region will manage it: whether new development will reinforce existing patterns of sprawl and inequity, or whether it will be directed toward more efficient, equitable, and sustainable forms. The choices made now, through zoning decisions, infrastructure investments, and regional policy frameworks, will determine the answer.

At the same time, the region faces a set of structural challenges that compound each other and demand coordinated, cross-sectoral responses. These include an acute housing affordability crisis that is displacing working families and long-established communities; a transportation network that has not kept pace with the region's geographic expansion; a climate system that is generating more frequent and severe heat events, drought conditions, and flooding; a water supply that is subject to longstanding inter-state legal disputes; and persistent economic inequality that concentrates opportunity in some communities while leaving others behind.

These are not abstract, distant threats. They are present realities that are already reshaping communities across the region. And they are interconnected: the household that cannot afford housing near employment must bear both housing instability and long commutes; the community without transit access cannot reach jobs that would lift it out of poverty; the watershed that loses tree canopy to development becomes more vulnerable to flooding and heat. Addressing these challenges requires a plan that sees the region as a whole and recognizes that investments in one domain have consequences in others.

Finally, this is a moment of extraordinary federal investment opportunity. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act together represent the most significant federal commitment to transportation, climate, housing, and community infrastructure in a generation. Capturing these resources for the Atlanta region — and directing them equitably — requires the kind of coordinated regional vision that only a well-prepared, current, and broadly supported Regional Development Plan can provide.

Challenges Driving This Plan

- 5.29M to 8M residents by 2050: around an additional 3M people requiring housing, water, and transportation infrastructure
- Housing affordability crisis: 45% of renters are cost-burdened; thousands are displaced annually
- Transportation gaps: half of workers commute across county lines with limited transit access
- Life expectancy gap: up to a 25-year difference between ZIP codes in the same county
- Climate pressure: 46% of GHG emissions from transportation; rising heat, drought, and flooding risk
- Water supply uncertainty: tri-state litigation unresolved; Lake Lanier under nutrient stress
- Economic inequality: 187,000 youth in poverty; minority firm revenues 30–50% below peers

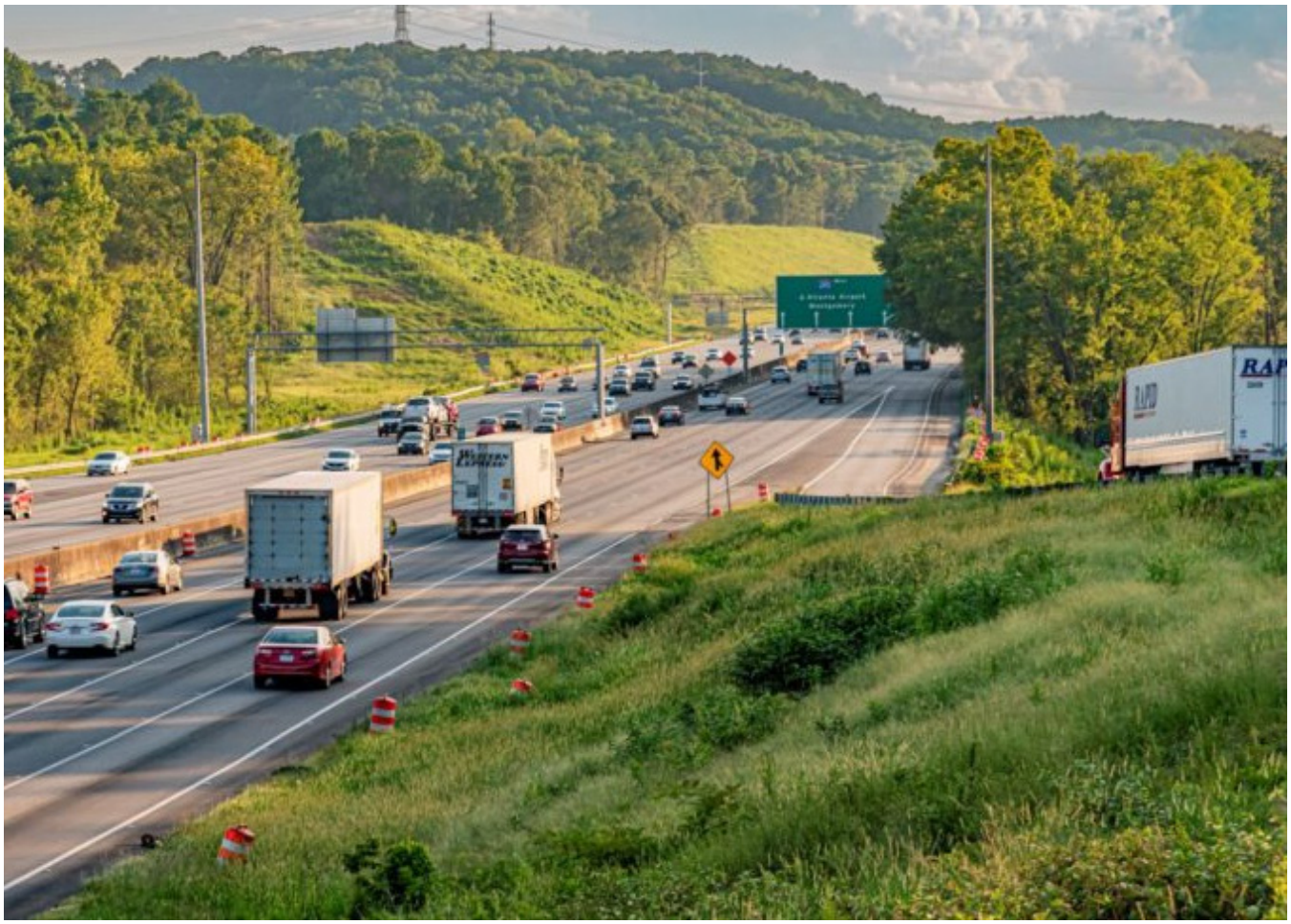
Opportunities Shaping This Plan

- Once-in-a-generation federal investment: Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act
- Growing regional transit momentum: multi-county BRT and rail expansion underway
- Metro Atlanta Climate Action Plan adopted: 24 measures, net-zero by 2050 roadmap in place
- CEDS vision: top global metro for prosperity, equity, and innovation
- Strong LCI and UGPM frameworks providing proven land use and development tools
- Hartsfield-Jackson global connectivity supporting logistics, tourism, and talent attraction
- Region's diversity as a competitive asset: majority-minority region with global workforce

WHAT THIS PLAN DOES — AND WHAT IT DOES NOT

The Regional Development Plan is a policy framework, not a project list. It establishes the vision, goals, and policies that guide regional investments and decisions, but it does not enumerate every project or program that ARC and its partners will undertake. For transportation project specifics, readers should consult the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program. For water infrastructure action items, the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's Water Resources Management Plan provides the authoritative framework. For economic development strategies and action assignments, the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is the primary reference. This plan integrates and aligns those documents within a unified regional framework.

The plan is organized around a set of interconnected planning categories — economy and workforce, water resources, transportation and mobility, housing and community development, land use and development patterns, environment and natural systems,z and regional resilience — that together define the full scope of ARC's regional planning responsibility. Each category is addressed through a consistent structure: regional context, goals and policies, and assets and challenges that frame the strategic choices ahead. Subsequent chapters translate this framework into a Regional Work Program that identifies the specific programs, initiatives, and investments through which ARC will advance these goals over the next five years.



ARC'S ROLE AS REGIONAL PLANNER

The Atlanta Regional Commission is the official regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency for the 11-county Atlanta region. It is a multi-jurisdictional organization governed by a board of elected officials — the county commission chairs and mayors of member jurisdictions — and it operates under multiple federal and state designations that define its roles and responsibilities.

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Atlanta urbanized area, ARC is responsible for the long-range transportation planning process and the programming of federal transportation funds. As an Economic Development District designated by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, ARC leads the development and implementation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. As the designated Area Agency on Aging for the 10-county area, ARC administers federal Older Americans Act programs and coordinates a regional network of aging services. As the planning staff to the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District, ARC supports the integrated water resources planning framework that governs water supply, wastewater, and watershed management across the region. And as the Regional Commission under Georgia law, ARC reviews Developments of Regional Impact, maintains the Regional Resource Plan, and coordinates comprehensive planning across member jurisdictions.

These roles are distinct but interconnected. ARC's unique value as a regional institution lies precisely in its ability to see across these silos — to understand that a housing decision affects transportation demand, that land use patterns affect water quality, that an economic development strategy must account for workforce access and climate risk. The Regional Development Plan is the document through which ARC articulates how these functions fit together into a coherent regional strategy.

ARC does not control land use — that authority rests with local governments. It does not build or operate transportation infrastructure — GDOT, MARTA, and local governments do that. It does not deliver water or wastewater services — local utilities do. But ARC shapes the decisions that those entities make, through the plans it prepares, the funding it programs, the technical assistance it provides, the reviews it conducts, and the regional voice it brings to state and federal partners. This plan defines how ARC will use those tools to advance One Great Region over the next quarter century.



HOW ARC DEVELOPED THIS PLAN

ARC developed this plan through an extensive process of research, analysis, and stakeholder engagement that built on ARC's ongoing planning programs and relationships across the region. The plan draws from a broad array of existing regional planning documents — including the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, the 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's 2022 Water Resources Management Plan, ARC's Metro Atlanta Climate Action Plan, the Live Beyond Expectations strategic plan on aging and life expectancy, and the Regional Resource Plan — as well as original regional analysis conducted by ARC staff.

ARC staff also directly engaged with ARC's board of county commission chairs and city mayors, whose direction on regional priorities, growth scenarios, and policy choices has shaped the framework presented here. It reflects input from ARC's advisory committees, from local government staff across all eleven counties, from regional stakeholders in the business, nonprofit, and advocacy communities, and from the public engagement process that accompanied the plan's development. Consistent with DCA's Regional Planning Requirements, the plan has been designed to involve all segments of the region and to generate a vision that is broadly representative of the full diversity of communities and interests that constitute the Atlanta region.



HOW THIS PLAN IS ORGANIZED

The Regional Development Plan is organized into five chapters that move from context to commitment:

Chapter 1 — Introduction (this chapter) establishes the purpose, legal basis, and audience of the plan, and frames the regional context of opportunity and challenge within which all planning decisions are made.

Chapter 2 — Community Engagement details the inclusive, region-wide outreach process that informed the plan's development, ensuring that the vision for 2050 reflects the diverse voices of the 11-county area. It documents the workshops, stakeholder interviews, and digital forums used to gather input from residents, local government officials, and community organizations.

Chapter 3 — Assets and Challenges provides the analytical foundation for the plan, examining current conditions across the full range of planning categories — demographics, economy, land use, transportation, environment, water resources, and housing — and identifying the key assets the region can build on and the challenges it must confront.

Chapter 4 — Goals and Policies establishes the normative framework for the plan: the goals and implementing policies across seven planning categories that will guide regional investment decisions, local government actions, and ARC's technical assistance over the planning horizon.

Chapter 5 — Regional Work Program translates the goals and policies of Chapter 3 into a five-year action agenda, identifying the specific programs, studies, initiatives, and investments that ARC and its partners will undertake to advance regional goals, with responsible parties, timelines, and funding sources identified.

Chapter 6 — Implementation and Accountability describes the mechanisms through which the plan will be monitored, updated, and held accountable — including performance metrics, the annual implementation report required by DCA, and the process for plan amendments.

Chapter 7 — Local Standards and Regional Quality outlines the framework for alignment between local government plans and regional objectives, ensuring that growth across the 11-county area is both cohesive and high-quality.

A Plan for All Who Call This Region Home

The Atlanta region has never been short on ambition. It has been a place that people come to — from across Georgia, across the country, and across the world — because they believe in what it offers: economic opportunity, cultural vitality, natural beauty, and the chance to build something lasting. This plan is built on that belief. It takes seriously the challenges that stand between the region's current condition and its full potential, and it charts a course for addressing them — not by hoping growth resolves disparities on its own, but by making deliberate choices about where investment goes, whose needs are prioritized, and what kind of region we are building together. The Atlanta Regional Commission is committed to One Great Region. This plan is the map.

CHAPTER 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes how the 2026 update was built with the public, the engagement program that surrounds it, and how that program is being strengthened for the cycle ahead. Our engagement was done differently this year. The approach is grounded in the belief that everything is engagement. During the first half of 2025, our team worked across departments at ARC and with outside partners in the form of steering committees to develop a refined vision for Growing Together for 2050: MetroATL Development Strategy – its underlying intent, what it should be and do, and what we want plan users and stakeholders to do with the plan.

In addition, our engagement was led by the Community Engagement and Culture team using arts and culture to engage with all populations in our metro Atlanta region. A number of populations in the region are not familiar with regional planning historically so three main initiatives have been developed to engage with communities, break down barriers, build trust and build a solid foundation to make our engagement and ultimately our regional planning better. Those initiatives include a Community Engagement Fellowship in our housing work, Community Forums, and Community-Centered Design. These initiatives are places where artists are planners are using creativity to authentically engage with the diverse metro-Atlanta region. This engagement approach was translated to artists and CBOs to reach more diverse voices to help shape the region for 2050.

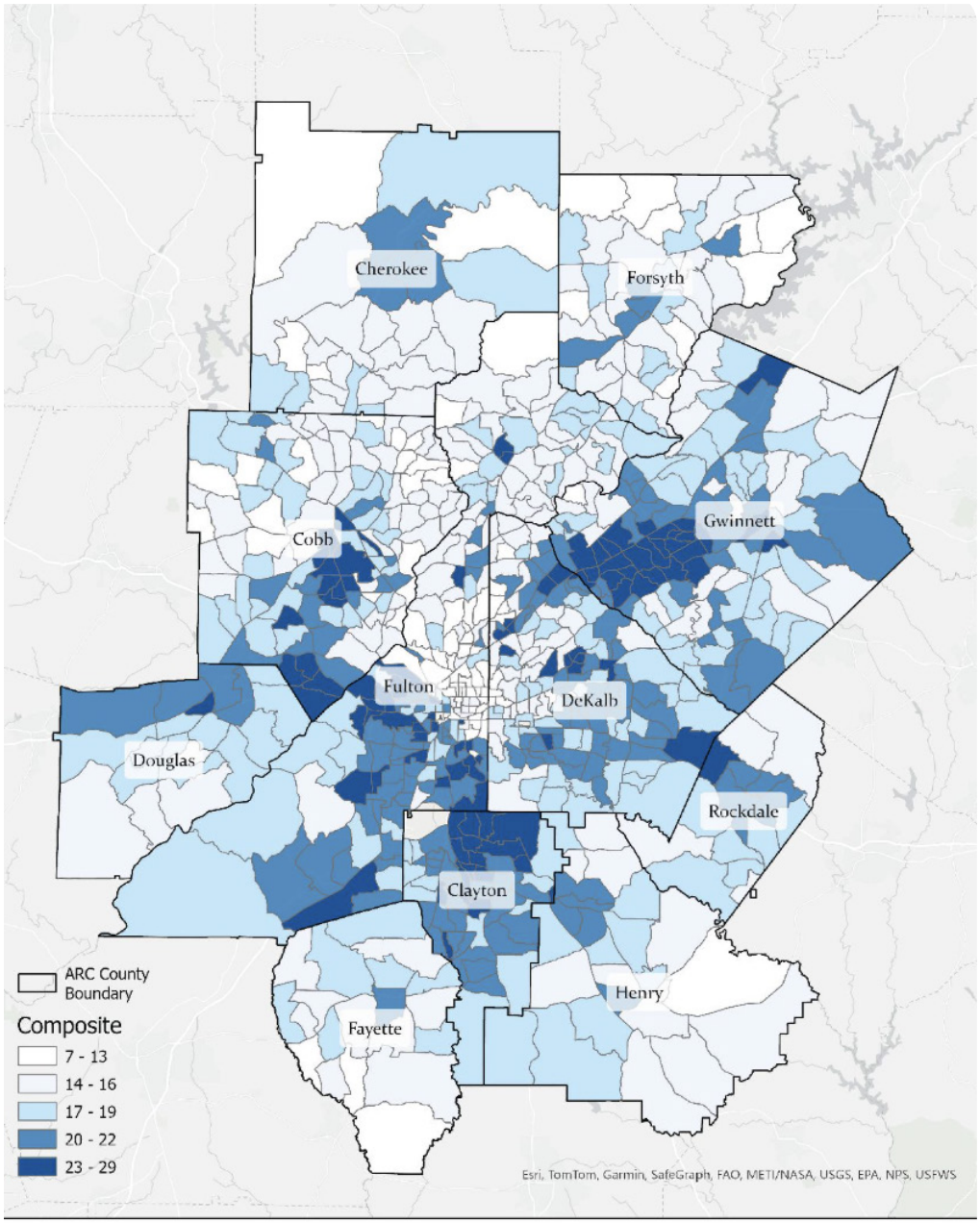
IAP2 Level	Promise to the public	ARC tactics deployed in 2026 cycle
Inform	We will keep you informed.	Plan website, fact sheets, e-newsletters, social media, press releases, public-notice mailings (Title VI compliant)
Consult	We will keep you informed, listen, and acknowledge concerns.	Online comment portal; comment-period summaries; surveys at programs; the formal DCA-required public hearings
Involve	We will work with you to ensure your concerns are reflected.	Listening sessions involving residents and workers from all of the 11 counties (DCA requires ≥3); workshops in Equity Priority Communities; multilingual workshop (Spanish); youth-focused session through MARC
Collaborate	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation.	Advisory Committees of CBOs; Co-design sessions on the Unified Growth Policy Map updates;
Empower	We will implement what you decide.	Developing strategy on implementing specifics from feedback given.



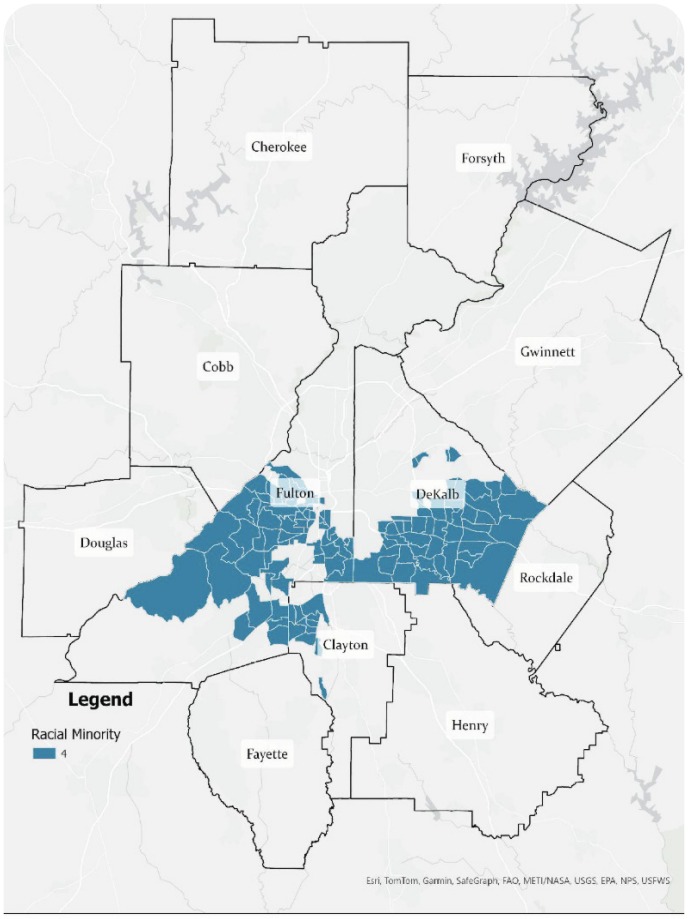
Equity Score Mapping

To ensure that populations across the metro region who are unfamiliar with ARC's Regional Development Plan participate in this process, we used equity scoring maps developed by our Research and Transportation teams to develop creative collaborations between artists and community-based organizations for learning about the plan and voicing their hopes and concerns for the region from now until the year 2050.

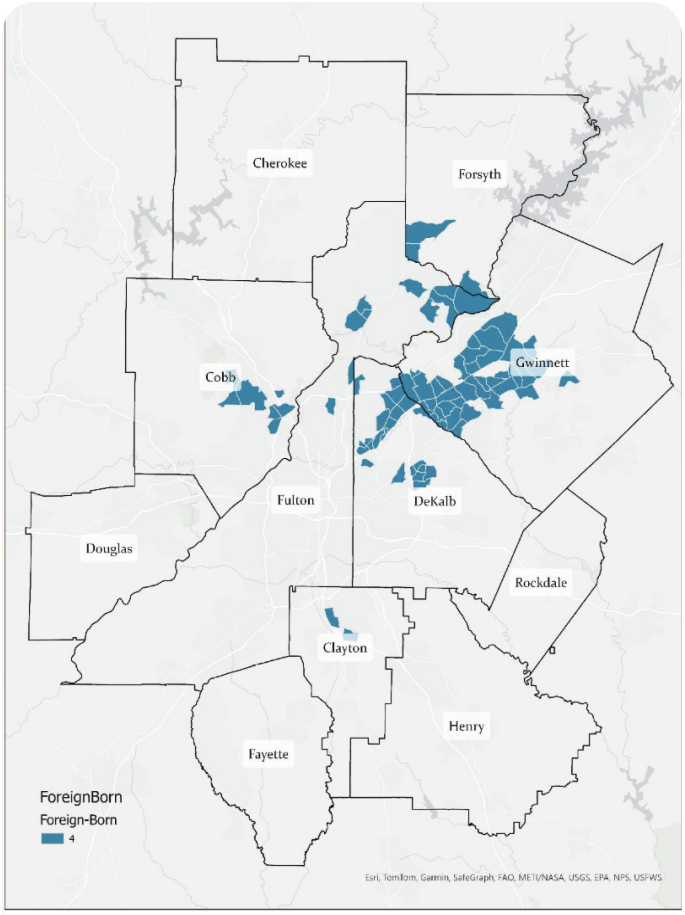
With these communities identified, ARC developed a series of creative collaborations between artists and community-based organizations to bring the RDP's questions to life in formats that those communities could meaningfully participate in. Three partnerships anchored this effort.



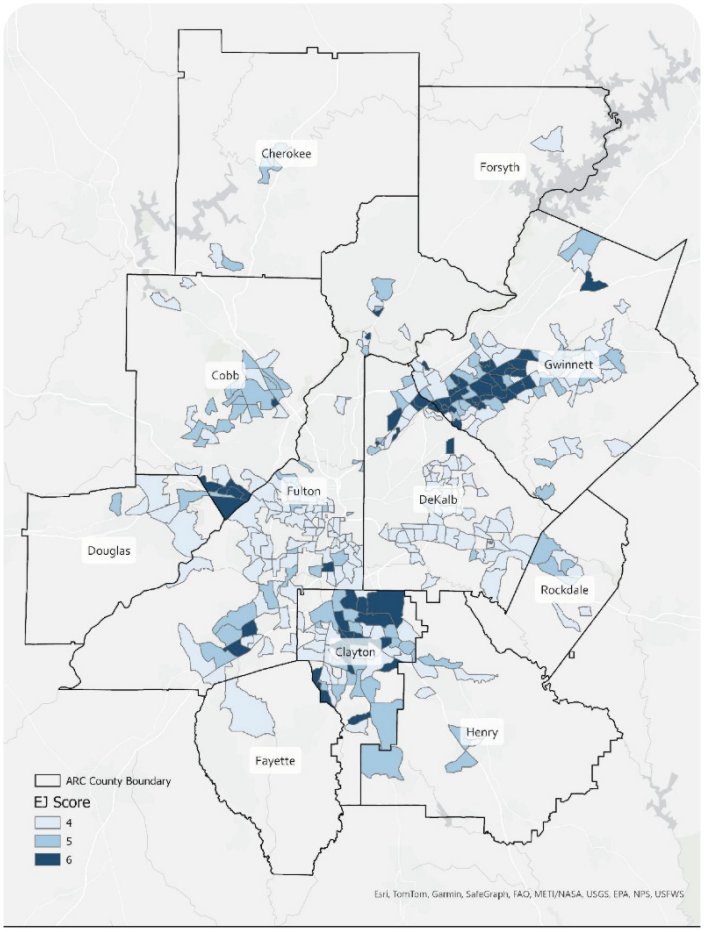
Composite Equity Score Mapping



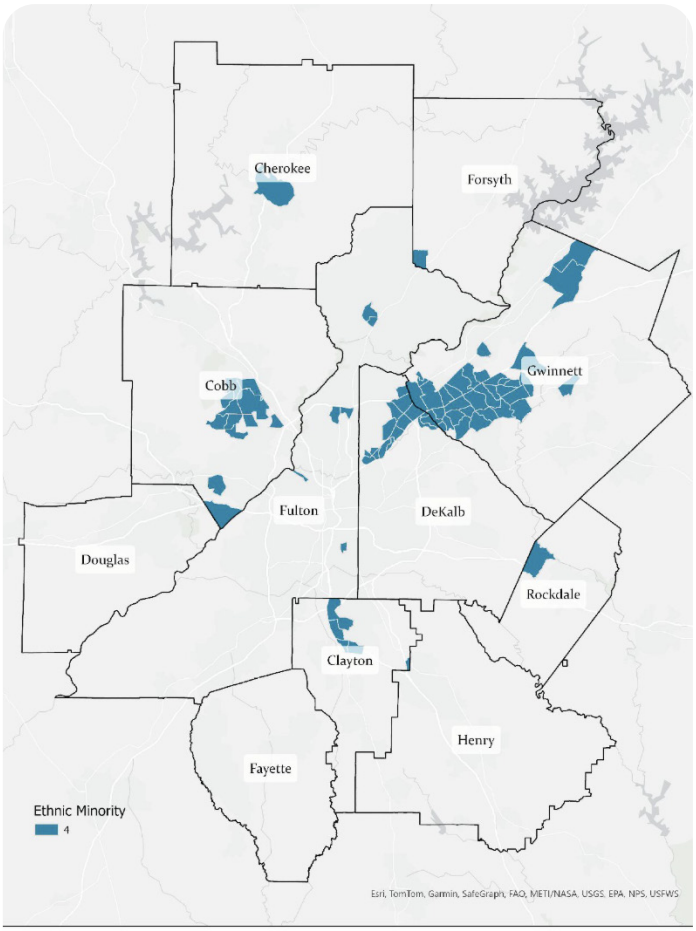
Racial Minority Mapping



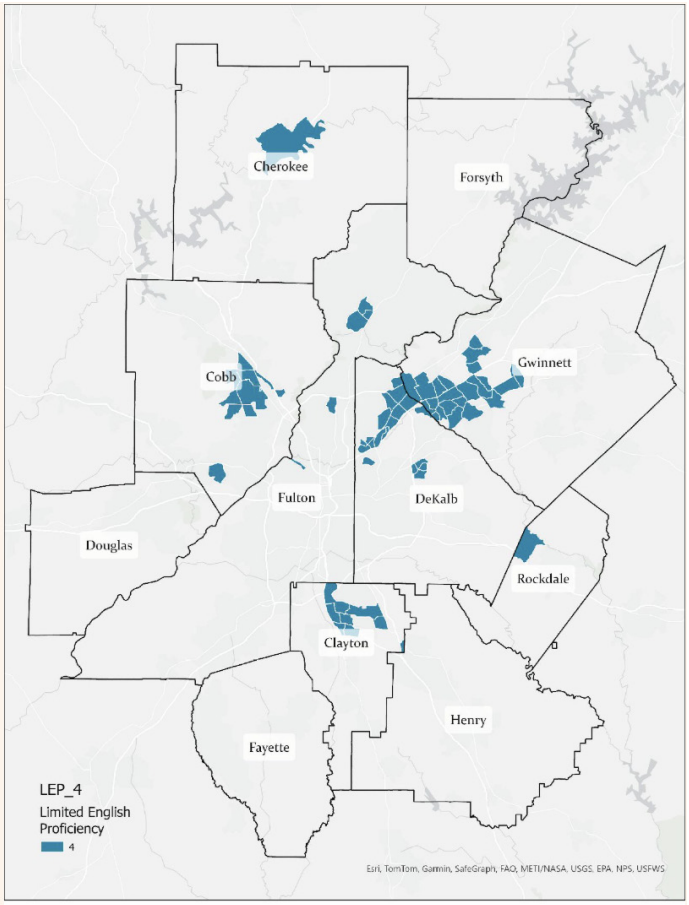
Foreign Born Mapping



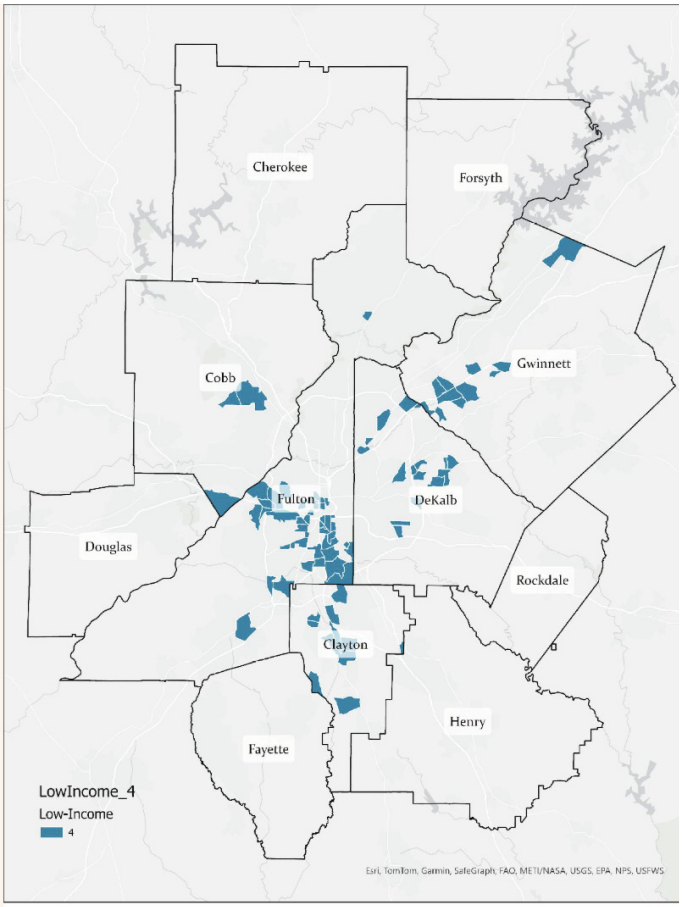
Environmental Justice Mapping



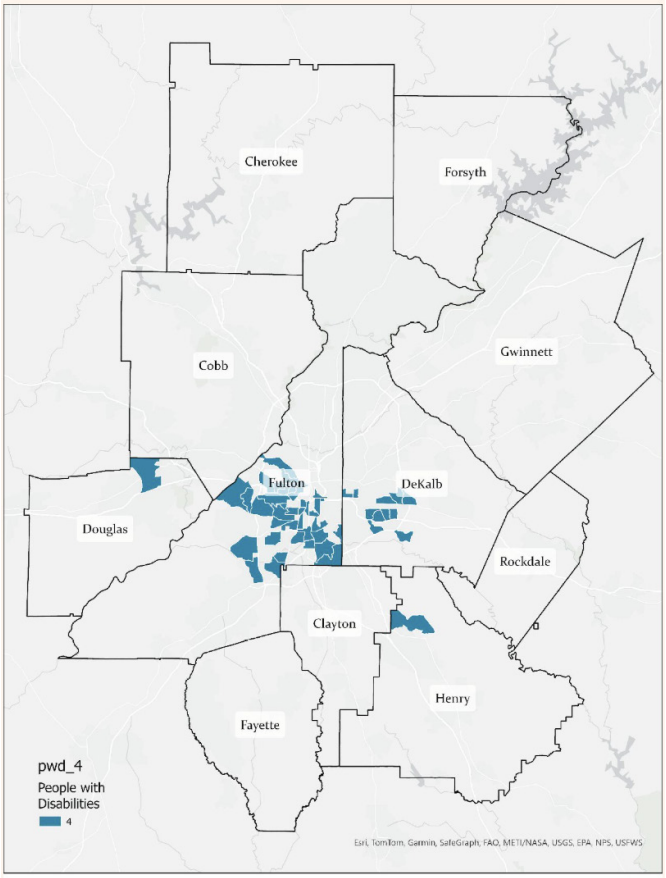
Ethnic Minority Mapping



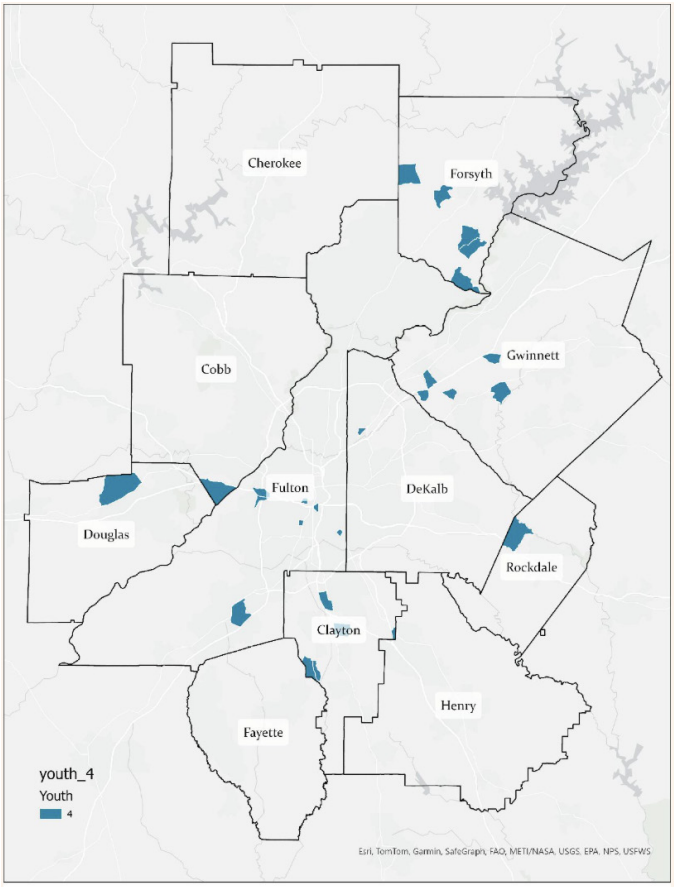
Population with LEP Mapping



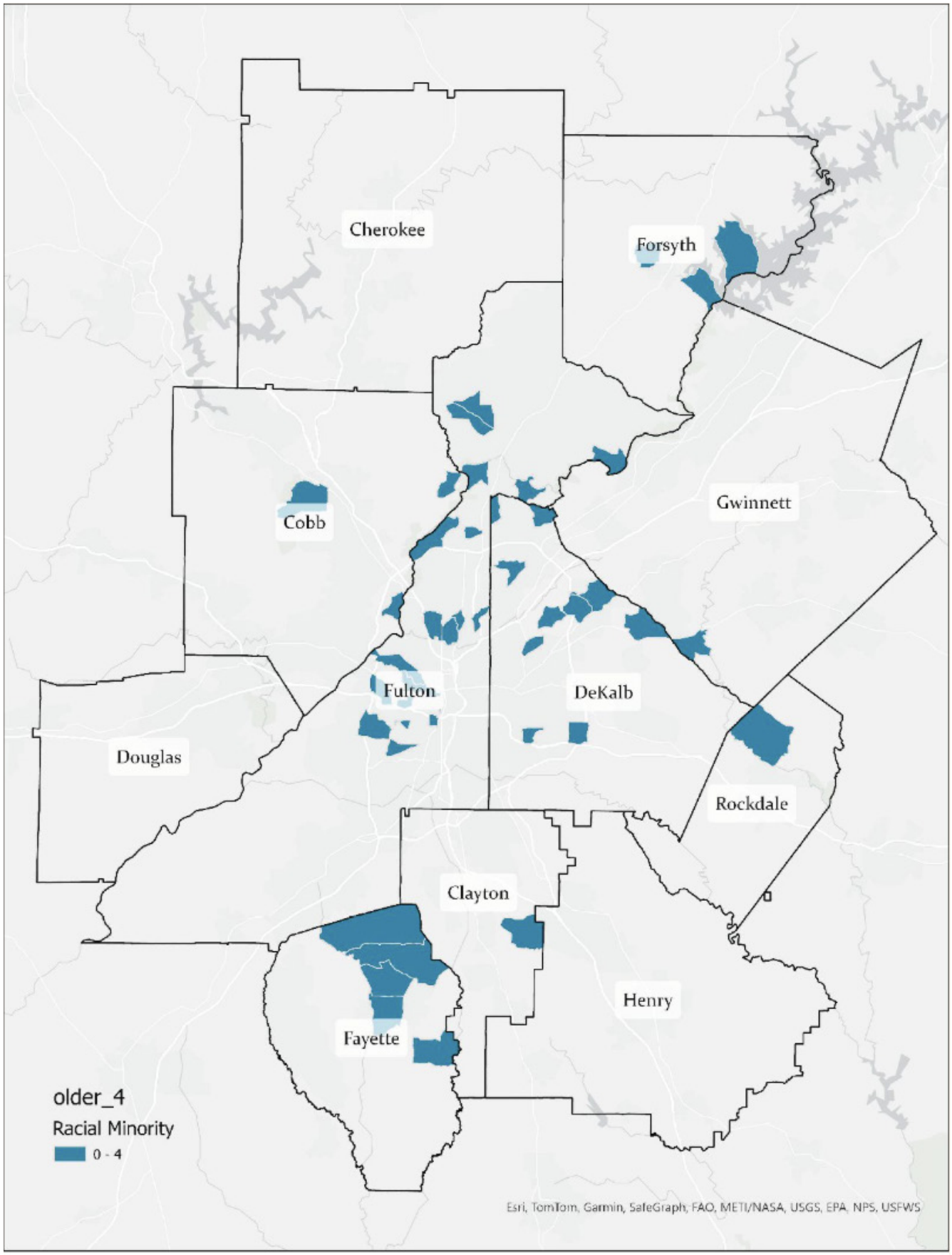
Low-Income Population Mapping



Person with Disabilities Mapping



Youth Population Mapping



Older Adults Population Mapping

CERAMICS WORKSHOP FOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Monica Campana, Amigos de la Comunidad de Georgia, and DeKalb County Schools

Artist Monica Campana hosted a three-part ceramics workshop with parents and youth who created ceramic plaques for their homes while discussing what home means to them and what matters most to their communities over the next 25 years. The workshops surfaced findings directly relevant to the RDP's growth and protection framework. Most participants identified their homes as their only place of safety, healthy eating, and ease — and a significant number reported anxiety about displacement and deportation. Participants expressed that green spaces, parks, and trails are essential to well-being but are limited or inaccessible. Family, friends, and church communities mattered far more than commercial or civic spaces as places of importance, underscoring the need for community-centered gathering spaces to support immigrant families. A central theme was fear of cultural erasure through displacement and the loss of Latino cultural spaces. Participants identified schools, streets, public transit, and public spaces as in need of investment, with particular concern about safety and accessibility on public transportation. When asked about the future, participants expressed a desire to live in places that are safe, free, and full of opportunity — without racism. Across the board, participants expressed strong interest in more free arts programs that create space for community-building.



COLLAGE AND QUILTING WORKSHOPS WITH SENIORS

Charity Hamidullah and the Olivia Haydel Senior Center, Rockdale County

Artist Charity Hamidullah led Mapping Our Future: Stories in Collage & Quilt, a two-part project at the Olivia Haydel Senior Center engaging seniors in storytelling through collage and collaborative quilting. The resulting findings illuminate conditions and needs in Rockdale County that the RDP's protection and investment framework must address. Many participants rely entirely on caregivers, the Senior Center's transportation, or its staff to get around — there is no public transit and very few sidewalks, and walkability, while strongly desired, is essentially absent. Participants want outdoor community spaces for people of all ages, bus transportation, and walking trails to feel more connected. They value the preservation of nature and are concerned about chemical spills and tree loss for commercial development. Seniors also expressed a desire for housing options and investment in the amenities that are already working well — the Senior Center above all. The session reinforced that the Senior Center is irreplaceable to this community and that spaces like it must be treated as protected assets in the RDP.



MURAL-MAKING WITH HOUSING-INSECURE YOUTH

Emida Roller and drawchange

Artist Emida Roller worked with housing-insecure youth through drawchange over three days, inviting young people to imagine what their neighborhoods could look like in 2050. Guided by questions about safety, growth, and hope, students responded through words, drawing, color, and paint — creating a movable mural from sketches, textures, and painted fabrics. Youth said they want more sports and recreational activities, green spaces and parks, playgrounds, and neighborly communities. They feel safe at home, at school, and when people are present to protect them. Joy for these young people comes from going to the park, playing outside, school, home, exercising, and family. They aspire to careers as firefighters, police officers, doctors, coaches, dancers, and artists. What makes them feel at home is family, friends, pets, healthy food, a bed, and being able to play. And what would improve their quality of life is stable housing, a place to play, plants, animals, friends, and love.



CHAPTER 3: ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION

The Atlanta region is among the most dynamic metropolitan areas in the United States. Over the past several decades, the 11-county Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) planning area has experienced transformational growth in population, employment, and economic activity, earning a place among the top 10 largest metropolitan regions in the country. This growth has brought with it remarkable assets—a globally connected airport, a thriving innovation economy, diverse communities, and an expanding network of livable centers—alongside significant challenges in infrastructure capacity, housing affordability, environmental resilience, and Access To Opportunity.

This chapter identifies the key assets and challenges that define the region's current condition and frame the strategic choices ahead. Understanding these conditions is essential to crafting a Regional Development Plan that builds on the region's strengths, addresses its vulnerabilities, and positions the Atlanta metro to thrive in the decades ahead. The chapter draws on regional data, the 2020 Regional Development Plan Update, ARC's integrated planning systems, and community input gathered throughout the planning process.

This chapter is organized around six thematic areas: People and Demographics; Economy and Employment; Land Use and Development Patterns; Transportation and Mobility; Environment and Natural Systems; and Housing and Community Development.



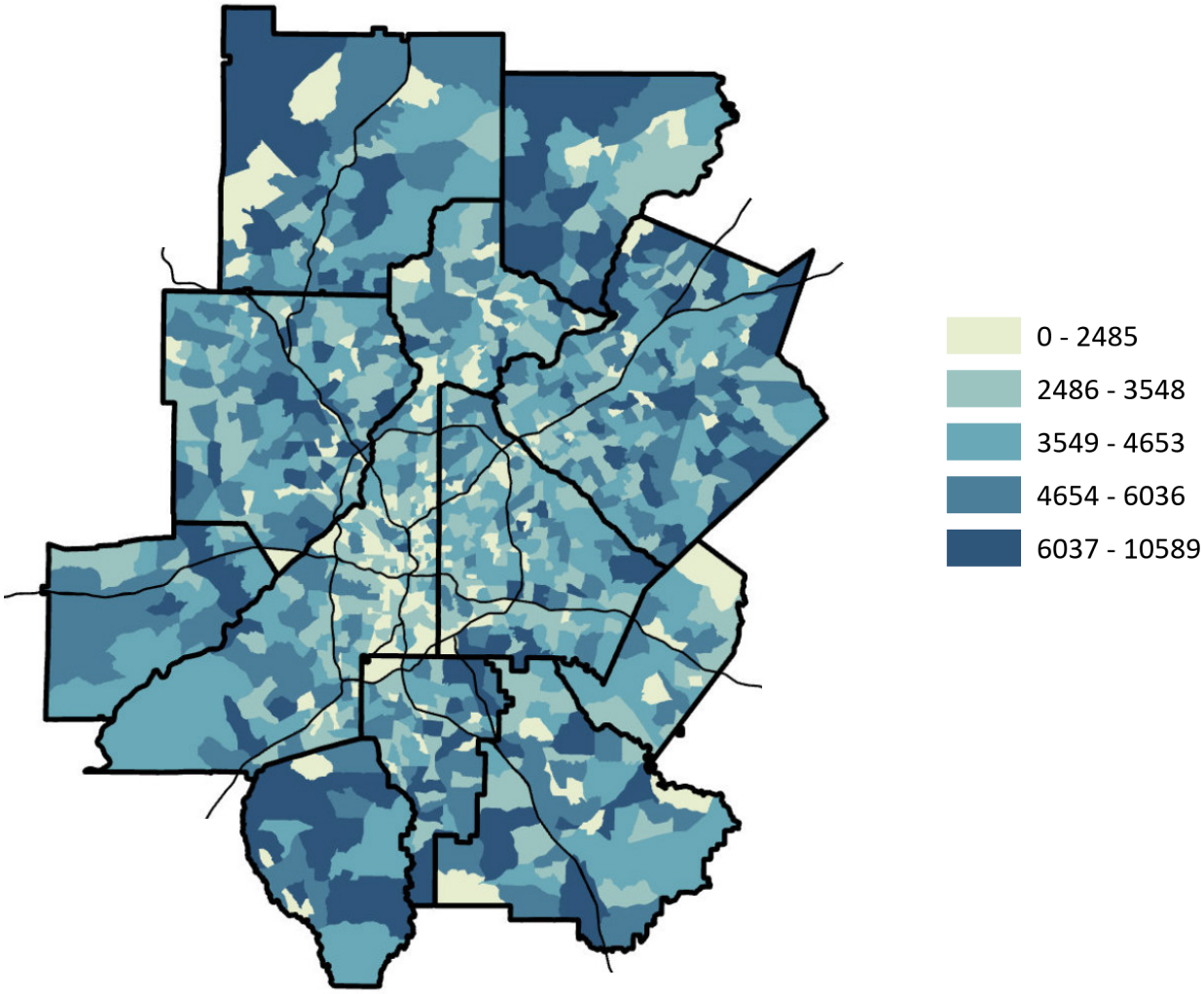
PEOPLE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The Atlanta region is one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the nation. In the past five years alone, it gained 320,000 new residents. This growth has been driven by a combination of domestic in-migration, international immigration, and natural population increase. These demographic trends shape demand for housing, transportation, public services, and infrastructure across the region.

POPULATION GROWTH AND PROJECTIONS

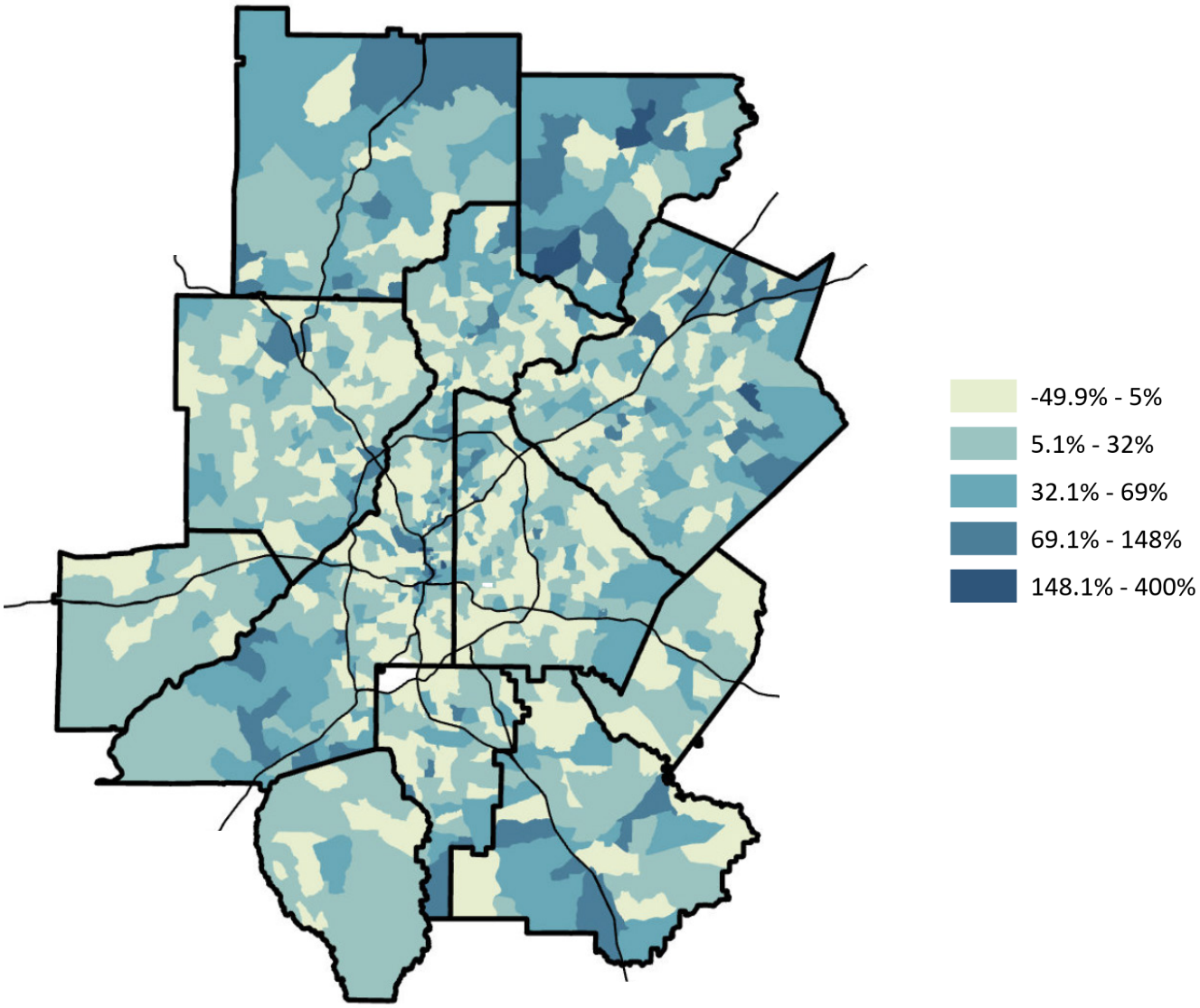
The Atlanta region surpassed 4.5 million residents by 2020 and is projected to reach approximately 8 million by 2050. Our growth has been, and will continue to be, unevenly distributed. Outer suburban and exurban counties are expected to absorb a disproportionate share of new residents. Meanwhile, urban core jurisdictions experience more moderate but steady growth driven by infill development and densification.

Total Population by Census Tract, ACS 2019-2023



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

Percent Change in Total Population, 2014-2018 to 2019-2023



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

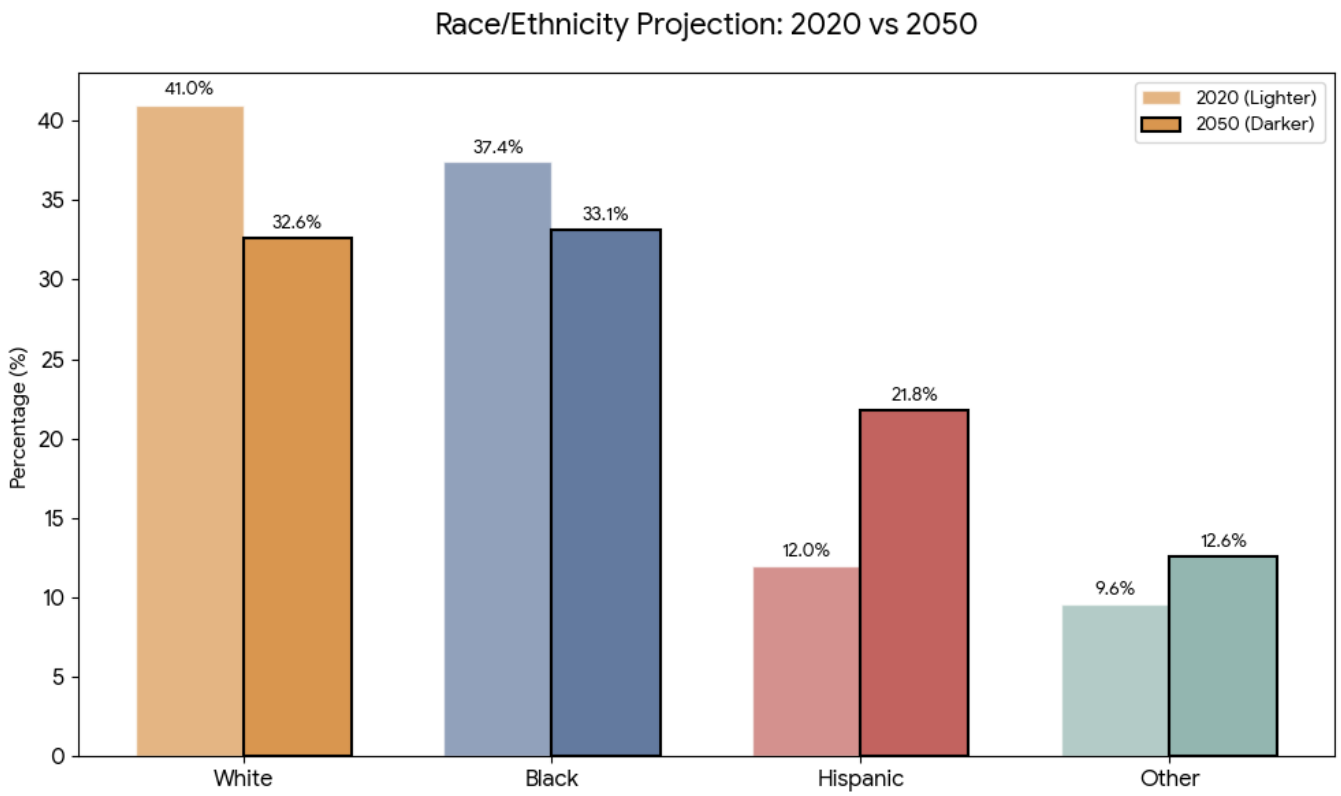
County	2020 Population (est.)	2050 Projection (est.)	% Change
Cherokee	266,000	430,000	+62%
Clayton	292,000	360,000	+23%
Cobb	766,000	1,000,000	+31%
DeKalb	764,000	980,000	+28%
Douglas	145,000	225,000	+55%
Fayette	116,000	160,000	+38%
Fulton	1,066,000	1,400,000	+31%
Gwinnett	957,000	1,350,000	+41%
Henry	240,000	410,000	+71%
Newton	109,000	200,000	+83%
Rockdale	90,000	150,000	+67%
11-County Total	4,811,000	6,665,000–8,000,000	+39–66%

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

The Atlanta region ranks among the most diverse in the Southeast. Gwinnett County, in particular, has emerged as one of the ten most ethnically diverse counties in the United States. This diversity is a significant regional asset, supporting cultural vitality, workforce breadth, and economic innovation. However, it also demands resilience-focused initiatives, including better access to opportunity, language services, and inclusive planning processes.

As of 2020, the region's population is approximately 41% White non-Hispanic, 37.4% Black or African American, 12% Hispanic, and 9.6% all other groups. These proportions represent a significant shift from 2000, when the White non-Hispanic share exceeded 65%.

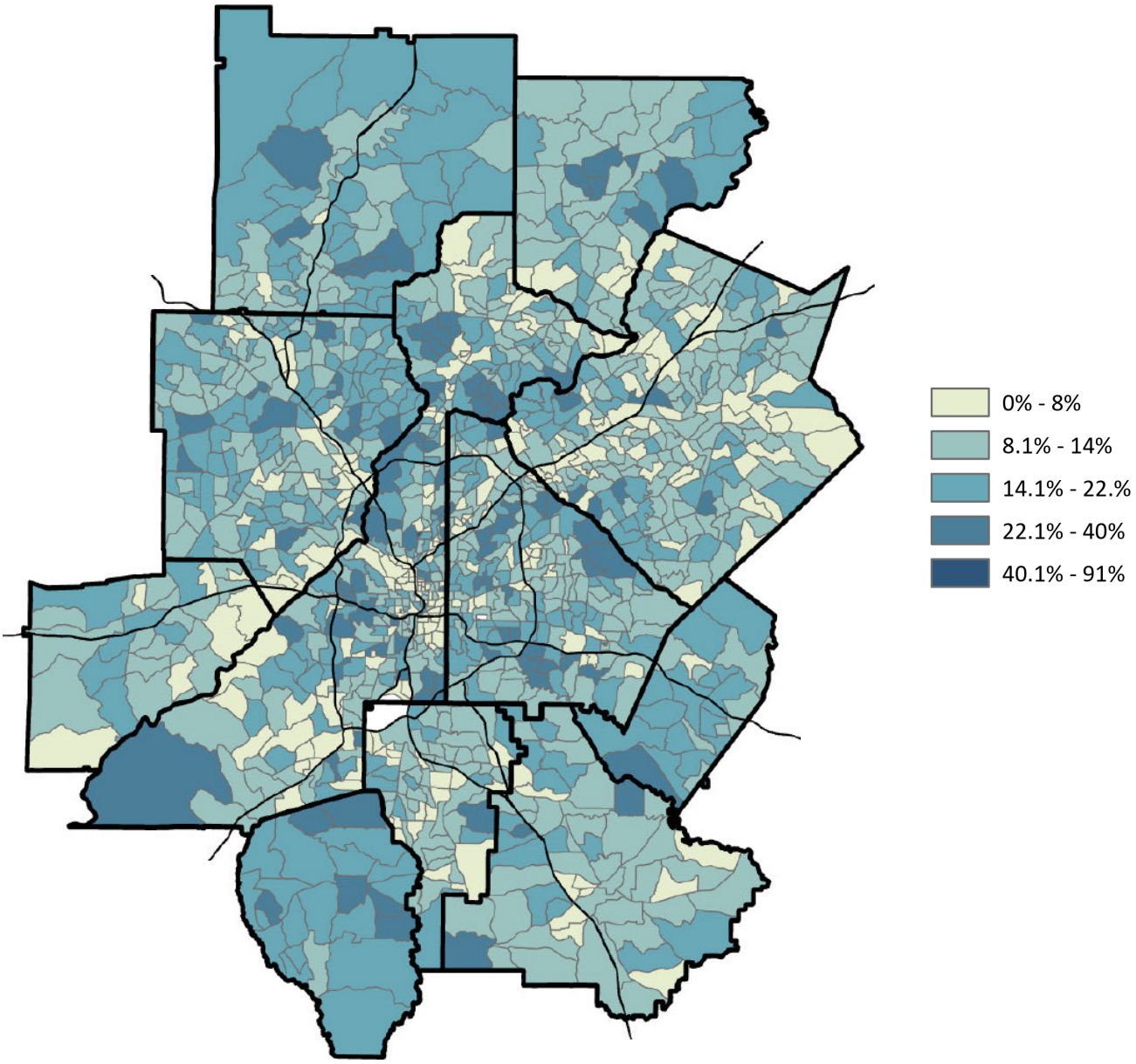
By 2050, ARC projects the region's population will be 33.1% Black and 32.6% White, with Hispanic residents comprising 21.8% and all other groups making up 12.6%.



AGE STRUCTURE AND AGING POPULATION

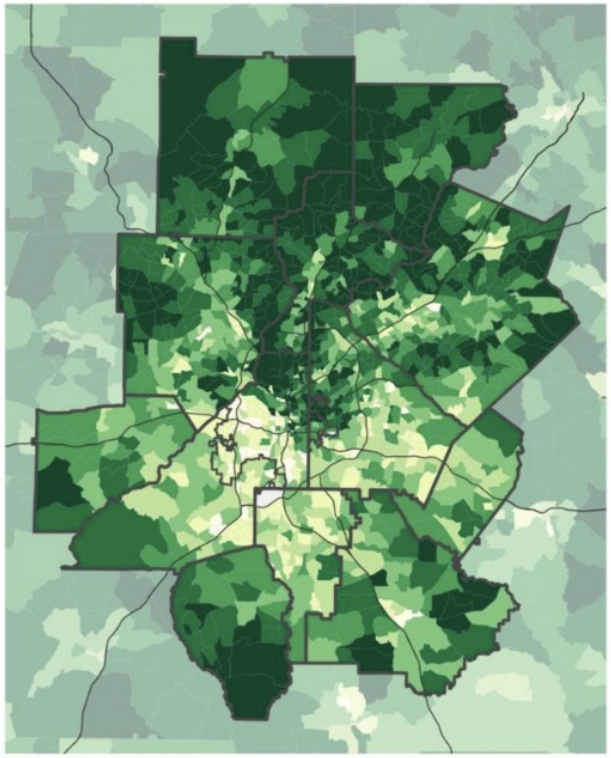
The region's population is aging. The baby boom cohort is moving into retirement age, placing new demands on healthcare, transit, accessible housing, and social services. The share of residents aged 65 and older is projected to nearly double by 2050, rising from approximately 11% to 20% of the total population. Our birth rates are declining and families are smaller, prompting some school districts to consider closing schools with low enrollment. Without children who grow to become the region's workforce, the large aging population will have an even harder time accessing services. At the same time, the region maintains a relatively young workforce profile compared to national averages, driven by in-migration of working-age adults.

Population Age 65 and Over, ACS 2019-2023

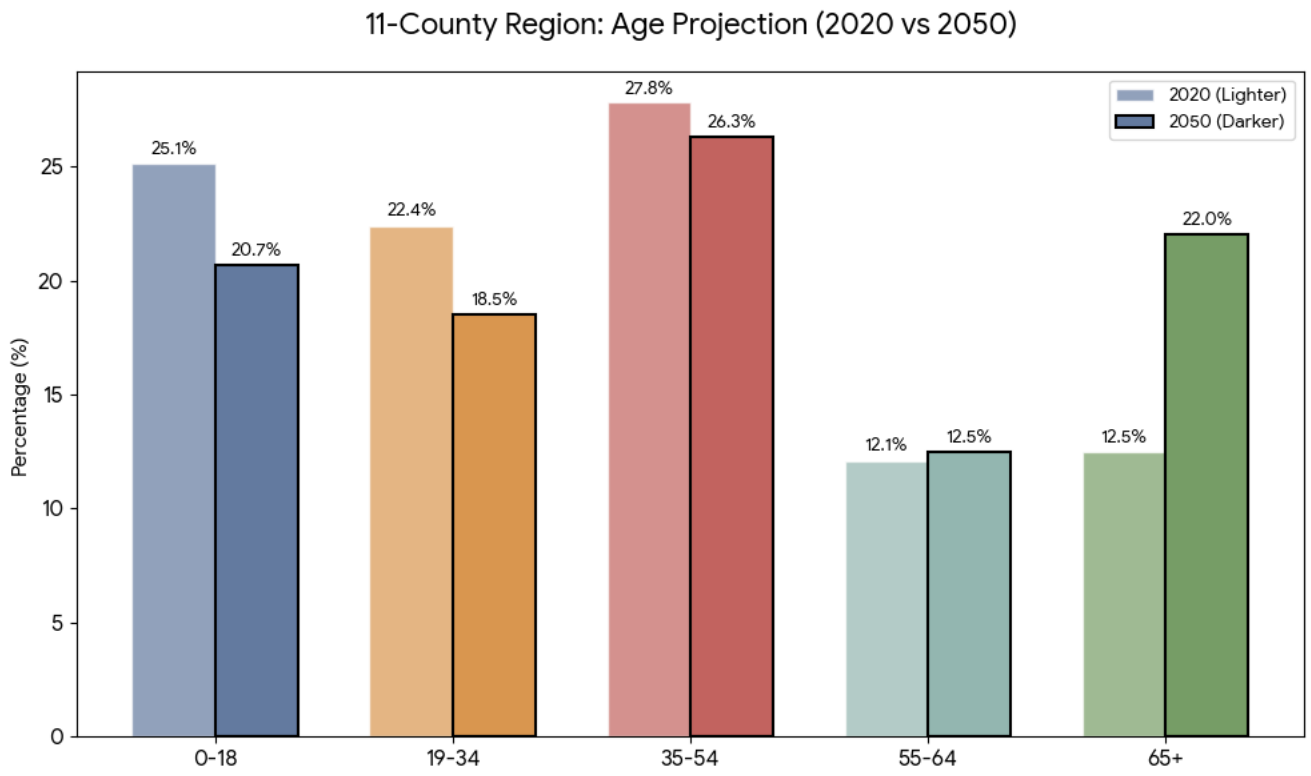


Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

Family Households with Children, ACS 2019-2023



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission · April 2026



Demographic Assets

- One of the fastest-growing major metros in the U.S.
- Highly diverse and growing immigrant communities
- Relatively young and educated workforce
- Strong domestic in-migration from other U.S. metros
- Significant international immigration supporting labor supply

Demographic Challenges

- Rapid growth straining infrastructure and services
- Racial equity gaps in income, wealth, and opportunity
- Aging population creating new demands on services
- Uneven distribution of growth across jurisdictions
- Language access and cultural inclusion in planning



Economy and Employment

The Atlanta metro economy is one of the largest and most diverse in the southeastern United States, anchored by a concentration of Fortune 500 companies, a world-class logistics and transportation hub, and rapidly growing technology and life sciences sectors. The region's economic strengths provide a strong foundation for continued growth, while structural challenges around workforce access, spatial mismatch between jobs and workers, and income inequality require strategic attention.

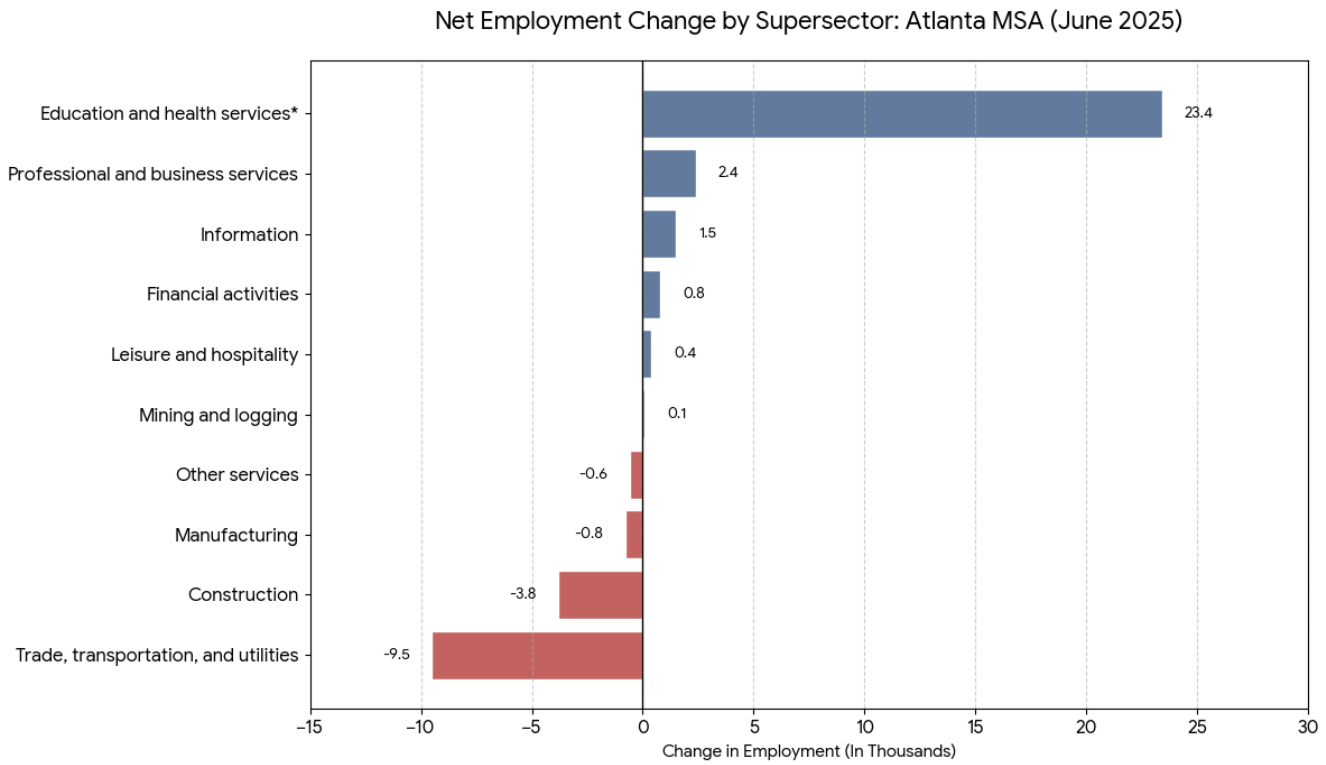
Economic Base and Major Sectors

The region hosts headquarters for major corporations including Coca-Cola, Delta Air Lines, The Home Depot, UPS, and numerous financial institutions. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the world's busiest by passenger volume, anchors a vast logistics and distribution economy that extends throughout the region. Emerging sectors include cybersecurity, film and media production, and healthcare and life sciences.

The technology sector has grown substantially, with Atlanta emerging as a recognized tech hub, sometimes called "Transaction Alley" for its concentration of fintech firms. Major corporate relocations and expansions have continued to bring high-wage employment to the region, while the service sector, including hospitality, healthcare, and retail, provides employment across a wide range of skill levels.

Workforce and Labor Market

The region's labor force is large and diverse, with strong representation in both knowledge-economy and service-sector occupations. However, workforce challenges persist. There is a significant skills gap in high-demand technical fields, creating shortages in healthcare, construction trades, IT, and advanced manufacturing. Spatial mismatch—where workers cannot efficiently access job centers due to transportation barriers—remains a major challenge, particularly for lower-income residents without reliable access to a vehicle.

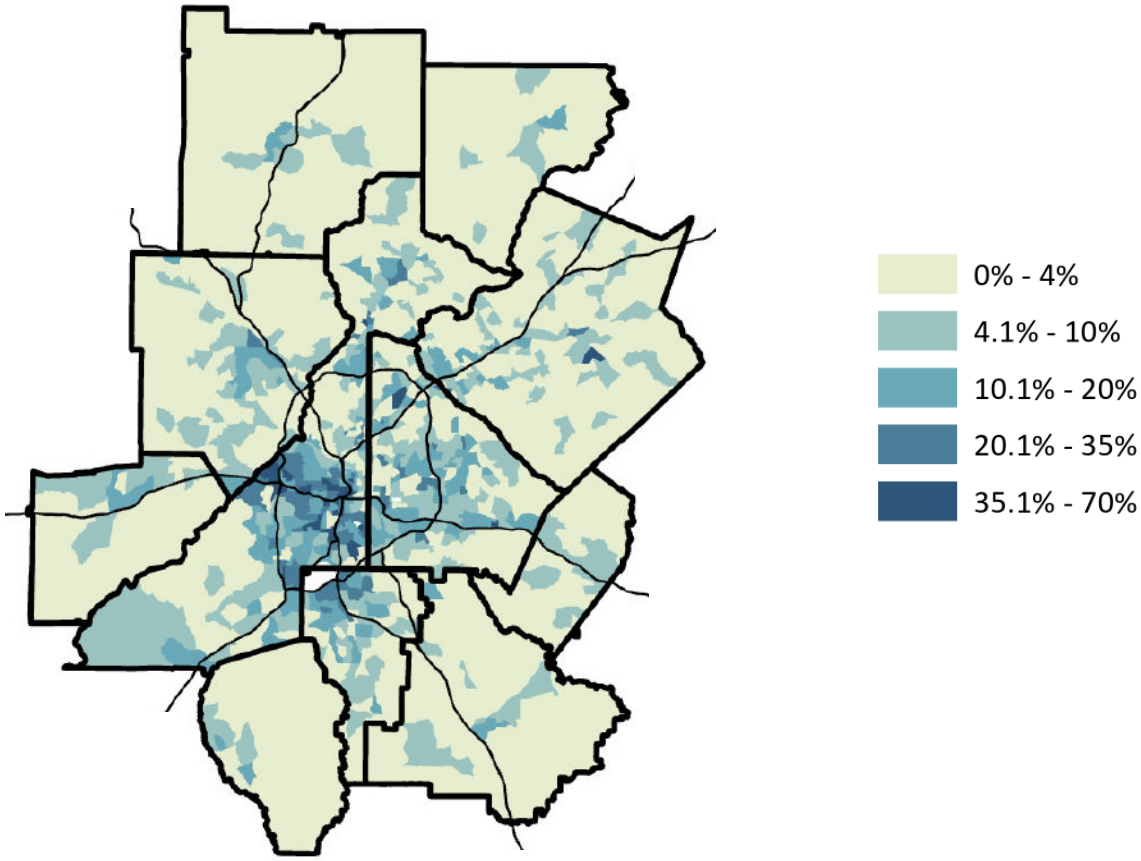


Jobs-to-Resident-Workers Ratio, LEHD 2023



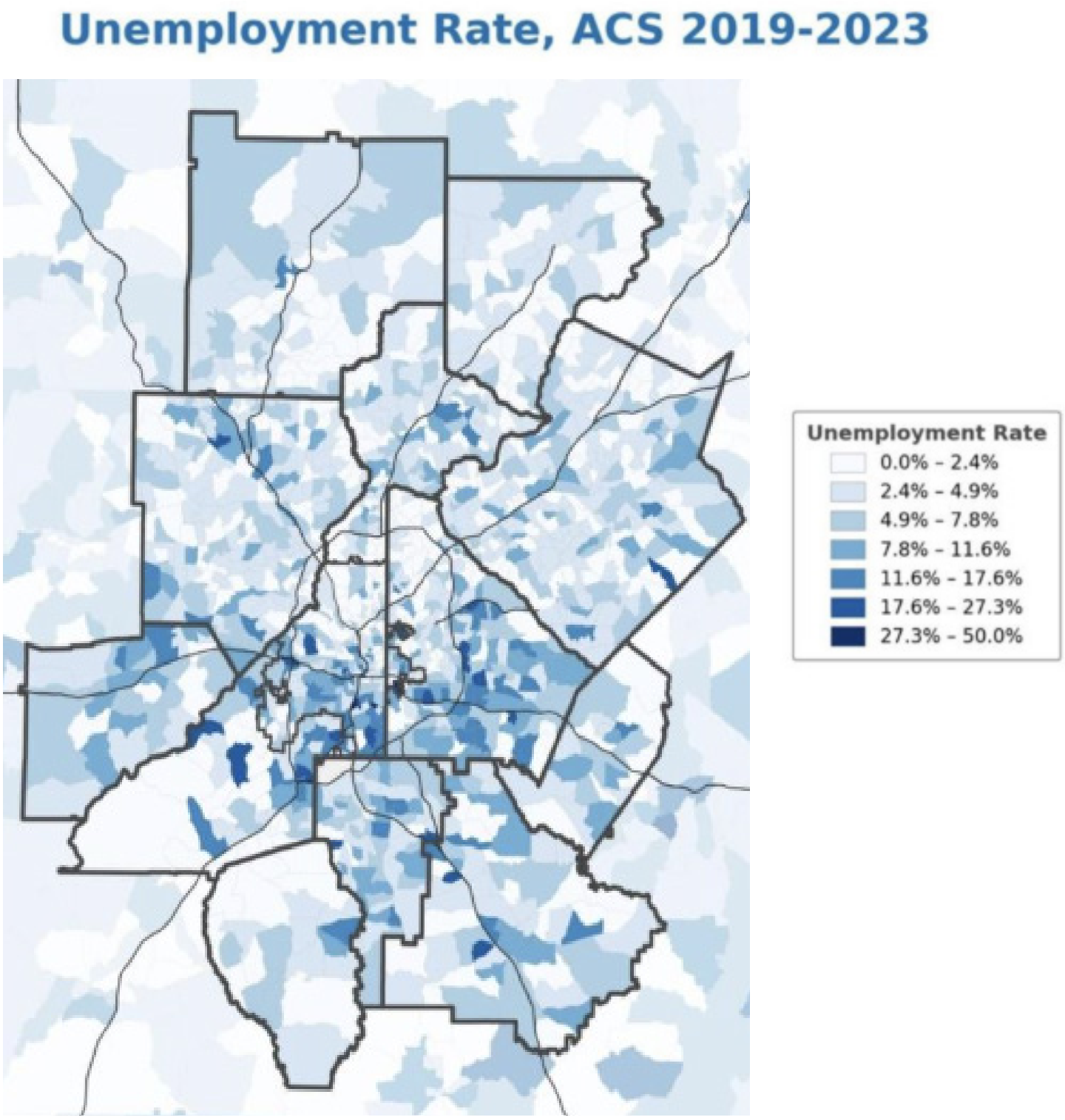
Source: LEHD / LODES – Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission · April 2026

Households with No Vehicle Available, ACS 2019-2023



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

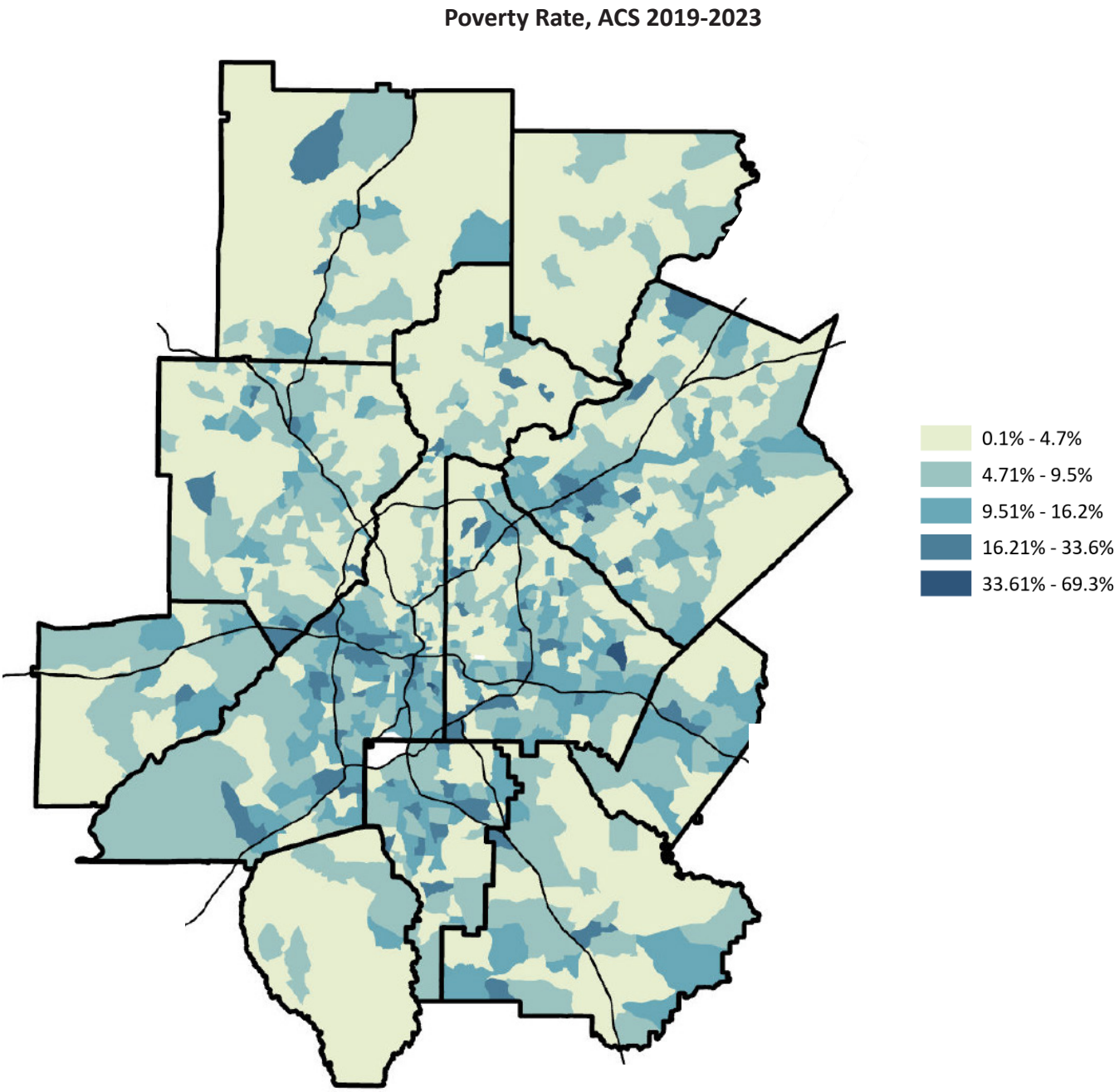
Unemployment rates across the region generally track at or below national averages, but these aggregate figures mask significant disparities by race, geography, and education level. Black residents experience unemployment rates that are roughly double those of white residents. Residents in Clayton, Rockdale, and southern DeKalb County face particular challenges in accessing quality employment opportunities proximate to their communities.



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

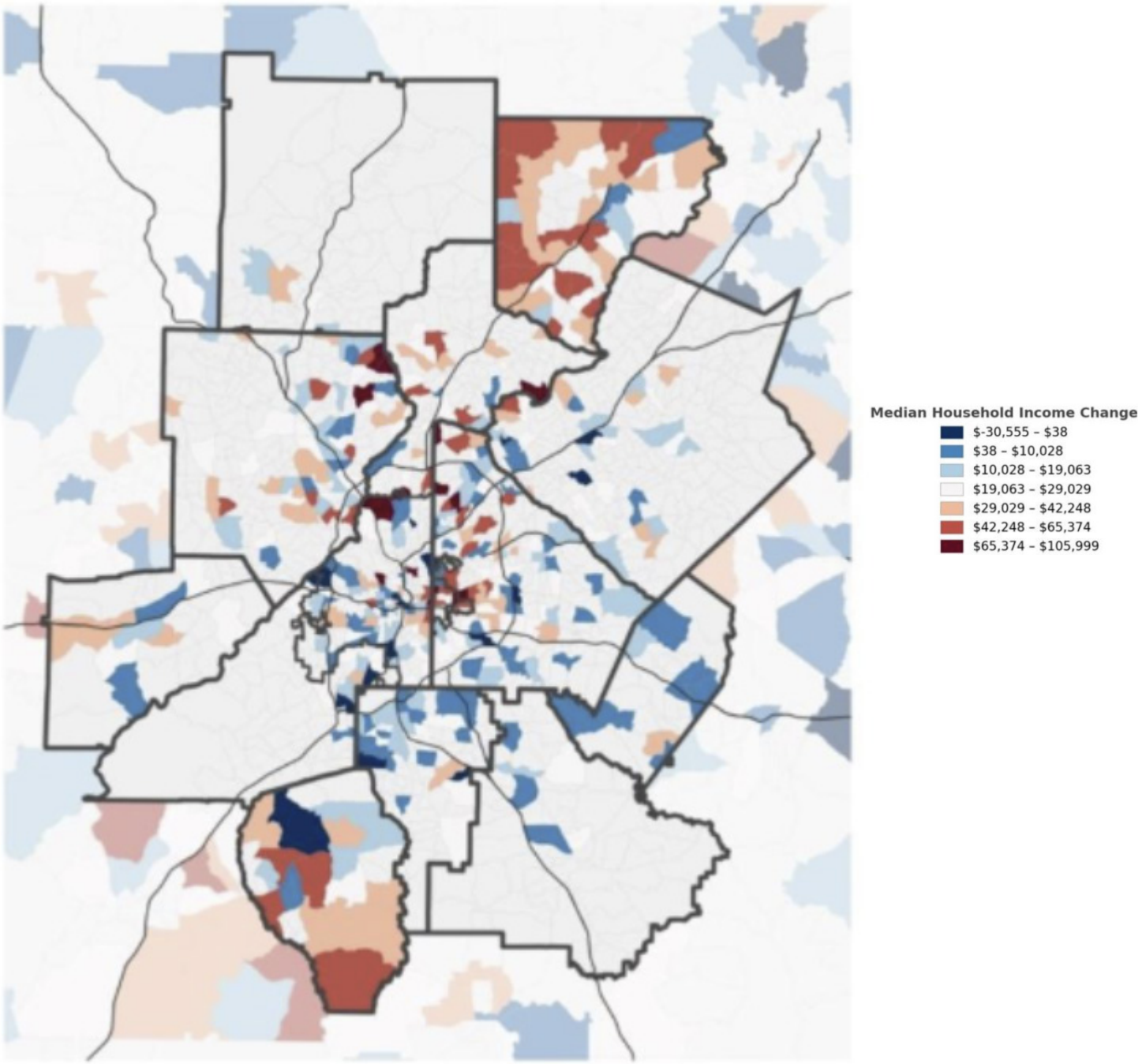
Income Disparities

The Atlanta region is home to significant wealth disparities. 535,233 people in the Atlanta region lived in poverty in 2023. Households living in poverty are not equitably distributed throughout the region, with lower income households concentrated on the south side and spreading outwards into the suburbs and urban fringes where more affordable housing can be found.



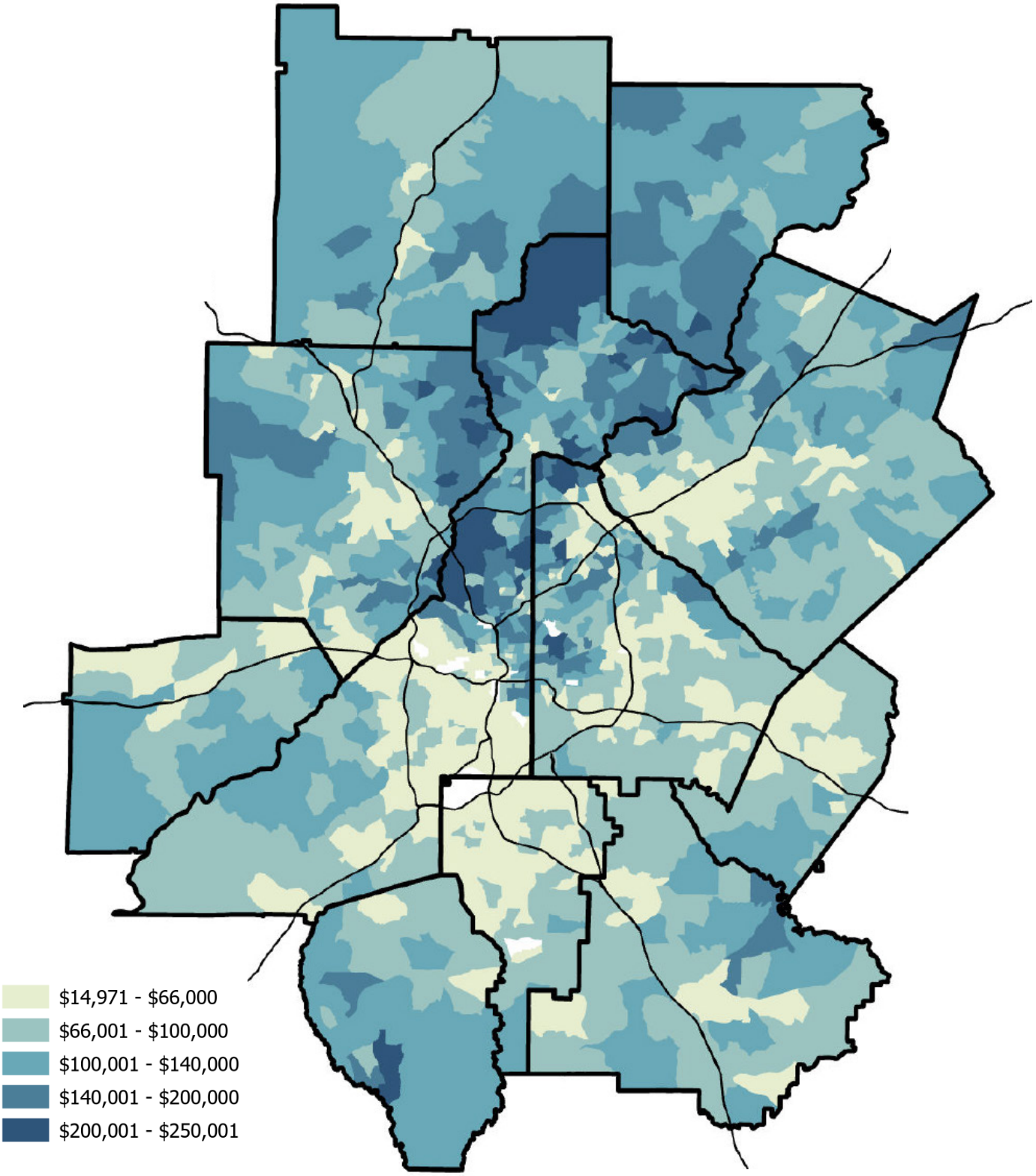
Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

Change in Median Household Income, 2014-2018 to 2019-2023



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

Median Household Income, ACS 2019-2023



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

Emerging Economic Disruptions

The regional economy faces a set of structural disruptions that will reshape employment patterns over the planning horizon. Automation and artificial intelligence are expected to displace significant numbers of jobs in logistics, administrative support, retail, and transportation. Remote work normalization following the COVID-19 pandemic has altered commute patterns, office space demand, and residential location choices in ways that remain in flux. These shifts create both risks, particularly for lower-wage workers in vulnerable occupations, and opportunities for communities to attract new types of employment.

Economic Assets

- World's busiest airport anchoring global connectivity
- Diverse Fortune 500 corporate presence
- Rapidly growing technology and fintech sectors
- Strong logistics, distribution, and trade economy
- Growing film production industry
- Expanding life sciences and healthcare employment

Economic Challenges

- Spatial mismatch limiting workforce access to jobs
- Skills gap in high-demand technical occupations
- Income and wealth inequality by race and place
- Automation risk for lower-wage occupations
- Office market uncertainty post-pandemic
- Limited transit connectivity to employment centers



Land Use and Development Patterns

Land use patterns in the Atlanta region have historically been characterized by low-density, automobile-dependent suburban sprawl extending outward along major highway corridors. However, recent years have seen growing momentum for mixed-use, walkable development concentrated in activity centers, transit corridors, and established urban neighborhoods. ARC's Unified Growth Policy Map (UGPM) provides a framework for distinguishing among area types—from the urban core to developing suburban communities to rural areas—and guiding growth and investment accordingly.

Development Patterns and Area Types

The 2026 UGPM identifies eight area types reflecting the full range of development contexts across the region: Urban Core, Suburban Established, Suburban Developing, Suburban Transforming, Rural Developing, Rural Conservation, Activity Centers, and Corridors. Each area type carries distinct implications for appropriate land uses, infrastructure investment, density, and connectivity.

The Urban Core (primarily central Atlanta, Decatur, and surrounding neighborhoods) has seen significant reinvestment and densification, with strong demand for transit-oriented, walkable development. Suburban Established communities face pressure from aging infrastructure and demographic transition. Rapidly growing Suburban Developing areas—particularly in the northern and southern parts of the region—require careful planning to ensure adequate infrastructure keeps pace with growth. Rural Conservation areas retain important agricultural land, tree cover, and watershed protection functions that are increasingly under development pressure.

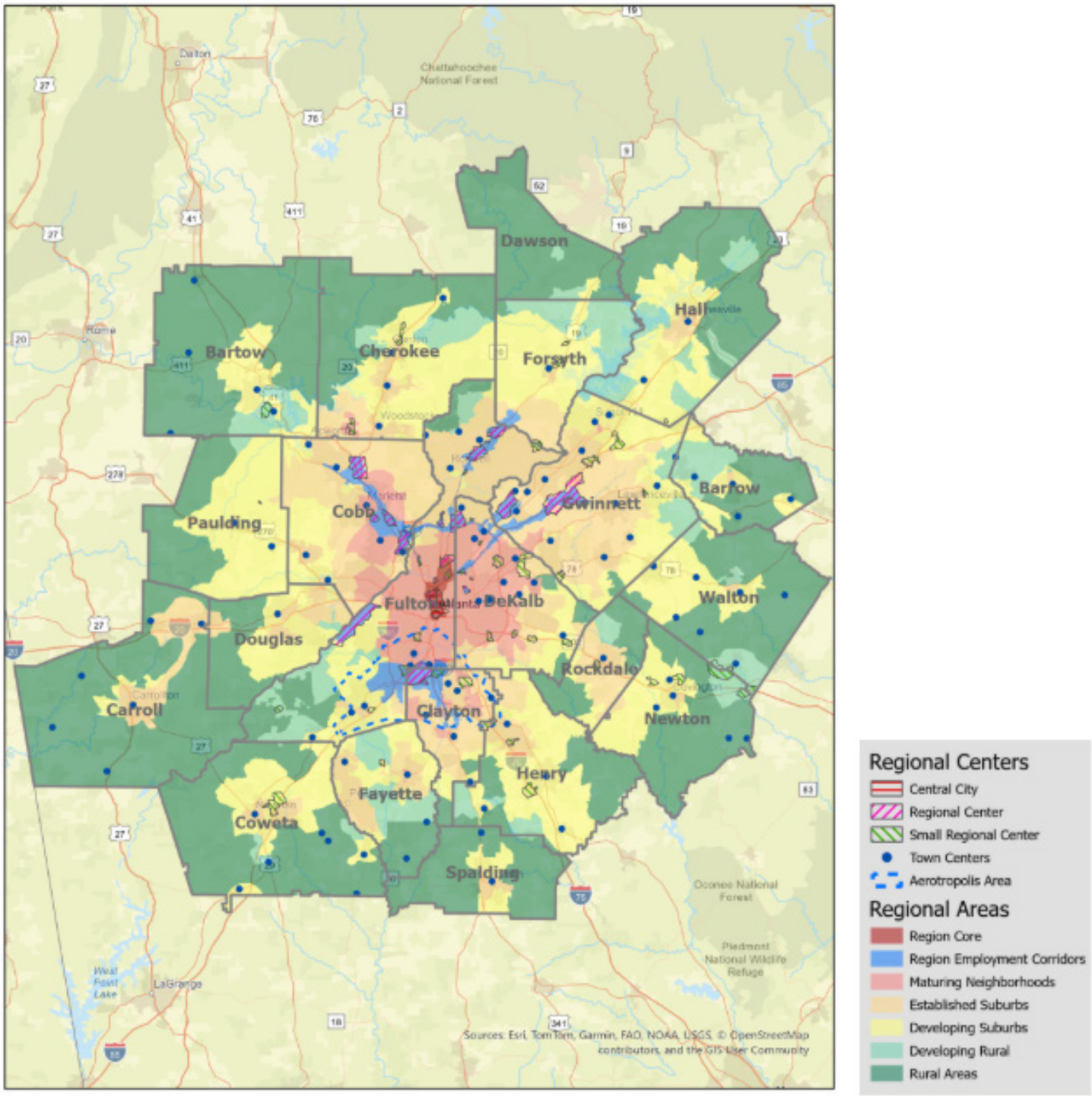
Livable Centers and Activity Centers

Since its inception in 1999, ARC's Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) has been a cornerstone program for promoting mixed-use, multimodal development within designated activity centers and around transit nodes. Over 130 master plans or plan updates – referred to as catalytic studies – and over 190 supplemental or tactical studies, which focus on plan implementation, have been funded through the LCI program, helping communities plan for compact, connected growth that reduces vehicle miles traveled and supports transit investment across the 19-county region covered by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Activity centers and transit nodes anchored by LCI studies are increasingly seen as areas of economic vitality, demographic and socioeconomic diversity, and housing opportunity, providing alternatives to sprawl across a range of community contexts.

Land Supply and Development Capacity

The region contains substantial remaining developable land, particularly in outer suburban counties. However, the distribution of that land relative to existing infrastructure, employment centers, and transit access varies significantly. ARC's PECAS (Production, Exchange, and Consumption of Activities in Space) land use model provides detailed estimates of development capacity by area type and geography, informing the transportation and economic models used in long-range planning. Constraints on infill development—including regulatory barriers, infrastructure gaps, and land assembly challenges—limit the region's ability to achieve more efficient growth patterns in established communities.

Unified Growth Policy Map (UGPM)



Land Use Assets

- UGPM framework guiding differentiated area-type investments
- Over 130 LCI studies creating walkable center and transit node plans
- Significant developable land supply in growth areas
- Growing market demand for mixed-use, walkable development
- ARC's PECAS model enabling data-driven capacity analysis

Land Use Challenges

- Legacy of low-density sprawl limiting efficiency
- Regulatory barriers to infill and missing-middle housing
- Growth pressure on rural and agricultural lands
- Mismatch between land supply and infrastructure capacity
- Local zoning inconsistency with regional growth goals

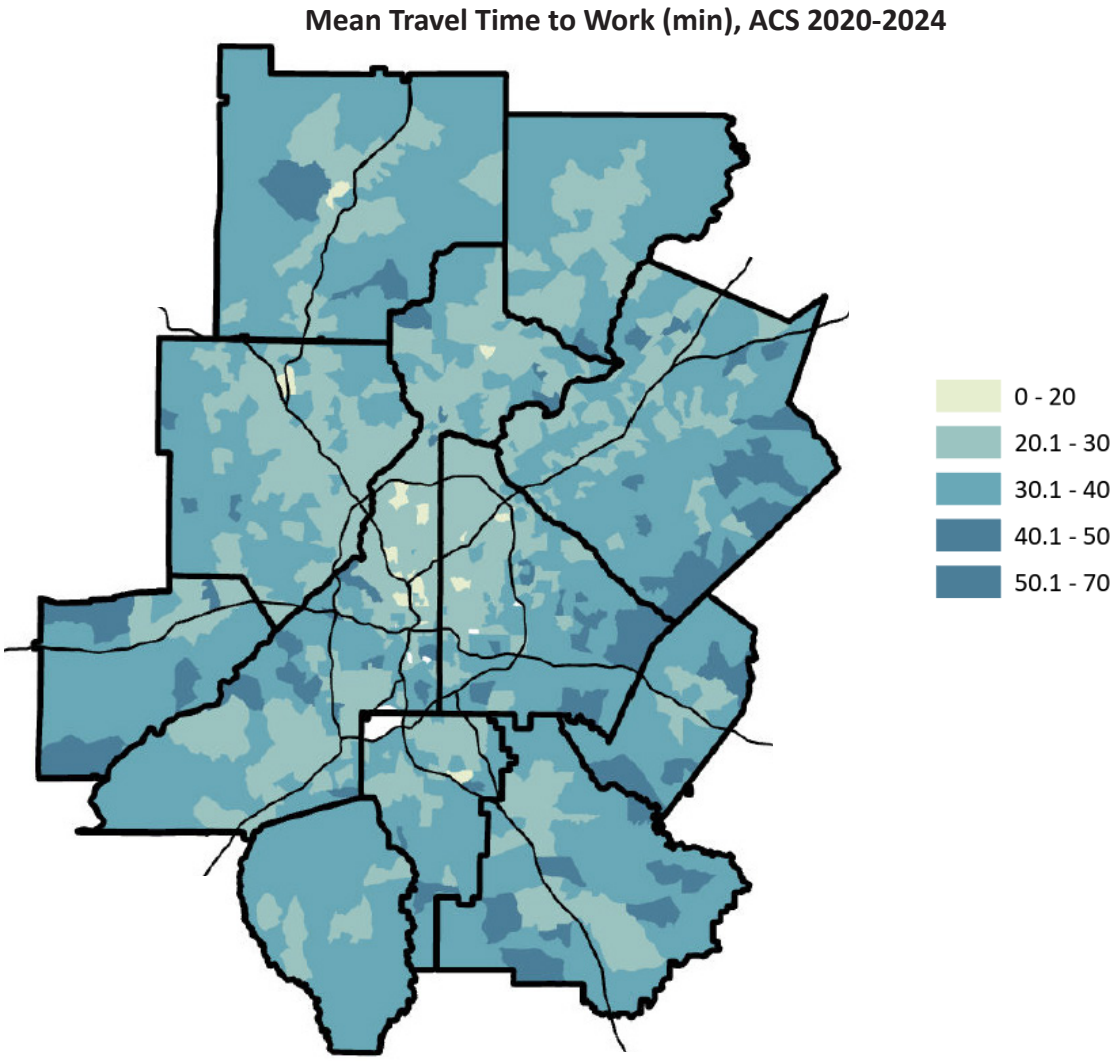


Transportation and Mobility

Transportation infrastructure is central to the Atlanta region's competitiveness and quality of life. The region's road network, anchored by one of the most extensive interstate highway systems in the country, has enabled broad suburban growth but also produced among the worst traffic congestion in the United States. Expanding multimodal options—including transit, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure—is a regional priority, yet the scale of the challenge remains formidable given the region's geographic spread and decades of auto-oriented development.

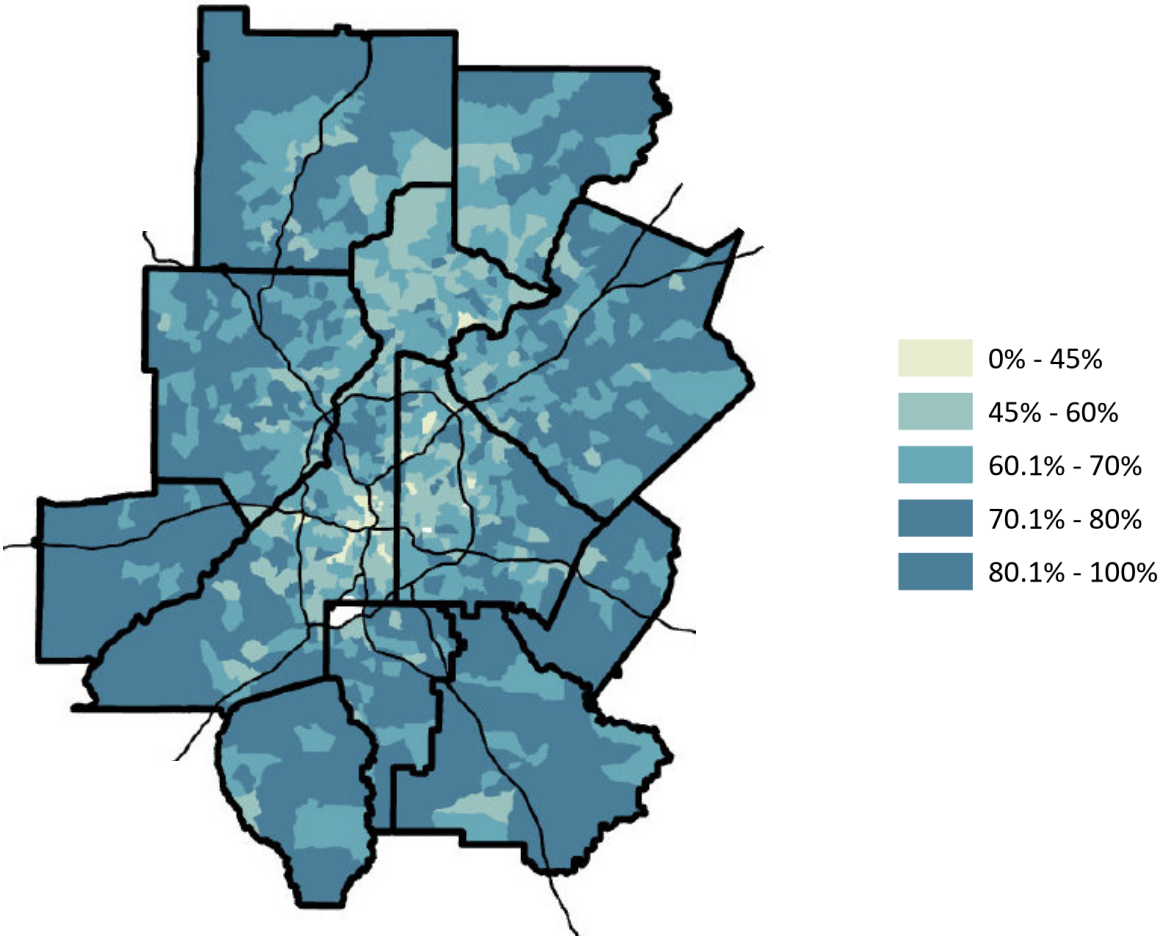
Road Network and Congestion

Atlanta consistently ranks among the top five most congested metropolitan areas in the United States, with commuters losing hundreds of hours annually to traffic delays. The region's highway network, while extensive, is heavily traveled and approaches capacity on major corridors during peak hours. Major freight corridors connecting Hartsfield-Jackson and the region's distribution centers to the national highway system are of particular concern, as freight volume is projected to grow substantially over the planning period.



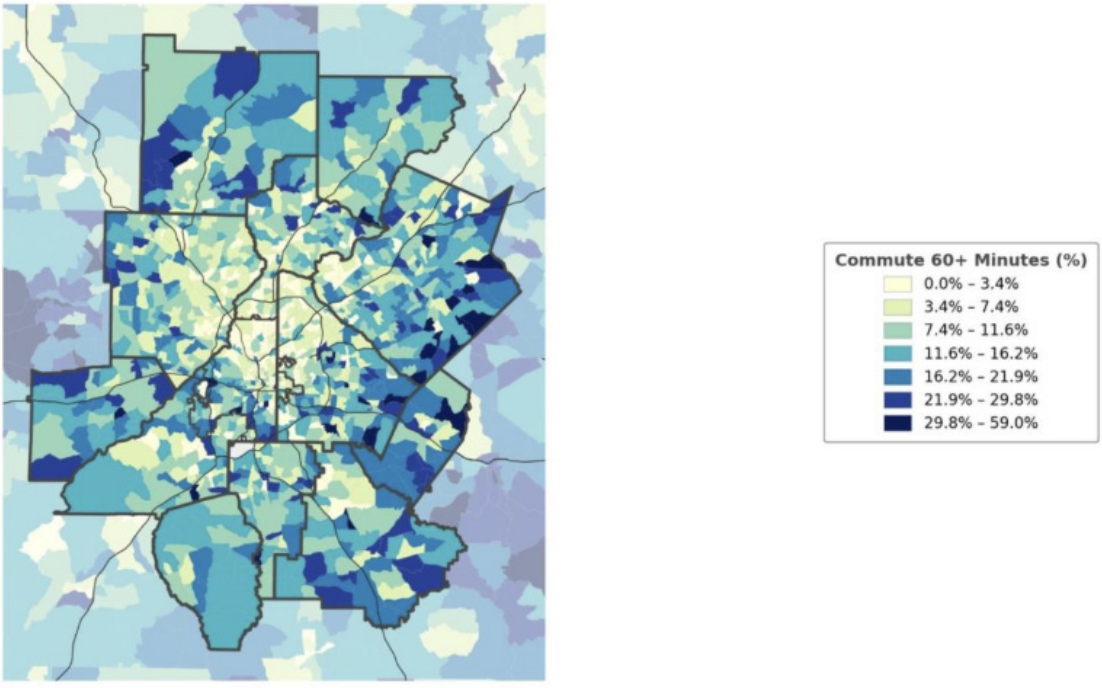
Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

Workers Commuting by Driving Alone, ACS 2019-2023



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

Workers with a Commute of 60 or More Minutes, ACS 2019-2023



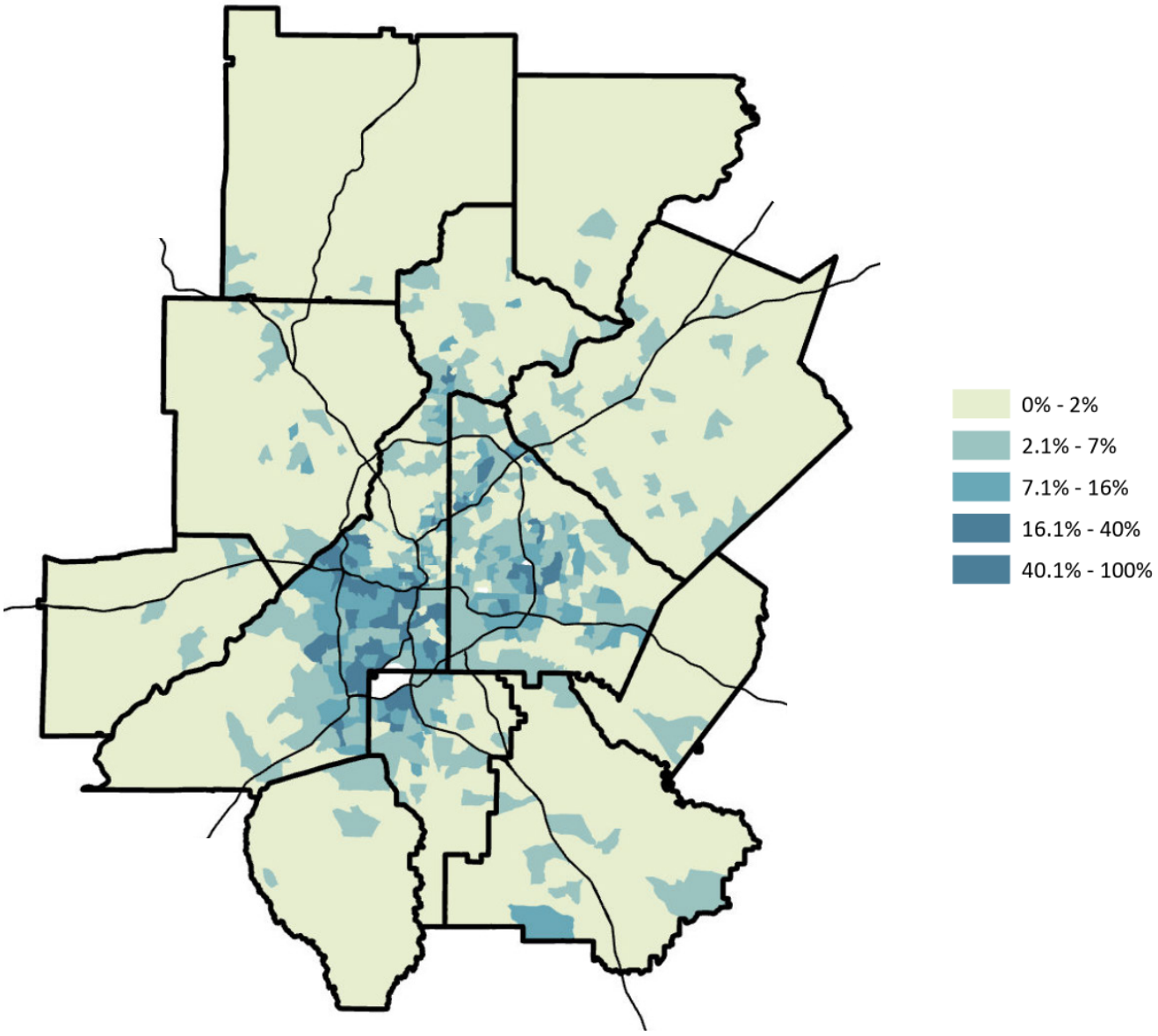
Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission · April 2026

Transit Systems

The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) provides heavy rail and bus service primarily within Fulton and DeKalb counties, with limited-service extensions into Clayton County. GRTA (Georgia Regional Transportation Authority) provides express bus service connecting suburban counties to employment centers. The region's transit coverage relative to its geographic footprint is limited compared to peer metropolitan areas, and the absence of dedicated regional transit funding has constrained system expansion.

Recent years have seen renewed momentum for transit investment, including the passage of transit referenda in several jurisdictions, the Atlanta Beltline's multi-use trail and proposed light rail network, and expanded bus rapid transit planning. The Connect Atlanta Plan and various county-level transit plans represent a growing portfolio of multimodal investment intentions, though funding gaps remain significant.

Workers Commuting by Public Transit (%), ACS 2020-2024



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

Active Transportation and Complete Streets

Investment in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure has grown significantly, led by signature projects such as the Atlanta Beltline, PATH Foundation trails, and urban streetscape improvements in numerous activity centers. However, the regional bicycle and pedestrian network remains fragmented and concentrated in the urban core. Gaps in sidewalk coverage, inadequate bicycle lanes, and unsafe pedestrian crossings on arterial roads remain widespread in suburban communities, limiting the usability of active transportation for everyday trips.

Freight and Logistics

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and the Port of Savannah (connected to the region via I-16/I-75) together anchor one of the most significant logistics nodes in the southeastern United States. The region's role as a distribution hub generates substantial truck traffic on the interstate network, contributing to congestion and pavement deterioration. Intermodal facilities and Class I railroad infrastructure provide freight rail connectivity, though last-mile delivery challenges in urbanizing areas are growing.

Transportation Assets

- World's busiest airport with unparalleled air access
- Extensive interstate highway network
- MARTA heavy rail serving urban core
- Atlanta Beltline as signature multimodal corridor
- Strong freight logistics and distribution infrastructure
- Growing portfolio of transit expansion plans

Transportation Challenges

- Among the worst traffic congestion in the U.S.
- Limited transit coverage relative to regional geography
- No dedicated regional transit funding mechanism
- Fragmented bicycle and pedestrian network
- Growing freight volume on congested corridors
- Aging road and bridge infrastructure



Environment and Natural Systems

The Atlanta region is situated within a diverse natural landscape that includes the upper Chattahoochee River watershed, the Piedmont physiographic region, and portions of the Southern Blue Ridge foothills. The region's natural systems provide critical ecosystem services—clean water, air quality, flood control, urban cooling, and recreational opportunity—that underpin quality of life and economic vitality. Rapid growth, impervious surface expansion, and climate change are placing increasing pressure on these systems.

Water Resources

The Chattahoochee River is the region's primary drinking water source, supplying water to approximately 3 to 4 million residents. The river's health is subject to ongoing pressure from nonpoint source pollution, urban runoff, and upstream development. Lake Lanier, the primary reservoir serving the northern metro counties, has experienced water quality concerns, including recurring algae blooms generating taste and odor compounds (geosmin and MIB), prompting treatment plant upgrades and innovative mitigation technologies. Water supply reliability is a long-term concern, given the tri-state water dispute among Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, which has produced years of litigation over Chattahoochee River allocations.

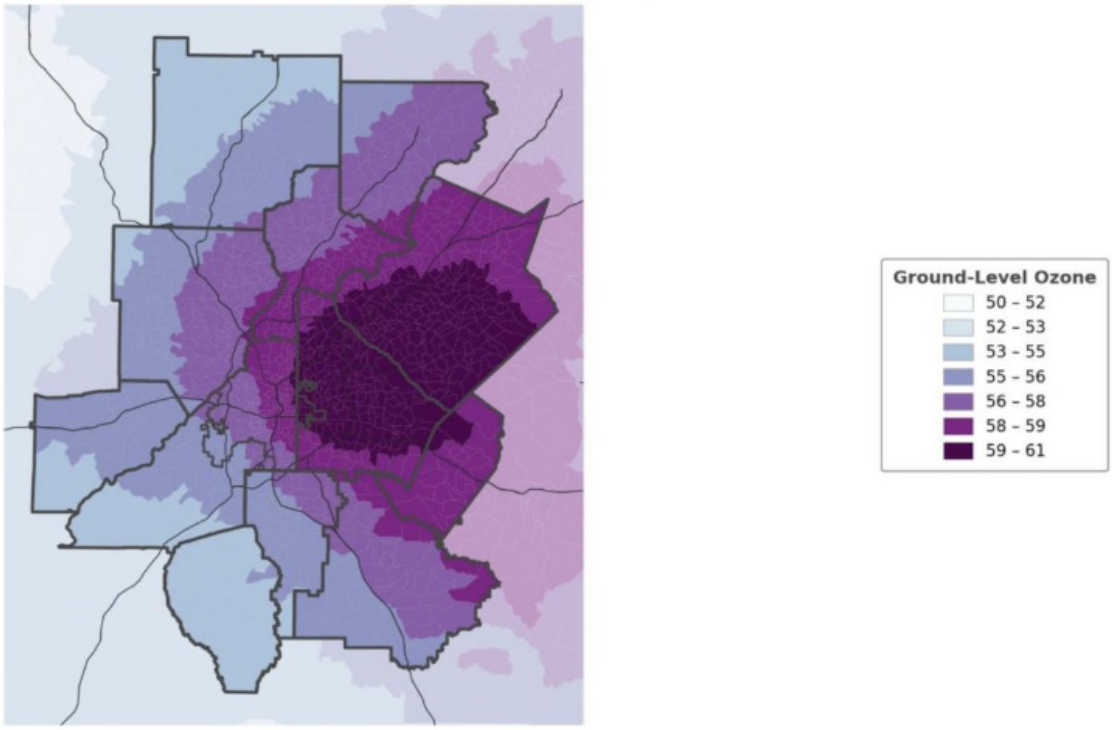
Tree Canopy and Green Infrastructure

The Atlanta region has historically been celebrated for its exceptional urban tree canopy, earning the informal designation as the 'city in a forest.' However, urbanization and development pressure have resulted in measurable canopy loss in the urban core and rapidly developing suburban areas. Tree canopy provides critical benefits, including urban heat island mitigation, stormwater management, air quality improvement, and carbon sequestration. ARC and member jurisdictions have increasingly focused on green infrastructure as an integrated approach to managing stormwater and supporting environmental quality.

Air Quality

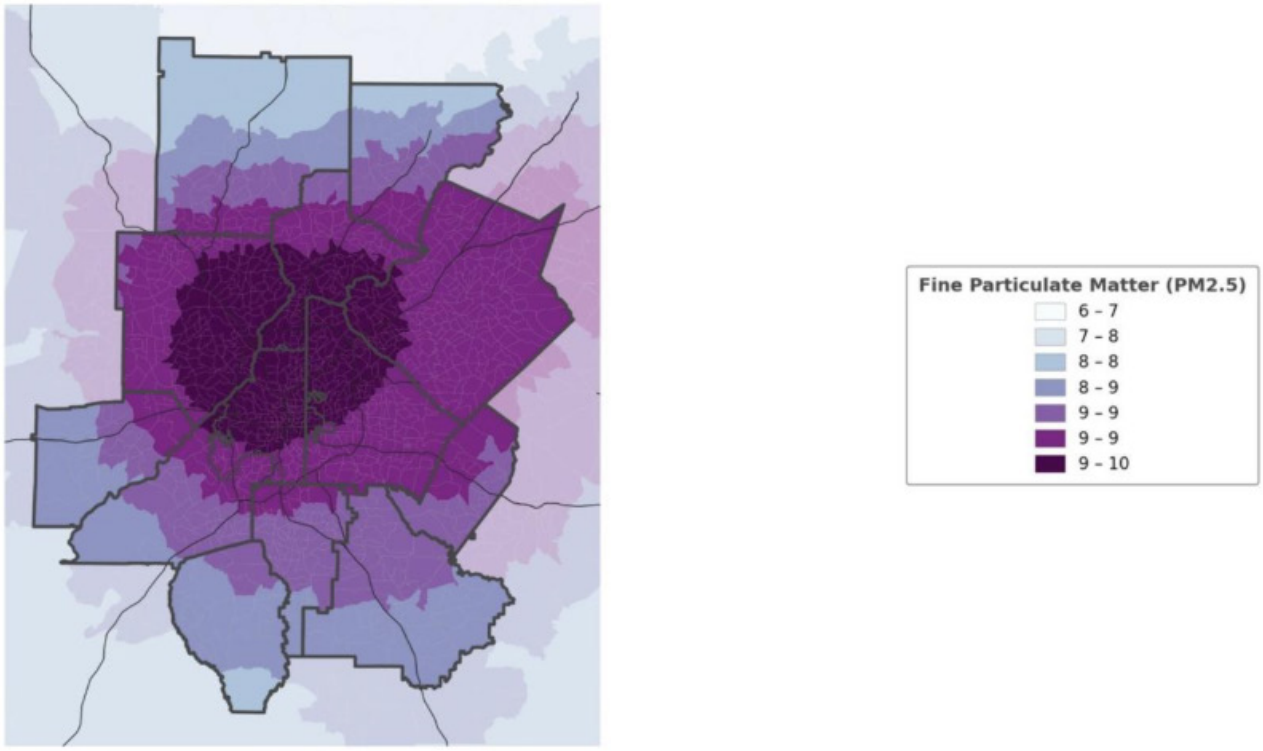
The Atlanta region has a history of nonattainment for ground-level ozone under National Ambient Air Quality Standards. While air quality has improved significantly over the past two decades due to cleaner vehicles, reformulated fuels, and industrial emission controls, portions of the region remain in nonattainment or near the attainment threshold. Transportation-related emissions are the dominant source, making land use and transportation decisions central to air quality outcomes. ARC's MOVES (Motor Vehicle Emission Simulator) modeling, integrated with the transportation planning process, provides the emissions analysis required for air quality conformity determinations.

Ground-Level Ozone, EPA EJScreen 2024



Source: EPA – EJScreen. Atlanta Regional Commission · April 2026

Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5), EPA EJScreen 2024



Source: EPA – EJScreen. Atlanta Regional Commission · April 2026

Climate Resilience

The Atlanta region faces an evolving set of climate-related risks, including increased frequency and intensity of extreme precipitation events, prolonged drought periods, higher temperatures driving urban heat stress, and related public health impacts. These risks disproportionately affect lower-income communities and communities of color, who often reside in areas with less tree canopy, more impervious surface, and older infrastructure. Regional resilience planning requires integrating climate risk into land use, infrastructure, and community development decisions.

Environmental Assets

- Rich natural landscape: Chattahoochee watershed, Piedmont forests
- Strong tradition of green infrastructure investment
- Improved air quality trajectory over past two decades
- Significant greenway and trail network
- ARC's integrated MOVES modeling for emissions analysis
- Growing regional commitment to climate resilience

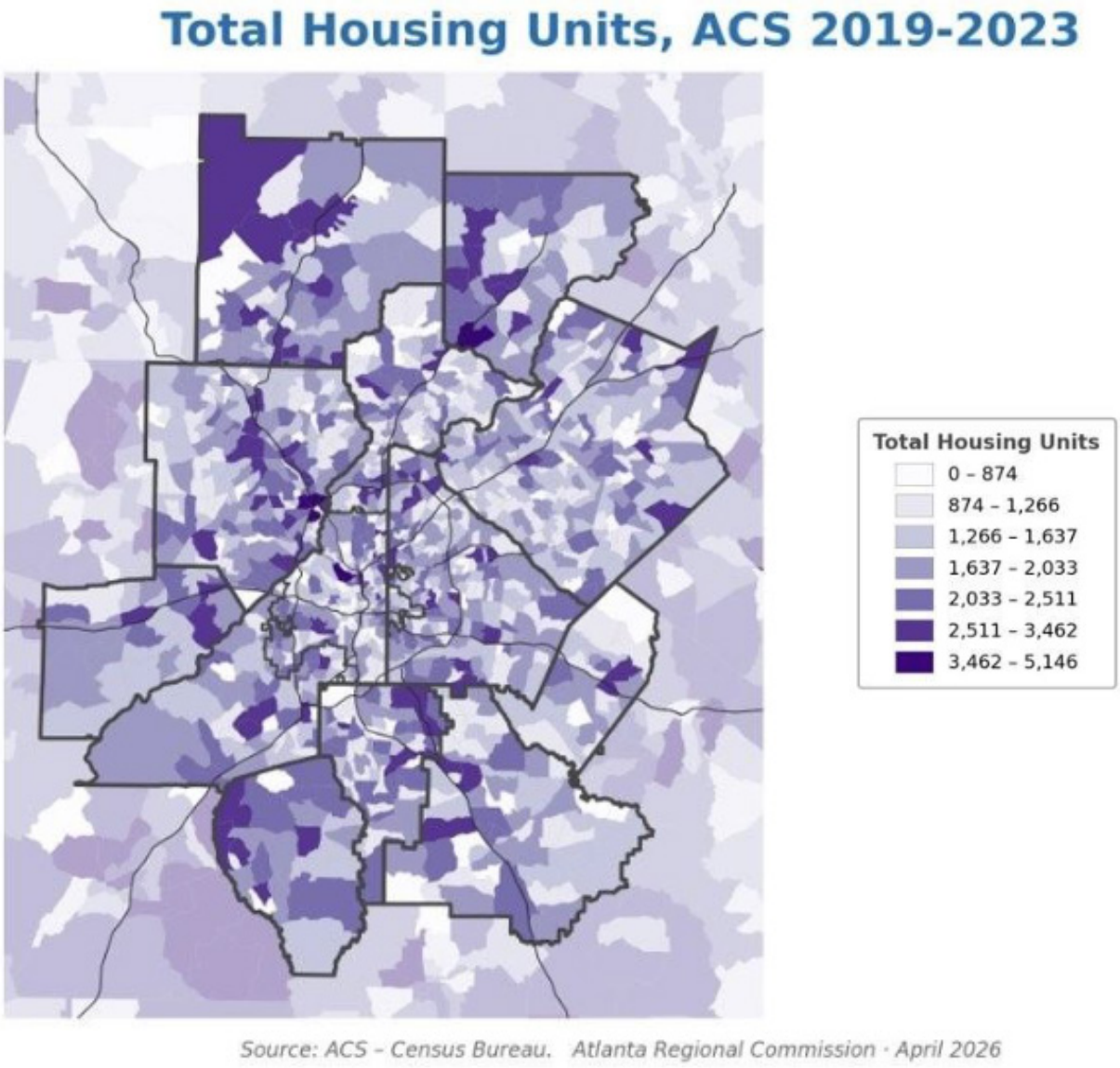
Environmental Challenges

- Water supply uncertainty from tri-state litigation
- Urban tree canopy loss in developing areas
- Persistent air quality nonattainment in portions of region
- Increasing extreme weather and climate stress
- Urban heat island effects in low-canopy communities
- Nonpoint source pollution from impervious surface growth

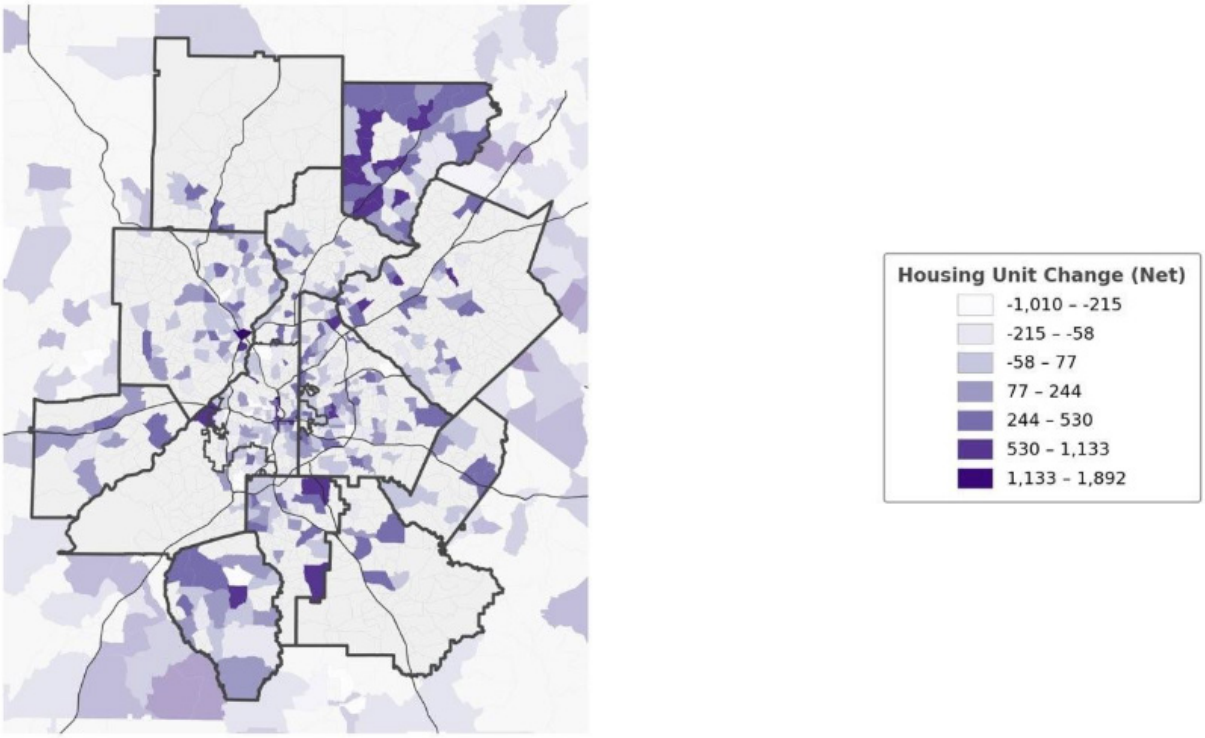


Housing and Community Development

Housing is among the most pressing regional challenges facing the Atlanta metro. Rapid population growth and a prolonged period of underbuilding following the 2008 housing market collapse have produced a significant housing shortage—particularly for workforce and affordable housing—driving cost increases that are straining households across the income spectrum. ARC has led the development of the first Housing Strategy for the Atlanta Region, which establishes shared goals and strategies for addressing housing affordability and access across the 11-county area.

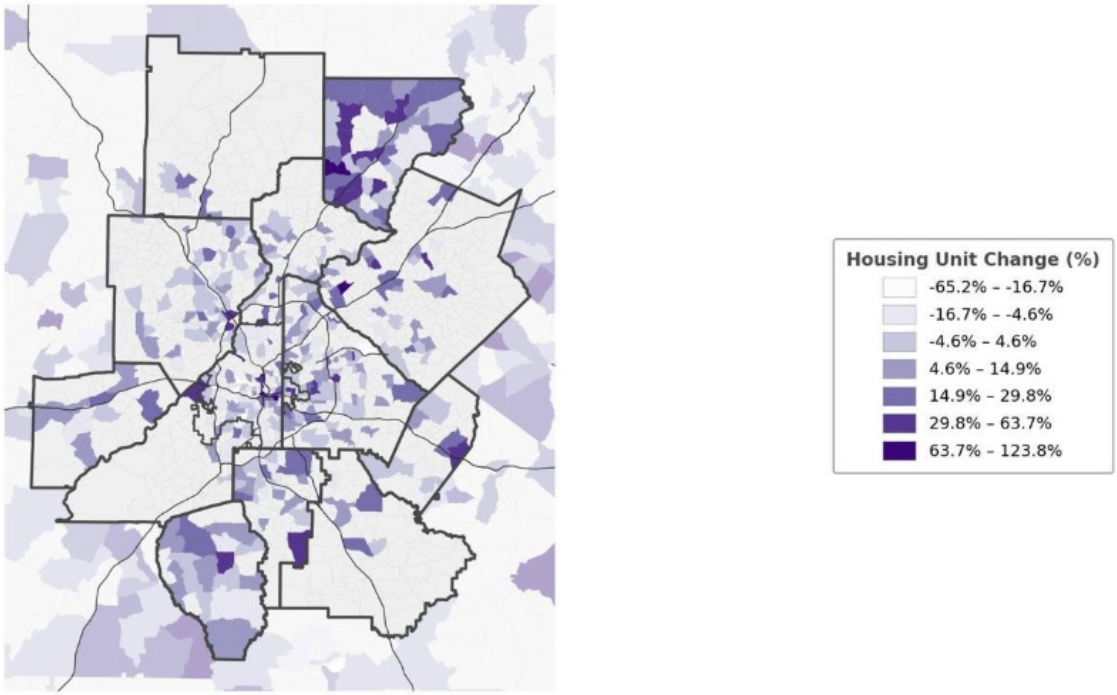


Change in Total Housing Units, 2014-2018 to 2019-2023



Source: ACS – Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission · April 2026

Percent Change in Total Housing Units, 2014-2018 to 2019-2023

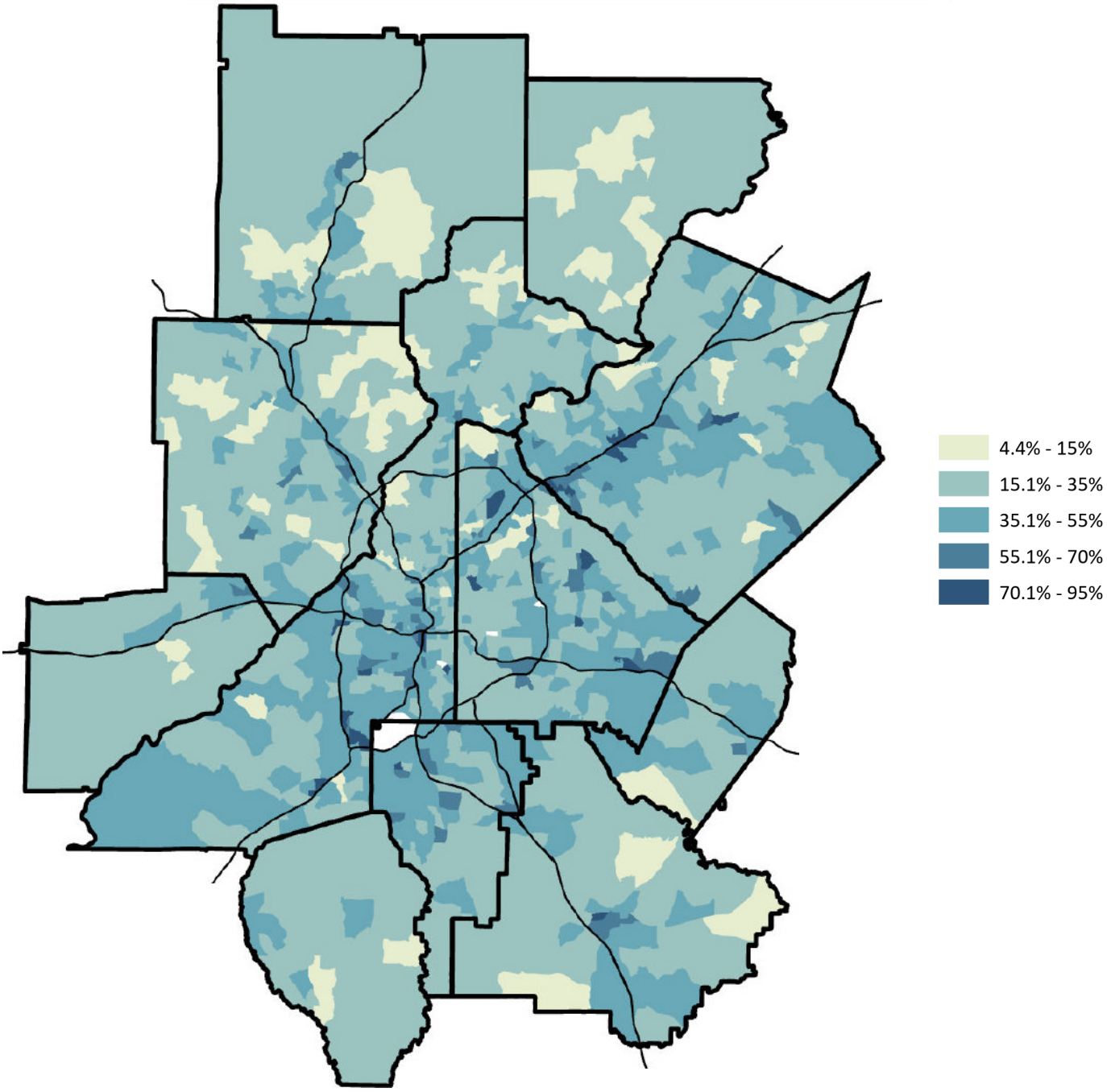


Source: ACS – Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission · April 2026

Housing Supply and Affordability

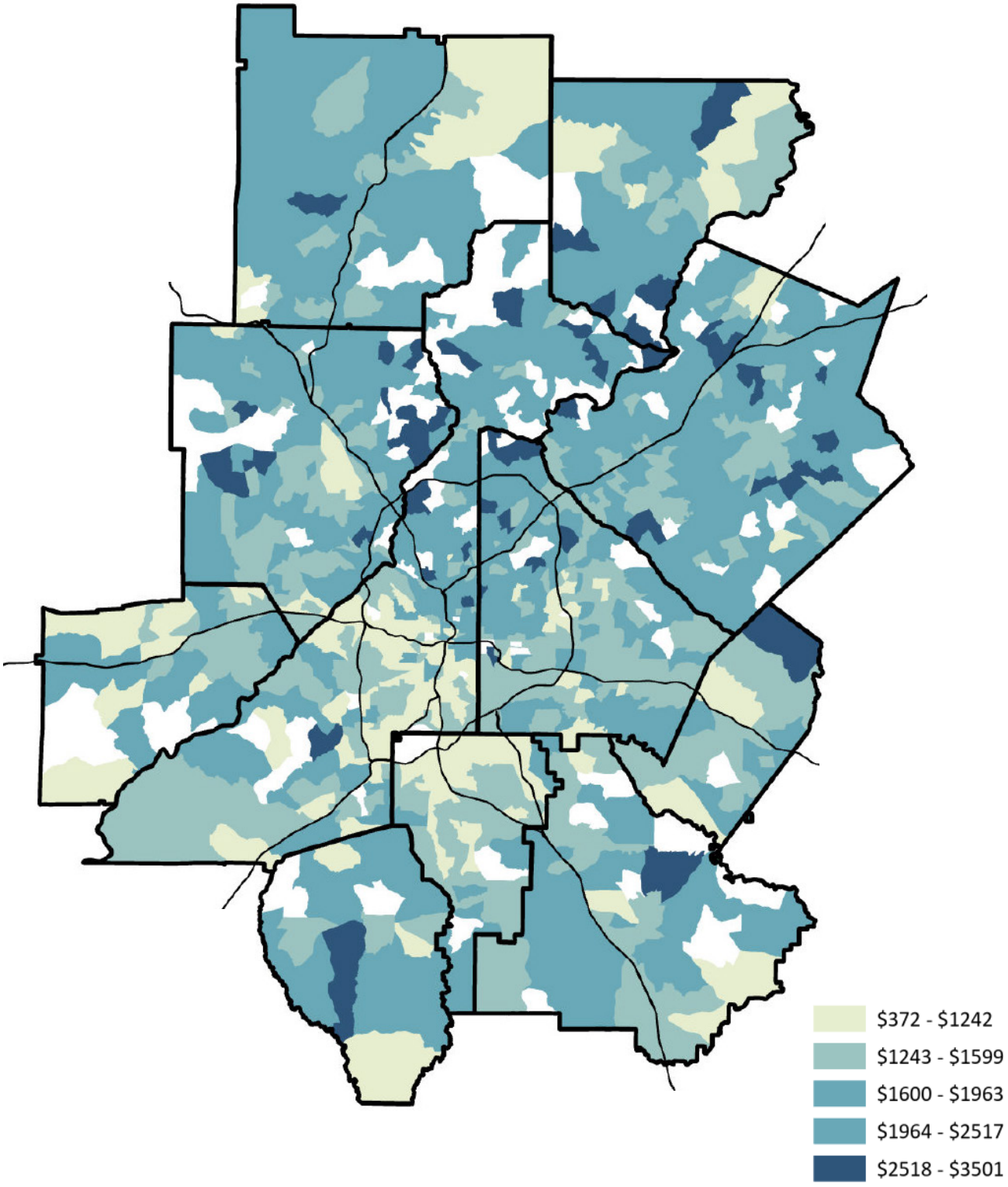
The Atlanta region experienced historically high home price appreciation in the early 2020s, with median home prices increasing by more than 40% in some jurisdictions between 2019 and 2023. Rental costs have followed a similar trajectory, with median rents rising sharply across the region. The result is a growing affordability crisis for moderate- and lower-income households. Cost burden—defined as spending more than 30% of income on housing—affects a substantial share of the region's renters and a growing share of homeowners.

Cost-Burdened Renters (Paying 30%+ of Income on Rent), ACS 2019-2023

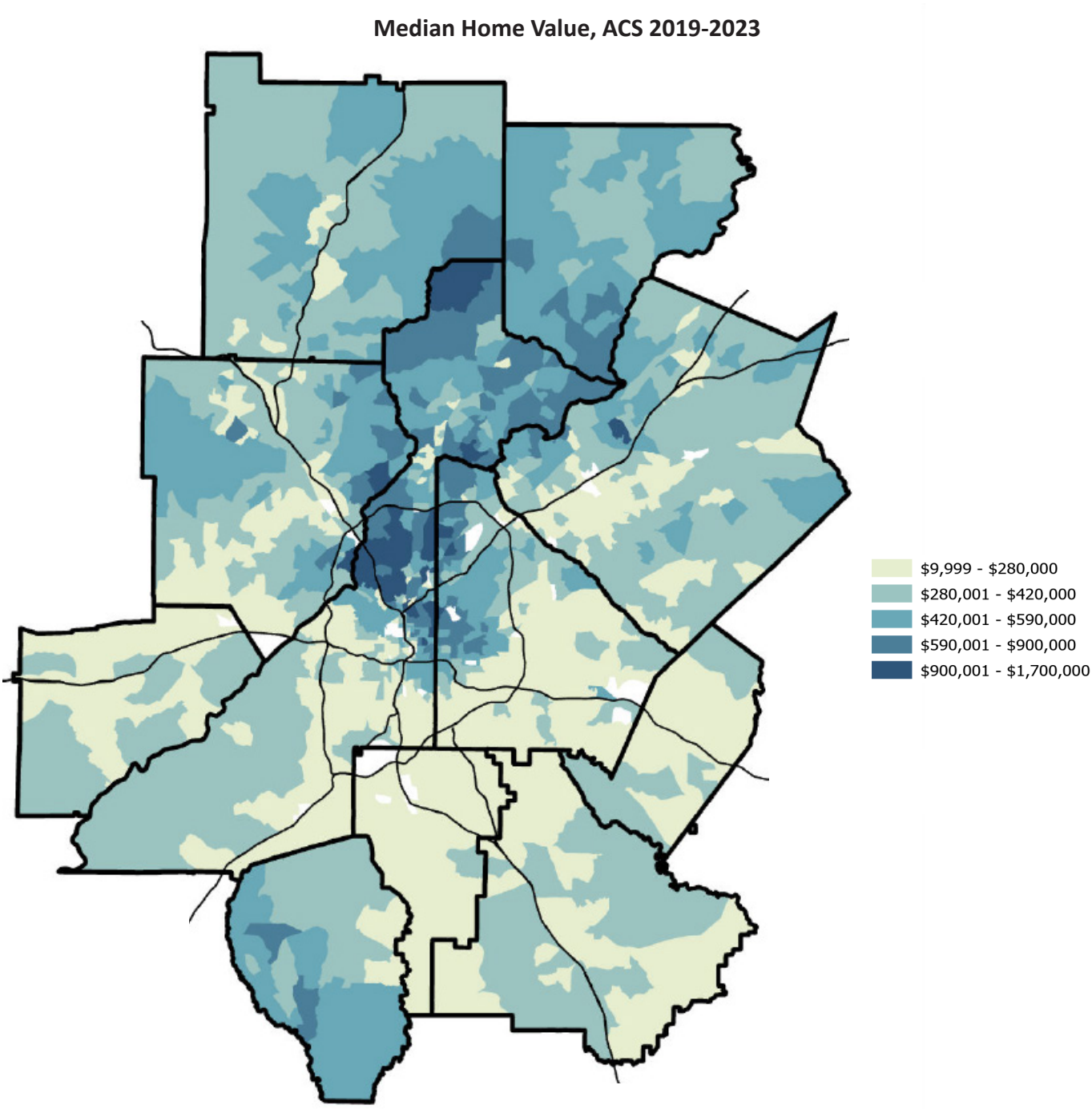


Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

Median Rent, ACS 2019-2023



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026



Source: ACS - Census Bureau. Atlanta Regional Commission - April 2026

The housing affordability challenge is compounded by a significant undersupply of housing types between single-family detached homes and large apartment buildings—the so-called 'missing middle' of duplexes, townhomes, accessory dwelling units, and small multifamily buildings that can provide more affordable options in established neighborhoods near job centers, transit, and areas of opportunity. Current housing production is not aligned with regional income levels, leaving a significant gap in housing affordable to residents with low- and moderate-income levels.

Homelessness and Housing Instability

The region's homeless population has grown in recent years, concentrated primarily in Fulton County and the City of Atlanta, which are served by the Atlanta Continuum of Care (GA-500). Addressing homelessness requires coordinated strategies across housing, behavioral health, employment services, and community development systems. Partners for HOME serves as the lead agency for the Atlanta Continuum of Care, coordinating regional response to homelessness.

Displacement and Gentrification

Revitalization and reinvestment in urban neighborhoods—while creating economic opportunity—has also generated significant displacement pressure on long-established communities, particularly communities of color in the urban core and inner-ring suburbs. Rising property values and rents, combined with an inadequate supply of deed-restricted affordable housing, have pushed lower-income households further from employment centers and transit, reversing decades of community investment, undermining regional resilience goals and increasing transportation costs.

Community Development Programs and ARC's Role

ARC plays a direct role in supporting community development across the region through several flagship programs. The Livable Centers Initiative provides planning grants and technical assistance to help communities plan for compact, mixed-use development in activity centers. The Community Development Assistance Program (CDAP) provides technical assistance on a range of planning and community development topics. The Culture and Community Design Program supports arts and culture integration in community development. The LINK program builds regional leadership capacity among local planning officials. These programs collectively support communities in addressing their development challenges and pursuing opportunities aligned with regional goals.

Housing Assets

- Regional Housing Strategy guiding coordinated action
- Strong market demand for housing across the region
- Continued multifamily development in parts of the region
- LCI program supporting housing in activity centers
- Metro Atlanta Housing Toolkit and CDAP supporting local implementation

Housing Challenges

- Regionwide housing affordability crisis across incomes
- Mismatch between housing supply and regional income needs
- Insufficient housing production and loss of existing affordable housing
- Loss of naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) and displacement pressures
- Rising homelessness and housing instability
- Regulatory and funding barriers limiting housing production

Summary: Regional Assets and Challenges

The following table synthesizes the key assets and challenges identified across the six thematic areas. These findings collectively inform the goals, strategies, and investments articulated in the subsequent chapters of the Regional Development Plan.

Theme	Key Assets	Key Challenges
People & Demographics	Fast growth, high diversity, young workforce	Equity gaps, aging population, uneven growth distribution
Economy & Employment	Global airport, Fortune 500 companies, growing tech sector	Spatial mismatch, skills gap, income inequality, automation risk
Land Use & Development	UGPM framework, LCI program, market demand for walkability	Legacy sprawl, regulatory barriers, rural growth pressure
Transportation & Mobility	World-class air access, interstate network, Beltline	Severe congestion, limited transit, fragmented active transport
Environment & Natural Systems	Chattahoochee watershed, improving air quality, green tradition	Water supply uncertainty, canopy loss, climate stress
Housing & Community	Regional Housing Strategy, strong housing demand, Metro Atlanta Housing Toolkit, LCI program and CDAP support	Affordability crisis, housing supply-income mismatch, production and preservation gaps, displacement, and homelessness

Looking Ahead

The assets and challenges documented in this chapter collectively frame the strategic choices embedded in the Regional Development Plan 2026. The region's strengths—its global connectivity, diverse economy, and growing commitment to livable, equitable communities—provide a strong foundation.

But realizing the region's potential requires deliberate action to address the structural challenges of congestion, housing affordability, environmental resilience, and equitable access to opportunity. The goals, strategies, and implementation actions in subsequent chapters are designed to build on these assets while tackling these challenges head-on.

This chapter should be read in conjunction with Chapter 1 (Regional Vision and Goals), Chapter 3 (Community Engagement), Chapter 4 (Regional Work Program), and the appendices documenting underlying data sources and modeling assumptions.

CHAPTER 4: REGIONAL GROWTH

Introduction

The Unified Growth Policy Map (UGPM) is the spatial expression of the region's response to the assets and challenges documented in Chapter 2 — translating what we know about population growth, economic expansion, environmental constraints, and community character into a differentiated framework that directs growth to the right places in the right ways, including aligning housing with income levels and expanding access to homes near jobs and transit while ensuring sufficient natural area preservation to meet resilience needs. It is also the foundation on which the goals, policies, and actions of Chapter 4 are built: the UGPM's area types define where compact development, infrastructure investment, conservation, and resilience-centered planning are most needed, and every regional goal in this plan can be understood in part as a commitment to achieving the development outcomes that the UGPM envisions.

The UGPM is how the region answers one of planning's most fundamental questions: not just how much growth will come, but where it should go and what it should look like when it gets there.

Unified Growth Policy Map

The Unified Growth Policy Map is ARC's primary land use policy instrument for the 11-county region. It provides direction for future growth by classifying every part of the region — every parcel, every corridor, every rural road and urban street — into one of eight area types that describe the predominant character of the landscape and carry specific guidance for appropriate land uses, development intensity, infrastructure investment, and transportation connectivity.

The UGPM is not a land use map in the traditional regulatory sense — it does not prescribe what can be built on any given parcel, which remains the authority of local governments through their zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans. Rather, it is a regional policy guide: a statement of where ARC and its partners believe growth should be concentrated, where it should be carefully managed, and where the landscape's natural, agricultural, and community character should be preserved, including where a broader range of housing types and price points should be supported to improve access to opportunity across the region. It is the lens through which ARC evaluates transportation investments, allocates Livable Centers Initiative funding, reviews Developments of Regional Impact, and advises local governments on land use decisions.

The UGPM is also a forecasting tool. ARC's PECAS (Production, Exchange, and Consumption of Activities in Space) land use model uses the UGPM's area type designations — combined with local zoning data, parcel records, transit accessibility, and market conditions — to allocate regional population and employment forecasts to specific geographies across the region. Those forecasts feed the regional travel demand model, which in turn informs the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. In this way, the UGPM is not merely a planning document; it is an active input into the integrated modeling chain that underlies every major regional investment decision.

The UGPM in the Regional Planning System

The UGPM sits at the center of ARC's integrated planning and forecasting system. Its downstream connections include:

- **PECAS Land Use Model:** UGPM area types define development capacity and guide the spatial allocation of regional population and employment forecasts across approximately 1.9 million parcels.
- **Regional Travel Demand Model (CT-RAMP):** Land use outputs from PECAS feed the activity-based travel model, which generates estimates of vehicle miles traveled, mode share, and transit ridership used in transportation planning and air quality conformity.
- **Metropolitan Transportation Plan:** UGPM designations inform transportation investment priorities; projects inconsistent with regional growth objectives are not recommended for federal funding.
- **Livable Centers Initiative:** Centers eligible for LCI funding must be located in area types that support compact, transit-served, mixed-use development, as defined by the UGPM.
- **DRI Reviews:** Proposed Developments of Regional Impact are evaluated for consistency with the UGPM's area type designations and accompanying development guidance.
- **Regional Housing Strategy:** The UGPM supports the implementation of the region’s housing goals by identifying where a broader range of housing types and price points should be encouraged, particularly near jobs, transit, and areas of opportunity.

How the 2026 UGPM Was Developed

The 2026 UGPM update was developed through a collaborative, iterative process with local governments across all eleven counties — a process designed to ensure that the regional framework reflects local land use plans and community visions rather than imposing a regional perspective over local intent. The UGPM is, by design, a synthesis: it builds upward from local comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances, integrating them with regional transportation forecasts, environmental constraints, and market conditions to produce a coherent regional growth framework that no single jurisdiction could develop on its own.

The update process began with a comprehensive gap analysis comparing the existing UGPM designations to changes in local comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and real-world development patterns that had occurred since the previous update. ARC staff identified areas where the existing designations had diverged from local planning decisions, where market conditions had shifted sufficiently to warrant reclassification, and where new data sources — including updated parcel records, revised Census estimates, and the expanded 2026 PECAS data pipeline — supported refinements to area type boundaries.

ARC then engaged local government planning staff through a structured outreach process, conducting individual meetings with planning directors and staff in each of the eleven counties and soliciting input from municipalities on proposed changes to area type designations within their boundaries. This outreach served two purposes: to ensure that ARC's proposed changes were grounded in accurate local knowledge, and to provide local governments with an opportunity to flag areas where their plans had changed and where the UGPM should be updated accordingly. Where local input identified discrepancies between ARC's proposed designations and adopted local plans, ARC revised its approach to reflect local intent.

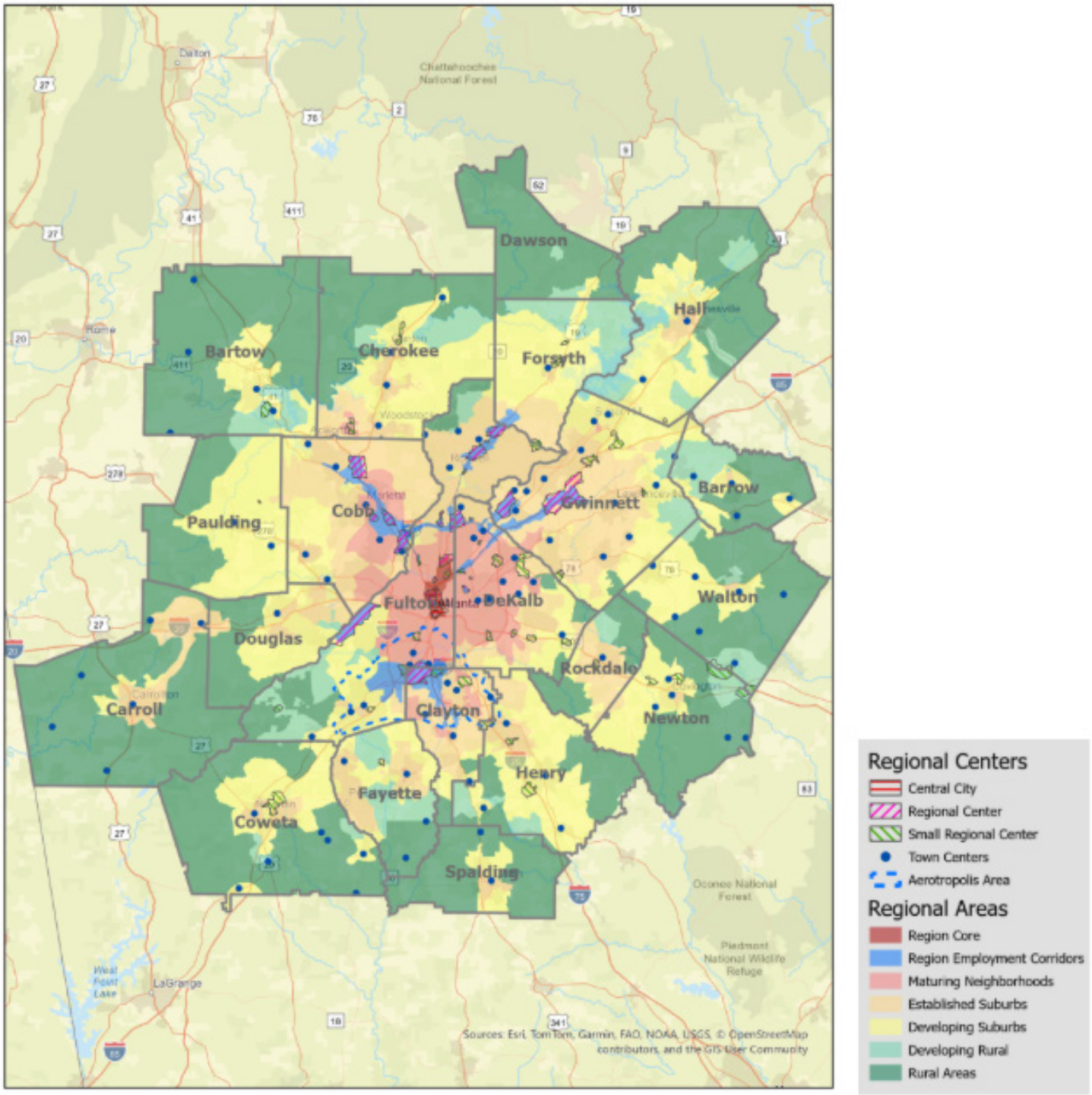
The draft UGPM was then reviewed through ARC's Land Use Coordinating Committee (LUCC), a standing committee of local government planning directors that provides technical guidance on regional land use policy. LUCC review provided an additional layer of peer review and local government validation before the map was presented for broader stakeholder review and board consideration. The final 2026 UGPM reflects the integrated product of this collaborative process: a regional growth framework that is anchored in local planning realities while advancing the regional goals of compact growth, environmental protection, and equitable access to opportunity.

UGPM 2026 Development Process: Key Steps

Key Step	Description
Gap Analysis	Comparison of existing UGPM designations to changes in local comprehensive plans, zoning, and development patterns since previous update.
Data Foundation Update	Refresh of parcel data, tax assessor records, zoning ordinances, QCEW employment data, and local government input for all 11 counties.
Local Government Outreach	Individual meetings with planning staff in each county and major municipality to review proposed area type changes and incorporate local input.
LUCC Technical Review	Review of draft UGPM by the Land Use Coordinating Committee of local government planning directors, with revisions incorporated prior to broader release.
Model Validation	Testing of revised UGPM designations in the PECAS land use model to confirm that area type boundaries produce development capacity estimates consistent with regional growth forecasts.
Stakeholder Engagement and Board Adoption	Broader stakeholder review, public input process, and adoption by the ARC Board of Directors.

The 2026 Unified Growth Policy Map

The map below presents the 2026 UGPM for the 11-county Atlanta region, color-coded by area type. The map reflects both the region's current development landscape and the regional aspirations for its future — where urban intensity should deepen, where suburban communities should evolve, where rural landscapes should be protected, and where the centers and corridors that connect communities should be strengthened. Reading the map alongside Chapter 3's assessment of assets and challenges provides the spatial context for understanding why the goals and policies of Chapter 5 are prioritized as they are.



The Seven Area Types

The 2026 UGPM organizes the region into seven area types. Each area type carries a distinct set of policy expectations — for land use mix, development intensity, infrastructure investment, environmental protection, and transportation connectivity — that are detailed in the Regional Development Guide accompanying this plan. The seven area types are:

Area Type	Character and Planning Approach
Regional Core	The Region Core is the major economic, cultural and transportation hub of the region. This area is the densest in terms of employment, residential, and cultural offerings throughout the region, with the most developed transit service in the region. The Region Core can handle the most intense development due to the amount of infrastructure already in place; however, this infrastructure may need improvements due to its age.
Regional Employment Corridors	Regional Employment Corridorsrepresent the densest development outside of the Region Core. The Regional Employment Corridors connect the various Regional Centers and the Region Core via existing or planned high capacity transportation facilities. These areas need to increase in housing or job density, and focus primarily on improving connectivity between Centers and the Region Core. These areas often buffer the denser parts and the less denseparts of the region. These areas often face greater peak hour congestion, therefore transit station areas and transit right-of-way (ROW) need to be preserved within Regional Employment Corridors.
Maturing Neighborhoods	Maturing Neighborhoods are areas in the region characterized by older neighborhoods that include singleand multifamily development, as well as commercial and office uses at connected key locations. Though commercial and office buildings are aging, they nonetheless are often incorporated into neighborhoods, providing an active mix of uses and amenities. Maturing neighborhoods are denser than established suburbs and the development pattern is more similar to that of pre-1970s urban development. These areas represent the part of the region that is facing infill and redevelopment pressures. In many cases, the infrastructure is in place to handle the additional growth, however in some areas, infrastructure is built out with limited ability to expand. This may constrain the amount of additional growth possible in certain areas. Many arterial streets in this area are congested due to their use as a regional route for commuters. Limited premium transit service is available in these areas.
Established Suburbs	Established Suburbs are areas in the region where suburban development has occurred. These areas are characterized by strip commercial development, single family subdivisions, and offices in limited locations. These areas represent the part of the region that has just recently reached "build out." With few remaining large parcels for additional development, these are the areas in which the region may see the least amount of land use change outside of retail/ commercial areas. While there is still room for limited infill, these areas may begin to focus more on redevelopment over the next 30 years. Within this area, infrastructure is built out with limited ability to expand, which may constrain the amount of additional growth that is possible.
Developing Suburbs	Developing Suburbs are areas in the region where suburban development has occurred, and the conventional development pattern is present but not set. These areas represent the extent of the urban service area. The region should strive to develop these areas in a more sustainable way than the existing development model. Limited existing infrastructure in these areas will constrain the amount of additional growth that is possible. Some transportation improvements may be needed within these developing suburbs, but care should be taken not to spur unwanted growth.
Developing Rural Areas	Developing Rural Areas are areas in the region where little to no development has taken place, but where there is development pressure. These areas are characterized by limited single-family subdivisions, individual large single-family lots, agricultural uses, protected lands, and forests. The region should strive to protect these areas by limiting infrastructure investments to targeted areas and allowing no development or only low intensity development.Limited existing infrastructure in these areas will constrain the amount of additional growth that is possible. Some transportation improvements may be needed in developing rural areas, but care should be taken not to spur unwanted growth.
Rural Areas	Rural Areas, shown in dark green, are areas on the periphery of the region where little to no development has taken place or where there is little development pressure. These areas are characterized by sporadic large single familylots, agricultural uses, protected lands, and forests. These areas outline the developed and developing areas, as well as the limits to the urban service area in Atlanta region. There is a desire by many living in and governing these areas to keep them rural in character. Within rural areas confusion may exist regarding appropriate development densities for rural intensity uses. Most rural zoning categories have 1 unit per acre minimums, which will lead to dramatic changes in character for some rural areas. Increased development may also threaten existing rural economic uses, including forestry and agriculture. The region should strive to protect these areas by limiting infrastructure investments to targeted areas and allowing no development or only low intensity development. There is a need for additional preservation of critical environmental locations, as well as agricultural and forest uses. There will be a need to maintain existing transportation infrastructure, but care should be taken to not spur unwanted growth by inappropriate expansion of infrastructure capacity.

How the UGPM Informs Regional Policy

The UGPM is not simply a description of where the region is — it is a framework for where the region should go and what ARC and its partners will do to get there. Each area type designation carries with it a set of regional policy expectations that inform how ARC allocates resources, reviews developments, provides technical assistance, and advocates for local government decisions that advance regional goals.

In the most direct sense, the UGPM determines which communities are eligible for ARC's Livable Centers Initiative funding, which proposed developments receive additional scrutiny in the DRI review process, and which transportation investments are identified as consistent or inconsistent with regional growth objectives in the MTP. But the UGPM's influence extends beyond these formal mechanisms. It shapes how ARC staff advise local governments on zoning and comprehensive plan amendments, how ARC makes the case for resilience-focused federal discretionary investments through programs like IIJA and Justice40, and how ARC communicates the region's growth framework to state agencies, the private sector, and the public.

The goals and policies of Chapter 5 are organized around the same planning categories that define this regional development plan — economy and workforce, water resources, transportation, housing, land use, environment, and resilience — but each of those categories can be read back onto the UGPM's eight area types. Questions like where housing of different price points is needed, how to align housing with job centers, and how to preserve existing affordability, which watersheds require the most urgent protection, which corridors should receive priority transit investment, and where economic development should be concentrated are all answered, at least in part, by the spatial framework the UGPM provides. In this way, Chapter 4 is not simply a map chapter between two text chapters — it is the connective tissue that links the diagnostic work of Chapter 3 to the policy commitments of Chapter 5.



Areas and Places: The Full UGPM Framework

The UGPM is organized into two complementary components: Areas and Places. The eight area types described above define the predominant character of the regional landscape across broad geographies. Places — which include Regional Centers and Town Centers — are the concentrated nodes of activity that sit within these areas and that receive the most focused regional investment and policy attention.

Regional Centers are the largest and most complex activity nodes in the region: places like Perimeter Center, Cumberland, the Airport/Aerotropolis area, and downtown Atlanta, where employment, commercial, and increasingly residential uses converge at a scale that has regional economic significance. Town Centers are typically smaller, historically rooted nodes — county seats, historic Main Street districts, traditional neighborhood commercial areas — that serve as the civic and commercial anchors of their surrounding communities. Both types of Places are identified in the UGPM because they represent the locations where compact, mixed-use, transit-served development is most achievable and most consequential for regional outcomes.

The Places designation also carries important implications for LCI eligibility, infrastructure investment priority, and the scale of mixed-use development that ARC's policies actively support. Communities with adopted LCI plans for their Town Centers or Regional Centers are prioritized for LCI transportation infrastructure funding — creating a direct incentive for local governments to plan their centers in ways consistent with the regional growth framework. This alignment between local planning decisions and regional investment incentives is one of the UGPM's most powerful implementation mechanisms.

From Map to Action

The Unified Growth Policy Map is where the region's vision for its future takes spatial form. It represents a shared commitment among ARC, its member governments, and its planning partners to manage growth deliberately — concentrating investment where it is most efficient, protecting the landscapes that sustain the region's long-term health, and ensuring that the geography of opportunity is not fixed by past decisions but shaped by intentional choices. The chapter that follows — Goals and Policies — translates this spatial commitment into the policy framework and strategic priorities that will guide regional action across every dimension of community life through 2050.

The Regional Development Guide — available as a companion document to this plan — provides full development character descriptions, infrastructure guidance, and policy expectations for each area type and place category. Readers are encouraged to consult that document for the complete area type framework that underlies the policies and programs described in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 5: GOALS AND POLICIES

This chapter establishes the goals and policies guiding regional decision-making over the planning horizon. Each planning category presents goals—each supported by a concise two-sentence policy statement—that together constitute the region's framework for growth, investment, and community well-being. Source planning documents referenced throughout this chapter are listed in the appendix; readers are encouraged to consult those documents for full action item frameworks, implementation metrics, and responsible party assignments.



Economy and Workforce Development

The region's economic development goals are organized around five priorities: building on existing regional strengths, reinforcing resilience as a structural requirement, growing the innovation and small business ecosystem, developing a competitive workforce pipeline, and ensuring global economic competitiveness. Together these goals advance the region's vision of becoming the leading metropolitan area in the United States for prosperity, access to opportunity, and talent.

Build on Regional Strengths to Advance Shared Prosperity: The region will leverage its Fortune 500 corporate base, the global connectivity of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, and ARC's community planning framework to promote broad-based economic resiliency. Coordinated regional economic development efforts, workforce programs, and annual strategy review processes will ensure growth benefits are widely distributed across all eleven counties.

Reinforce Equity as the Foundation for Economic Development: Structural barriers facing minority-owned businesses and historically underserved populations will be addressed through procurement reform, expanded capital access, and region-wide broadband deployment. The region recognizes that an equitable economy is a more productive and competitive economy, and that closing racial and geographic wealth gaps is both a social and economic imperative.

Grow Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Small Business: A region-wide network of innovation hubs, accelerators, and business incubators will be developed across the region, integrated into activity center planning, and designed to create entrepreneurship pathways for small and minority businesses and for youth in poverty. Streamlined local permitting and regional Merchants' Associations will support a more favorable environment for business formation and growth.

Build a Cradle-to-Career Workforce Pipeline: The region will aggressively connect education—from early childhood through post-secondary—to high-demand careers in technology, STEM, and the creative economy, with prioritized access for historically excluded youth. Business engagement with schools, expanded apprenticeship and dual enrollment programs, and direct industry partnerships will create a talent and trade pipeline that meets both current and emerging workforce needs.

Ensure Global and National Economic Competitiveness: The region will invest in emerging industry clusters—including cybersecurity, life sciences, fintech, film, and music—and position itself as a destination for businesses and talent seeking a globally competitive, sustainability-minded metropolitan area. Defining and growing the creative economy, promoting the region's climate commitments, and fostering university-industry partnerships will strengthen long-term competitive advantage.

Goals & Strengths	Key Challenges
• CEDS vision: top global metro for prosperity, equity, and talent	• 187,000 youth in poverty; minority firm revenues 30–50% below peers
• 15+ Fortune 500 HQs; world's busiest airport anchoring global logistics	• Broadband poverty limiting education and economic participation
• Robust innovation ecosystem of accelerators, incubators, and tech companies	• Automation risk for blue-collar and service sector employment
• Strong higher education institutions and regional workforce coordination	• Creative sector largely excluded from economic development policy

Water Resources Management

Water resources planning is guided by seven long-standing regional policy goals: Protect Water Quality and Public Water Supplies; Support Conservation and Demand Management; Support Economic Growth and Development; Equitably Distribute Benefits and Costs; Promote Public Education and Awareness; Facilitate Implementation; and Improve Resiliency. The goals below translate these principles into five regional priorities that integrate water supply, wastewater, stormwater, and watershed management as a unified system.

Protect Water Quality and Public Water Supplies: The region will safeguard its primary drinking water sources—the Chattahoochee River, Lake Lanier, and Allatoona Lake—through coordinated source water protection programs, watershed land use controls, and long-term water quality monitoring. Protecting these sources at the headwaters of six major river basins is a prerequisite for both public health and the region's long-term water supply reliability.

Support Water Conservation and Demand Management: All water providers will maintain comprehensive conservation programs—including tiered pricing, leak reduction, and efficiency standards for new development—to extend the life of existing supplies and minimize consumptive use. Active water loss control, asset management, and enforceable drought response measures will ensure reliable service even during periods of constrained supply.

Manage Wastewater to Protect Water Quality and Recover Water Resources: Local wastewater systems will be operated and planned to achieve high treatment reliability, prevent sewer system failures, and meet increasingly stringent nutrient standards for discharges into regional water bodies. Where feasible, highly treated effluent will be returned to regional water supply basins to support indirect potable reuse and augment long-term water supply.

Provide Integrated Infrastructure Planning Across Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater: Local governments and utilities will maintain coordinated water and wastewater master plans, participate in basin-level coordination, and manage stormwater impacts of development through post-construction standards, stream buffer protections, and illicit discharge elimination. Integration across these systems—rather than siloed planning—is essential to managing growth while protecting the region's hydrologic resources.

Promote Public Education, Equitable Implementation, and System Resilience: Public education on conservation, proper chemical disposal, and system maintenance will be sustained across all jurisdictions, with technical assistance pathways scaled to support smaller communities. Water and wastewater planning will proactively address climate variability and emerging contaminants to ensure the region's water systems remain resilient and equitably managed for all communities.

Goals & Strengths	Key Challenges
• 100% of providers with tiered conservation rate structures	• Tri-state litigation creating long-term water supply uncertainty
• 150,000+ toilets replaced; FOG education reduced overflows 65% since 2003	• Nutrient loading impairing Lake Lanier and Allatoona Lake water quality
• Integrated framework linking water supply, wastewater, and watershed planning	• PFAS and emerging contaminants requiring advanced treatment investment
• Required local master plans ensuring coordinated infrastructure investment	• Climate variability increasing drought frequency and severity

Transportation and Mobility

The 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan establishes a balanced, multimodal vision for the region: safe and accessible travel for all users, strategic investment in infrastructure and demand management, and a commitment to reconnecting communities divided by historical transportation decisions. Transportation investments totaling $168 billion through 2050 will maintain existing systems, expand capacity where needed, and advance a more equitable and sustainable mobility network.

Achieve Zero Deaths and Serious Injuries on Regional Roadways: The region has adopted a Vision Zero goal of eliminating all traffic deaths and serious injuries on public roads, guided by the Regional Safety Strategy and its Safe Systems approach to roadway design, data analysis, and project prioritization. Transportation investments will be evaluated for their ability to reduce crash risk using proven safety countermeasures, and local governments will be encouraged to integrate Safe Systems principles into their own transportation planning processes.

Expand and Improve Regional Transit Service: Transit expansion—including Bus Rapid Transit, Light Rail, and Arterial Rapid Transit corridors—will extend high-quality service to underserved counties and create a seamless regional network that connects residents to jobs, education, and services. The region will coordinate with MARTA, the ATL Authority, and local transit operators to implement the Regional Transit Plan and ensure that federal and local transit investments work together as an integrated system.

Invest in Active Transportation and First/Last Mile Connectivity: Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure—including regional trails, complete streets, and micromobility options—will be expanded to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), improve public health, and provide affordable transportation alternatives for all residents. The Walk Bike Thrive! plan, the Regional Trail Vision, and the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) program will guide prioritization of active mode investments, with particular attention to safety risk corridors and underserved communities.

Manage System Performance Through Technology and Demand Management: The region will optimize the performance of its existing transportation network through Transportation System Management and Operations (TSMO) strategies—including connected vehicle technology, signal coordination, and incident management—to improve safety and reliability without solely relying on capacity expansion. Transportation Demand Management programs, including Georgia Commute Options and employer partnerships, will continue to reduce peak-hour single-occupancy vehicle travel and advance equitable mobility options.

Reconnect Communities and Advance Transportation Equity: ARC's Reconnecting the Region initiative will guide federal discretionary funding applications toward transportation investments that mitigate the legacy of infrastructure decisions—including the I-20 corridor—that created economic and racial divides across the region. The Environmental Justice Model and federal Justice40 guidance will inform project prioritization to ensure that transportation benefits are equitably distributed and that historically underserved populations gain improved access to the transportation network.

Goals & Strengths	Key Challenges
• $168B in planned transportation investments through 2050	• ~600 deaths and 3,000+ serious injuries on regional roads annually
• World's busiest airport; extensive interstate and freight network	• Limited transit coverage relative to the region's geographic scale
• Growing transit expansion pipeline across multiple modes and counties	• Fragmented active transportation network; micromobility regulatory gaps
• Regional Safety Strategy and Vision Zero goal adopted in 2023	• Transportation emissions represent 46% of the region's total GHG output

Housing and Community Development

Housing affordability and community development are foundational to regional equity and economic competitiveness. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan and CEDS identify housing as a core regional challenge—affecting worker recruitment, traffic congestion, school stability, and public health outcomes—and call for coordinated action across land use, transportation, and community investment to increase housing supply, preserve affordability, and create stable, inclusive communities across all eleven counties.

Increase the Supply and Diversity of Housing Across the Region: The region will work to increase housing production by providing tools for developers to contribute to both market-rate and affordable supply, removing regulatory barriers to diverse housing types, and aligning zoning codes with regional goals for mixed-income, transit-accessible communities, and ensuring housing supply better reflects regional income levels. A greater mix of housing options—including a broader range of housing types, such as missing-middle housing and units near job centers—will improve affordability, reduce commute burdens, and support workforce retention across all income levels.This includes expanding housing options affordable to low and moderate-income households, who are not currently well served by existing housing supply.

Preserve Existing Affordable Housing and Prevent Displacement: The region will pursue policies and investments to preserve the existing supply of affordable housing and prevent the displacement of lower-income residents and long-established communities, particularly in areas experiencing rapid reinvestment. Tools including anti-displacement ordinances, housing trust funds, and targeted technical assistance to local governments will be advanced through regional collaboration. This includes addressing the ongoing loss of lower cost housing and preserving existing affordable options wherever possible.

Reduce Housing and Transportation Cost Burdens Together: The Metro Atlanta Housing Strategy frames the joint cost of housing and transportation as the true affordability metric and will advance strategies that expand housing options near job centers, transit corridors, and activity centers to reduce the combined burden on households. Equitable transit-oriented development planning—integrating affordable housing, transit access, and community services near rail and BRT stations—will be a priority for regional investment and local plan development.

Support Lifelong, Inclusive Communities for Residents of All Ages and Abilities: The region will invest in community development programs—including the LCI program, Community Development Assistance Program (CDAP), and the Live Beyond Expectations aging strategy—that help communities plan for and accommodate residents across the full life span, from young families to older adults aging in place. Expanding access to healthy food, green infrastructure, arts and culture, and community services in underinvested neighborhoods will address social determinants of health and support regional equity goals.

Address Life Expectancy Disparities Through Place-Based Community Investment: ARC's Live Beyond Expectations framework recognizes that a resident's ZIP code strongly predicts their life expectancy—with differences of up to 25 years across the region—and commits to addressing the underlying inequities in housing, transportation, healthcare access, and the built environment that drive these disparities. Place-based community investment targeted to neighborhoods with the most concentrated disadvantage will be guided by data, community partnership, and the policy, place, and practice intervention framework of the Live Beyond Expectations strategic plan.

Goals & Strengths	Key Challenges
• Regional Housing Strategy providing regional affordability framework • LCI program supporting mixed-use, transit-accessible, and multimodal community development • CDAP providing technical assistance for housing, food access, and placemaking • Live Beyond Expectations framework targeting life expectancy disparities	• 45% of renters cost-burdened; wages lagging behind rents and home prices • Up to 25-year life expectancy gap between ZIP codes within the same region • Gentrification displacing long-established communities near reinvestment areas • Insufficient regional tools to address housing affordability at scale

Land Use and Development Patterns

Land use decisions are the most consequential choices the region makes—they determine the efficiency of infrastructure investment, the character of communities, access to opportunity, and the long-term health of environmental systems. The Unified Growth Policy Map (UGPM) provides the region's foundational policy framework for guiding growth to appropriate locations, while the LCI program and Regional Resource Plan support compact development and the protection of irreplaceable natural and cultural assets.

Direct Growth to Activity Centers, Transit Corridors, and Appropriate Locations: The UGPM will guide regional investment and local land use decisions toward area types where development can be efficiently served by infrastructure, transit, and community services, and away from sensitive environmental lands and agricultural areas. Transportation investments inconsistent with regional growth objectives—including those that would accelerate sprawl into rural conservation and greenspace areas—will not be recommended for federal funding.

Support Compact, Mixed-Use, Walkable Development in LCI Communities: The LCI program will continue to fund master plan updates, zoning code development and other tactical studies that focus on implementation, and transportation infrastructure in established town centers and transit-served employment centers to foster vibrant, walkable communities with a diverse mix of housing, jobs, and services that better reflect the needs and income levels of the region's residents. New LCI transportation funding eligibility will be tied to funded or programmed high-capacity transit service to ensure that compact development investment is anchored by multimodal access.

Protect Regionally Important Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources: The Regional Resource Plan identifies and guides the stewardship of three categories of irreplaceable regional assets—Areas of Conservation and Recreational Value, Historic and Cultural Resources, and Areas of Scenic and Agricultural Value—and establishes management strategies that balance development pressure with long-term resource protection. ARC will coordinate with local governments, land trusts, and conservation organizations to build a continuous green infrastructure network that protects these resources while accommodating regional growth.

Align Local Land Use Plans with Regional Goals Through Technical Assistance: ARC will support local governments in developing and implementing comprehensive plans, zoning codes, and development standards that are consistent with regional land use and transportation goals, through CDAP, Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) program, and ongoing plan review processes. Developments of Regional Impact (DRIs) will be evaluated for consistency with the 2026 Regional Development Plan, with recommendations provided to local governments on project design improvements that advance regional environmental, transportation, and community development policies.

Ensure Land Use and Transportation Decisions Are Made Together: The UGPM and MTP will remain tightly integrated tools, with land use forecasts informing transportation investment priorities and transportation investment decisions reinforcing—rather than undermining—regional growth management objectives. ARC will use its regional forecasting system, including the PECAS land use model and the regional travel demand model, to evaluate the long-term consequences of development patterns and infrastructure investments on VMT, air quality, equity, and fiscal sustainability.

Goals & Strengths	Key Challenges
• UGPM providing policy framework for differentiated growth management • 130+ LCI catalytic studies advancing walkable, mixed-use activity centers with diverse housing options • Regional Resource Plan identifying and protecting regionally important assets • PECAS land use model enabling data-driven development capacity analysis	• Legacy of low-density sprawl driving VMT and inefficient infrastructure investment • Development pressure on rural, agricultural, and conservation lands from continued outward growth • Local zoning inconsistencies with regional compact growth goals • Regulatory barriers limiting infill, diverse housing types, and mixed-use development

Environment and Natural Systems

The Atlanta region is situated within a rich natural landscape—the upper Chattahoochee watershed, Piedmont forests, and the headwaters of six major river basins—that provides critical ecosystem services underpinning quality of life and economic vitality. The Metro Atlanta Climate Action Plan (MACAP), adopted in December 2025, commits the region to near-net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 through 24 measures across transportation, buildings, energy, waste, and trees and greenspaces. The Regional Resource Plan, WRMP watershed programs, and MTP environmental policies collectively advance the region's commitment to protecting natural systems alongside managing growth.

Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions Across All Sectors Toward Net-Zero by 2050: The Metro Atlanta Climate Action Plan establishes the region's first comprehensive GHG reduction roadmap, targeting near-net-zero emissions by 2050 through measures spanning transportation electrification, building efficiency, clean energy transition, waste reduction, and natural lands protection. Regional transportation investments, land use decisions, and building standards will be aligned with climate targets, with the transportation sector—which accounts for 46% of regional GHG emissions—receiving priority attention through mode shift, electrification, and demand management strategies.

Protect and Restore Natural Lands, Tree Canopy, and Green Infrastructure: The region will protect areas of conservation and recreational value identified in the Regional Resource Plan, restore urban tree canopy lost to development, and invest in green infrastructure that simultaneously delivers stormwater management, urban heat island mitigation, carbon sequestration, air quality improvement, and public health benefits. Trees and greenspaces are recognized in the MACAP as a critical climate mitigation and adaptation strategy, and ARC will support local governments in expanding canopy cover and integrating green infrastructure into transportation and community development projects.

Improve Air Quality and Protect Public Health from Environmental Burdens: The region will continue working toward and maintaining attainment of federal air quality standards for ozone and fine particulate matter, using ARC's integrated MOVES modeling to evaluate transportation-related emissions and guide air quality conformity determinations. Environmental Justice areas—where low-income populations and communities of color bear disproportionate pollution burdens—will be prioritized for clean transportation investments, green infrastructure, and health-protective land use policies.

Build Regional Resilience to Climate-Related Hazards: The region will identify its most vulnerable transportation, water, and community infrastructure and develop adaptation strategies to address increasing risks from extreme heat, more intense rainfall events, prolonged drought, and flooding, with particular attention to communities least able to cope with these impacts. ARC will encourage the use of green infrastructure techniques in new projects and retrofits, promote climate resilience in local comprehensive planning, and pursue federal funding for climate adaptation investments in overburdened and high-risk communities.

Goals & Strengths	Key Challenges
• MACAP adopted Dec. 2025: 24 measures targeting net-zero GHG by 2050 • WRMP green infrastructure and watershed management programs • ARC MOVES modeling integrating emissions analysis into transportation planning	• Transportation sector = 46% of regional GHG emissions; trend not improving • Urban tree canopy loss in developing areas reducing ecosystem services • Disproportionate pollution and climate burdens on EJ communities • Increasing extreme heat, flooding, and drought threatening infrastructure and health

Regional Resilience

Resilience is not a discrete planning category but an animating principle that runs through every dimension of the Regional Development Plan. It is given separate treatment here because the region's source planning documents—the CEDS, MTP, Live Beyond Expectations plan, WRMP, and MACAP—each independently elevate resilience as a primary goal requiring explicit structural commitment, not merely a secondary consideration. This section synthesizes resilience goals that must be realized across all planning categories if the region is to achieve its vision of One Great Region.

Embed Resilience in Regional Investment Decisions and Program Design: All major regional investment decisions—in transportation, housing, economic development, water infrastructure, and environmental programs—will be evaluated through an equity lens to ensure that benefits are broadly distributed and that historically underserved communities are not disproportionately burdened. ARC's Environmental Justice Model, the federal Justice40 framework, and the CEDS equity goal will jointly guide project prioritization, with quantitative equity analysis informing TIP project selection, CEDS action implementation, and MACAP measure sequencing.

Close the Life Expectancy Gap Across the Region's Communities: The Live Beyond Expectations framework establishes a long-range regional commitment to reducing the stark life expectancy disparities—up to 25 years between ZIP codes within the same county—that are driven by inequities in housing quality, transportation access, environmental conditions, and healthcare. ARC will coordinate a growing regional partnership network, develop a Life Expectancy Scorecard to track progress, and target its aging services, community development, and advocacy resources to the communities and populations experiencing the greatest disadvantage.

Ensure That Transportation Investments Reconnect Divided Communities: The region's Reconnecting the Region initiative recognizes that past transportation infrastructure decisions—including highway routing designed to divide communities along racial lines—created persistent economic and health disparities that require intentional corrective investment. Federal discretionary funding applications will consistently invoke the Reconnecting the Region framework to build a coherent, long-range story of equity-focused investment for federal partners, and new transportation projects in or adjacent to Environmental Justice communities will be held to higher standards of community engagement and benefit analysis.

Build Economic Resilience for All Residents and Businesses: Economic resilience—the capacity to withstand and recover from disruptions including recessions, automation, and climate events—requires that all residents and businesses, not only those with existing capital and opportunity, have access to the tools needed to adapt and thrive. The region will pursue this through diversified industry investment, small and minority business support, workforce development, and safety net programs that together reduce the region's structural economic vulnerabilities, with particular focus on youth in poverty, workers in automation-vulnerable occupations, and communities of color.

Advance Resilience as a Shared Regional Accountability Framework: Achieving regional resilience requires shared goals, common metrics, and mutual accountability across the 11 counties and 76 municipalities that comprise the region—not just aspirational language at the regional level. ARC will work with local governments, community partners, and the private sector to develop a regional resilience baseline, track progress annually, and use the CEDS Action Plan review process, MTP performance monitoring, and the Life Expectancy Scorecard as accountability mechanisms that make resilience outcomes visible and drive continuous improvement.

Goals & Strengths	Key Challenges
• CEDS, MTP, MACAP, and LBE each independently elevate equity as a primary goal • EJ frameworks aligning funding with resilience priorities • Growing regional awareness of life expectancy and opportunity disparities • ARC's EJ Model recognized nationally for its simplicity and utility	• Atlanta region among highest inequality levels in the U.S. by multiple measures • Up to 25-year life expectancy gap driven by ZIP-code-level inequity • Fragmented resilience accountability across 76 municipalities and 11 counties • Legacy infrastructure decisions continue to generate racial and economic divides

Looking Ahead

The goals and policies documented in this chapter establish the normative framework for the 2026 Regional Development Plan. Across seven planning categories—from global economic competitiveness to watershed protection, from housing affordability to climate resilience—this framework reflects both the ambition and the urgency of this planning moment for the Atlanta region. The programs, partnerships, and investments detailed in subsequent chapters are designed to operationalize these goals for the 11-county region over the next two decades.



CHAPTER 6: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

This chapter constitutes the Implementation Strategy for the 2026 ARC Regional Development Plan. It fulfills the requirements of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' Standards and Procedures for Regional Planning (Chapter 110-12-6) for an implementation program component, which must include a five-year work program identifying the activities ARC will undertake to advance the plan's goals and policies, and a report of accomplishments documenting the status of activities identified in the previous plan cycle. The chapter also fulfills the DCA requirement for an annual implementation update mechanism and establishes the framework for tracking local government compliance with regional plan minimum standards.

The Five-Year Work Program (2027–2031) identifies major plans, programs, initiatives, and activities that ARC and its departments plan to implement or initiate during the next five years. Projects are organized by ARC's five Strategic Framework goals and linked to the priority issues identified in Chapter 3 (Assets and Challenges). Each project entry identifies the responsible ARC department, the anticipated timeframe, and the cost basis. The work program is updated annually as part of ARC's regular plan implementation review, with completed projects documented in subsequent reports of accomplishments.

DCA Regional Plan Requirements Fulfilled by This Chapter

- **Five-Year Work Program:** Identifies specific activities ARC will undertake in 2027–2031 to implement the goals and policies of the RDP, with responsible parties, timeframes, and cost estimates, as required by Chapter 110-12-6 (Regional Planning Requirements).
- **Report of Accomplishments:** Documents the status of all 28 projects identified in the 2021 Five-Year Work Program of the 2020 ARC Regional Plan, classifying each as Complete, Underway, Dropped, or requiring verification, as required by DCA's annual update provisions.
- **Local Government Minimum Standards Tracking:** Identifies whether each of the region's 11 counties and 76 municipalities meets the three minimum standards required for consistency with the Regional Plan, as required by Chapter 110-12-6 and updated annually in coordination with DCA's Office of Planning.

Department Abbreviations

The following abbreviations identify the ARC department responsible for each work program item:

CD — Community Development Department

MS — Mobility Services Department (Georgia Commute Options)

NR — Natural Resources Department / Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District

R&I — Research and Innovation Department

TP — Transportation Planning Department

WS — Workforce Solutions Department

AIS — Aging and Independence Services Department

HSR — Homeland Security and Recovery Department

EXT — External Affairs / Executive Director's Office

IT — Information Technology Department



Five-Year Work Program (2027–2031)

The following projects represent ARC's planned new and continuing investments over the 2027–2031 period to implement the goals and policies of the Regional Development Plan. Projects are organized by the primary Strategic Framework goal. Priority issues are keyed to the eleven regional priority issues identified in Chapter 3. This work program is reviewed and updated annually; new projects are added, and completed projects migrate to the Report of Accomplishments.

Project Name	Timeframe	Cost	Resp. Party	Priority Issue(s)	Strategic Goal
Livable Communities — Healthy, safe, livable communities in the Atlanta Metro area					
Regional Housing Strategy — Adoption and Implementation	2026–2027	Staff + grants	CD	5	Livable Communities
LCI Project Implementation Pilot Program	2026–2027	Staff + LCI funds	CD	1, 5, 6	Livable Communities
Live Beyond Expectations (LBE) 2026–2031 Strategic Plan Implementation	2026–2030	Federal/State grants	AIS	9	Livable Communities
Climate Pollution Reduction Plan Implementation	2026–2030	EPA grant	NR	4, 8	Livable Communities
Age-Friendly Region Plan Implementation	2026–2030	Staff time	AIS / CD	9, 10	Livable Communities
Update of the Metro Atlanta Housing Toolkit	2027–2028	Staff time	CD / R&I	5	Livable Communities
Regional Housing Forum and Housing Leadership Academy	2026–2030 (annual)	Staff + sponsorships	CD	5	Livable Communities
Georgia Commute Options (GCO) Program	2027–2031 (annual)	CMAQ funds	MS	1, 6, 7, 8	Livable Communities
Employer Services Program (TMA Subgrants)	2027–2031 (annual)	CMAQ funds	MS	1, 6, 7	Livable Communities
TDM Regional Rideshare Program	2027–2031 (annual)	CMAQ funds	MS	6, 7, 8	Livable Communities
Regional Modal Promotions (Biketober, Try Transit, etc.)	2027–2031 (annual)	Staff + partner funds	MS	6, 7, 8, 10	Livable Communities
Georgia Commute Schools (GCS) — K–12 Air Quality & TDM Outreach	2027–2031 (annual)	Staff time	MS	8, 10	Livable Communities
Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) — School Pool / Safety Pilots	2026–2028	FHWA SS4A grant	MS	2, 7, 9	Livable Communities
City of Atlanta E-Bike Rebate Program (potential regional expansion)	2026–2027	City + partner funds	MS / CD	5, 6, 7	Livable Communities
Strategic Investments — Strategic investments in people, infrastructure, mobility, and preserving natural resources					
Three Regional Trail Plans (launch)	2026	TBD	TP / CD	1, 7, 10	Strategic Investments
Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Update — adoption 2028	2026–2028	FHWA Planning Funds	TP	1, 6, 7, 8	Strategic Investments
Household Travel Survey (with GDOT)	2026	GDOT partnership	R&I / TP	1, 6, 7	Strategic Investments
Transportation Resilience Plan	2026–2027	TBD	TP / NR	1, 7, 8	Strategic Investments
Regional Safety Action Plan — Continued Vision Zero Implementation	2026–2030	TBD	TP	2, 7	Strategic Investments
Aerotropolis Atlanta Implementation Support	2026–2028	Staff + partner funds	CD	1, 11	Strategic Investments
Chattahoochee RiverLands Implementation	2026–2030	Staff + project funds	CD / NR / TP	4, 8, 10	Strategic Investments
TIP Solicitation Cycles (annual/biennial)	2026–2031 (annual)	Staff time	TP	1, 6, 7	Strategic Investments
Stakeholder Engagement — Diverse stakeholders engage and take a regional approach to solve local issues					
ConnectATL Transportation Summit (annual)	2026–2030 (annual)	Staff + sponsorships	TP / EXT	6, 7	Stakeholder Engagement
Downtown Atlanta Evacuation Strategy	2026–2027	UASI funding	HSR	11	Stakeholder Engagement
2030 Census Outreach and Coordination	2026–2030	Staff time	R&I	2, 9	Stakeholder Engagement
ARC Innovation Team / SPARC Competition (annual)	2026–2030 (annual)	$150K seed	R&I	1, 3	Stakeholder Engagement
Regional Assembly of Public Officials (annual)	2026–2030 (annual)	Staff time	EXT / Exec.	1, 5, 6, 9, 10	Stakeholder Engagement
Metro Atlanta Speaks Annual Survey	2026–2031 (annual)	Staff + KSU partnership	R&I	All	Stakeholder Engagement
Competitive Economy — A competitive economy that is inclusive, innovative, and resilient					
Building Georgia Initiative — Infrastructure Workforce Pathways (with GDOT)	2026–2030	GDOT partnership	WS	1, 3	Competitive Economy
Building Georgia Sustainability Plan — Diversified Funding and Industry Alignment	2027	Staff time	WS	1, 3	Competitive Economy
Apprenticeship Expansion — Regional Apprenticeship Ecosystem Development	2027–2028	Staff time	WS	1, 3	Competitive Economy
CEDS Update	2026–2027	Staff + EDA grant	CD	1, 3, 11	Competitive Economy
Atlanta Regional Workforce Development Board Plan (next cycle)	2026–2028	WIOA funding	WS	3	Competitive Economy
Hartsfield-Jackson Aerotropolis Economic Development	2026–2030	Staff + partner funds	CD	1, 11	Competitive Economy

Note: Priority Issues are keyed to the eleven regional priority issues identified in Chapter 3 (Assets and Challenges). Projects are updated annually as part of ARC's regular implementation review. Cost estimates reflect the primary funding basis; actual expenditures vary by year and are detailed in ARC's annual Budget and Work Program.



Report of Accomplishments (2021 Work Program)

The 2021 Work Program of the 2020 ARC Regional Plan Update identified 28 projects ARC would undertake from 2021 through 2025. The table below documents the status of each project as of the adoption of the 2026 RDP, based on input gathered from ARC department heads and staff through the Internal Advisory Committee process. Statuses are: Complete (fully implemented), Underway (in active progress), Dropped (no longer being pursued, with explanation), or Verify (status not yet confirmed at time of publication and requiring follow-up with the responsible department prior to final adoption). This table will be updated annually through the plan's implementation review process.

Project (2021 Work Program)	Status	Notes
Regional Safety Action Plan	Complete	Incorporated into 2024 MTP; TIP project selection criteria updated to account for safety. Vision Zero implementation continuing under Regional Safety Action Plan.
Green Infrastructure Best Practices and Workshops	Underway	Green infrastructure prioritization criteria incorporated into TIP project selection framework. Additional education needed on how to incorporate green infrastructure into standard design. Integrated into ongoing Climate Pollution Reduction Plan and NR programs.
Transportation Project Selection Update	Complete	Criteria updated and applied to the 2022 and 2024 TIP Solicitation cycles.
Project Environmental Screening Tool	Dropped	No longer being developed separately; ARC is using GDOT tools and guidance for environmental screening.
Project Database Redevelopment	Complete	New PlanIt database platform launched in 2024.
Electric Charging Station Plan	Complete	Transportation Electrification Plan completed in 2025; resource page developed; ongoing coordination with stakeholders and agencies. PowerUp Atlanta Program advancing 50 EV chargers at Hartsfield-Jackson via federal CFI grant.
Connected Vehicle Signal Pilot Project	Complete	Implemented in partnership with GDOT and Gwinnett County. ITS4US connected vehicle implementation referenced in 2023 UPWP.
FHWA Resilience and Durability Pilot Project - Tool	Underway	Plan completed; tools underway. Foundational work informing the new Transportation Resilience Plan beginning 2026. (Note: Status to be verified with Transportation Planning Department prior to final publication.)
Coordinated Paratransit Study	Complete	Completed in 2025 under Mobility Services Department.
COVID-19 Economic Relief	Complete	ARPA grant successfully closed out in 2025.
Pilot Small Housing Study	Complete	Likely informed Metro Atlanta Housing Toolkit; confirm completion status with Community Development Department.
Develop Regional Housing Targets	Underway	Continuing through Regional Housing Strategy targeting 2026 Board approval; incorporating the ten-submarket Metro Atlanta Housing Toolkit framework.
Develop a Regional BRT Land Use Typology and Policies	Verify	Confirm current status with Community Development Department. May be addressed through Regional TOD Strategy (ARC/ATL, 2024).
Recalibrate the UGPM with LandPro	Verify	Confirm with Research and Innovation / Community Development. UGPM 2026 update is underway as part of this RDP cycle.
Complete LandPro	Verify	Confirm with Research and Innovation Department.
Develop Best Practices for Low-Cost Transportation / Placemaking Solutions	Verify	Confirm with Community Development / Transportation Planning Departments.
TOD Zoning Assistance	Verify	Confirm with Community Development Department. TOD planning has continued through LCI and MARTA partnership studies.
Transit Creative Placemaking	Complete	Creative Bus Stop Plans completed by Midtown Alliance and Upper Westside CID (2021).
Data Collection Around Transit	Underway	Continuing through 2026 Household Travel Survey conducted in partnership with GDOT.
Finding the Flint Assistance	Complete	Confirmed complete by Natural Resources Department / Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (April 2026).
Equity Training for Local Officials	Underway	Equity criteria added to LCI project evaluation framework; ongoing through CDAP and Community Planning Academy programs.

Update of the Regional Economic Strategy	Complete	ARC operates as designated EDA Economic Development District; 2022 CEDS completed and under implementation. Update underway for 2026-2027.
Update of the Regional Housing Strategy	Underway	Regional Housing Strategy 2025-2026 in active development; targeting 2026 Board adoption. Metro Atlanta Housing Toolkit updated in 2024 with 2023 ACS data.
Develop a New Regional Land Use Vision	Underway	To be addressed through the 2026 UGPM update (this RDP cycle) and the ARC 2027-2031 Strategic Plan development.
Regional Housing Demand Forecast Coordination with Plans	Underway	Confirm with Research and Innovation / Community Development Departments.
Aerotropolis Blueprint 2.0	Complete	Aerotropolis Atlanta Alliance partnership ongoing; confirm Blueprint 2.0 status with Community Development Department.
Freight Plan Update	Complete	Freight Mobility Plan Update completed in 2025 by Transportation Planning Department.
RiverLands Implementation	Underway	Study complete. Cobb County segment awarded TIP funding for PE; scoping funding awarded to City of Atlanta and South Fulton segments. Chattahoochee Working Group meets monthly to advance implementation.
Create a Regional Workforce Plan	Complete	Most recent plans updated; next update cycle due September 2026.
Create a Local Workforce Plan	Complete	Most recent plans updated; next update cycle due June 2026.

Note: Items marked 'Verify' require confirmation from the responsible ARC department before final publication. Many statuses were gathered through the RDP Internal Advisory Committee process (2025–2026); some items require follow-up with department heads to confirm current status prior to Board adoption.



Local Government Implementation

With each annual update, ARC publishes the current status of local governments meeting the minimum standards identified in the Local Government Implementation component of the Regional Development Plan, in accordance with Chapter 110-12-6 of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' Standards and Procedures for Regional Planning. The 2026 region includes 11 counties and 76 municipalities, reflecting the addition of Forsyth County and the City of Cumming since the 2021 plan cycle.

The three minimum standards for local government consistency with the Regional Plan are:

Minimum Standard 1 — An adopted comprehensive plan that meets DCA's minimum planning standards and has been reviewed and found in compliance by DCA's Office of Planning.

Minimum Standard 2 — Adopted land development regulations (zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, etc.) that are generally consistent with the community's comprehensive plan.

Minimum Standard 3 — A short-term work program (or equivalent implementation mechanism) that identifies specific actions the local government will take to implement its comprehensive plan.

Data Refresh Required Prior to Publication

Compliance status for each jurisdiction must be obtained from DCA's Office of Planning prior to final Board adoption of this plan. Several jurisdictions have updated their comprehensive plans in 2024–2025, including the City of Atlanta (Plan A, adopted July 2025), Brookhaven (Comprehensive Plan 2044, September 2024), and others. Status data shown below requires verification and should be treated as placeholder content only.

Jurisdiction	County	Min. Std. 1: Comp. Plan	Min. Std. 2: Land Dev. Regs.	Min. Std. 3: STWP
Cherokee County	Cherokee	[]	[]	[]
City of Acworth	Cobb	[]	[]	[]
City of Alpharetta	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Atlanta	Fulton / DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of Austell	Cobb	[]	[]	[]
City of Avondale Estates	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of Ball Ground	Cherokee	[]	[]	[]
City of Berkeley Lake	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Brookhaven	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of Buford	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Canton	Cherokee	[]	[]	[]
City of Chamblee	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of Chattahoochee Hills	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Clarkston	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of College Park	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Conyers	Rockdale	[]	[]	[]
City of Cumming	Forsyth	[]	[]	[]
City of Dacula	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Decatur	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of Doraville	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of Douglasville	Douglas	[]	[]	[]

City of Duluth	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Dunwoody	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of East Point	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Fairburn	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Fayetteville	Fayette	[]	[]	[]
City of Forest Park	Clayton	[]	[]	[]
City of Grayson	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Hampton	Henry	[]	[]	[]
City of Hapeville	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Holly Springs	Cherokee	[]	[]	[]
City of Johns Creek	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Jonesboro	Clayton	[]	[]	[]
City of Kennesaw	Cobb	[]	[]	[]
City of Lake City	Clayton	[]	[]	[]
City of Lawrenceville	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Lilburn	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Mableton	Cobb	[]	[]	[]
City of Marietta	Cobb	[]	[]	[]
City of McDonough	Henry	[]	[]	[]
City of Milton	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Morrow	Clayton	[]	[]	[]
City of Mulberry	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Norcross	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Palmetto	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Peachtree City	Fayette	[]	[]	[]
City of Peachtree Corners	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Pine Lake	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of Powder Springs	Cobb	[]	[]	[]
City of Riverdale	Clayton	[]	[]	[]
City of Roswell	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Sandy Springs	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Smyrna	Cobb	[]	[]	[]
City of Snellville	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of South Fulton	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Stockbridge	Henry	[]	[]	[]
City of Stone Mountain	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of Stonecrest	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
City of Sugar Hill	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Suwanee	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
City of Tucker	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
Town of Tyrone	Fayette	[]	[]	[]
City of Union City	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
City of Villa Rica	Douglas	[]	[]	[]
City of Waleska	Cherokee	[]	[]	[]
City of Woodstock	Cherokee	[]	[]	[]
Clayton County	Clayton	[]	[]	[]
Cobb County	Cobb	[]	[]	[]
DeKalb County	DeKalb	[]	[]	[]
Douglas County	Douglas	[]	[]	[]
Fayette County	Fayette	[]	[]	[]
Forsyth County	Forsyth	[]	[]	[]
Fulton County	Fulton	[]	[]	[]
Gwinnett County	Gwinnett	[]	[]	[]
Henry County	Henry	[]	[]	[]
Rockdale County	Rockdale	[]	[]	[]

Note: Compliance status (✓ where Minimum Standard is met) must be obtained from DCA's Office of Planning prior to final publication. Placeholder brackets [ ] should be replaced with verified status indicators. This table is updated annually with each plan implementation report.

Annual Plan Update

This Work Program and Report of Accomplishments will be updated annually in accordance with DCA's Regional Planning Requirements (Chapter 110-12-6). Each annual update will document project completions, add new projects as ARC's work program evolves, revise timeframes and cost estimates as needed, and update the Local Government Implementation Tracking Summary in coordination with DCA's Office of Planning. Annual updates are submitted to DCA and made available to the public through ARC's website.



CHAPTER 7:
PLANNING TOGETHER — LOCAL STANDARDS AND REGIONAL QUALITY

Introduction

Chapter 6 defined what ARC will do over the next five years to advance the Regional Development Plan. This chapter defines what local governments are asked to do — and how ARC will support and measure their progress.

Chapter 7 has two parts. Part A establishes Local Performance Standards: a set of specific, measurable actions that local governments across the region should have in place to be considered consistent with the 2026 RDP. Part B presents ARC's Assessment of Regional Consistency with Georgia's Quality Community Objectives — the state's framework of planning ideals against which every regional plan is measured.

Together, these two parts fulfill the requirements of Georgia DCA Rules Chapter 110-12-6, which requires every Regional Commission to establish Minimum and Excellence Standards for local governments and to assess regional consistency with the Quality Community Objectives as part of its Regional Development Plan.

How the Two Parts Relate

The Quality Community Objectives (Part B) are DCA's ten statewide planning ideals — an honest assessment of where the Atlanta region measures up and where gaps remain. The Local Performance Standards (Part A) are ARC's translation of those ideals into concrete, trackable actions that local governments can take. If Part B identifies the gaps, Part A defines what closing those gaps looks like at the local level.



PART A: Local Performance Standards

A.1 How the Standards Work

Local governments are the region's most important planning partners. The decisions made in county commission chambers and city halls — about zoning, infrastructure, housing, and community investment — determine whether the goals of the Regional Development Plan are realized. The Local Performance Standards in this chapter define the baseline planning actions that ARC expects of every jurisdiction in the region, and the leadership practices that ARC encourages communities to pursue.

The Two Tiers

Regional Planning Foundation (DCA Minimum Standard) — The essential planning actions every local government should have in place to be considered consistent with the 2026 RDP. These are the non-negotiable baseline. ARC will provide technical assistance to help every jurisdiction meet the Foundation by December 2029.

Regional Leadership Practices (DCA Excellence Standard) — A voluntary menu of best practices that go beyond the Foundation. There is no required minimum. Communities that achieve Leadership Practices receive recognition in ARC's annual report and gain priority consideration in competitive ARC assistance programs.

The Two Tracks

ARC recognizes that a municipality of 800 residents does not have the same planning capacity as a county of 900,000. Two tracks accommodate this reality:

Track	Who It Applies To	Foundation Standards
Track A	All counties and all municipalities with a population of 10,000 or more	All 33 Foundation Standards
Track B	Municipalities with a population under 10,000	15 Foundation Standards (marked ★ throughout this chapter)

Compliance Timeline

Date	Milestone
August 2026	RDP adopted. Chapter 6 takes effect. ARC distributes baseline survey to all 87 jurisdictions.
January 2028	First annual compliance report submitted to DCA. Baseline status documented for all jurisdictions.
December 2029	Foundation compliance deadline. All Track A and Track B jurisdictions expected to meet applicable standards.
Annually (January)	Annual survey distributed each October. Results compiled and published in ARC's annual implementation report submitted to DCA.

How Compliance Is Measured

Each year, ARC distributes a brief survey to all 87 jurisdictions — 11 counties and 76 municipalities. For each Foundation Standard, jurisdictions report one of three responses:

Response	What It Means
Yes	The standard is in place. No further action required for this cycle.
In Progress	Work is underway. ARC may offer support. Expected completion should be noted.
No	Not yet in place. ARC will follow up to offer technical assistance. No penalty applies; this is a partnership process.

Survey responses are self-reported by local government staff. ARC may verify responses through its existing planning assistance relationships, CDAP engagement, and DCA comprehensive plan review data. ARC does not conduct independent audits.

Equivalency Requests

A jurisdiction that cannot meet a Foundation Standard as written — but has an equivalent action in place that achieves the same regional outcome — may submit a one-page Equivalency Request to ARC. Requests are reviewed by the Community Development Department within 60 days. Approved equivalencies are documented in the annual report. This replaces the innovation credit system used in the 2020 RDP.

What Consistency With the Regional Plan Means

A jurisdiction is considered consistent with the 2026 RDP when it has met all applicable Foundation Standards by December 2029. Consistency is required to maintain eligibility for ARC-administered financial assistance programs, including CDAP and LCI. It also satisfies the local government plan consistency requirements of DCA's comprehensive planning rules (Chapter 110-12-1).

ARC's Commitment to Local Governments

- ARC will distribute the annual compliance survey each October and publish results each January.
- ARC will notify any jurisdiction reporting a standard as 'No' and offer direct technical assistance.
- ARC will publicly recognize Regional Leadership Practice achievers in each annual report.
- ARC will never use compliance status to penalize a jurisdiction — this is a support process, not an enforcement process.

A.2 Economy and Workforce Standards

These standards support Chapter 4 Goal 1: a competitive, equitable regional economy. They focus on the foundational planning tools that position local governments to attract investment, develop workforce, and participate in regional economic strategy.

E-1 **Current Comprehensive Plan** ★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)	**What:** The jurisdiction has a current, DCA-certified Comprehensive Plan that includes an economic development element. **Why it matters:** The comp plan is the foundation for all local planning decisions and a prerequisite for state and ARC funding eligibility. **ARC support:** ARC's CDAP program provides technical assistance for comp plan updates. Contact: Community Development Department. **Survey question:** Does your jurisdiction have a current, DCA-certified Comprehensive Plan with an economic development element? (Yes / In Progress / No)
E-2 **Public-Facing Government Website** ★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)	**What:** The jurisdiction maintains a public-facing website with government contact information, development requirements, and local economic development resources. **Why it matters:** Accessible information reduces barriers for businesses and developers, supporting economic activity across the region. **ARC support:** ARC can provide guidance on site content best practices through CDAP. **Survey question:** Does your jurisdiction maintain a public-facing website with development requirements and economic development contacts? (Yes / In Progress / No)
E-3 **Regional Economic Coordination** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction participated in at least one ARC-led regional economic coordination activity in the past 12 months (CEDS process, Regional Assembly, workforce board, ARC economic forum). **Why it matters:** Economic challenges and opportunities cross jurisdictional lines. Regional coordination ensures local strategies align with the CEDS and broader workforce goals. **ARC support:** ARC convenes annual CEDS updates, workforce board meetings, and the Regional Assembly. Contact: Community Development / Workforce Solutions. **Survey question:** Did your jurisdiction participate in at least one ARC-led regional economic coordination activity in the past 12 months? (Yes / In Progress / No)

E-4 **Economic Action in Short-Term Work Program** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program includes at least one economic development action item. **Why it matters:** The STWP is the primary implementation tool of the comp plan. An economic action item ensures economic development remains an active local priority. **ARC support:** ARC can assist jurisdictions in identifying and scoping appropriate STWP action items through CDAP. **Survey question:** Does your jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program include at least one economic development action item? (Yes / In Progress / No)

Economy — Regional Leadership Practices

Voluntary. No minimum required. Reported annually in the compliance survey.

Practice ID	Leadership Practice
LE-1	Adopted a fiscal impact analysis process for major development projects.
LE-2	Established or participates in a Tax Allocation District (TAD) or equivalent redevelopment incentive tool.
LE-3	Adopted a local hiring, procurement preference, or small and minority business development program.

A.3 Water Resources Standards

These standards support Chapter 4 Goal 2: protecting the region's water resources. They align with the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's requirements and ARC's Regional Resource Plan. Water planning is among the most consequential local government responsibilities in the Atlanta region.

W-1 **Regionally Important Resources in Comp Plan** ★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)	**What:** The jurisdiction has identified Regionally Important Resources (RIR) in its Comprehensive Plan as Conservation Areas, Areas Requiring Special Attention, or an equivalent classification on the future development map. **Why it matters:** RIR identification in the comp plan is a DCA requirement and ensures that development decisions account for regionally significant natural resources. **ARC support:** ARC maintains the Regional Resource Plan and RIR map. Contact: Natural Resources Department. **Survey question:** Does your jurisdiction's Comprehensive Plan identify Regionally Important Resources as Conservation Areas or equivalent? (Yes / In Progress / No)
W-2 **Tree and Forest Protection Ordinance** ★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)	**What:** The jurisdiction has adopted a tree ordinance, forest conservation ordinance, or equivalent regulation that requires minimum tree retention or replacement standards for new development. **Why it matters:** Tree canopy provides stormwater management, urban heat mitigation, and air quality benefits. Outer suburban development pressure is the leading cause of regional canopy loss. **ARC support:** ARC's CDAP program can assist with tree ordinance development. ARC's Natural Resources team can provide model ordinance language. **Survey question:** Has your jurisdiction adopted a tree ordinance or forest conservation ordinance requiring minimum tree retention or replacement for new development? (Yes / In Progress / No)
W-3 **Green Infrastructure Inventory** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction has prepared an inventory of green infrastructure resources — including passive parks, trails, stream buffers, forests, wetlands, and agricultural land — accompanied by a map. **Why it matters:** A green infrastructure inventory is the foundational tool for protecting natural systems from fragmentation and ensuring conservation areas are reflected in planning decisions. **ARC support:** ARC provides regional GIS data, RIR mapping, and green infrastructure guidance. Contact: Natural Resources Department. **Survey question:** Has your jurisdiction prepared a green infrastructure inventory with a map? (Yes / In Progress / No)

W-4 **Water District Coordination** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction has participated in the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's local government coordination process in the current planning cycle. **Why it matters:** The District's water management plan contains action items that are legally binding for local governments in the Atlanta region. Participation ensures local plans remain consistent with water supply and watershed requirements. **ARC support:** ARC serves as staff to the District. Contact: Natural Resources / Water Planning. **Survey question:** Has your jurisdiction participated in the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's local government coordination process in the current planning cycle? (Yes / In Progress / No)

Water Resources — Regional Leadership Practices

Voluntary. No minimum required. Reported annually in the compliance survey.

Practice ID	Leadership Practice
LW-1	Developed a comprehensive Greenspace or Green Infrastructure Plan for the jurisdiction.
LW-2	Adopted low-impact development (LID) standards for new construction that exceed minimum EPD requirements.
LW-3	Developed a Community Forest Master Plan.

A.4 Transportation and Mobility Standards

These standards support Chapter 4 Goal 3: a safe, multimodal transportation network. The Atlanta region's transportation challenges — severe congestion, limited transit coverage, and pedestrian safety gaps — require local governments to plan proactively for all modes of travel, not just the automobile.

T-1 **Pedestrian Accommodation Requirements** ★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)	**What:** The jurisdiction's land development regulations require pedestrian accommodations — sidewalks, crosswalks, or equivalent — in new development along public street frontages. **Why it matters:** Pedestrian infrastructure gaps are among the most common and most costly transportation deficiencies across the region. Requiring developers to construct connections at the point of development is far more cost-effective than retrofitting later. **ARC support:** ARC's CPA offers training on pedestrian design standards. CDAP can assist with code updates. **Survey question:** Do your jurisdiction's land development regulations require pedestrian accommodations in new development along public street frontages? (Yes / In Progress / No)
T-2 **Comprehensive Transportation Plan Participation** ★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)	**What:** The jurisdiction has participated in the development or most recent update of a local Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) or equivalent multimodal plan. **Why it matters:** A CTP is the primary tool for identifying multimodal transportation needs and priorities at the local level and is required for access to ARC transportation funding programs. **ARC support:** ARC's Transportation Planning Department provides direct assistance with CTP development and updates. **Survey question:** Has your jurisdiction participated in the development or update of a local Comprehensive Transportation Plan or equivalent multimodal plan? (Yes / In Progress / No)
T-3 **Transit-Supportive Zoning Evaluation** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction has evaluated its zoning regulations for transit-supportive development at existing or planned transit station areas identified in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, where applicable. **Why it matters:** Transit investments only achieve their full potential when land use around stations supports walkable, mixed-use development. This evaluation is the first step toward transit-oriented development. **ARC support:** ARC supports TOD planning through LCI and CDAP. ARC and the ATL Authority have a Regional TOD Strategy available as a reference. **Survey question:** Has your jurisdiction evaluated zoning regulations for transit-supportive development near existing or planned transit stations identified in the MTP, where applicable? (Yes / In Progress / No)

T-4

ADA Transition Plan

Track A only

What: The jurisdiction has adopted an ADA Transition Plan for public rights-of-way and government facilities.

Why it matters: An ADA Transition Plan is a federal requirement for governments with 50 or more employees. It ensures that people of all abilities can access public infrastructure — a core equity and livability standard.

ARC support: ARC's CPA provides training on ADA requirements. CDAP can assist with plan development.

Survey question: Has your jurisdiction adopted an ADA Transition Plan for public rights-of-way and facilities? (Yes / In Progress / No)

T-5

Multimodal Action in Short-Term Work Program

Track A only

What: The jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program includes at least one multimodal transportation action item — addressing transit, bicycle, pedestrian, or demand management.

Why it matters: An active STWP commitment to multimodal transportation signals that the jurisdiction is moving toward the transportation goals of the regional plan.

ARC support: ARC can help identify and scope STWP transportation action items through CDAP.

Survey question: Does your jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program include at least one multimodal transportation action item? (Yes / In Progress / No)

Transportation — Regional Leadership Practices

Voluntary. No minimum required. Reported annually in the compliance survey.

Practice ID	Leadership Practice
LT-1	Adopted a Complete Streets policy covering all new road projects and significant reconstruction.
LT-2	Developed a community-wide bicycle and pedestrian plan.
LT-3	Adopted EV-ready development standards or installed EV charging infrastructure at public facilities.
LT-4	Participates in Georgia Commute Options or a regional Transportation Management Association (TMA) program.

A.5 Housing and Community Development Standards

These standards support Chapter 4 Goal 4: affordable, diverse, and stable housing. The Atlanta region's housing affordability crisis — 45% of renters cost-burdened, a median home price exceeding $400,000, and a significant missing-middle housing shortage — demands active engagement by every local government. These standards define the minimum planning foundation for addressing housing at the local level.

H-1

Housing Element in Comprehensive Plan

★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)

What: The jurisdiction's Comprehensive Plan includes a housing element that addresses housing diversity, affordability, and projected residential need.

Why it matters: A housing element ensures that local planning anticipates and plans for the full spectrum of housing needs — not just market-rate single-family development.

ARC support: ARC's Local Housing Studies program (through CDAP) helps jurisdictions develop or strengthen their housing elements.

Survey question: Does your jurisdiction's Comprehensive Plan include a housing element addressing diversity, affordability, and projected need? (Yes / In Progress / No)

H-2

Publicly Accessible Civic Space

★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)

What: The jurisdiction provides or supports at least one publicly accessible civic space — park, community building, recreation facility, or equivalent — available to all residents.

Why it matters: Access to civic space is a basic quality-of-life standard and a community health priority identified in the Live Beyond Expectations framework and the 2026 RDP equity goals.

ARC support: ARC's CDAP program can assist with park and civic space planning. The Culture and Community Design Program supports creative placemaking.

Survey question: Does your jurisdiction provide or support at least one publicly accessible civic space available to all residents? (Yes / In Progress / No)

H-3

Regulatory Barriers Code Audit

Track A only

What: The jurisdiction has conducted a code audit or regulatory review to identify barriers to housing production or diversity within the current planning cycle.

Why it matters: Local zoning and development regulations are frequently the most significant barrier to housing supply. Identifying and addressing those barriers is a prerequisite for meaningful housing progress.

ARC support: ARC's CDAP program can fund and assist with housing code audits. Model audit frameworks are available through the Metro Atlanta Housing Strategy Toolkit.

Survey question: Has your jurisdiction conducted a code audit or regulatory review to identify barriers to housing production or diversity in the current planning cycle? (Yes / In Progress / No)

H-4 **Jobs-Housing Balance Evaluation** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction has evaluated jobs-housing balance in Activity Centers or Corridors as identified on the UGPM, where applicable. **Why it matters:** Spatial mismatch between jobs and affordable housing is one of the region's most significant economic and transportation challenges. Local evaluation is the first step toward addressing it. **ARC support:** ARC provides UGPM-based jobs-housing data and analytical support through the Research and Innovation Department. **Survey question:** Has your jurisdiction evaluated jobs-housing balance in Activity Centers or Corridors identified on the UGPM, where applicable? (Yes / In Progress / No)
H-5 **Housing Action in Short-Term Work Program** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program includes at least one housing affordability or housing diversity action item. **Why it matters:** An active STWP commitment signals that the jurisdiction is taking concrete steps toward the regional housing goals — not just acknowledging them in plan language. **ARC support:** ARC can help identify housing STWP action items through CDAP, the Regional Housing Strategy, and the Metro Atlanta Housing Strategy Toolkit. **Survey question:** Does your jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program include at least one housing affordability or housing diversity action item? (Yes / In Progress / No)

Housing — Regional Leadership Practices

Voluntary. No minimum required. Reported annually in the compliance survey.

Practice ID	Leadership Practice
LH-1	Adopted regulations allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) by right in at least one residential zoning district.
LH-2	Adopted missing-middle housing regulations (duplexes, triplexes, or small multifamily) in at least one zoning district.
LH-3	Established or contributed to a Housing Trust Fund or equivalent affordable housing financing mechanism.

A.6 Land Use and Development Patterns Standards

These standards support Chapter 4 Goal 5: land use patterns that direct growth to the right places. The UGPM is the regional land use policy framework that connects local comprehensive plans to ARC's transportation, housing, and environmental programs. These standards ensure that local land use decisions align with regional growth priorities.

L-1
Land Development Regulations Consistent With Comp Plan

★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)

What: The jurisdiction has adopted land development regulations — zoning, subdivision, development standards — that are consistent with its Comprehensive Plan and UGPM area type designation.

Why it matters: Regulatory consistency is the bridge between planning intentions and on-the-ground outcomes. Inconsistent regulations undermine both local and regional planning investments.

ARC support: ARC's CDAP program can fund zoning audits and regulatory updates. The UGPM area type guidance is available through ARC's Community Development Department.

Survey question: Has your jurisdiction adopted land development regulations consistent with its Comprehensive Plan and UGPM area type designation? (Yes / In Progress / No)

L-2
UGPM Designations in Future Development Map

★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)

What: The jurisdiction's Comprehensive Plan future development map identifies the jurisdiction's UGPM area type designations.

Why it matters: Explicit UGPM identification in the future development map is how ARC connects local plans to the regional forecasting and investment models — including the MTP, PECAS, and DRI review processes.

ARC support: ARC provides UGPM mapping and coordination support through the Community Development and Research and Innovation Departments.

Survey question: Does your jurisdiction's Comprehensive Plan future development map identify UGPM area type designations? (Yes / In Progress / No)

L-3
UGPM Review and Coordination Participation

Track A only

What: The jurisdiction has participated in ARC's UGPM review and coordination process in the current planning cycle.

Why it matters: The UGPM is updated on a five-year cycle through a collaborative process with all 11 county planning departments. Local participation ensures that the regional land use framework accurately reflects local growth plans.

ARC support: ARC's Land Use Coordinating Committee (LUCC) is the primary forum for UGPM coordination. Contact: Community Development Department.

Survey question: Has your jurisdiction participated in ARC's UGPM review and coordination process in the current planning cycle? (Yes / In Progress / No)

L-4 **Infill and Redevelopment Site Inventory** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction has prepared or maintains an inventory of vacant, underused, or brownfield sites suitable for infill development or redevelopment. **Why it matters:** Directing growth to underutilized sites within established areas reduces infrastructure costs, protects rural land, and maximizes existing public investment — a core principle of the UGPM and the 2026 RDP. **ARC support:** ARC's CDAP program can assist with site inventories. Neighborhood Nexus provides regional data on vacant and underused parcels. **Survey question:** Has your jurisdiction prepared or maintained an inventory of vacant, underused, or brownfield sites suitable for infill or redevelopment? (Yes / In Progress / No)
L-5 **Infill or Redevelopment Action in Short-Term Work Program** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program includes at least one infill development, redevelopment, or land use efficiency action item. **Why it matters:** An active STWP commitment to infill and redevelopment demonstrates that the jurisdiction is working to align growth with the UGPM framework and regional land use goals. **ARC support:** ARC can help identify and scope infill-related STWP action items through CDAP. **Survey question:** Does your jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program include at least one infill development, redevelopment, or land use efficiency action item? (Yes / In Progress / No)

Land Use — Regional Leadership Practices

Voluntary. No minimum required. Reported annually in the compliance survey.

Practice ID	Leadership Practice
LL-1	Adopted form-based code or design standards for at least one Activity Center or Corridor as identified on the UGPM.
LL-2	Adopted parking maximums or meaningfully reduced parking minimums in mixed-use or transit-served areas.
LL-3	Adopted zoning that supports LCI plan recommendations (applies to jurisdictions with an adopted LCI plan only).

A.7 Environment and Natural Systems Standards

These standards support Chapter 4 Goal 6: protecting the region's natural systems and building climate resilience. Development pressure on tree canopy, increased impervious surface, and the growing frequency of extreme weather events are among the most significant environmental challenges facing the region through 2050.

N-1

Stormwater Management Regulations

★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)

What: The jurisdiction has adopted stormwater management regulations consistent with Georgia EPD requirements and applicable NPDES permit conditions.

Why it matters: Impervious surface growth is the primary driver of nonpoint source water pollution and downstream flooding in the region. Local stormwater regulations are the first line of defense.

ARC support: ARC's Natural Resources team and the Water Planning District provide technical assistance on stormwater management. Contact: Natural Resources Department.

Survey question: Has your jurisdiction adopted stormwater management regulations consistent with Georgia EPD requirements and applicable NPDES permit conditions? (Yes / In Progress / No)

N-2

Tree Canopy Protection Ordinance

★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)

What: The jurisdiction has adopted a tree canopy protection or urban forestry ordinance that requires canopy retention, replacement, or both for new development and redevelopment.

Why it matters: Atlanta's tree canopy is one of the region's most celebrated assets and a critical piece of its green infrastructure network. Rapid outer suburban development is measurably reducing canopy cover. Local ordinances are the primary protection mechanism.

ARC support: ARC's Natural Resources team can provide model ordinance language and technical guidance. CDAP can fund ordinance development.

Survey question: Has your jurisdiction adopted a tree canopy protection or urban forestry ordinance requiring retention, replacement, or both for new development? (Yes / In Progress / No)

N-3

Green Building Code Audit

Track A only

What: The jurisdiction has conducted a code audit to identify regulatory barriers to green building, energy efficiency, or renewable energy installation.

Why it matters: Many jurisdictions have outdated codes that inadvertently prohibit or discourage energy-efficient design, solar installation, or green building practices. Identifying and removing those barriers is low-cost and high-impact.

ARC support: ARC's CDAP program can fund green building code audits. The Metro Atlanta Climate Action Plan (MACAP) provides a framework for local code improvements.

Survey question: Has your jurisdiction conducted a code audit to identify regulatory barriers to green building, energy efficiency, or renewable energy? (Yes / In Progress / No)

N-4 **Environmental Action in Short-Term Work Program** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program includes at least one environmental resilience, green infrastructure, or natural systems protection action item. **Why it matters:** Climate resilience and environmental protection require active local investment. An STWP commitment ensures these goals move from plan language to funded action. **ARC support:** ARC can help identify environment-related STWP action items through CDAP and MACAP implementation guidance. **Survey question:** Does your jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program include at least one environmental resilience, green infrastructure, or natural systems protection action item? (Yes / In Progress / No)
N-5 **Metro Atlanta Climate Action Plan (MACAP) Step** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction has taken at least one documented step toward implementing locally applicable measures from the Metro Atlanta Climate Action Plan (MACAP), adopted December 2025. **Why it matters:** MACAP establishes the region's commitment to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 with 24 specific measures. Local government action is essential to achieving regional climate goals. This standard is intentionally flexible — one documented step, proportional to local capacity. **ARC support:** ARC's Natural Resources Department provides MACAP implementation guidance and can identify the most relevant and achievable measures for each jurisdiction. **Survey question:** Has your jurisdiction taken at least one documented step toward implementing locally applicable measures from MACAP? (Yes / In Progress / No)

Environment — Regional Leadership Practices

Voluntary. No minimum required. Reported annually in the compliance survey.

Practice ID	Leadership Practice
LN-1	Adopted green building standards for new or substantially renovated government-owned buildings.
LN-2	Developed a local climate resilience or adaptation action plan.
LN-3	Achieved or is actively pursuing a recognized sustainability certification or designation (e.g., Tree City USA, LEED ND, Clean Energy Community).

A.8 Access, Opportunity, and Resilience Standards

These standards support Chapter 4 Goal 7: closing the region's equity gaps and building resilient communities. The Atlanta region's 25-year life expectancy gap between ZIP codes in the same county — and its ranking last among the 50 largest metros for economic mobility — are not abstract statistics. They are the direct result of planning and investment decisions made over decades. These standards ask every local government to take concrete steps toward more equitable outcomes.

Q-1 **Multilingual Public Engagement** ★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)	**What:** The jurisdiction provides multilingual public notice or engagement materials for planning processes, proportional to the non-English-speaking population in the jurisdiction. **Why it matters:** Meaningful participation in planning requires that residents can understand what is being proposed and how to engage. Language access is a legal requirement under Title VI and a basic equity standard. **ARC support:** ARC can provide guidance on language access planning and identify translation resources. The Regional Assembly engagement team has experience with multilingual outreach. **Survey question:** Does your jurisdiction provide multilingual public notice or engagement materials for planning processes, proportional to the non-English-speaking population? (Yes / In Progress / No)

Q-2 **Planning Commissioner Training** ★ Applies to all jurisdictions (Track A and B)	**What:** At least 50% of the jurisdiction's current planning commission members have completed ARC's Community Planning Academy (CPA) introductory training or an equivalent, within their first 12 months of appointment. **Why it matters:** Planning commissioners make consequential decisions about land use, zoning, and community development. Training ensures they understand the regional context, legal requirements, and best practices that inform those decisions. **ARC support:** ARC's CPA offers introductory training multiple times per year at no cost to jurisdictions. Contact: Community Development Department. **Survey question:** Have at least 50% of your jurisdiction's current planning commission members completed CPA introductory training or equivalent within their first 12 months? (Yes / In Progress / No)

Q-3 **School Board Coordination Agreement** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction has developed a coordination agreement or MOU with local school boards covering school siting, enrollment forecasts, joint facility use, and Safe Routes to School, where applicable. **Why it matters:** School siting decisions significantly influence land use, transportation patterns, and community health outcomes. Coordination between planning and school systems is essential for efficient infrastructure and equitable access. **ARC support:** ARC's CDAP program can assist with MOU development. The SS4A program provides funding for Safe Routes to School planning. **Survey question:** Has your jurisdiction developed a coordination agreement or MOU with local school boards covering school siting, forecasts, joint facility use, and Safe Routes to School? (Yes / In Progress / No)
Q-4 **Senior Services Coordination Program** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction has developed a coordination program with senior service providers — regarding senior transportation, senior housing, and senior-focused services. **Why it matters:** The share of the region's population aged 65 and older is projected to nearly double by 2050. Coordination between planning and aging services is a Live Beyond Expectations priority and a regional resilience imperative. **ARC support:** ARC's Aging and Independence Services Department can assist jurisdictions in developing senior coordination programs and connecting to existing regional resources. **Survey question:** Has your jurisdiction developed a coordination program with senior service providers regarding transportation, housing, and senior-focused services? (Yes / In Progress / No)
Q-5 **Equity Action in Short-Term Work Program** Track A only	**What:** The jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program includes at least one equity-focused action item — addressing access, affordability, inclusion, or community resilience. **Why it matters:** An active STWP commitment to equity signals that the jurisdiction is taking concrete steps toward the regional equity goals — not simply acknowledging them in plan language. **ARC support:** ARC can help identify equity-related STWP action items through CDAP and the RDP equity framework. **Survey question:** Does your jurisdiction's current Short-Term Work Program include at least one equity-focused action item addressing access, affordability, inclusion, or resilience? (Yes / In Progress / No)

Access, Opportunity & Resilience — Regional Leadership Practices

Voluntary. No minimum required. Reported annually in the compliance survey.

Practice ID	Leadership Practice
LQ-1	Developed a formal public engagement process that reaches underrepresented populations beyond standard legal notice requirements.
LQ-2	Adopted age-friendly or Lifelong Communities design principles into at least one development regulation or overlay district.
LQ-3	Conducted or commissioned an equity impact assessment for a major land use decision, infrastructure investment, or planning initiative.

A.9 Standards Summary and Applicability

The table below summarizes all 33 Foundation Standards by category, with Track A and Track B applicability. The full compliance tracking table — listing all 87 jurisdictions and their annual survey responses — is published each January as part of ARC's Annual Implementation Report to DCA.

ID	Foundation Standard	Track A	Track B ★
Economy & Workforce			
E-1	Current DCA-certified Comprehensive Plan with economic development element	•	•
E-2	Public-facing website with development requirements and economic contacts	•	•
E-3	Participation in at least one ARC-led regional economic coordination activity (past 12 months)	•	—
E-4	Economic development action item in current Short-Term Work Program	•	—
Water Resources			
W-1	Regionally Important Resources identified in comp plan	•	•
W-2	Tree/forest protection ordinance with minimum retention or replacement standards	•	•
W-3	Green infrastructure inventory with map	•	—
W-4	Participation in Water District local government coordination process	•	—
Transportation & Mobility			
T-1	Pedestrian accommodation requirements in land development regulations	•	•
T-2	Participation in local CTP development or update	•	•
T-3	Transit-supportive zoning evaluation at MTP station areas (where applicable)	•	—
T-4	ADA Transition Plan for public rights-of-way and facilities	•	—
T-5	Multimodal action item in current Short-Term Work Program	•	—
Housing & Community Development			
H-1	Housing element in comp plan addressing diversity, affordability, and projected need	•	•
H-2	At least one publicly accessible civic space available to all residents	•	•

H-1	Housing element in comp plan addressing diversity, affordability, and projected need	●	●
H-2	At least one publicly accessible civic space available to all residents	●	●
H-3	Code audit to identify housing production or diversity barriers	●	—
H-4	Jobs-housing balance evaluation in UGPM Activity Centers/Corridors (where applicable)	●	—
H-5	Housing affordability or diversity action item in Short-Term Work Program	●	—
Land Use & Development Patterns			
L-1	Land development regulations consistent with comp plan and UGPM area type	●	●
L-2	UGPM area type designations identified in future development map	●	●
L-3	Participation in ARC's UGPM review and coordination process	●	—
L-4	Inventory of vacant, underused, or brownfield sites	●	—
L-5	Infill/redevelopment action item in Short-Term Work Program	●	—
Environment & Natural Systems			
N-1	Stormwater management regulations consistent with Georgia EPD/NPDES requirements	●	●
N-2	Tree canopy protection ordinance requiring retention or replacement for new development	●	●
N-3	Code audit for green building/energy efficiency barriers	●	—
N-4	Environmental resilience or green infrastructure action item in Short-Term Work Program	●	—
N-5	At least one documented MACAP implementation step	●	—
Access, Opportunity & Regional Resilience			
Q-1	Multilingual public engagement materials, proportional to non-English-speaking population	●	●
Q-2	50% of planning commission members completed CPA training within first 12 months	●	●
Q-3	Coordination agreement with school boards (siting, forecasts, Safe Routes)	●	—
Q-4	Coordination program with senior service providers	●	—
Q-5	Equity-focused action item in Short-Term Work Program	●	—

● Required — Not required for Track B ● Track B universal standards (15 total)

PART B: Quality Community Objectives — Regional Assessment

B.1 Introduction

Georgia's Quality Community Objectives (QCOs) are ten state planning ideals established by DCA to guide comprehensive planning by local governments and regional commissions across Georgia. DCA's Rules (Chapter 110-12-6) require every regional plan to include an analysis of consistency with the QCOs — an honest assessment of where the region measures up and where gaps remain.

This assessment was conducted as part of the 2026 RDP update, drawing on regional data, Chapter 2 conditions analysis, community engagement findings, and ARC's ongoing planning programs. It is not a self-congratulatory summary. Where the region has made progress, that progress is acknowledged. Where gaps persist, they are named — and connected to the goals, policies, and performance standards that address them.

How QCOs and Performance Standards Relate

The QCO assessment (Part B) identifies gaps at the regional level. The Performance Standards (Part A) define what local governments should do to help close those gaps. The two parts are designed to be read together: every significant gap identified in Part B has a corresponding standard in Part A.



B.2 Regional Consistency Assessment

Each QCO is assessed using a three-level rating:

Rating	Meaning
Consistent	The region demonstrates strong alignment with this objective. Policies, programs, and local practices support the stated ideal.
Partially Consistent	The region has meaningful progress, but significant gaps remain. Policies exist but implementation is uneven.
Needs Attention	The region has significant unresolved gaps. Existing policies and programs are insufficient to address the challenge.

QCO 1 — Economic Prosperity	◐ Partially Consistent

DCA Objective: Encourage development or expansion of businesses and industries that are suitable for the community.

Where the region is strong: The Atlanta region is the 10th largest economy in the United States, with globally competitive sectors in logistics, finance, technology, and film. The CEDS 2022 provides a strong regional framework, and ARC's workforce programs reach thousands of residents annually.

Where gaps remain: The region ranks 50th out of 50 major metros for economic mobility. Nearly 187,000 youth live in poverty across the 11-county area. Minority-owned businesses generate 30–50% less revenue than their white-owned counterparts. Economic growth is not reaching all residents or all communities equally.

2026 RDP response: Chapter 4 Goal 1; Standards E-1, E-3, E-4; Leadership Practices LE-1, LE-2, LE-3

QCO 2 — Educational Opportunities	◐ Partially Consistent

DCA Objective: Make educational and training opportunities readily available to enable all community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, and pursue life ambitions.

Where the region is strong: ARC serves as the Atlanta Regional Workforce Board for seven counties, operating Career Resource Centers and technical training programs. The region's universities and colleges provide a world-class higher education pipeline.

Where gaps remain: Skills gaps in high-demand technical fields persist. Black residents represent only 9% of the STEM workforce nationally. Learning loss from the COVID-19 pandemic reversed years of educational progress for lower-income youth. Broadband gaps in rural and lower-income areas limit access to online education and remote work.

2026 RDP response: Chapter 4 Goal 1 (workforce); Standard Q-2 (planning commissioner training); Leadership Practice LQ-1

QCO 3 — Community Health	◐ Partially Consistent

DCA Objective: Ensure that all community residents, regardless of age, ability, or income, have access to critical goods and services, safe neighborhoods, and good work opportunities.

Where the region is strong: ARC integrates transportation, housing, aging services, and workforce development through its multi-agency structure. The Live Beyond Expectations framework directly addresses aging-related health and access needs.

Where gaps remain: A 25-year life expectancy gap exists between ZIP codes within the same county — one of the most striking inequality indicators in the region. Communities of color and lower-income areas consistently have less access to parks, healthy food, quality healthcare, and safe transportation. These disparities are rooted in land use and infrastructure decisions.

2026 RDP response: Chapter 4 Goal 7; Standards Q-1, Q-4, Q-5; Leadership Practices LQ-1, LQ-2, LQ-3

QCO 4 — Efficient Land Use	◐ Partially Consistent

DCA Objective: Maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the costly conversion of undeveloped land at the periphery of the community.

Where the region is strong: The UGPM directs growth to existing infrastructure and activity centers. Over 130 LCI areas promote compact, mixed-use development. Market demand for walkable, infill development is growing across the region.

Where gaps remain: The region continues to expand outward at a rate faster than population growth — consuming rural and agricultural land and requiring costly new infrastructure extensions. Regulatory barriers to infill development remain widespread. Outer suburban development is the leading driver of tree canopy loss and impervious surface growth.

2026 RDP response: Chapter 4 Goal 5; Standards L-1, L-2, L-3, L-4, L-5; Leadership Practices LL-1, LL-2

QCO 5 — Housing Options	○ Needs Attention

DCA Objective: Promote an adequate range of safe, affordable, inclusive, and resource-efficient housing in the community.

Where the region is strong: ARC has led development of the first Regional Housing Strategy for the metro area, providing a shared framework and toolkit for local action. The LCI program enables housing-supportive planning in activity centers.

Where gaps remain: 45% of renters across the region are cost-burdened. The median home price exceeds $400,000. The region has lost tens of thousands of affordable units to market pressures. Missing-middle housing types remain prohibited or heavily restricted in most jurisdictions. Displacement is accelerating in urban and inner-ring suburban communities.

2026 RDP response: Chapter 4 Goal 4; Standards H-1, H-2, H-3, H-4, H-5; Leadership Practices LH-1, LH-2, LH-3

QCO 6 — Regional Cooperation	● Consistent

DCA Objective: Cooperate with neighboring jurisdictions to address shared needs.

Where the region is strong: ARC's governance structure — monthly Board meetings of county and municipal elected officials, formal advisory committees, the LUCC, the Transportation Coordinating Committee, and annual convenings including the Regional Assembly — provides one of the strongest regional cooperation frameworks in the Southeast. The RDP itself is the product of extensive intergovernmental engagement.

Where gaps remain: Intergovernmental cooperation is structurally strong but not uniform. Some jurisdictions are more consistently engaged than others. Service delivery strategy agreements between counties and municipalities require ongoing attention.

2026 RDP response: Chapter 4 Goal 7; Standard E-3; Leadership Practice LQ-1

QCO 7 — Resource Management	◐ Partially Consistent

DCA Objective: Promote the efficient use of natural resources and identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas of the community.

Where the region is strong: The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District provides a strong governance framework for water resource management. Per capita water use has declined 27% since 2001. ARC's Regional Resource Plan identifies and maps Regionally Important Resources across the region.

Where gaps remain: Tree canopy is declining in rapidly developing suburban areas. Impervious surface coverage is growing. Data center proliferation is creating significant new water and energy demand. Many jurisdictions lack tree ordinances, green infrastructure plans, or stormwater regulations beyond minimum state requirements.

2026 RDP response: Chapter 4 Goals 2 and 6; Standards W-1, W-2, W-3, W-4, N-1, N-2, N-3, N-4; Leadership Practices LW-1, LW-2, LN-1, LN-2

QCO 8 — Sense of Place	● Consistent

DCA Objective: Protect and enhance the community's unique qualities.

Where the region is strong: The region's 76 municipalities represent a genuine diversity of community character — from historic downtowns like Decatur and Marietta to rural crossroads communities to emerging mixed-use nodes. The LCI program has supported over 130 community-specific planning efforts. Fourteen communities participate in the National Main Street Program.

Where gaps remain: Rapid growth and displacement pressure threaten the character of long-established communities — particularly communities of color in the urban core and inner suburbs. As growth accelerates in outer suburban areas, proactive planning for community character is needed before development patterns become entrenched.

2026 RDP response: Chapter 4 Goals 4 and 5; Standards L-1, L-2, H-3; Leadership Practices LL-1, LL-3

QCO 9 — Transportation Options	○ Needs Attention

DCA Objective: Address the transportation needs, challenges, and opportunities of all community residents.

Where the region is strong: The 2050 MTP represents $168 billion in planned transportation investment. MARTA serves the urban core. Georgia Commute Options and regional TMA programs provide demand management across the region.

Where gaps remain: Atlanta consistently ranks among the top five most congested metros in the United States. Only two of eleven counties have heavy rail transit service. The bicycle and pedestrian network is fragmented. Over half of all workers commute across county lines, many without viable transit alternatives. Transportation costs are a significant burden for lower-income households.

2026 RDP response: Chapter 4 Goal 3; Standards T-1, T-2, T-3, T-4, T-5; Leadership Practices LT-1, LT-2, LT-3, LT-4

QCO 10 — Traditional Neighborhoods and Infill	◐ Partially Consistent

DCA Objective: Ensure that infill development and new development adjacent to existing neighborhoods are compatible in scale, use, and design.

Where the region is strong: The LCI program, CDAP, and ARC's UGPM framework all promote compact, compatible infill development. Market demand for walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods is growing across the region.

Where gaps remain: Regulatory barriers to infill remain widespread — restrictive zoning, parking requirements, setback standards, and minimum lot sizes that were designed for greenfield development. Many jurisdictions lack the code infrastructure to guide compatible infill. Displacement from infill investment is a growing concern in lower-income communities.

2026 RDP response: Chapter 4 Goal 5; Standards L-1, L-4, L-5, H-3; Leadership Practices LL-1, LL-2

B.3 Summary: Where the Region Stands

The following table summarizes the regional QCO consistency ratings and cross-references to the standards designed to address identified gaps.

Quality Community Objective	Rating	Primary Standards Addressing Gaps
Economic Prosperity	Partially Consistent	E-1, E-3, E-4; LE-1, LE-2, LE-3
Educational Opportunities	Partially Consistent	Q-2; LQ-1
Community Health	Partially Consistent	Q-1, Q-4, Q-5; LQ-1, LQ-2, LQ-3
Efficient Land Use	Partially Consistent	L-1 through L-5; LL-1, LL-2
Housing Options	Needs Attention	H-1 through H-5; LH-1, LH-2, LH-3
Regional Cooperation	Consistent	E-3; LQ-1
Resource Management	Partially Consistent	W-1, W-2, W-3, W-4, N-1–N-4; LW-1–3, LN-1–3
Sense of Place	Consistent	L-1, L-2, H-3; LL-1, LL-3
Transportation Options	Needs Attention	T-1 through T-5; LT-1, LT-2, LT-3, LT-4
Traditional Neighborhoods & Infill	Partially Consistent	L-1, L-4, L-5, H-3; LL-1, LL-2

Priority Areas for the 2026–2031 Planning Cycle

Two Quality Community Objectives are rated Needs Attention — Housing Options and Transportation Options. Both are named priorities of the 2026 RDP, reflected in Chapter 4 Goals 3 and 4, and addressed by the most robust sets of Performance Standards in Part A. Closing the region's housing affordability gap and transit coverage gap are the two challenges most directly within the influence of local government planning decisions. Progress on these two objectives will define the region's planning success over the next five years.

APPENDIX

Regional Resource Plan

What Is the Regional Resource Plan?

The Regional Resource Plan (RRP) is ARC's framework for identifying and protecting Regionally Important Resources (RIRs) — natural, cultural, historic, agricultural, and scenic resources that have significance beyond any single jurisdiction's boundaries. RIRs range from river corridors and urban forests to National Register historic districts and trail networks.

The RRP establishes the regional policy for how these resources are identified, classified, and protected through local comprehensive plans, development regulations, and ARC's planning programs. It provides the foundational resource inventory that informs the Unified Growth Policy Map (UGPM), the Regional Development Plan's land use goals, and ARC's Natural Resources Department programs.

DCA Requirement

The Regional Resource Plan is a required component of every Regional Development Plan under Georgia DCA's Standards and Procedures for Regional Planning (Chapter 110-12-6). DCA rules require Regional Commissions to maintain an inventory of Regionally Important Resources and to establish policy for their protection as part of the regional planning process. The rules do not require the RRP to be updated with every RDP cycle — only that it be included and remain current.

Why the 2026 RDP Retains the Existing RRP

ARC's current Regional Resource Plan was adopted in 2016 and incorporated into the 2020 Regional Development Plan without substantive revision. For the 2026 RDP, ARC has again reviewed the RRP and determined that a full update is not warranted. Three factors support this decision:

01

The resource inventory remains accurate.

The RIR categories and individual resource listings identified in the 2016 plan continue to reflect the region's most significant natural, cultural, and historic assets. No major new resource categories have emerged, and no listed resources have been formally delisted.

02

The policy framework is still relevant.

The RRP's approach to Green Infrastructure, resource vulnerability assessment, and local government guidance remains consistent with DCA rules, current best practices, and the goals of the 2026 RDP. The 2026 plan's emphasis on tree canopy, water resources, and natural systems protection directly reinforces the RRP's priorities.

03

A targeted update is planned.

ARC is undertaking a targeted review of tree canopy and urban forest resource classifications in the 2026–2027 period, informed by recent regional canopy data and the Metro Atlanta Climate Action Plan (MACAP). Any material updates will be incorporated into the next RDP cycle.

What the Regional Resource Plan Contains

The Regional Resource Plan that follows this introduction is the 2020 ARC Regional Resource Plan, as incorporated into the 2020 Regional Development Plan. It includes:

- Background on ARC's history of resource planning, dating to the 1950s
- The methodology for identifying and classifying Regionally Important Resources, including the Value and Vulnerability Assessment framework
- The full inventory of RIRs by category: Areas of Conservation and Recreation Value; Historic, Cultural, and Scenic Resources; Greenways and Trails; Agricultural Resources; and Urban Forest
- Maps of RIR locations across the 11-county region
- Policy guidance for local governments on how to incorporate RIRs into comprehensive plans, future development maps, and land development regulations
- Guidance on development practices in and adjacent to RIR areas

How the RRP Connects to the 2026 Regional Development Plan

The Regional Resource Plan is not a standalone document — it is an integrated part of ARC's planning framework. The RIRs identified in the RRP are referenced throughout the 2026 RDP: they inform the **UGPM area type classifications** (particularly Rural Conservation and Activity Center designations); they underpin **Chapter 4's natural systems and water resources goals**; and they anchor **Performance Standards W-1 and N-2 in Chapter 6**, which require local governments to identify RIRs in their comprehensive plans and adopt tree canopy protection ordinances. The RRP is the evidentiary and policy foundation for all of these connections.

How Local Governments Should Use This Appendix

Local governments across the region should use the Regional Resource Plan to:

- Identify which Regionally Important Resources fall within or adjacent to their jurisdiction
- Ensure that their comprehensive plan's future development map designates RIR areas as Conservation Areas, Areas Requiring Special Attention, or an equivalent classification — as required by Performance Standard W-1
- Reference the RRP's development guidance when reviewing applications for development in or near RIR areas
- Coordinate with ARC's Natural Resources Department on resource protection strategies through the CDAP programs

Questions about the Regional Resource Plan or the RIR inventory should be directed to ARC's Natural Resources Department: naturalresources@atlantaregional.org | atlantaregional.org/natural-resources



PRIORITY REGIONAL RESOURCE PLAN ANALYSIS & GUIDANCE

Draft February 2021



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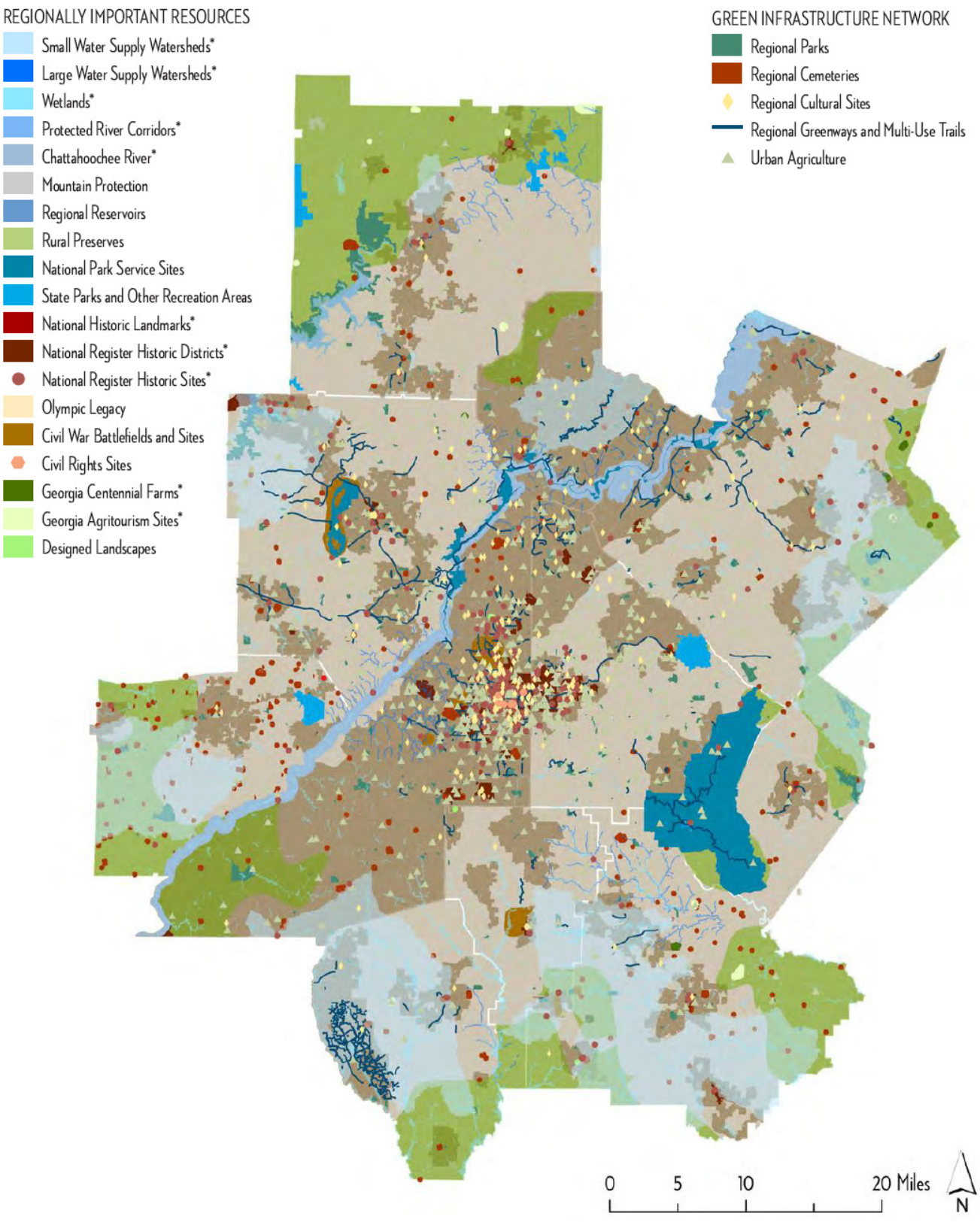


*Classified as Priority Regionally Important Resources

INTRODUCTION

Regionally Important Resources are defined as "any natural or cultural resource area identified for protection by a Regional Commission."

BACKGROUND

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency created by the local governments in the Atlanta region pursuant to legislation passed by the Georgia General Assembly. As an area of greater than 1,000,000 in population, ARC has authority under state laws as both a Metropolitan Area Planning and Development Commission (MAPDC) and Regional Commission (RC).

ARC engages in a continuous program of research, study and planning of numerous matters affecting the Atlanta region. As a Regional Commission, ARC must prepare and adopt a Regional Plan to meet both federal transportation planning rules and also minimum standards and procedures for regional planning developed by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA).

ARC's current Regional Resource plan including the current catagories was adopted in 2016. With the revisions to Chapter 110-12-6, Standards and Procedures for Regional Planning, "Regional Planning Requirements." in 2018, ARC needed to conduct analysis of the catagories to identify "Threatended Regional Important Resources", and develop guidence for development practices

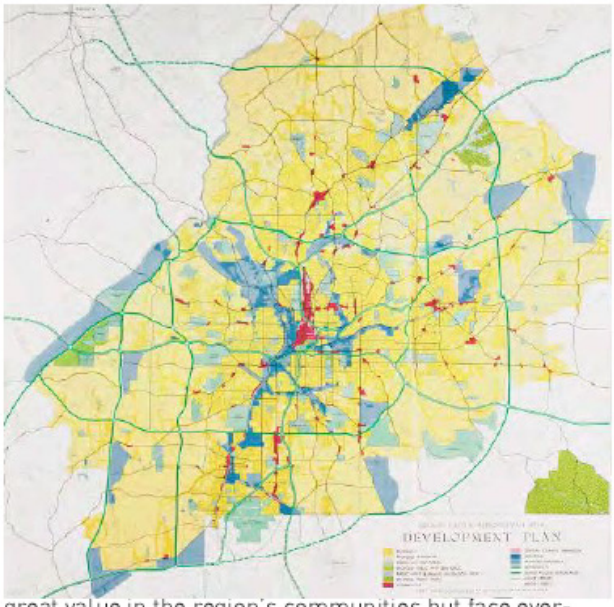
HISTORY OF REGIONALLY IMPORTANT RESOURCES

The Atlanta Regional Commission has been planning for natural, cultural, and historic resources since the 1950s, producing plans such as the 1954 Regional Development Plan, the 1963 Nature Preserves Plan, and the 1972 Chattahoochee Recreation Area Study. In the 1980s and 1990s, ARC began identifying Regionally Important Resources based on rules defined by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. While these rules have changed to focus on the creation and documentation of a regional Green Infrastructure Network, the resource lists from the 1989 and 1996 Resource Plans provide insight into the region's priorities 30 years ago. The rules define the Green Infrastructure Network as "a strategically planned and managed network of wilderness, parks, greenways, conservation easements, and working lands with conservation value."

Many of the resources currently classified as Areas of Conservation and/or Recreation and Historic or Cultural Resources were already included in these plans. However, resources such as Greenways and Trails and some historic resources not listed on the National Register have been added as their importance and/or vulnerability in the region has grown. The 1996 plan highlights Prime Forest Land and Tree Cover, which did not appear in recent updates of the plan. However, Urban Forest has been added as a crucial component of the Green Infrastructure Network in this update due to the numerous environmental and social benefits of trees. While the 1989 and 1996 plans identified several pieces of the region's infrastructure as Regionally Important Resources, such as the Freeway System, the Public Transportation System, the Railroad System, and the Airport System, as well as Regional Hospitals and Publicly Assisted Housing, more recent updates of the Resource Plan have placed greater importance on regional connectivity through trails and greenspace, as well as agricultural and scenic resources. These resources have

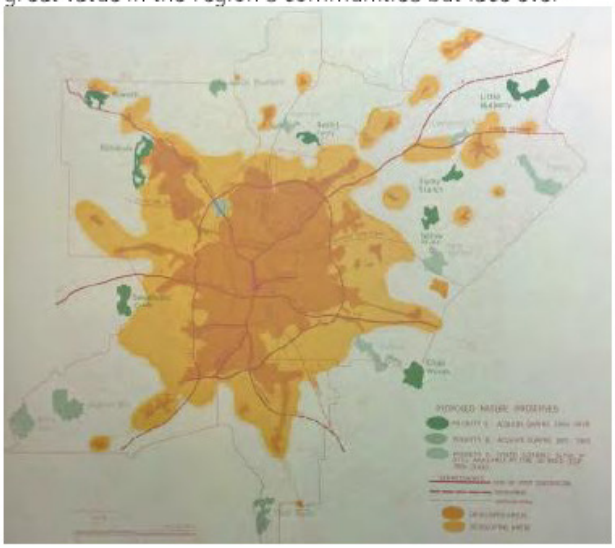


1976 NATURE PRESERVES PLAN



1954 REGIONAL PLAN

great value in the region's communities but face ever-



1963 NATURE PRESERVES PLAN



1976 NATURE PRESERVES PLAN

growing pressure due to development and overuse.

DESIGNATION OF REGIONALLY IMPORTANT RESOURCES

Pursuant to Rules of the Department of Community Affairs, Chapter 110-12-4, Regionally Important Resources are defined as "any natural or cultural resource area identified for protection by a Regional Commission following the minimum requirements established by the Department." The 2016 Regional Resource Plan was designed to:

- *Enhance the focus on protection and management of important natural and cultural resources in the Atlanta region.*
- *Provide for careful consideration of, and planning for, impacts of new development on these important resources.*
- *Improve local, regional, and state level coordination in the protection and management of identified resources.*

The plan will identified the methodology and process involved in selecting Regionally Important Resources. It will include a map of Regionally Important Resources, a brief narrative relating the values and vulnerabilities of each resource, as well as guidance for appropriate development practices and general policies, protection measures, and management strategies for identified resources. Ultimately, the plan is used to "...coordinate activities and planning of local governments, land trusts and conservation or environmental protection groups' activities in the region, and state agencies toward protection and management of the identified Regionally Important Resources."

In 2016, ARC adopted the Regional Resource Plan and the current catagories of the Regional Important Resources. That map is on page 9.

IDENTIFICATION OF REGIONALLY IMPORTANT RESOURCES

The rules promulgated by the Department of Community Affairs give general direction in identifying potential resources.

1. *Accept nominations by any individual, interested organization, local government/ government agency*
2. *Consider resources identified by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources as State Vital Areas*
3. *Consider natural or cultural resources that are already preserved by an existing conservation mechanism*
4. *Consider natural or cultural resources identified by other state agencies and/or environmental protection organizations*

GIS data used for conservation mapping was collected and analyzed as the foundation of the 2016 Regionally Important Resources Map. ARC staff also reviewed existing state and federal programs that document and manage significant natural and cultural resources, as well as activities undertaken by a variety of non-profit organizations working to further conservation goals of the natural and built environment.

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING VALUE OF REGIONALLY IMPORTANT RESOURCES.

In addition to guidelines established within the DCA Rules, the ARC Board adopted six criteria to provide guidance in selecting resources that should be considered priorities.

1. *Preserves water quality and quantity by protecting drainage, flood control, recharge areas, watersheds, buffers, etc.*
2. *Creates or preserves active or passive greenspaces including trails, gardens and informal places of natural enjoyment in areas currently underserved by greenspace*
3. *Protects wildlife habitat by creating, buffering, preserving habitat areas and corridors*
4. *Preserves areas that have historical or cultural value by virtue of history, place or time period represented*
5. *Preserves significant working agricultural or forest resources and/or creates opportunities for local food production activities*
6. *Areas that contribute to region-wide connections between existing and proposed regional resources*

IDENTIFICATION OF VULNERABILITY OF REGIONALLY IMPORTANT RESOURCES.

The criteria for determining Regionally Important Resources allows for a concise snapshot of the value of each resource to the Atlanta Region. In recognizing the value of these resources, consideration is also given to their potential vulnerabilities. Nominations included descriptions of the resource's vulnerabilities and the degree to which the resource is threatened or endangered. Review of the nominations for each resource provided a similar snapshot in regard to vulnerability. Generally, threats to resources fell within three broad categories.

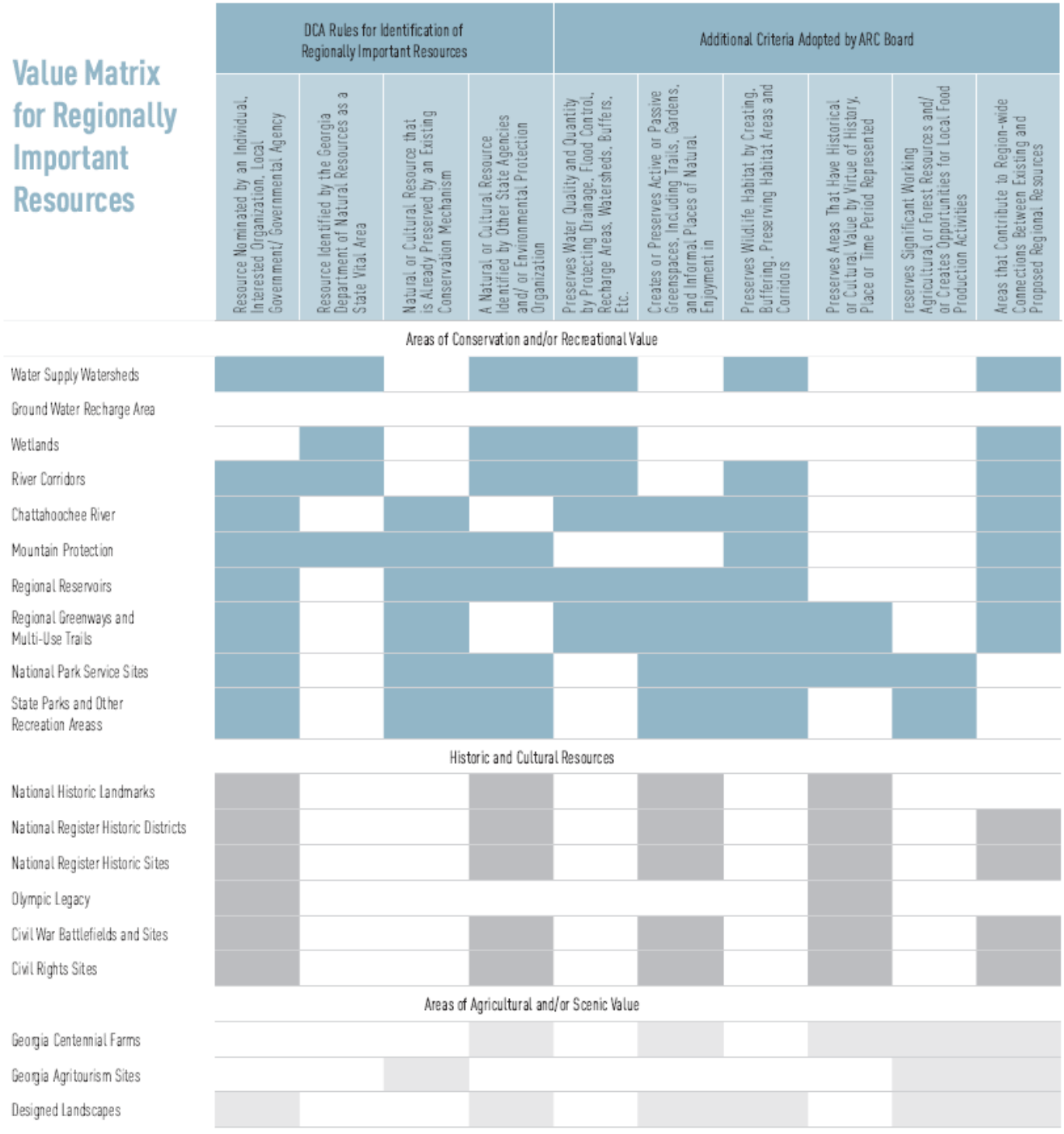
- *Development Pressures*
  - » *Threatened by destruction of subsurface resources, such as archaeological sites*
  - » *Fluctuations in land values threatens economic viability of current use*
  - » *Threatened by adjacent development that is incompatible in terms of design, scale or land use*
  - » *Threatened by destruction of significant viewshed*
  - » *Creation of urban heat island effect due increased impervious surface coverage*
- *Environmental Degradation*
  - » *Potential adverse impact on wildlife/ loss of biodiversity*
  - » *Subject to damaging pollutants and/ or contaminants*
  - » *Threatened by erosion and/ or stormwater run-off flows*
  - » *Threatened by the changing effects of extreme weather events*
  - » *Threatened by over-use of resource (i.e. inappropriate recreational use, too much traffic, etc)*
- *Resource Management*
  - » *Lack of protection through adequate regulations or easements*
  - » *Lack of enforcement of existing regulations*
  - » *Lack of financial resources for appropriate stewardship*
  - » *Lack of long-term ownership plan/ transitional ownership*
  - » *Lack of equitable access by all populations in the region*



ATLANTA BOTANICAL GARDENS / CREDIT: ARC

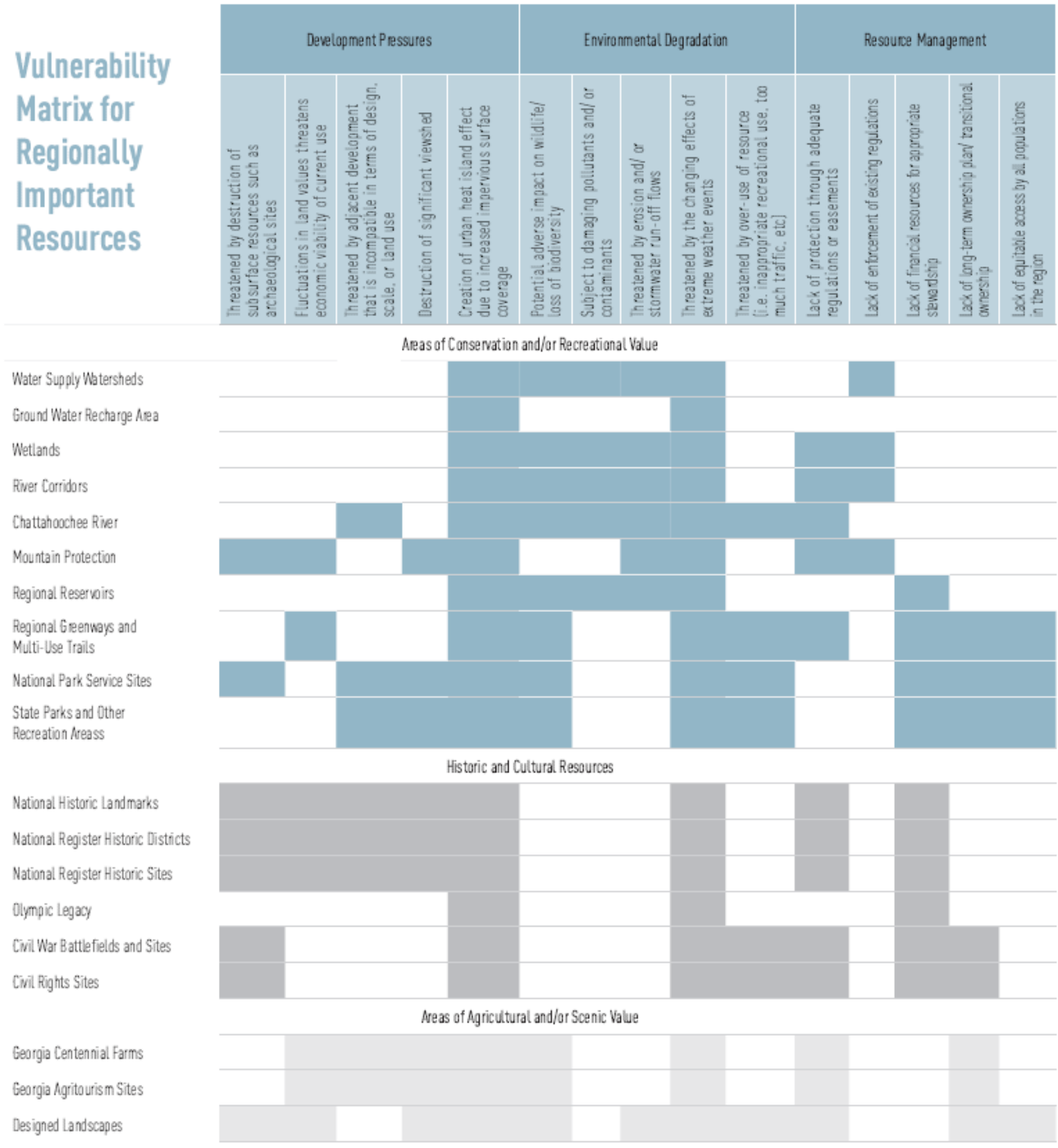
VALUE AND VULNERABILITY SCALE. A Value and Vulnerability Scale was developed for each area identified as a Regionally Important Resource. The Value and Vulnerability Scale evaluates the criteria proscribed by ARC and DCA, as well as other considerations, against each category of Regionally Important Resource. This scale will assist in identifying Regionally Important Resources that may meet the criteria of "threatened" RIRs as described in the Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Regional Planning Requirements, Chapter 110-12-6 (adopted 2018).

Value Matrix for Regionally Important Resources



The Resource Narratives of this plan provide a description and additional information on the value and vulnerability of each Regionally Important Resource.

Vulnerability Matrix for Regionally Important Resources

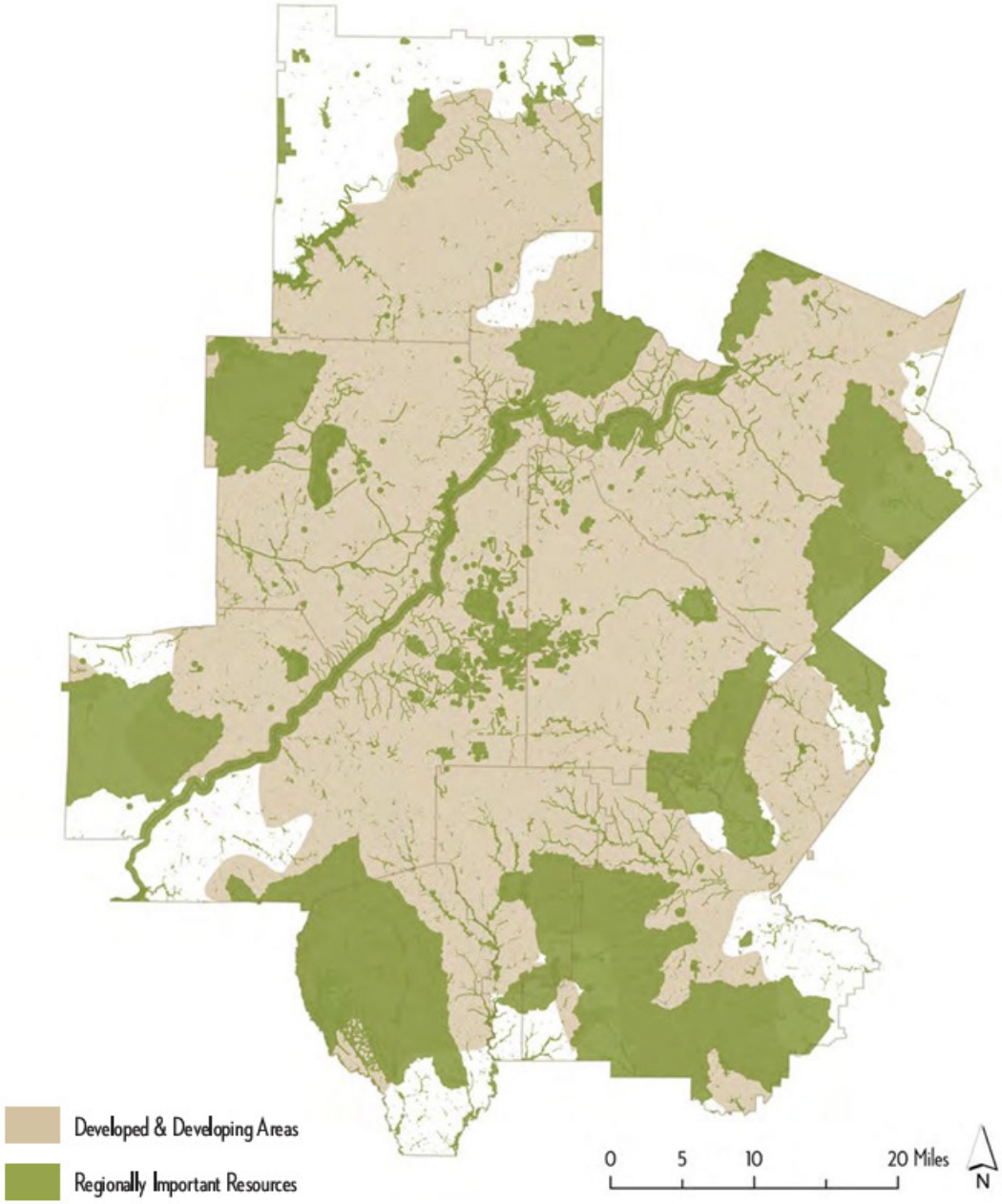


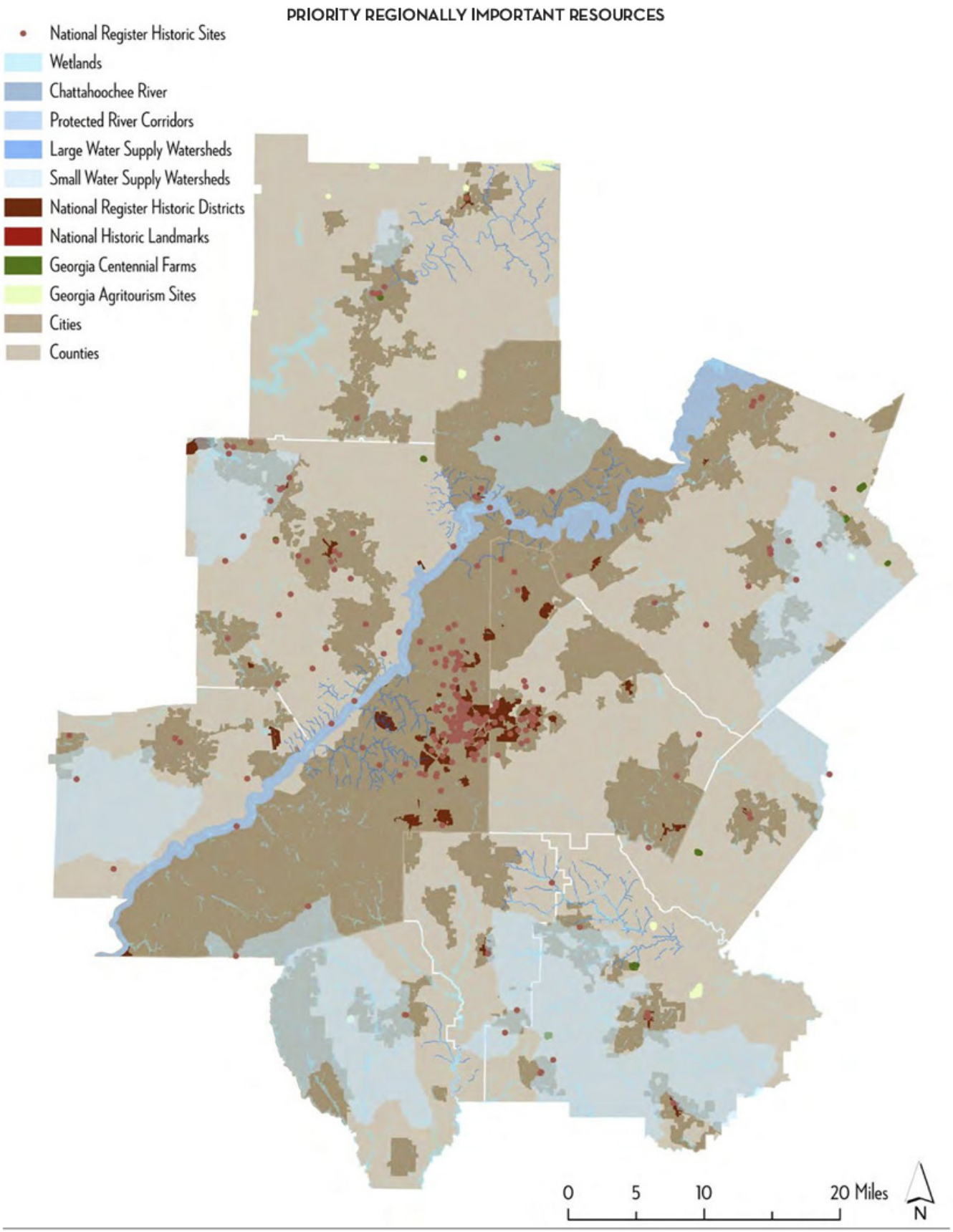
The Resource Narratives of this plan provide a description and additional information on the value and vulnerability of each Regionally Important Resource.

PRIORITY REGIONALLY IMPORTANT RESOURCES

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs identify threatened Regionally Important Resources as areas where significant natural or cultural resources are likely to be impacted by development. With limited guidance, Regional Commissions are left to identify the degree to which certain RIRs fall into this category based on a review of proximity to developed areas of the region. Metro Atlanta is a highly urbanized area, therefore many RIRs fall within developed areas. However, many also have developed long term protection methods to ensure the viability of the resource.

To meet the standard of identifying threatened resources as defined by DCA, ARC evaluated all resource categories against the Value and Vulnerability Scale developed in this plan. Feedback was received from technical experts and community stakeholders. Those resources where the scale shows high value and vulnerability are classified as Priority Regionally Important Resources (using "priority" in place of "threatened" as a way to more accurately describe the condition of these resources, and ARC's policies toward implementation.)





10 The Atlanta Region's Plan

CATEGORIES OF REGIONALLY IMPORTANT RESOURCES

The following categories were designed to broadly bracket the resources identified as regionally important.

AREAS OF CONSERVATION OR RECREATIONAL VALUE. This broad classification identifies the core natural resources within the Atlanta Region, as well as sites that provide unique opportunities for environmental conservation, heritage preservation and recreation. Consideration was given to areas under management by state or federal agencies, and those that serve populations extending through the region and beyond. In general, this category focuses on large-scale amenities, whose boundaries are often multi-jurisdictional. Local parks and some trails are assumed to be of local significance and best preserved by action at the local level, and not included as a regional resource.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES. This broad classification focuses primarily on those resources that meet the benchmarks established by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, as well as other resources identified through State agencies that represent the unique history and heritage of Georgia. In general, individually identified historic or cultural resources are assumed to be of local significance, and best preserved by action at the local level. Individually identified resources that were nominated and supported by a local government or other nominating party have been included in the Plan when it was found they represented unique or transcendent historic or cultural value to the region.

AREAS OF AGRICULTURAL AND SCENIC VALUE. Though the Atlanta Region primarily includes urban and suburban developed areas, the fact remains that many areas still reflect the character and aesthetic qualities of Georgia's agrarian roots. Local communities have recognized character areas within their communities that are intended to balance growth pressure with opportunities for rural preservation. Increasing demand for organic and locally grown food production creates new opportunities for agricultural land to remain economically viable without conversion to a more intensive use. These factors, as well as the pace of past development and the potential of future development, have made the recognition of these areas a priority. This category focuses on both site specific resources and broad boundaries of distinctive character within the Atlanta region.

The Rules of the Department of Community Affairs also direct Regional Commissions to "include linkages between [mapped] resources to form, to the maximum feasible extent, a continuous regional green infrastructure network." There is a definition of a green infrastructure network included in the Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Regional Planning Requirements, Chapter 110-12-6 (adopted 2018):

A strategically planned and managed network of wilderness, parks, greenways, conservation easements, and working lands with conservation value that benefits wildlife and people, supports native species, maintains natural ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, links urban settings to rural ones, and contributes to the health and quality of life for the communities and citizens sharing the network. The network should encompass a wide range of elements, including: natural areas – such as wetlands, woodlands, waterways and wildlife habitat; public and private conservation lands – such as nature preserves, wildlife corridors, greenways, and parks; and public and private working lands of conservation value – such as forests, farms and ranches. It should also incorporate outdoor recreation and trail networks.

The green infrastructure network for the Atlanta Region includes diverse resources such as cemeteries, community parks, community gardens. Taken collectively, these resources are not included as Regionally Important Resources and are not subject to any additional Guidance, Policies or Protection Measures. They do function as a backdrop to the Regionally Important Resources Map to form a continuous regional green infrastructure network.



LOVEJOY CITY GARDEN / CREDIT: ARC

The Regionally Important Resources Map includes all of the resources in the region identified as having regional importance as defined by the criteria established by DCA and ARC. In addition to the map, a snapshot of the value and vulnerability of these resources is included in Figure X, and are further explored in its supporting narrative. Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices and General Policies and Protection Measures for Regionally Important Resources are included within the narrative.

Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices is a listing of best practices to be considered by developers for designing new developments located within one mile of any area included on the Regionally Important Resources Map. The recommendations included within the Guidance section reflect broad management practices, but may not be appropriate for every type of development. ARC staff will use professional judgment to determine whether recommendations are applicable to a project under review within one mile of a Regionally Important Resource.

General Policies and Protection Measures are targeted toward local governments that make decisions which affect Regionally Important Resources.

The Plan concludes with an Appendix of supporting material to further elaborate on the Process and Methodology and reinforce the determinations made for Regionally Important Resources.





CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

Communities throughout the Atlanta Region emphasize the importance of conservation and recreation areas to maintain quality of life, health, and welfare. Within this plan, the foundation of natural resources planning has been the Environmental Planning Criteria for State Vital Areas. Defined in compliance with the 1989 Georgia Planning Act, Minimum Planning Requirements, these requirements govern water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, river corridors and mountains. Development limitations mandated by the State provide a level of protection for these resources; several communities in the Atlanta Region have voluntarily adopted more stringent protections for water features than the minimum required by the state.

Beyond State Vital Areas, other natural resources have been managed in ways that provide conservation and recreation value to the region. Regional river greenways include river corridors that have been enhanced by improvements (such as trails or greenways) and protections (such as easements). Lake Allatoona and Lake Lanier are two regional water reservoirs that are indentified for the multiple roles they have for conservation and recreation (smaller water reservoirs are generally encompassed within water supply watersheds). National and State Parks, and other recreational and multi-use trails round out this category.

Local, state and non-profit organizations have invested in parks, trails, and recreational amenities that lay the foundation of an interconnected green infrastructure system in the region. The need to protect and enhance natural and recreational resources has been bolstered by the connection to economic vitality within a community. Access to parks, trails and greenspace adds value to real property, and conservation of natural resources protects environmental quality and can deter expensive mitigation measures or fines for environmental degradation.



WATER SUPPLY WATERSHEDS

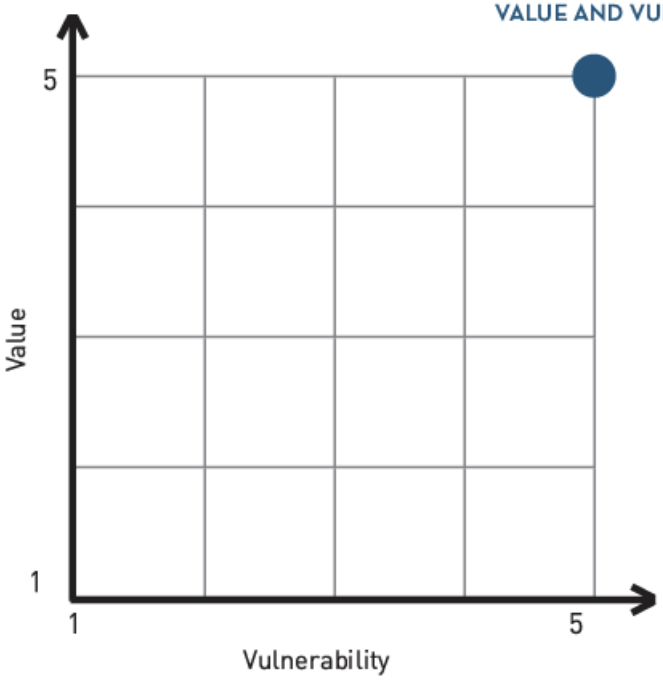
PRIORITY RESOURCE

In compliance with the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, Minimum Planning Requirements, the Department of Natural Resources defined Environmental Planning Criteria for the protection of water supply watersheds, which fall under the classification of a State Vital Area. Water supply watersheds are identified within the context of regional river basins. The Criteria for water supply watersheds protect community drinking water sources through the imposition of land use restrictions such as impervious surface limitations and minimum required buffers along stream channels. These development limitations provide a degree of protection for these resources, but several communities within the Atlanta Region have voluntarily adopted more stringent protections for water features within these watersheds than the minimum requirement mandated by the State.

The protection of water supply watersheds is a multi-jurisdictional responsibility. Developments that affect a water supply watershed may be located in an adjacent city or county from the intake point, thus their stewardship qualifies as a regional issue. The Criteria for water supply watersheds distinguish between small watersheds (less than 100 square miles) and large watersheds (greater than 100 square miles), and different rules are imposed for the critical area within a 7 mile upstream radius of the intake point. Within small water supply watersheds, RIR mapping includes the entire impacted land area, however within the large water supply watersheds, only buffer zones along impacted streams are mapped.

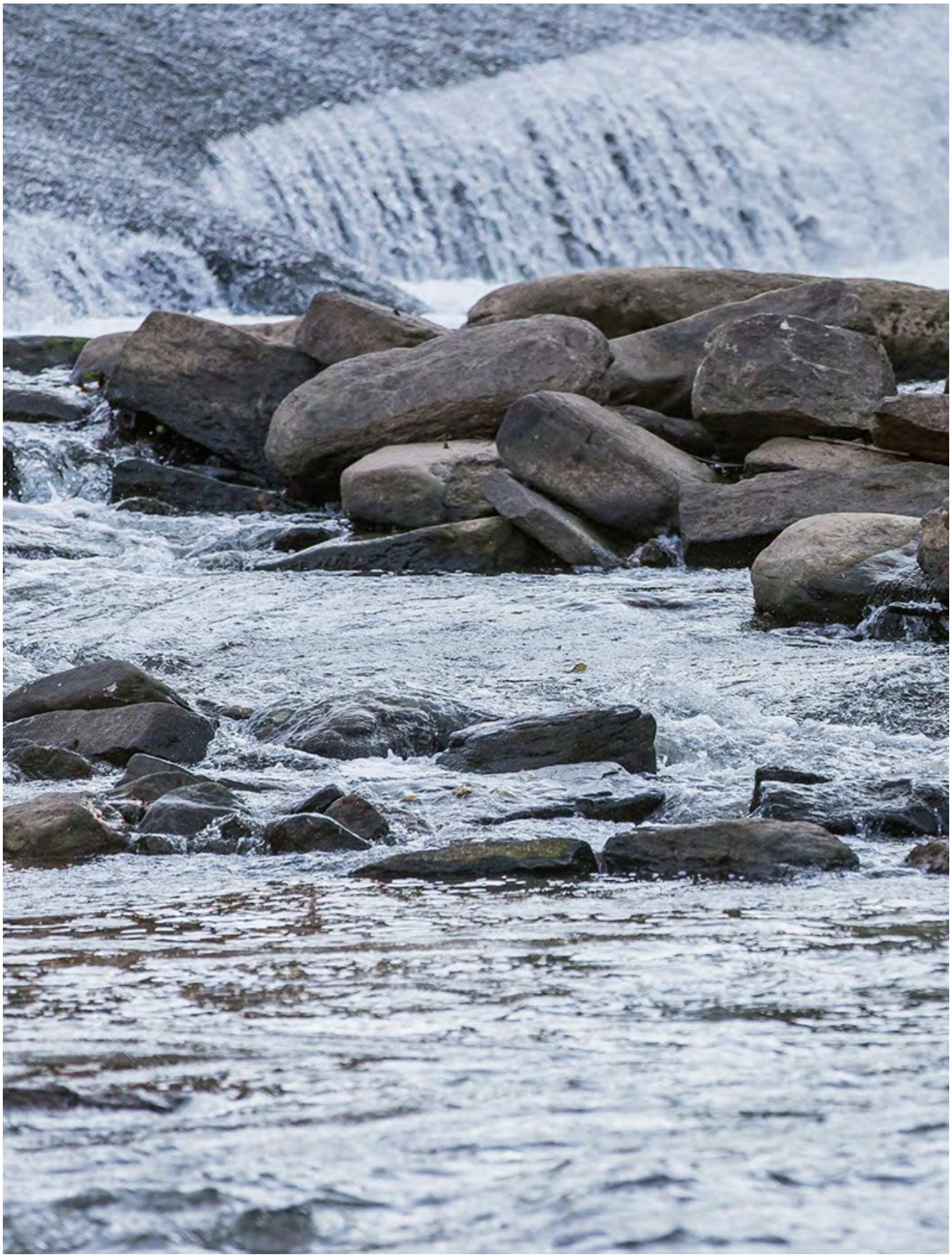
Several agencies play diverse roles in water planning and conservation in the Atlanta Region. It is the goal of the Regional Resource Plan to reinforce the recommendations of existing agencies and enhance the guidance set out in other planning documents of these agencies. The recommendations of the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's (MNGWPD) Water Resource Management Plan were used for developing Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices and General Policies and Protection Measures of this Plan. The specific recommendations for Guidance and Policies in regard to watershed protection in the Regional Resource Plan focus mostly on broad best management practices in deference to specific implementation strategies of other regional water quality plans.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



Water Supply Watersheds are identified as Priority Resources given their high value for preservation of water quality and quantity, their function as a wildlife habitat, and the value of water resources as an educational and recreational amenity.

Watersheds are vulnerable to limited protections by public agencies and lack of resources for monitoring and enforcement of environmental quality. Much of the land in watersheds is subject to development pressures, and land and water resources can be burdened by recreational overuse.

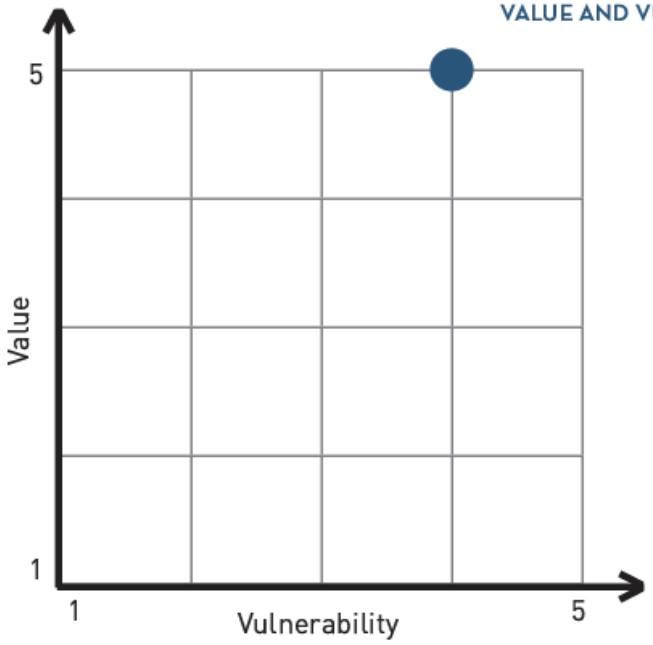


WETLANDS

PRIORITY RESOURCE

In compliance with the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, Minimum Planning Requirements, the Department of Natural Resources defined Environmental Planning Criteria for the protection of wetlands, which fall under the classification of a State Vital Area. The Criteria for wetlands protect land areas adjacent to surface water bodies that sustain vegetation typically found in areas with saturated soil conditions. These areas support a variety of ecosystems that make dynamic environmental contributions and are important to sustainable planning and practice. Wetlands are generally found along or adjacent to stream corridors in this region. To mitigate their disturbance, communities have incorporated them into trails and greenways, thus still preserving a sensitive habitat while creating a community amenity. Preserving the diversity of wildlife supported by wetlands further lends to creating a recreational and educational amenity on otherwise undevelopable land. In instances where alteration or degradation of wetlands is unavoidable, federal regulations generally require "no net loss of wetlands," therefore the creation of wetlands banks have become more widespread. The disturbance of wetlands is permitted through the US Army Corps of Engineers and governed by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



Wetlands are identified as Priority Resources given their high value for preservation of water quality and quantity, their function as a wildlife habitat, and the value of water resources as an educational and recreational amenity.

Wetlands are vulnerable to limited protections by public agencies and lack of resources for monitoring and enforcement of environmental quality. Much of the land in wetlands is subject to development pressures, and land and water resources can be burdened by recreational overuse.

GROUNDWATER RECHARGE

In compliance with the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, Minimum Planning Requirements, the Department of Natural Resources defined Environmental Planning Criteria for the protection of groundwater recharge areas, which fall under the classification of a State Vital Area. The Criteria for groundwater recharge areas protect those areas that are particularly suitable for the penetration of water into the aquifers that hold the groundwater supply. Using the DRASTIC methodology, a standardized system for evaluating groundwater pollution potential, it has been determined that there are no areas meeting the criteria for high pollution susceptibility groundwater recharge areas in the Atlanta Region. There are areas of soils that are susceptible to the infiltration of pollutants, which are also governed by the Environmental Planning Criteria, however these areas do not meet the specifications identified within the Rules for identifying Regionally Important Resources.



PROTECTED RIVER CORRIDORS

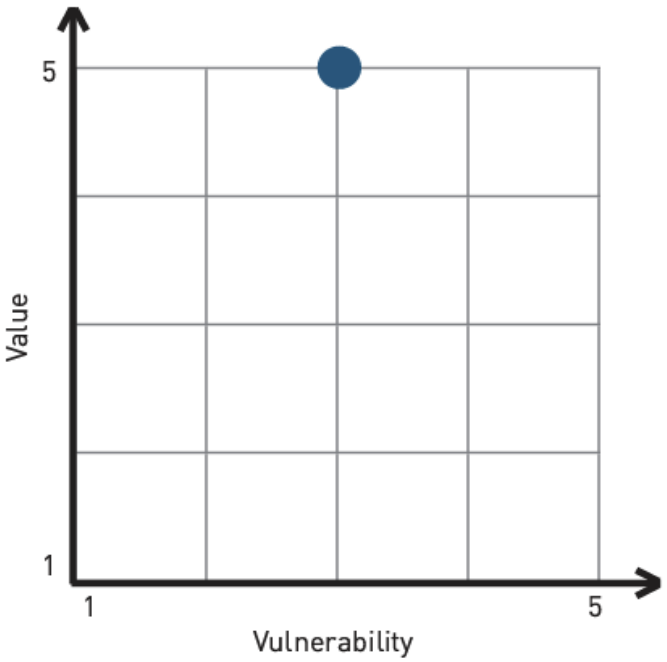
PRIORITY RESOURCE

In compliance with the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, Minimum Planning Requirements, the Department of Natural Resources defined Environmental Planning Criteria for the protection of rivers, which fall under the classification of a State Vital Area. The Criteria for protected river corridors focus on preserving the land adjacent to rivers to support a diversity of wildlife, recreational interests, and water quality. Land adjacent to rivers is also subject to periodic inundation due to flooding and other changes in water currents. Limiting development along river corridors enhances the environmental quality within a community and protects investments in real property from damage due to flooding. Within the area served by ARC, several counties have been identified as having protected River Corridors. The Etowah River flows through Cherokee County and the South River flows through Henry, Rockdale, DeKalb, and Fulton Counties. The Chattahoochee River flows through Cobb, Fulton, Douglas and Gwinnett Counties, but it is expressly exempted from the Environmental Planning Criteria because of its protections under the Metropolitan River Protection Act.

Pursuant to the Criteria "river corridor" refers to areas of a protected river and being within 100 feet on both sides of the river as measured from the river banks. A "protected river" is distinguished by exceeding a threshold for average annual flow as determined by the U.S. Geological Service.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 allows for the creation of Habitat Conservation Plans to protect endangered wildlife species. The Etowah River Habitat Conservation Plan was initiated by the local governments within the Etowah River Basin, and after several years of planning, a document was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and comment.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



Protected River Corridors are identified as Priority Resources given their high value for preservation of water quality and quantity, their function as a wildlife habitat, and the value of water resources as an educational and recreational amenity.

Protected River Corridors are vulnerable to limited protections by public agencies and lack of resources for monitoring and enforcement of environmental quality. Much of the land in Protected River Corridors is subject to development pressures, and land and water resources can be burdened by recreational overuse.



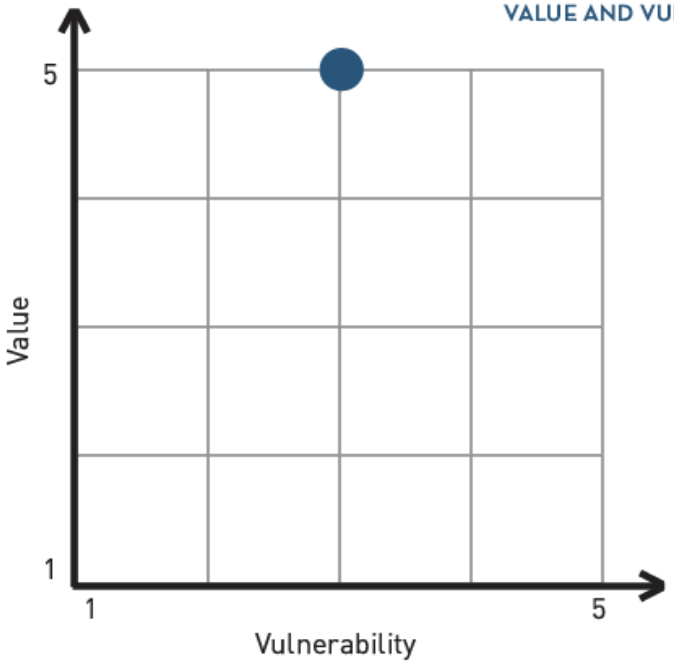
CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER

PRIORITY RESOURCE

The Chattahoochee River flows through Cobb, Fulton, Douglas and Gwinnett Counties, but it is expressly exempted from the Environmental Planning Criteria because of its protections under the Metropolitan River Protection Act.

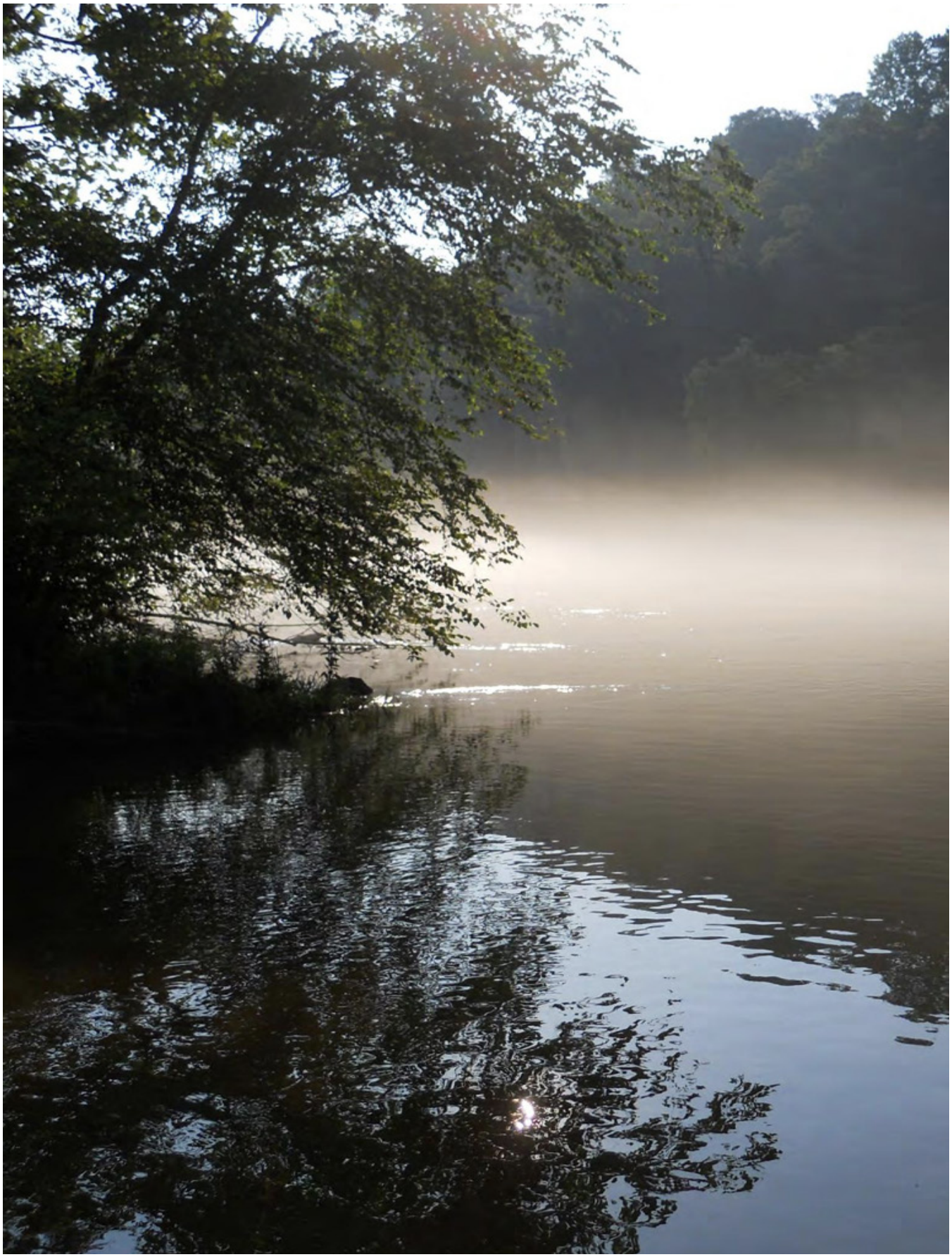
In 1973, the Georgia General Assembly passed the Metropolitan River Protection Act. The initial Act, and a later amendment in 1998, establishes a 2,000 foot corridor along the Chattahoochee River through the Atlanta Region, beginning at Buford Dam and extending through Douglas County. Pursuant to the regulations of the Act, ARC oversees the process whereby all land disturbing activity within the corridor is reviewed, approved and certified for consistency with Corridor Standards.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



The Chattahoochee River is identified as a Priority Resource given its high value for preservation of water quality and quantity, its function as a wildlife habitat, and the value of water resources as an educational and recreational amenity.

The Chattahoochee River has strong protections by public agencies, but is vulnerable to lack of resources for monitoring and enforcement of environmental quality. Much of the area along the Chattahoochee River is subject to development pressures, and land and water resources can be burdened by recreational overuse.

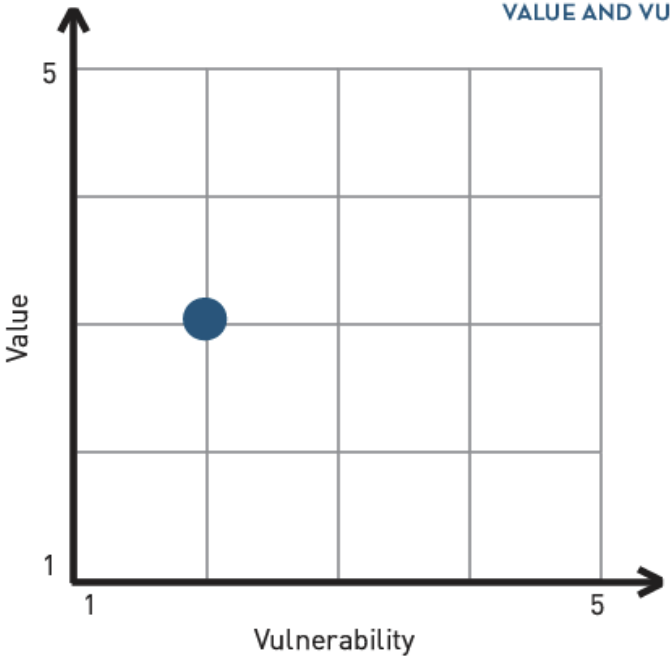


MOUNTAIN PROTECTION

In compliance with the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, Minimum Planning Requirements, the Department of Natural Resources defined Environmental Planning Criteria for the protection of mountains, which fall under the classification of a State Vital Area. The Criteria for protected mountains are designed to limit development activities on sensitive mountain slopes to protect the general health, safety and public welfare of a community. Located at the convergence of the Blue Ridge and Piedmont Regions of the state, limited areas of Protected Mountain resources are found within the Atlanta Region.

Mountains contain unique natural and topographic features that support a diversity of wildlife and contribute to the scenic qualities of a community. However, those same features can be fragile and can threaten water quality, real property investments and public welfare. Within the area served by ARC, mountain protection requirements have been established in Cherokee County in proximity to Kennesaw Mountain and Pine Log Mountain. Much of Pine Log Mountain is leased by Georgia DNR as a Wildlife Management Area. Garland Mountain, also in Cherokee County, has not been identified as a Protected Mountain by the State criteria, but Cherokee County does own a large portion of the site.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



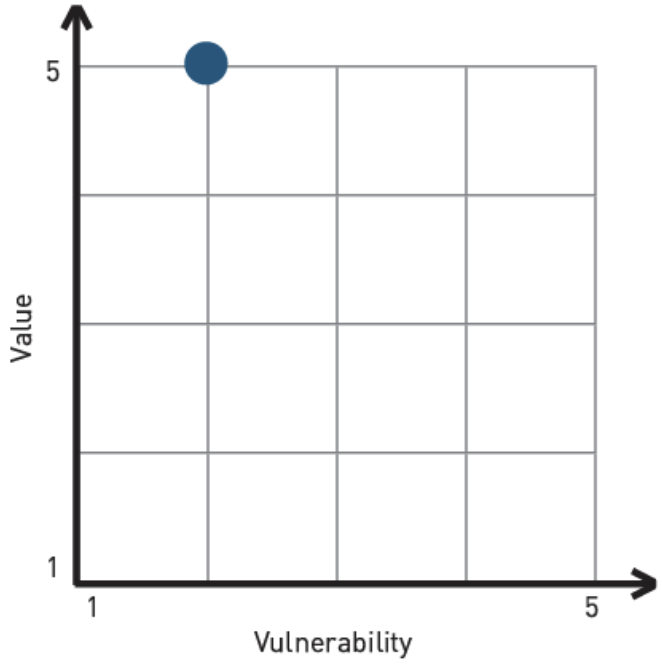
Areas subject to regulations under the state rules for Mountain Protection are very limited in metro Atlanta. The sites subject to this criteria are largely under protection by local or state agencies. There are areas that could be subject to development pressures and lack of resources for monitoring and enforcement.



REGIONAL RESERVOIRS

Major lakes in the region serve multiple purposes, including preservation of wildlife habitat, recreational amenities and critical drinking water supplies. Lake Allatoona is located within Bartow, Cherokee, and Cobb Counties and is managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It is an integral part of the system of rivers, lakes and reservoirs that provide drinking water to the Atlanta region. The shoreline of the lake includes numerous recreation facilities that are open to the public. The lake is also buffered by greenspace that is not open to the public, but is nonetheless critical to maintaining the lake and providing species habitat. Lake Lanier, located mostly within Forsyth and Hall County beyond the 10-county region, is a significant resource for the Atlanta Region. It serves as a source of drinking water, power generation, and flood control, as well as a recreational and economic development amenity for the Atlanta Region. The construction of Buford Dam and the subsequent creation of Lake Lanier was a significant force in shaping the region and marking Atlanta as an emerging major metropolitan area.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



Regional Reservoirs have high value for preservation of wildlife habitat and preservation of the region's water supply and water quality. Regional reservoirs offer recreational and scenic amenities, and attract users from beyond the jurisdiction in which they are located. Regional Reservoirs are managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers, but nonetheless are still vulnerable to natural processes resulting in pollution, erosion, and stormwater runoff. Litigation surrounding Lake Lanier is ongoing.



REGIONAL GREENWAYS AND MULTI-USE TRAILS

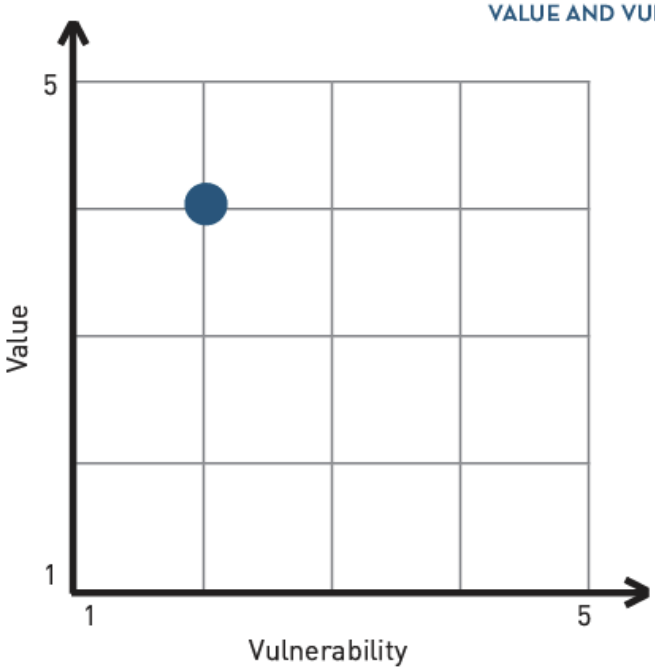
Both greenways and trails have been identified within the Regional Resource Plan for their conservation value, as well as their function as points of connectivity within larger green infrastructure and transportation networks. As advocacy efforts for greenway and trail building have increased, numerous local governments have begun to identify and develop local greenway and trail systems within their own communities.

Greenways. The area adjacent to all rivers can be considered a greenway, but this plan focuses on those areas that are enhanced by active conservation measures and/ or recreational use of their greenways.

Multi-Use Trails. Trail systems can be combined with river greenways, but as often can be found utilizing other corridors such as city streets, public utilities, linear parks, or abandoned rail lines.

Development of river greenways facilitates conservation and recreational amenities and is closely linked to the protection of river corridors and wetlands, enhancing the protection of water quality and water supply sources. Multi-use trails establish connectivity to parks, historic districts, and other cultural amenities and provide additional opportunities for community and economic development. If strategically planned, greenways and multi-use trails can provide alternate routes for transportation choices for both functional and recreational purposes.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



Regional Greenways and Multi-Use Trails have high value for preservation of environmental corridors and providing alternative transportation opportunities. They offer recreational and scenic amenities and attract users from beyond the jurisdiction in which they are located. Regional Greenways and Multi-Use Trails are generally managed by a local government or similar group that undertakes responsibility for maintenance and safety. However, they are nonetheless vulnerable to lack of resources for ongoing maintenance and potential overuse by the community.



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SITES

The National Park Service has created several classifications for park sites, a variety of which are found in the Atlanta Region. Collectively, these sites encompass several thousand acres and offer unique opportunities for environmental conservation, heritage preservation and recreation.

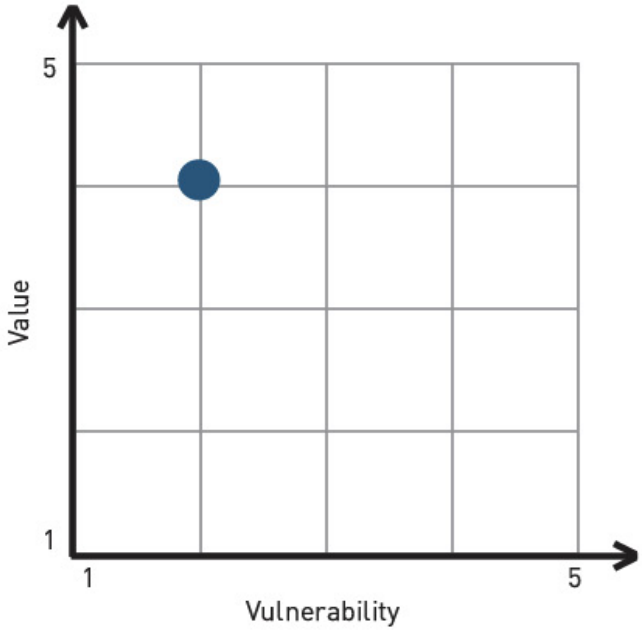
The Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area consists of a 48 mile stretch of the Chattahoochee River and 14 land units along its corridor. It begins at Lake Lanier's Buford Dam and continues downstream through Forsyth, Gwinnett, Fulton and Cobb Counties to Peachtree Creek near downtown Atlanta. It is the site of both prehistoric and historic resources and wildlife habitat, and welcomes millions of visitors annually. Recreational activities at the site include hiking, fishing, picnicking, rafting, canoeing, kayaking, and evening family programs. The Chattahoochee River was identified by the National Park Service as the country's first National Water Trail in 2012.

Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park in Cobb County is a site affiliated with the Atlanta Campaign of the Civil War. Encompassing approximately 3,000 acres, it is reflective of cultural elements of Native American, Antebellum, and Civil War history that unfolded on this site. It includes a trail network and several different forms of interpretive media that detail the significance of the site. Other elements of this cultural landscape include historic earthworks, monuments to commemorate fallen soldiers, and historic structures such as Kolb's Farm and family cemetery.

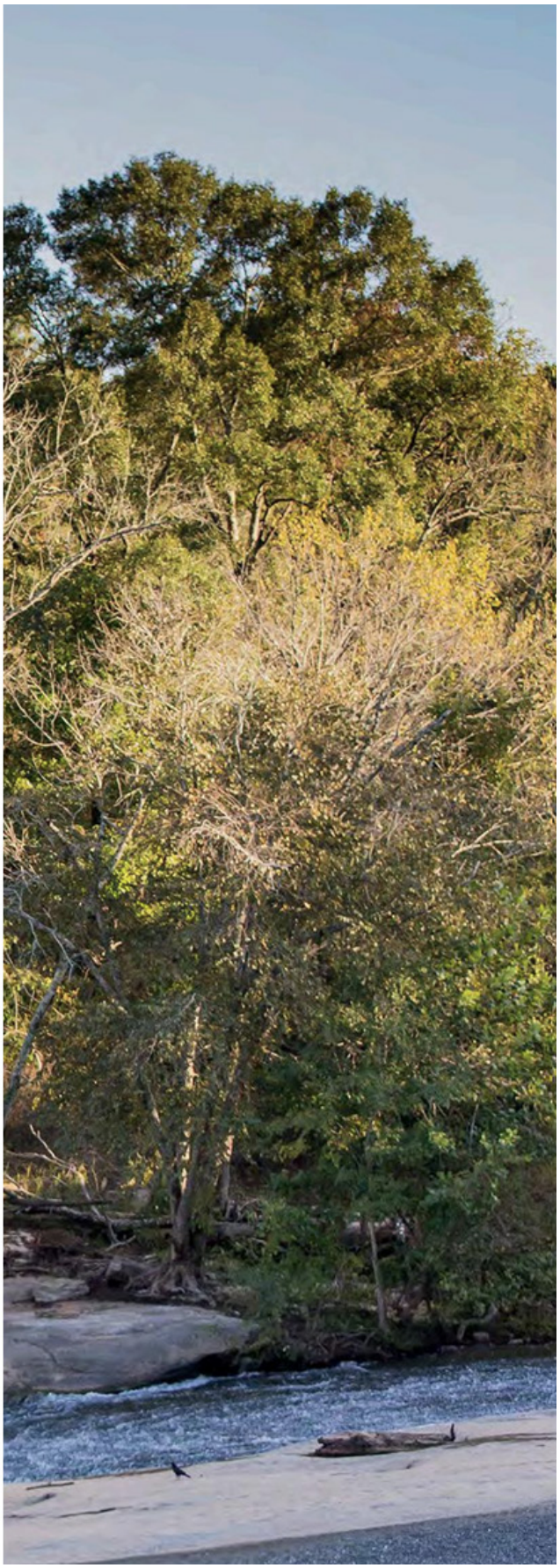
The Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area offers a unique showcase of natural, cultural and historic legacies concentrated in portions of DeKalb, Rockdale, and Henry Counties. The land that comprises the Heritage Area includes active quarries, rolling topography, rural landscapes and unique granite outcroppings – a singular habitat feature of the Georgia Piedmont Region. This area has been linked to human settlement and activity for thousands of years and contains unique and diverse ecosystems that encompass spiritual landscapes, mountains, quarries, woodlands, lakes, rivers and farmland. Land acquisition as a part of this project has been identified as an endorsed project by the Georgia Land Conservation Program. Included within the Heritage Area are unique resources, including Panola Mountain State Park, the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, and the Monastery of the Holy Spirit.

Panola Mountain State Park is registered as a National Natural Landmark and its vast granite outcroppings preserve features of the Georgia Piedmont habitat that have been threatened or lost in the vicinity due to residential developments. Located in Rockdale County, it provides passive recreation and learning opportunities while preserving wildlife habitat, watershed protection, floodplain protection and preservation of delicate ecological features including many rare plants of the Piedmont region. It is a key component in both the Arabia Mountain Trail and the Rockdale River Trail, and land acquisition at this site has been targeted as an endorsed project within the Georgia Land Conservation Program.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



National Park Service sites create opportunities for protection of wildlife habitat, as well as provide protection for scenic and historic amenities. They are used for recreational opportunities by people beyond the boundaries of the jurisdiction in which they are located. They are managed by the National Park Service in partnership with various local entities, but they can be vulnerable to over-use, inappropriate development, and lack of financial resources for maintenance.



STATE PARKS AND OTHER RECREATION AREAS

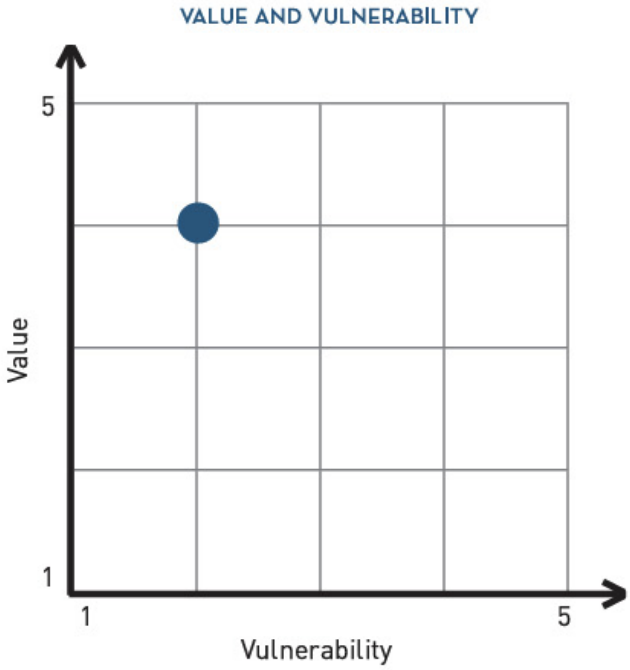
Similar to National Park Sites, State Parks also provide opportunities for environmental conservation, heritage preservation and recreation.

Panola Mountain State Park provides passive recreation and learning opportunities while preserving wildlife habitat, watershed protection, floodplain protection and preservation of delicate ecological features including many rare plants of the Piedmont region. Located in Rockdale County, Panola Mountain State Park is registered as a National Natural Landmark and its vast granite outcroppings preserve features of the Georgia Piedmont habitat that have been threatened or lost in the vicinity due to residential developments. It is a key component in both the Arabia Mountain Trail and the Rockdale River Trail, and land acquisition at this site has been targeted as an endorsed project within the Georgia Land Conservation Program.

Sweetwater Creek State Park, located in Douglas County, includes the ruins of the New Manchester Manufacturing Mill, several miles of hiking trails, and the George Sparks Reservoir. The Visitors Center at the site includes information on recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat and historic resources, and also boasts LEED Platinum certification for its environmentally friendly building design. It is a model structure within the state park system as well as the larger built environment of the region.

Stone Mountain, at 825 feet tall and reaching 1,683 feet above sea level, is the world's largest known free-standing piece of exposed granite. Stone Mountain Park hosts festivals and family-oriented activities, and boasts trails, lakes and opportunities for wildlife viewing. It includes more than 3,000 acres of parkland and attracts over 4 million visitors annually. Located in DeKalb County, the view from the top of the mountain provides a scenic panorama of many parts of the region. The mountain is approximately five miles in circumference at its base, but its subterranean reach is more extensive.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) support habitats of diverse wildlife species and provide recreational opportunities for public hunting, fishing and related sports. The Atlanta Region includes the Allatoona WMA, the Pine Log WMA, and the McGraw Ford WMA all in Cherokee County. Fee simple land acquisition within the McGraw Ford WMA was identified as an endorsed project by the Georgia Land Conservation Program. The area in Cherokee County around Lake Allatoona which is under the stewardship of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also serves a similar function to that of recreational amenities such as State Parks and WMAs.



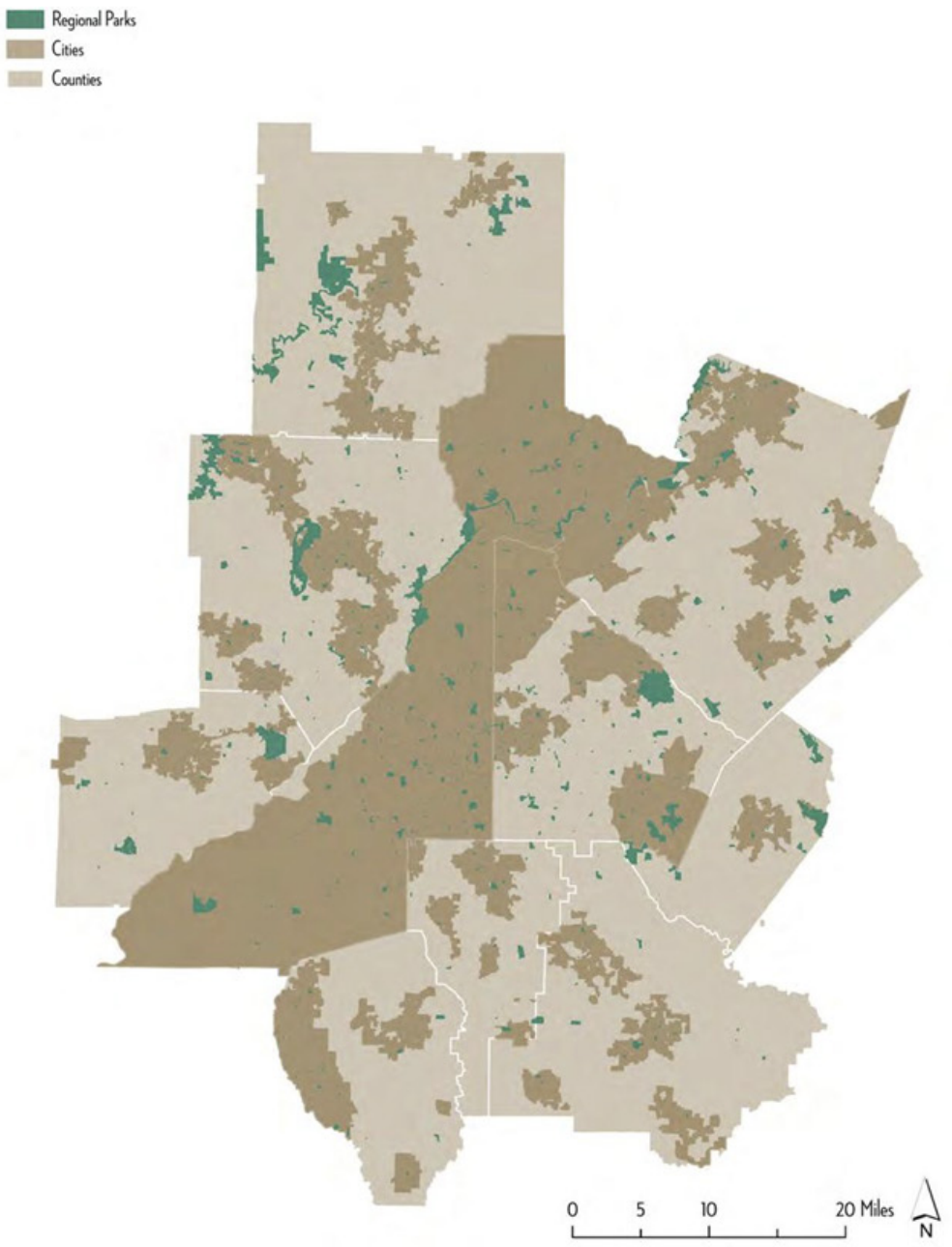
State Parks and Other Recreation Areas create opportunities for protection of wildlife habitat, as well as provide protection for scenic and historic amenities. They are used for recreational opportunities by people beyond the boundaries of the jurisdiction in which they are located. They are managed by the State of Georgia in partnership with various local entities, but they can be vulnerable to over-use, inappropriate development, and lack of financial resources for maintenance.



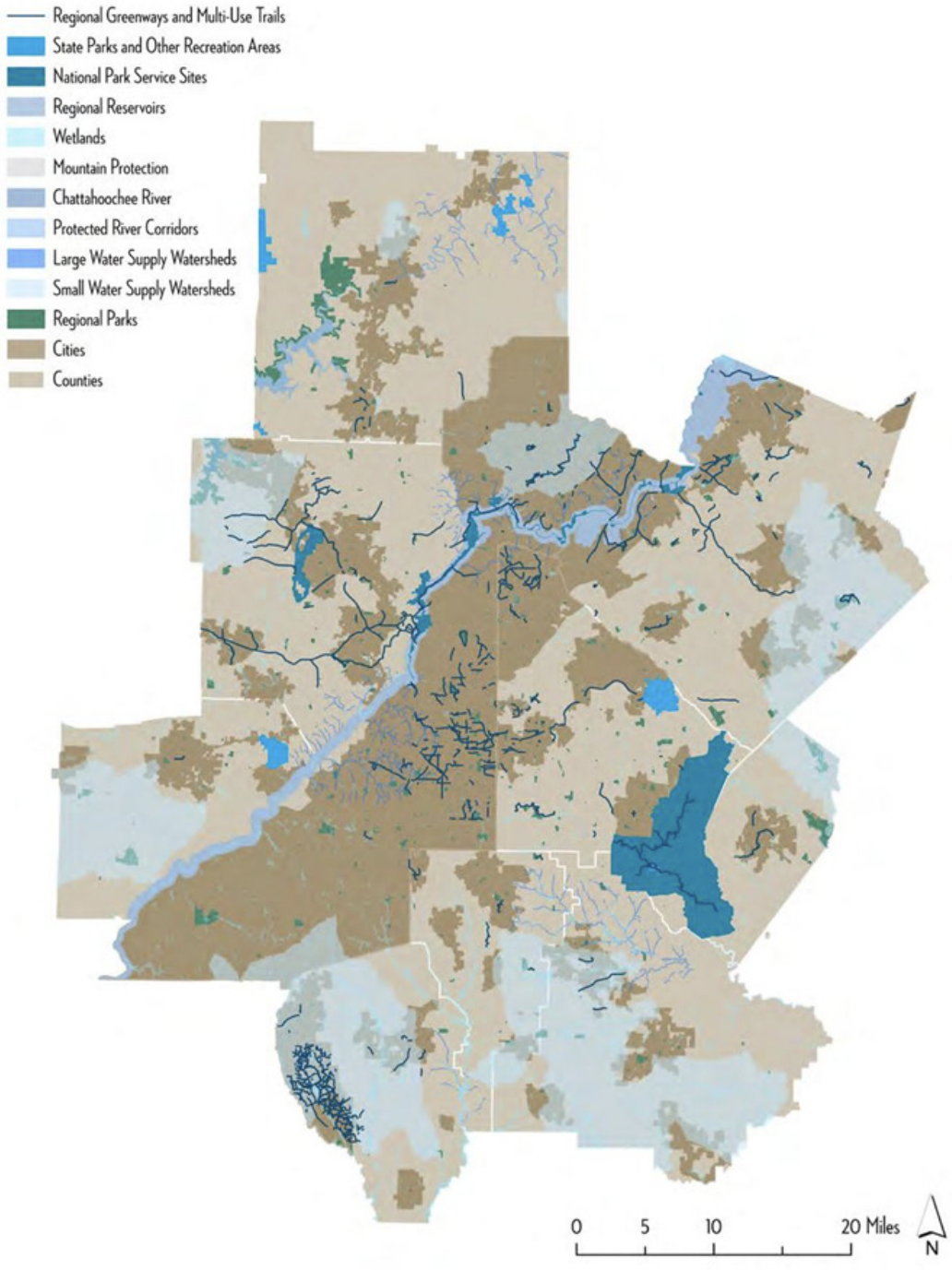
REGIONAL PARKS

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK

The regional park network contributes to the core of a green infrastructure plan. The Atlanta region includes thousands of acres of community parks in all forms and sizes. Many parks are the legacy of historic events such as Piedmont Park, which was the site of the 1895 Cotton States Exposition, or Kennesaw Mountain, site of a key Civil War battle. Others provide environmental protection, such as the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. The majority are designed to commemorate key events or important citizens for the local community, or provide recreational areas for neighborhoods. Pursuant to the DCA Rules for Regional Resource Plans, parks in the Atlanta Region are included as part of the Green Infrastructure Network. [Resources in the Green Infrastructure Network are not considered to be Regionally Important Resources for the purposes of this plan.]



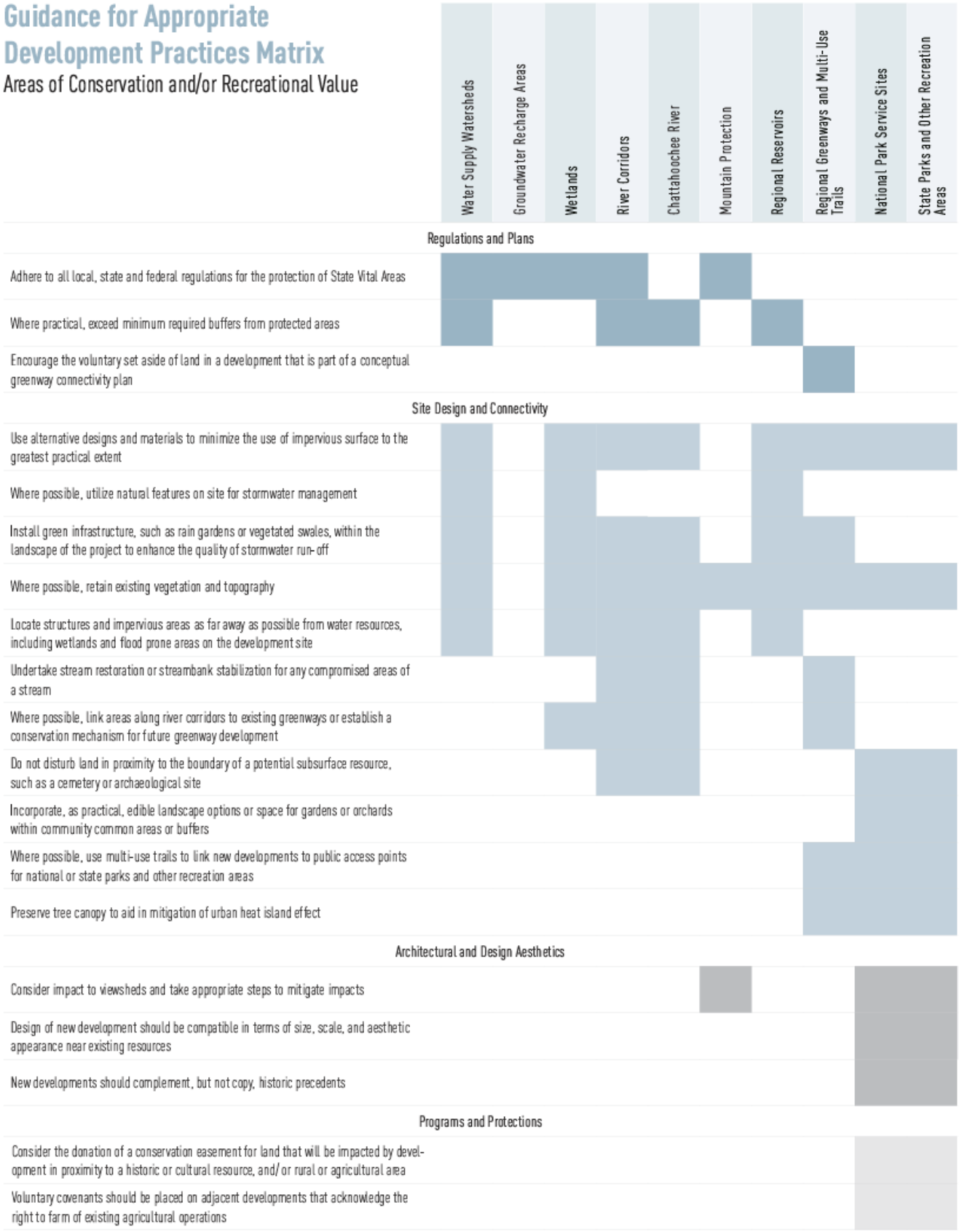
CONSERVATION & RECREATION
REGIONALLY IMPORTANT & GREEN INFASTRUCTURE NETWORK RESOURCES



Regional Resource Plan 35

Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices Matrix

Areas of Conservation and/or Recreational Value



General Policies and Protection Measures Matrix

Areas of Conservation and/or Recreational Value



HISTORY AND CULTURE

Historic and cultural resources create the contextual setting for many of the character defining features of a community. Historic preservation planning is generally governed by the parameters established by the Department of the Interior, National Park Service. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards are the benchmark by which a property is deemed to have historic significance. A property listed on the National Register of Historic Places has been vetted through an extensive review process and is, by definition, a historic place worthy of preservation.

Communities in the Atlanta Region have recognized projects that demonstrate historic preservation initiatives on multiple scales – from identification of National Landmarks to documentation of subsurface archaeological resources. Included in the Regional Resource Plan are structures that reflect both high-style and vernacular architectural traditions. It includes landscapes by the Olmstead Firm, structures by Heinz, Reed and Adler, and cultural repositories of arts and archives. The diversity of resources within the Atlanta Region is reflected through a multitude of historic districts and individual sites that trace significant cultural events from its prehistoric occupants, through early European settlements, the Civil War, the New South and into the mid-20th century.

In the Atlanta Region, historic preservation and resource conservation have been used as tools for benchmarking community identity beyond just proscriptive architectural requirements. Cultural sites express distinctive beliefs, qualities or ideas of regional importance, and serve as repositories for collections of cultural objects. An increasing awareness of the importance of cultural landscapes – sites and places identified with the unique heritage of a community or region whereby context is created by a combination of historic and natural resources – can overlap with more traditional elements of a green infrastructure network. They can enhance interest and appeal beyond the natural and recreational qualities of a community, and often add an educational component beyond understanding the need to preserve biodiversity and environmental quality.



NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

PRIORITY RESOURCE

There are fewer than 2,500 National Historic Landmarks identified throughout the United States, and the Atlanta Region is fortunate to have nine National Historic Landmarks, all located within the City of Atlanta. National Historic Landmarks are properties identified as having exceptional value or quality in illustrating the history of the United States, therefore they have been identified as Regionally Important Resources.

The Georgia State Capitol: Constructed between 1884 and 1889, the Georgia Capitol is a Neoclassical government building that follows the design of the U.S. Capitol. It is symbolic of the "capitol" of the New South, as Atlanta considered itself to be after Reconstruction.

Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site and District: This district includes the Martin Luther King Jr. birth and childhood home, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Fire Station #6 and the King Center.

Sweet Auburn Historic District: Sweet Auburn is a 1 ½ mile stretch along its namesake Road, Auburn Avenue. This neighborhood, adjacent to the Martin Luther King National Historic Site, is associated with significant events of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the New South experiences of African Americans.

Herndon Mansion (1910): The Herndon Mansion was the home Alonzo Herndon and wife Adrienne, who was also the designer of the residence. Alonzo was born into slavery and raised in a sharecropping family, but would later become Atlanta's first black millionaire as a real estate investor and founder of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company in the Sweet Auburn neighborhood.

Wren's Nest – the Joel Chandler Harris House (c.1880): The Wren's Nest is the home where Harris wrote many of his Uncle Remus/ Br'er Rabbit tales. He spent his early years growing up on a southern plantation where he was exposed to these stories and their storytellers first hand. His position with the local newspaper, the Atlanta Constitution, provided a forum for widespread dissemination of these tales.

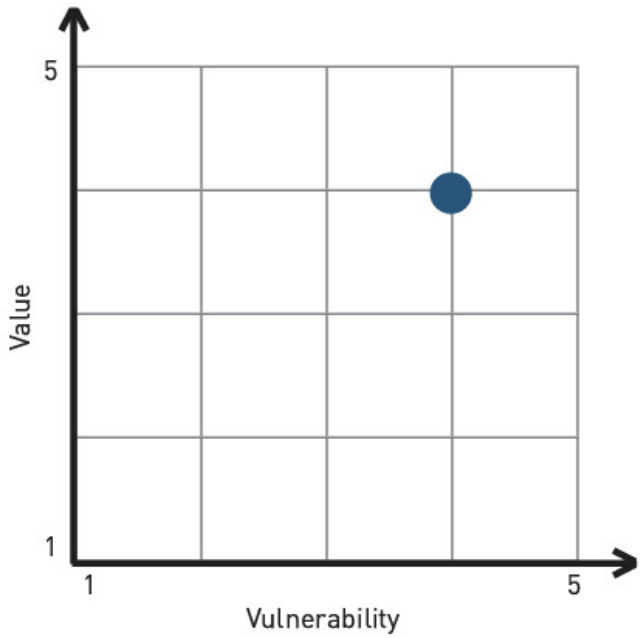
Fox Theatre (1929): The Fox Theatre is a unique example of neo-Mideastern exotic revival architecture and has played a significant role in the cultural heritage of Atlanta. It is also an outstanding example of the classic ornate movie palaces that thrived in the early 20th century.

Dixie Coca Cola Bottling Plant (c.1900): This plant is the first Georgia bottling plant of the Coca-Cola Company, an international beverage icon. In addition to being the oldest surviving building of the early history of the Coca Cola Company, it is also a unique example of Victorian-era commercial architecture.

Stone Hall, Atlanta University (1882): Serving historically as the administration building for Atlanta University between 1882 and 1929, Stone Hall is an icon of the Atlanta University Center (AUC) and part of the larger campus for Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

U.S. Post Office and Courthouse (1911): Covering an entire downtown city block, the Second Renaissance Revival structure served as the central post office until services were moved in the early 1930s. As the home of the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals it is named in honor of Judge Albert P. Tuttle.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



National Historic Landmarks are identified as Priority Resources given their high value for preservation of historic and cultural resources and the role they play as an educational amenity in the community. Landmarks are recognized by the National Park Service, but they are owned by a variety of private and public entities. They have no specific protection outside of the federal and state review process when public funds are allocated toward infrastructure projects. Therefore, they can be vulnerable to development pressures, lack of financial resources, and lack of adequate regulations for long-term protection.



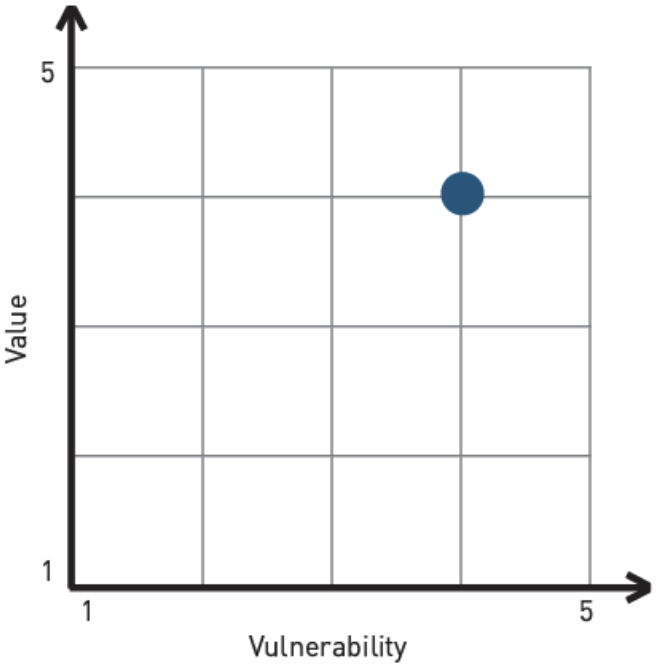
NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS & SITES

PRIORITY RESOURCE

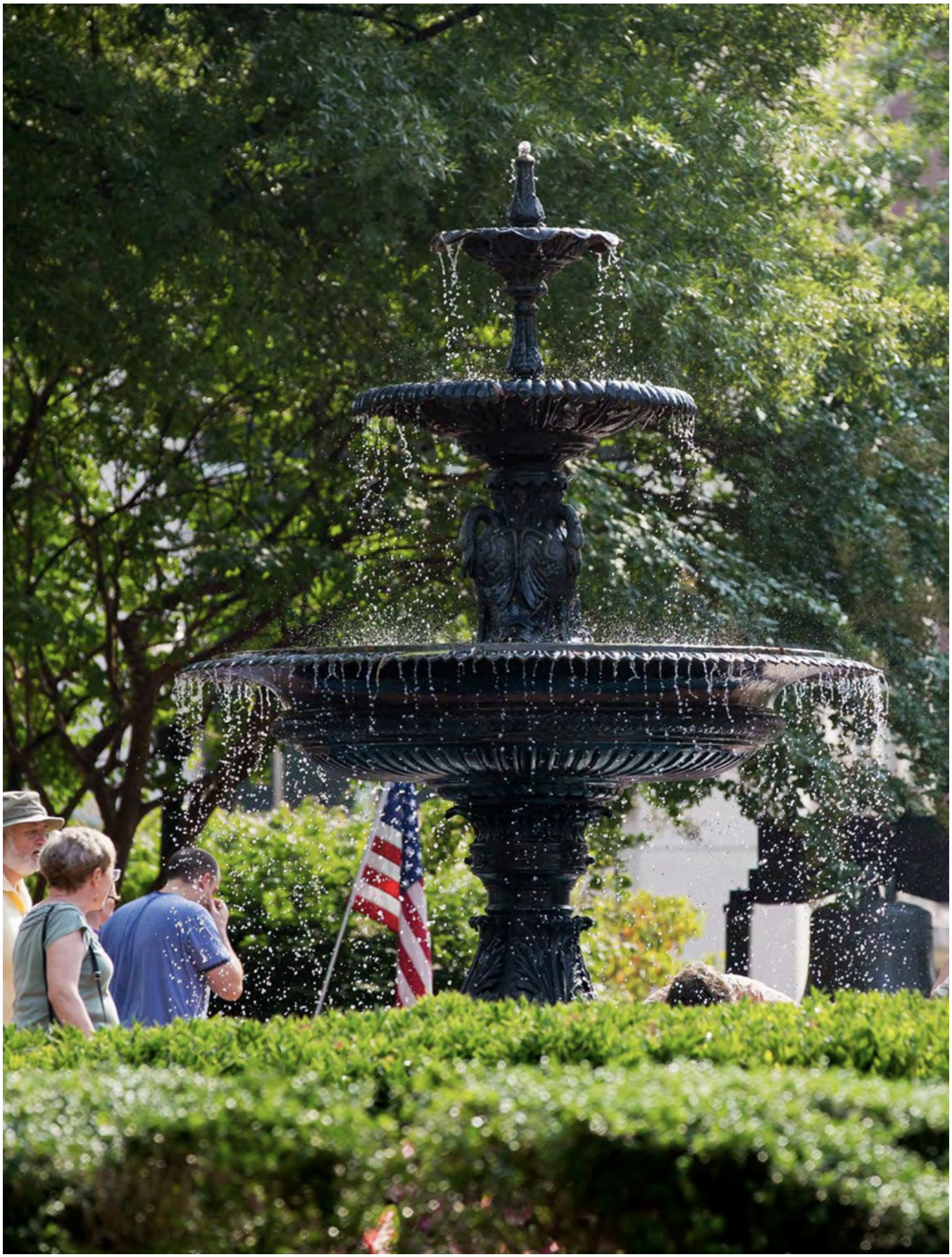
National Register Historic Districts include buildings, structures, sites and objects that are, by definition, worthy of preservation. Districts reflect the core community building blocks of neighborhoods and activity centers that are the character and culture of our region. They encompass a scale and diversity of resources that are appropriate to be considered as regionally significant. Several individual districts were nominated by local jurisdictions for inclusion, and it was deemed equitable to include all National Register districts as equally important. In several instances, National Register Districts also encompassed sites that had been individually nominated as Regionally Important Resources, including Piedmont Park, the Olmstead Parks in the Druid Hills Neighborhood, Grant Park in the city of Atlanta and Woodward Academy, Barrett Park and the City Amphitheatre and Cemetery in the city of College Park.

As with districts that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, individually listed sites bridge the gap among those places in between neighborhoods and commercial centers that laid the foundations of communities. Metro Atlanta claims almost 300 individually listed National Register sites, with countless more eligible sites identified through regular evaluation. These sites are more than just the private homes of important citizens and early civic buildings. They include sites such as the military earthworks at Johnston's Line from the Atlanta Campaign of the Civil War; objects such as the Riverview Carousel and the Memorial to the Six Million. They include commercial and industrial buildings, hotels and schools, churches and train depots. All of these buildings are integral to the history and community development of their cities and towns, and they provide connections in the larger cultural infrastructure network of the Metro Atlanta region.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



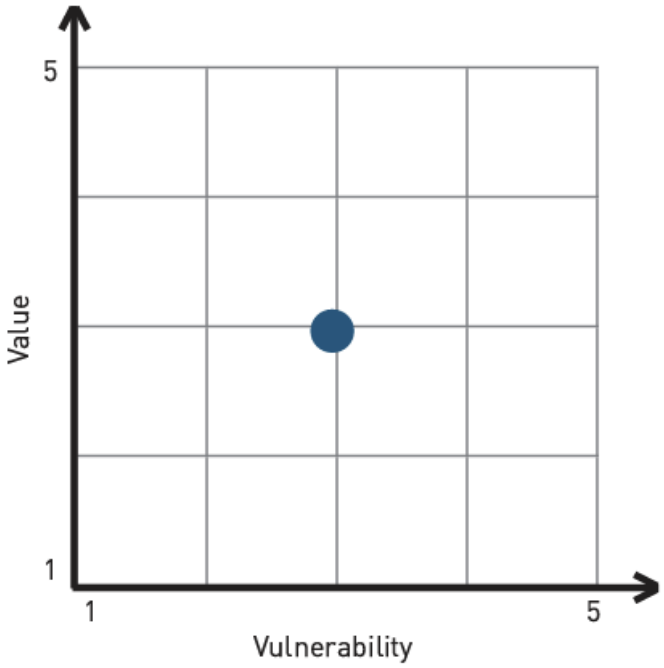
National Historic Districts and Sites are identified as Priority Resources given their high value for preservation of historic and cultural resources and the role they play as an educational amenity in the community. National Register Districts and Sites are recognized by the National Park Service, but they are owned by a variety of private and public entities. They have no specific protection outside of the federal and state review process when public funds are allocated toward infrastructure projects. Therefore, they can be vulnerable to development pressures, lack of financial resources, and lack of adequate regulations for long-term protection.



OLYMPIC LEGACY

Atlanta hosted the Summer Olympics in 1996, and the entire region and State had the benefit of the exposure as a world class city, capable of hosting such an event. The modern Olympics began in 1896, and since that time, only two other U.S. cities have had the distinction of serving as host communities for the Summer Olympics. The 1996 games in Atlanta coincided with its centennial celebration, adding another level of significance to the experience. Within the Atlanta Region, Olympic events were held at fifteen different locations, but Centennial Olympic Park stands out as Georgia's lasting legacy of the Centennial Olympic Games. Located in downtown Atlanta, the 21-acre park includes commemorative features such as 600,000+ engraved bricks sponsored by private donors; granite from each of the five continents represented in the Olympic Games; and the Fountain of Rings – using the Olympic symbol of five interconnected rings. As a symbol of the Olympic legacy in Georgia, Centennial Olympic Park has been identified as a Regionally Important Resource.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



Centennial Olympic Park recognizes an event of historic and cultural significance. As a public park, it is vulnerable to over-use and lack of resources.



CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELDS AND SITES

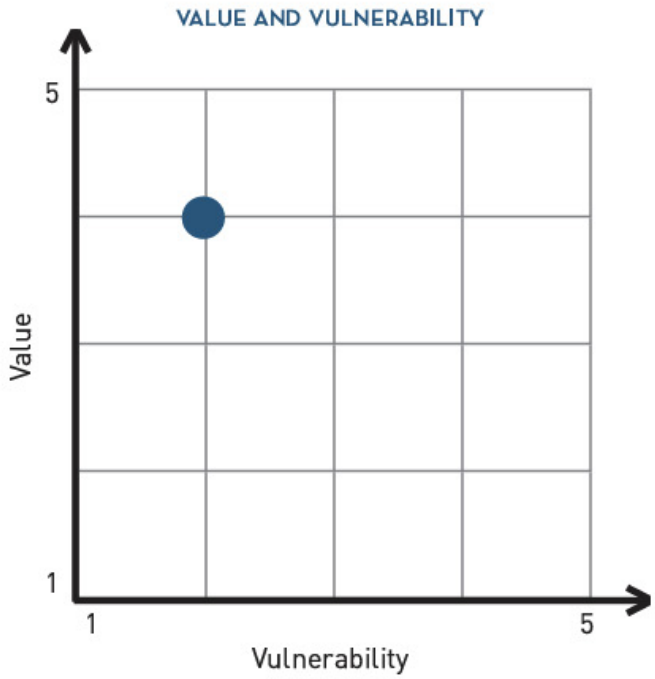
The National Park Service has taken the lead on recognizing the importance of Civil War Battlefields within the context of our local and regional cultural heritage, as well as for their implications for our national history. Working through local partnerships with organizations such as the Georgia Battlefield Association, continued documentation has identified remnants of several significant sites in the Atlanta Region. These are sites of value as both historic resources and cultural landscapes. The Civil War Sites Advisory Commission has identified seven primary Civil War Battles that are associated with the Atlanta Campaign (1864) within the Atlanta Region: Ezra Church/ Battle of the Poor House (Fulton County); Jonesborough (Clayton County); Kennesaw Mountain (Cobb County); Kolb's Farm (Cobb County); Lovejoy's Station (Clayton County); Peachtree Creek (Fulton County) ; Utoy Creek (Fulton County). Nominations were also submitted for additional Civil War sites: Nash Farm Battlefield Park (Henry County) and the remnants of the earthwork Shoupades constructed by Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston (Cobb County).

In addition to battlefields, the Atlanta region has several sites affiliated with events of the Civil War, which are accessible to the public. Located in downtown Kennesaw, Camp McDonald Park (Cobb County) was a Confederate Civil War training ground.

The remnants of Fort Walker (Fulton County) are located in the city of Atlanta on the edge of National Register listed Grant Park. It includes the remains of earthworks that were formerly a four-gun battery. Also referred to as a redoubt (a protected place of refuge or defense), Fort Walker was constructed in 1863 as a part of the defensive line surrounding the city of Atlanta.

The Concord Bridge Historic District and Heritage Park, including the site of the Concord Woolen Mill (Cobb County) was a complete mill community with a school, church and general store. Developed by Martin Ruff and Robert Daniel beginning in the 1830s, the Union Army destroyed the factory on July 4, 1864. Shortly thereafter on July 9, 1864, the Union Army had moved into Douglas County and burned the New Manchester Mills at Sweetwater Creek State Park, also a listed as a Regionally Important Resource. The Concord Woolen Mill was rebuilt in 1869, and Ruff and Daniel are also credited with building the Concord Covered Bridge in 1872.

Finally, cemeteries throughout the region include individual burials or small sections of Confederate soldiers. In addition to the Confederate Cemetery found at Oakland Cemetery, the Jonesboro Confederate Cemetery (Clayton County) and Marietta Confederate Cemetery (Cobb County) are both under the stewardship of the Georgia Building Authority in addition to four other confederate cemeteries in the State. The Marietta National Cemetery was established in 1866 with a program to reinter 10,000 deceased Union soldiers from Sherman's Atlanta Campaign. The Marietta National Cemetery is listed as a Regionally Important Resource as a National Register listed Cemetery.



Civil War Battlefields and Sites preserve a historic and cultural legacy and play a role as an educational and greenspace amenity. These sites are recognized by groups such as the American Battlefield Trust and the National Park Service, but they are owned by a variety of private and public entities. They generally have no specific protection outside of the federal and state review process when public funds are allocated toward infrastructure projects. Therefore, they can be vulnerable to development pressures, lack of financial resources, and lack of adequate regulations for long-term protection.

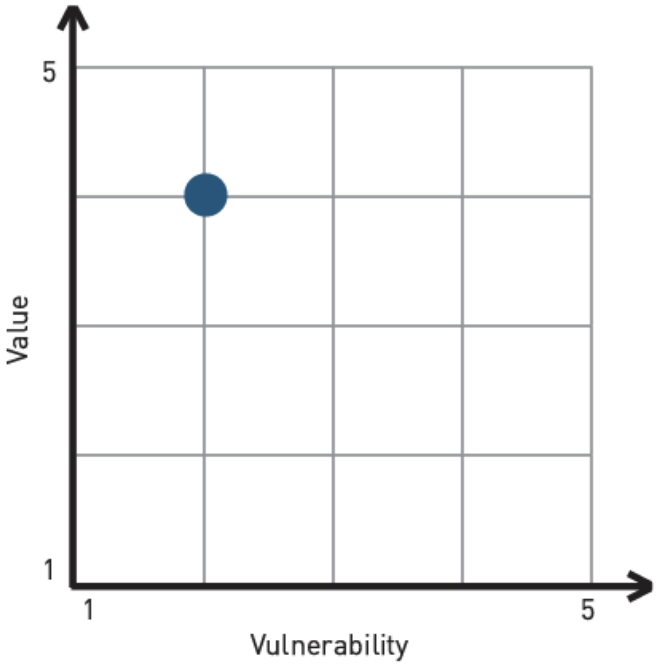


CIVIL RIGHTS SITES

Many of Metro Atlanta's Civil Rights Sites also fall under other categories of Regionally Important Resources, including National Park Service Sites, National Historic Landmarks, and National Register Historic Districts and Sites. The importance of these areas cannot be over-emphasized, and recent efforts to coordinate a cohesive identity for the Civil Rights story draws attention to their significance. Georgia State University has been working to identify and nominate Civil Rights Sites as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. UNESCO is the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Over 1,000 properties have been identified as World Heritage Sites, but only 23 of those are in the United States.

The United States Civil Rights Trail also identifies sites that are significant for understanding the Civil Rights story in the Southeast. It guides travels to locations in Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. The sites identified in metro Atlanta include the Apex Museum; the Center for Civil and Human Rights; the Ebenezer Baptist Church; the Elbert P. Tuttle United States Court of Appeals building; the Martin Luther King Jr. Birth Home; the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Park and the King Life Home; the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum; and The King Center.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



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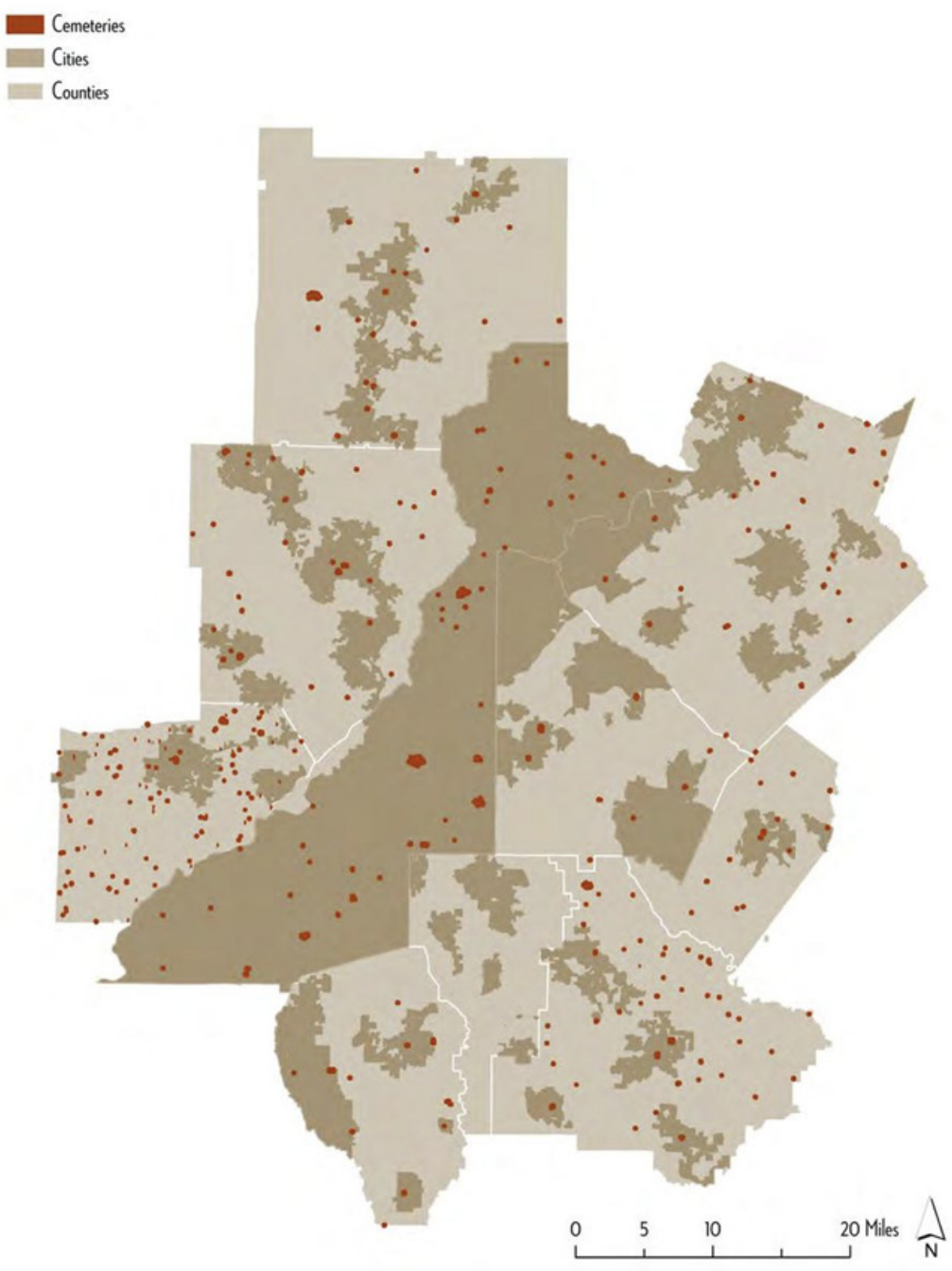
MARTIN LUTHER
KING
JR.
NATIONAL
HISTORIC
SITE
I grew up in a family where love was central and where lonely relationships were ever present.

REGIONAL CEMETERIES

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK

Cemeteries also create a larger regional network of unique resources. Over 400 individual cemeteries have been identified in the Atlanta Region. Ongoing research will continue to identify previously undocumented cemetery sites. Cemeteries are significant not only as community greenspace, but also for their value as historic and cultural resources, genealogical records, and their value to foster a local sense of place. Pursuant to the DCA Rules for Regional Resource Plans, cemeteries in the Atlanta Region are included as part of the Green Infrastructure Network. [Resources in the Green Infrastructure Network are not considered to be Regionally Important Resources for the purposes of this plan.]



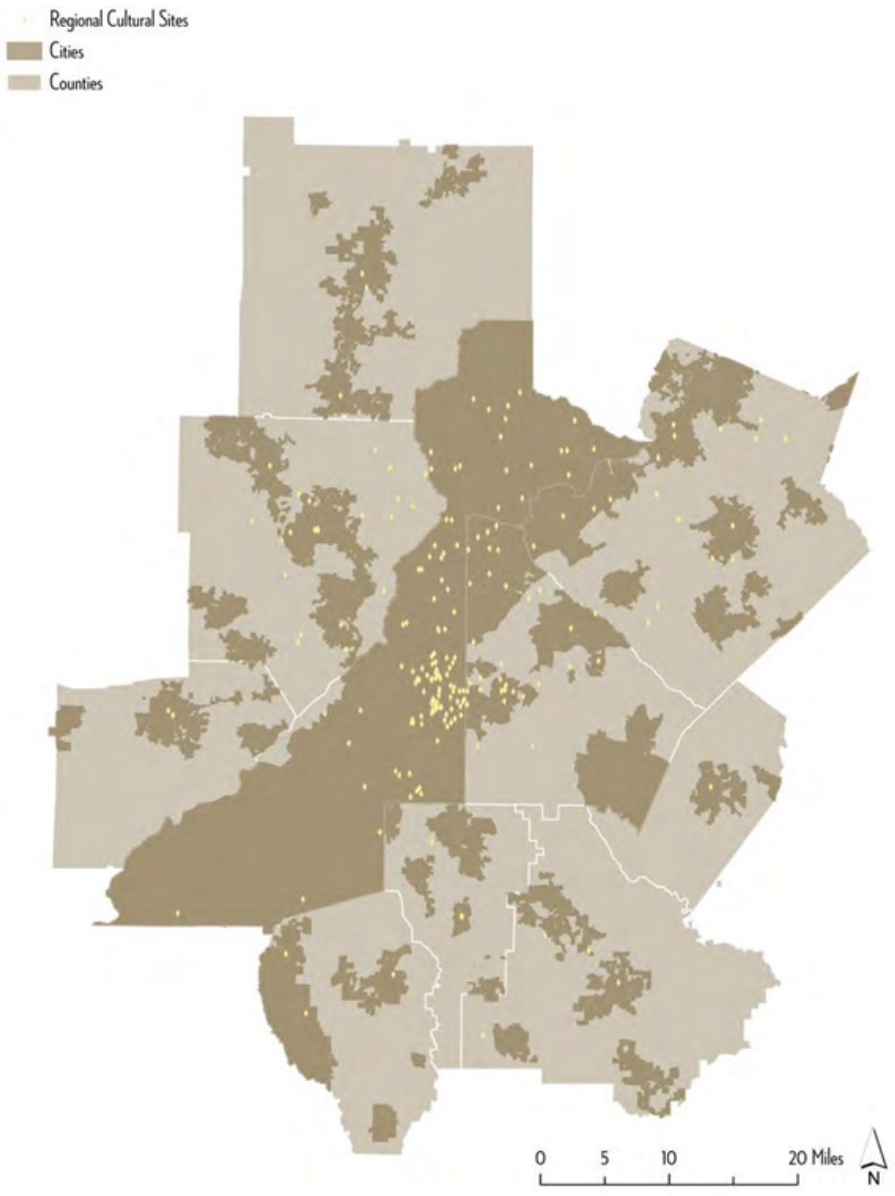
REGIONAL CULTURAL SITES

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK

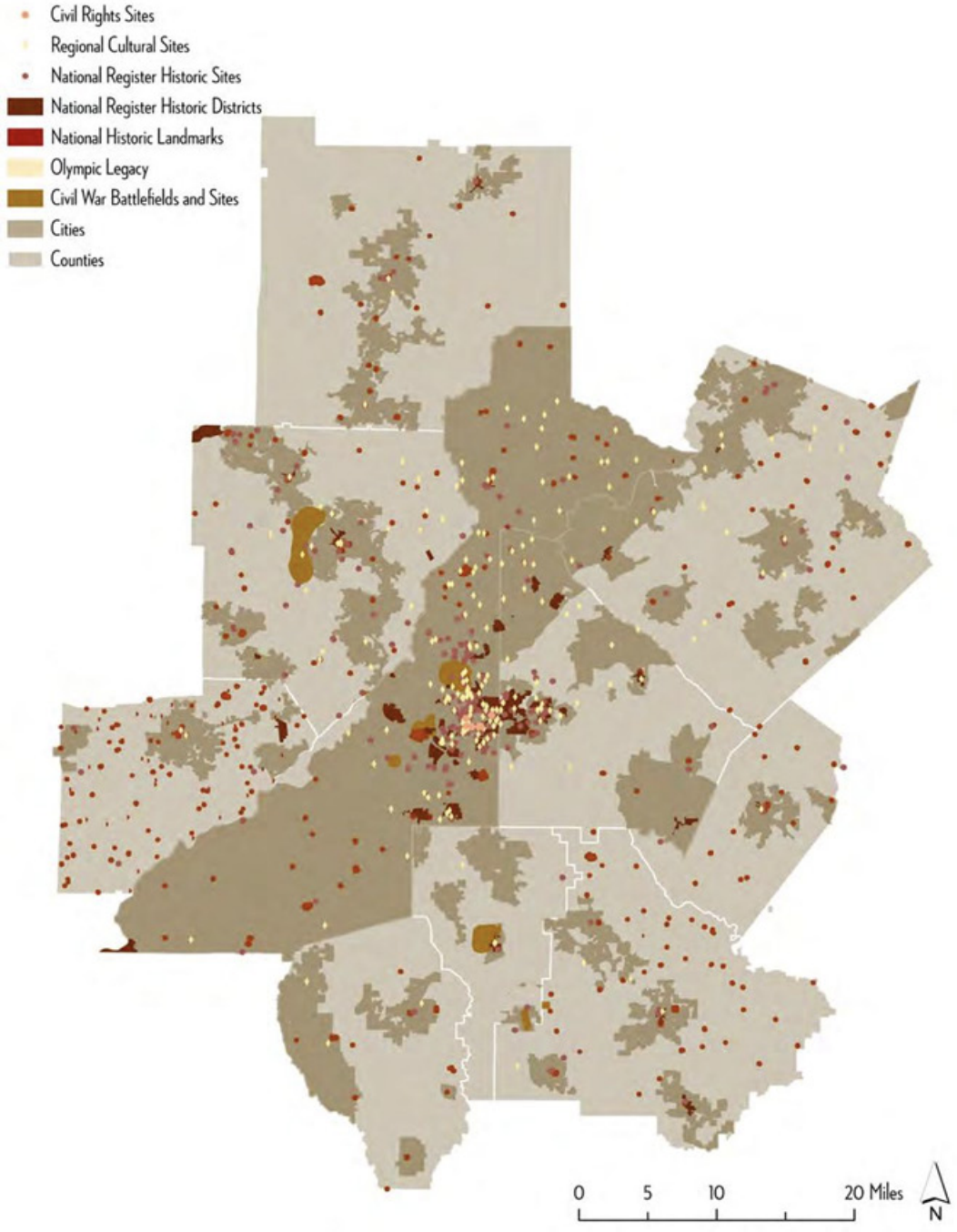
Metro Atlanta is home to world class cultural infrastructure. Cultural Sites include sites or corridors that express distinctive beliefs, qualities or ideas of regional importance. Cultural sites can include, but are not limited to

- Repositories for a collection of natural, scientific, historic, literary, artistic, or other cultural objects;
- Sites with distinctive features that are emblematic of the region; and/ or
- Cultural centers with strong cultural ties.

Over half of the cultural non-profit organizations in the State of Georgia are located in the 10-county Atlanta region, with over $1.8 billion in assets. The Atlanta region also ranks at the top of the scale among our national peers in the number of arts related businesses and the employees that work in those industries. Libraries, museums, and theaters provide the front-line opportunities for public access to arts and cultural opportunities in communities across the region and they are included as links in the regional Green Infrastructure Network. [Resources in the Green Infrastructure Network are not considered to be Regionally Important Resources for the purposes of this plan.]



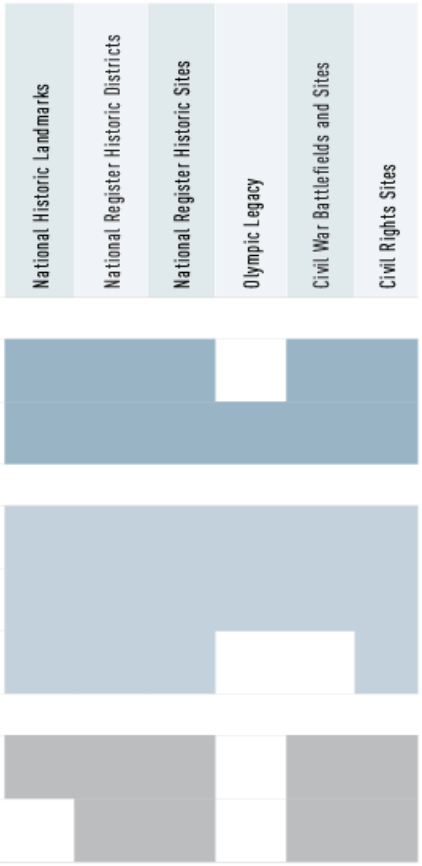
HISTORIC & CULTURAL REGIONALLY IMPORTANT & GREEN INFASTRUCTURE NETWORK RESOURCES



52 The Atlanta Region's Plan

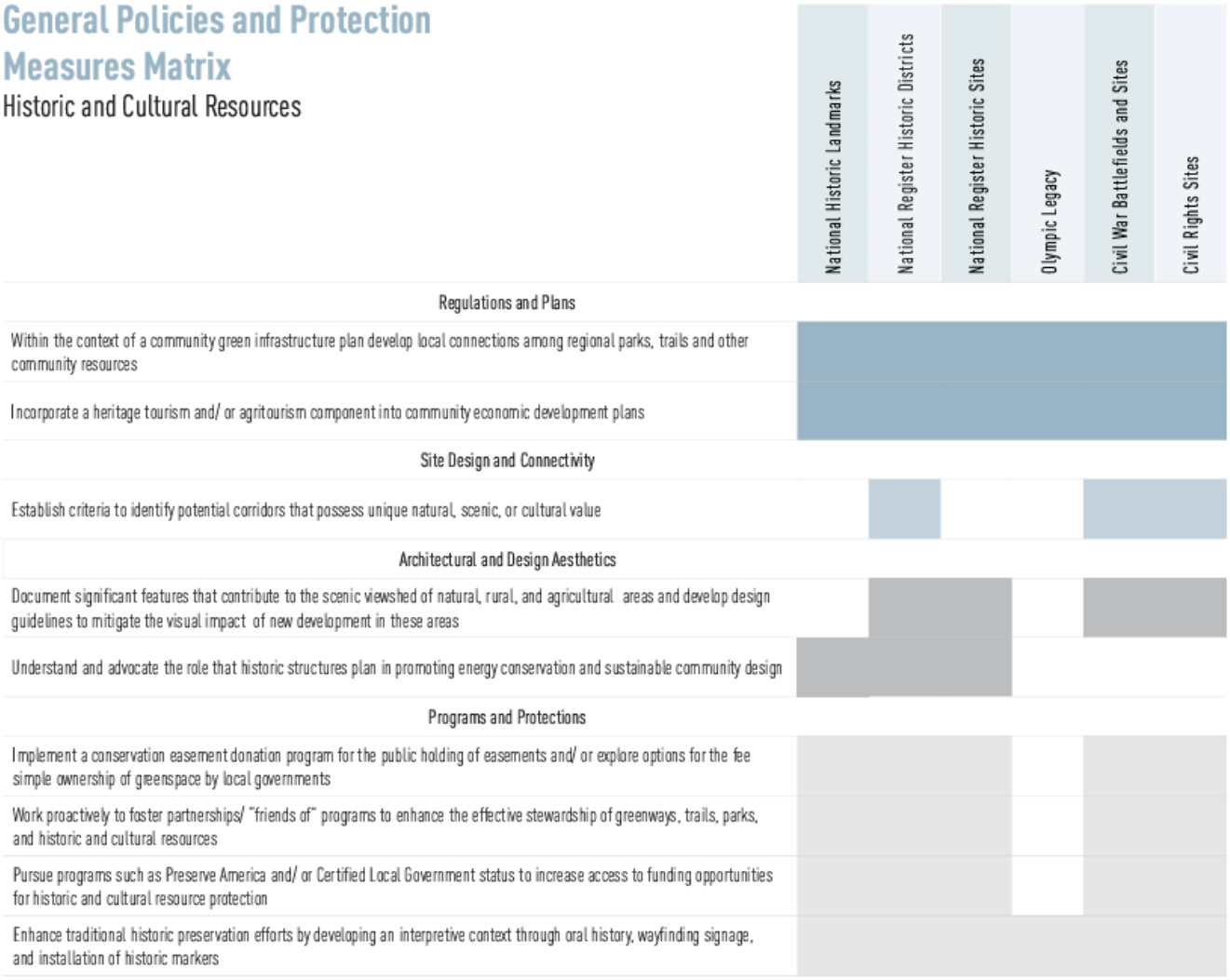
Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices Matrix

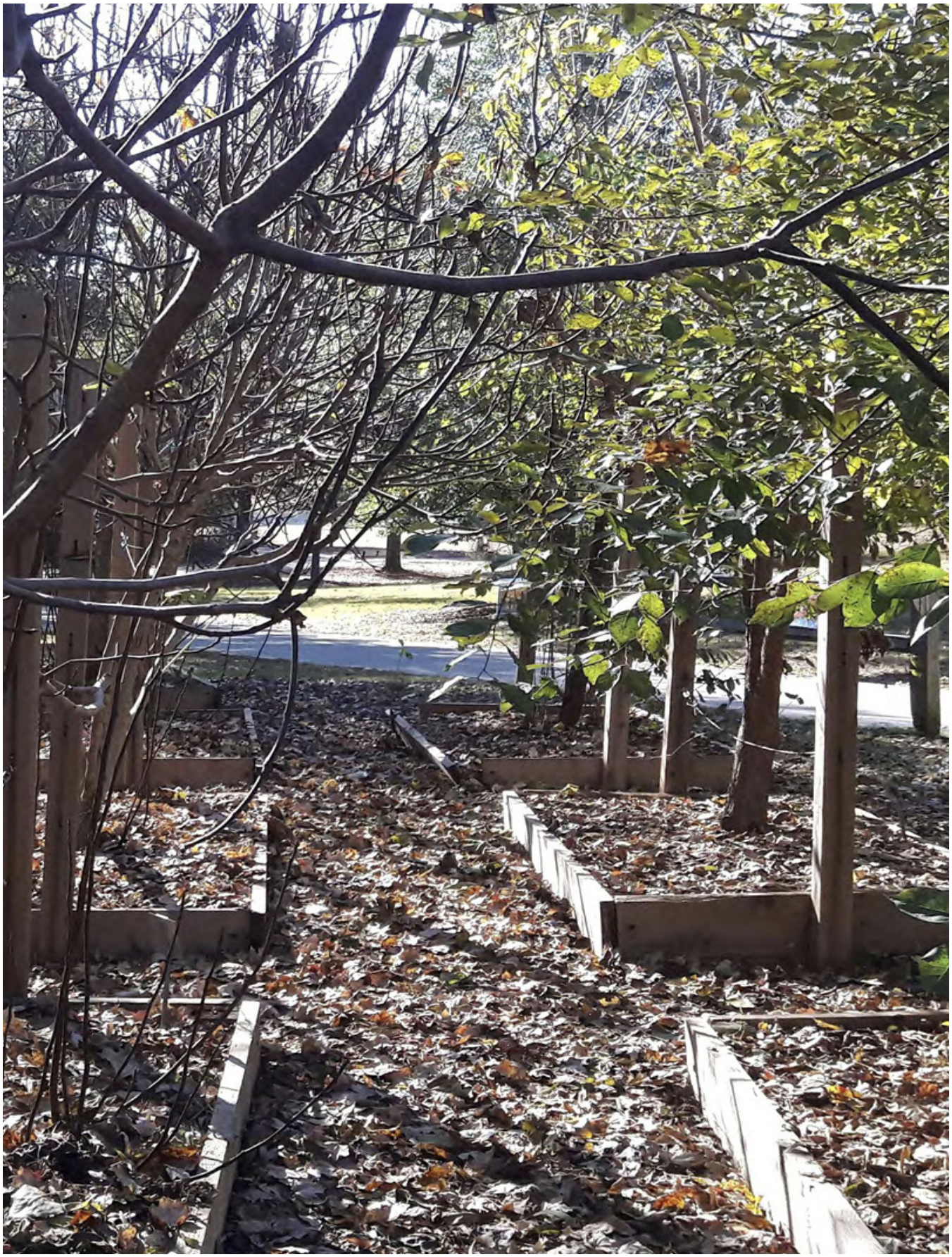
Historic and Cultural Resources



General Policies and Protection Measures Matrix

Historic and Cultural Resources





SCENIC AND AGRICULTURAL

The pace and scale of the urbanization that has taken place in the Atlanta Region has precluded many of the traditional land uses associated with the rural, agrarian character found throughout Georgia. Nonetheless, there are communities that desire to preserve of their rural character as a tool to manage growth. With growth in the demand for locally grown and/ or organic foods, preservation of rural areas and agricultural uses is an important consideration in the overall growth strategy of the region. Portions of the outer periphery of many metro counties still retains the feel and character of rural communities. Local Comprehensive Plans for these areas reflect the desire to protect this character against the pressures of continued development. Within these areas and other isolated pockets throughout the Atlanta Region, small-to-medium size farms have been able to engage in agricultural production. Much of this is done on a limited scale and may be sustained by access to local farmers markets or Community Supported Agricultural cooperatives. Community gardens are established in neighborhoods in every county and many cities.

Overall, each of these areas of agricultural and scenic value encompass a broad range of unique issues and opportunities. Their inclusion in this plan results from the distinctive niche they hold in an otherwise largely urban and suburban region. Within each, there is an array of existing mechanisms to control land use patterns – zoning and development regulations, overlay districts, and future development plans, to name a few. Identifying these areas as Regionally Important Resources or part of the regional Green Infrastructure Network reinforces many of the local policies and regulations that govern these areas and enhances the awareness of the value of cultural landscapes within these areas. Of all resources defined within this Plan, areas of agricultural and or scenic value can benefit from holistic land planning efforts that consider their value defined within a larger context and merges the best of natural resource conservation with historic preservation.

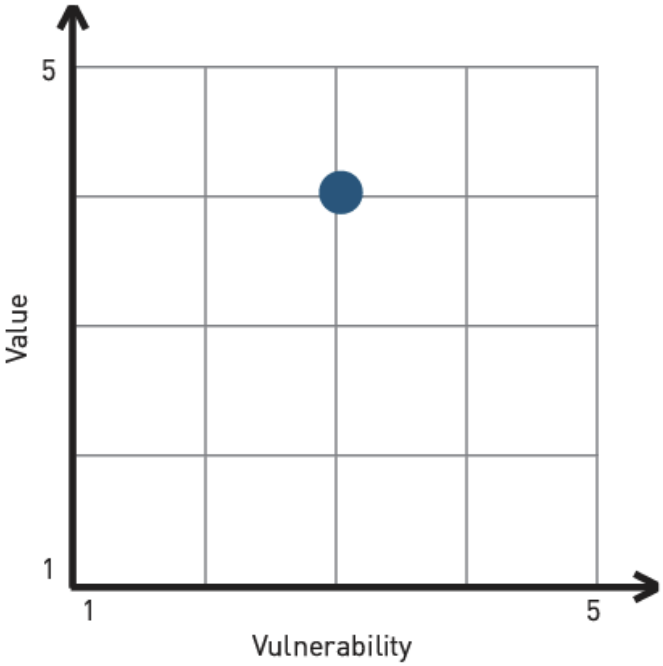


GEORGIA CENTENNIAL FARMS

PRIORITY RESOURCE

The Georgia Centennial Farm Program recognizes the agricultural heritage of the state and the families who have been integral to its history. It focuses on farms that have been in operation for over a century - some held by the same family, and some meeting the criteria to be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Centennial Farms in the Atlanta Region have not only been identified as significant historic resources and cultural landscapes by a state agency, but also connect with the ARC criteria of preserving significant working agricultural resources. Ten farms have been recognized in the Atlanta Region through the Centennial Farm Program: A.W. Roberts Farm (Cherokee); Lake Laura Gardens (Cobb); Moss Clark Farm (Henry); Fieldstone Farm (Henry); Rolling Acres Farm (Rockdale); Gresham Galt Farm (Cherokee); Mabry Farm (Cobb); Alfarminda Farm (Gwinnett); Benefield Farm (Gwinnett); Dr. Samuel Locklin and Alice Stanley Hinton Farm (Gwinnett).

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



Sites recognized through the Georgia Centennial Farm Program are Priority Resources because they provide a range of value to the community, including preservation of historic and cultural resources, providing greenspace along with areas for active food production, and the opportunity to create an educational amenity for the community. They are vulnerable to a lack of protection by state or federal agencies, and they may be subject to different development pressures due to a variety of conditions of private ownership. They are subject to development pressures and lack resources long term preservation.



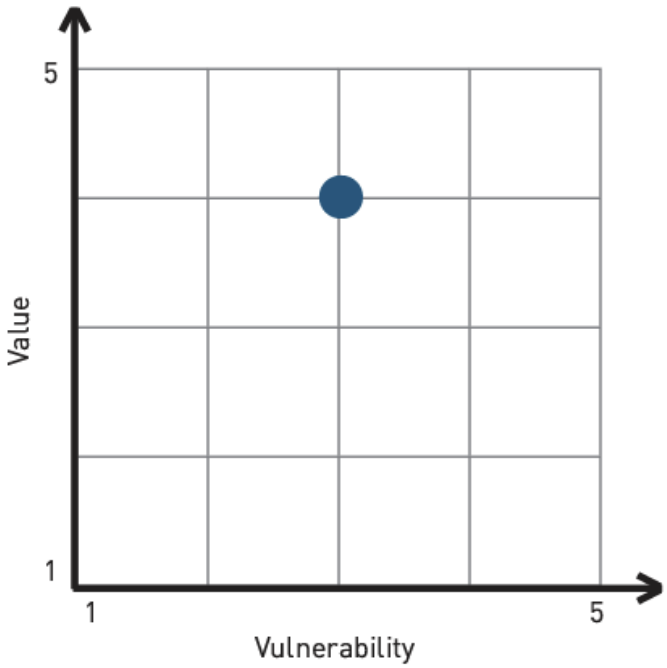
GEORGIA AGRITOURISM SITES

PRIORITY RESOURCE

The Georgia Agritourism Program fosters greater awareness of agritourism destinations by working with local farms to provide signage and other resources to increase visibility. Agritourism programs are a key benefit to maintaining the economic sustainability of regional resources of agricultural importance. Ten farms have been recognized in the Atlanta Region through the Georgia Agritourism Program: Rancho Alegre Farms (Gwinnett), Southern Belle Farms (Henry), Yule Forest/ The Pumpkin Patch (Henry), Adams Farm (Fayette), Gibbs Gardens (Cherokee), Feather's Edge Vineyards (Cherokee), Pleasant Union Farm (Cherokee), Lewallen Farms (Cherokee), Big Springs Farm (Cherokee), and Big Door Vineyards (Cherokee).

Rancho Alegre Farms promotes a variety of opportunities, including field trips, camps, farmers market, and rental space in an environment that includes food gardens, livestock and other elements of agricultural education. Southern Belle Farms includes an operational dairy farm alongside a corn maze and pick your own berry patch. They also offer field trips, seasonal special events and rental space on the farm. Yule Forest/ The Pumpkin Patch has a diversified offering of farm activities that features pick-your-own berries, landscape and holiday trees, and an outdoor classroom experience. Adams Farm shares their produce through a roadside stand, pick-your-own berries, and sale of value added farm products. Gibbs Gardens is a private estate open to the public that features acres of formal gardens, including thousands of daffodils, extensive water lily gardens, and a Japanese garden. Feather's Edge Vineyards offers locally sourced wines and is home to the art gallery Wildcat on a Wing. Pleasant Union Farm hosts a variety of events, including U-pick events, flower design workshops, and dinners. They specialize in blueberries, blackberries, seasonal vegetables, and cut flowers, and sell goats milk soap and lotion and free-range eggs at farmer's markets. Lewallen Farms covers 400 acres and host events ranging from farmer's markets to duck hunts. Big Springs Farm grows pumpkins for sale in the fall, and offers events and opportunities for field trips throughout the year. Big Door Vineyards hosts events including corporate retreats and weddings in addition to regular wine tastings and music performances.

VALUE AND VULNERABILITY



Georgia Agritourism Sites are Priority Resources because they provide a range of value to the community, including preservation of historic and cultural resources, providing greenspace along with areas for active food production, and the opportunity to create an educational amenity for the community. They are vulnerable to a lack of protection by state or federal agencies, and they may be subject to different development pressures due to a variety of conditions of private ownership. They are subject to development pressures and lack resources long term preservation.



DESIGNED LANDSCAPES

Criteria established by the ARC Board for consideration of Regionally Important Resources includes areas that create or preserve passive greenspaces including gardens. To further refine different types of gardens, the Designed Landscape category includes landscaped areas containing both plant materials and hardscape elements placed in an intentional design – formal or informal – including areas of institutional land uses. In many instances, designed landscapes also include both historic and cultural value, by their association with historic sites or the presence of heirloom plan material. The Georgia Historic Landscape Initiative has identified several gardens in the Atlanta Region that have value as both historic resources and greenspace opportunities.

The Spring at Kennesaw: The records of the Georgia Historic Landscape Initiative identify that, "the spring provided water for 150 years to the people of the community. It was the main water source for Camp McDonald prior to and during the Civil War." The Spring was included in the design of Kennesaw's City Hall when their new building was constructed in 1983.

Archibald Smith Plantation Garden: The Archibald Smith Plantation originally sat on 300 acres of farmland in what is now Roswell. Eight acres along with the house and outbuildings remain. The Roswell Garden Club maintains a Rose Garden on the property, and recreated an antebellum garden at the rear entrance.

Barrington Hall: Built from 1839-1842 on 12 acres at the highest point in Roswell, Connecticut architect Willis Ball designed the home. An unnamed landscape architect from England planned the ornate grounds, though the stone mason, also from England, is credited as Mr. Francis Minhinnett. Many remnants of the original garden design remain.

Bulloch Hall: Bulloch Hall bears a resemblance to Barrington Hall. The home, built in 1840 by the same Connecticut architect, Willis Ball, also has a heart shaped front drive. Though little is known about the original design of the grounds, the trees in the landscape point to clues of the layout. This site was the childhood home of Mittie Bulloch, mother of Theodore Roosevelt.

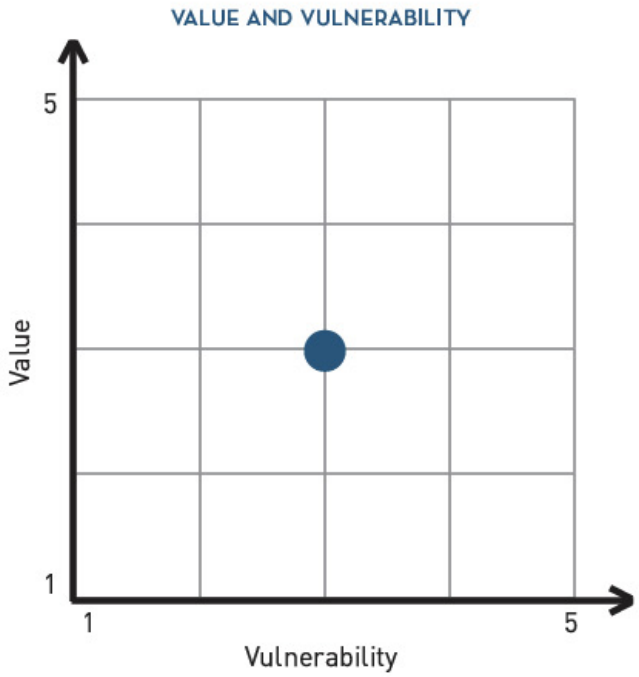
Goodrum – Abreau House and Grounds: The house and gardens are an excellent example of Regency design in the Atlanta area. Atlanta architect Phillip Trammell Shutze designed the home and grounds from 1929-1930.

Iris Garden: Described as a "beautiful showcase of irises," the Iris Garden is located near Ansley Park in the city of Atlanta. The garden is maintained by the city of Atlanta and the Iris Garden Club.

Woodhaven (Georgia State Governor's Mansion): Woodhaven was the name of a Tudor-Revival estate house that occupied the grounds of the current Georgia State Governor's Mansion. The estate house was demolished (partially by fire) to make way for the current structure built in 1967. Much of the design of the grounds was left intact from the days of Woodhaven.

The Atlanta History Center Grounds, including the Swan House Gardens and Grounds: The Atlanta History Center includes several distinct designed landscapes on the 33 acre property. The Mary Howard Gilbert Memorial Quarry Garden; Tullie Smith Farm Gardens ; Cherry Sims Asian American Garden; Frank A. Smith Rhododendron Garden; Swan House Gardens and Grounds; and Swan Woods Trail.

In addition to sites identified by the Georgia Historic Landscape Initiative, other public gardens can be visited throughout the region. Elements of historic value, species diversity, and a unique design aesthetic are on display. Included in this list are Hartsfield Jackson International Airport Floral Clock (Atlanta, Fulton County); Atlanta Botanical Gardens (Atlanta, Fulton County); Lewis Vaughn Botanical Garden (Conyers, Rockdale County); Claude T. Fortson Memorial Garden (Hampton, Henry County); Cator Woolford Gardens (Atlanta, DeKalb County); Callenwolde Park (Atlanta, DeKalb County); and Gibbs Gardens (Ball Ground, Cherokee County).



Designed Landscapes provide community greenspace along with areas for active food production. They are vulnerable to a lack of lack resources for maintenance long term preservation.



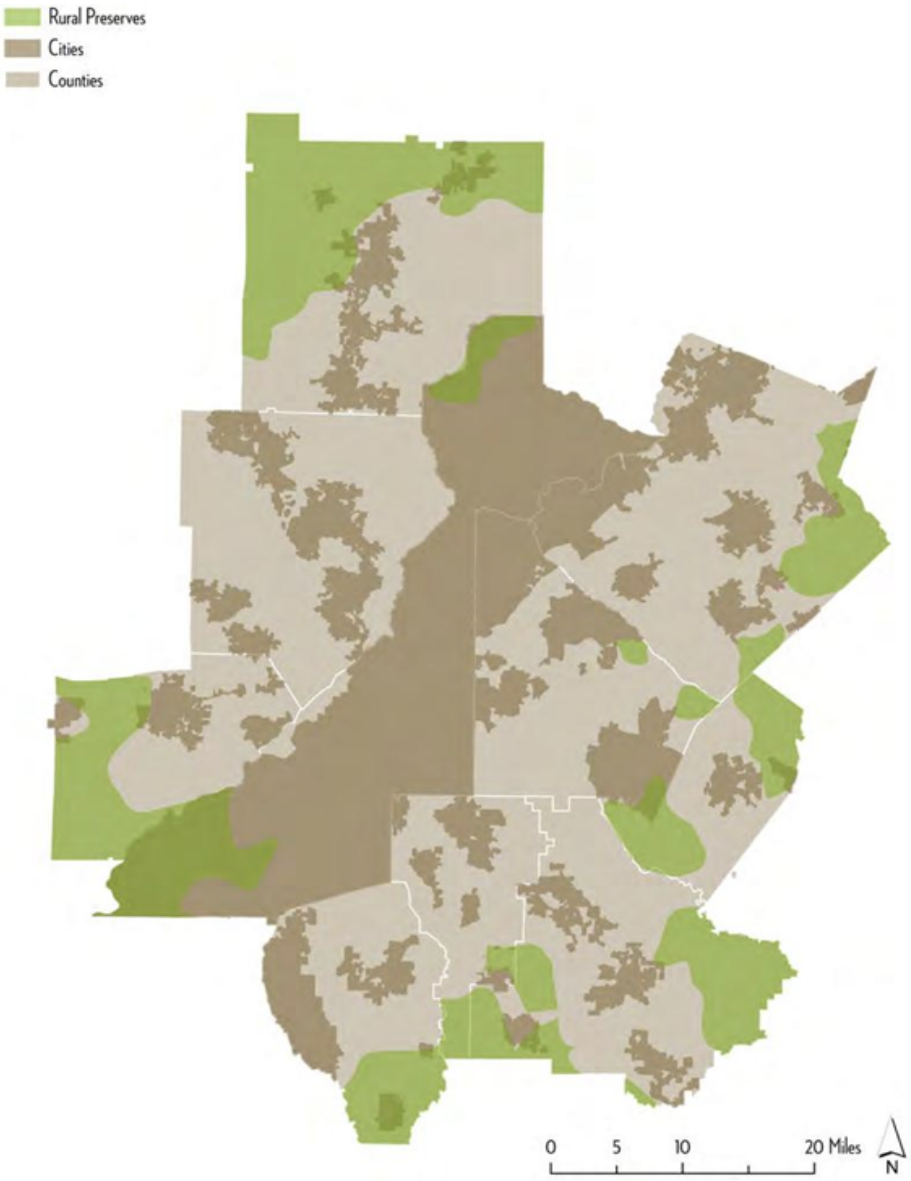
RURAL PRESERVES

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK

The Unified Growth Policy Map provides direction for future growth within the region. It represents local plans along with regional policies and forecasts. On the whole, it represents the region's vision for growth and development, as well as areas of protection.

The map depicts Rural and Developing Rural Areas. Taken together, these areas represent mostly undeveloped land in the region. Developing Rural areas may experience limited new growth, whereas Rural areas are planned for limited or no growth. Both of these areas may have limited infrastructure and services. These areas prioritize the maintenance of rural characteristics, including road profiles, and protections for scenic corridors are encouraged. Opportunities existing for conservation style development, along with heritage, recreation and agriculturally-based economic development initiatives.

Rural Preserves are identified based on the Rural and Developing Rural categories of the Unified Growth Policy Map and they are included here as a part of the regional Green Infrastructure Network. [Resources within the Green Infrastructure Network are not considered to be Regionally Important Resources for the purposes of this plan.]



URBAN AGRICULTURE

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK

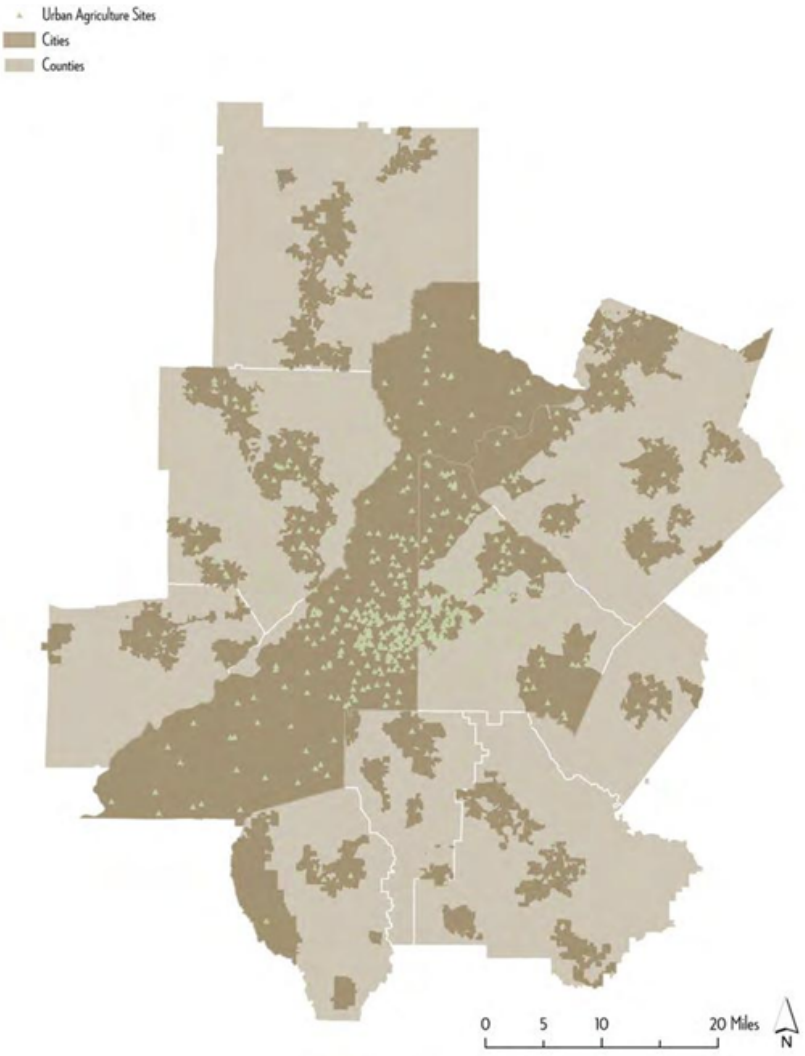
The Regional Resource Plan gives consideration to areas that create or preserve passive greenspaces including gardens, as well as opportunities for local food production activities. This plan includes three distinct areas for their contribution to local food production: Community Gardens, Urban Farms and Urban Orchards.

Community Gardens are greenspace areas used for limited production of food and/ or ornamental plants that are gardened and managed collectively by a limited group of individuals. Community gardens effectively combine both of the adopted goals of preserving greenspace and areas for local food production.

Urban Farms are generally larger in scale than community gardens, and are often cultivated for the commercial sale of products as an agriculturally-oriented business. Some urban farms may be developed in combination with a community garden; some may be operated as a home-based business; some may be operated on agricultural land leased or owned for the purpose.

Urban Orchards are found in combination with Community Gardens and Urban Farms, or as their own grove. Orchards typically include fruit and nut trees, and often require less regular maintenance than community gardens or urban farms.

Urban Agriculture Sites are included here as a part of the Regional Green Infrastructure Network. [Resources in the Green Infrastructure Network are not considered to be Regionally Important Resources for the purposes of this plan.]



URBAN FOREST

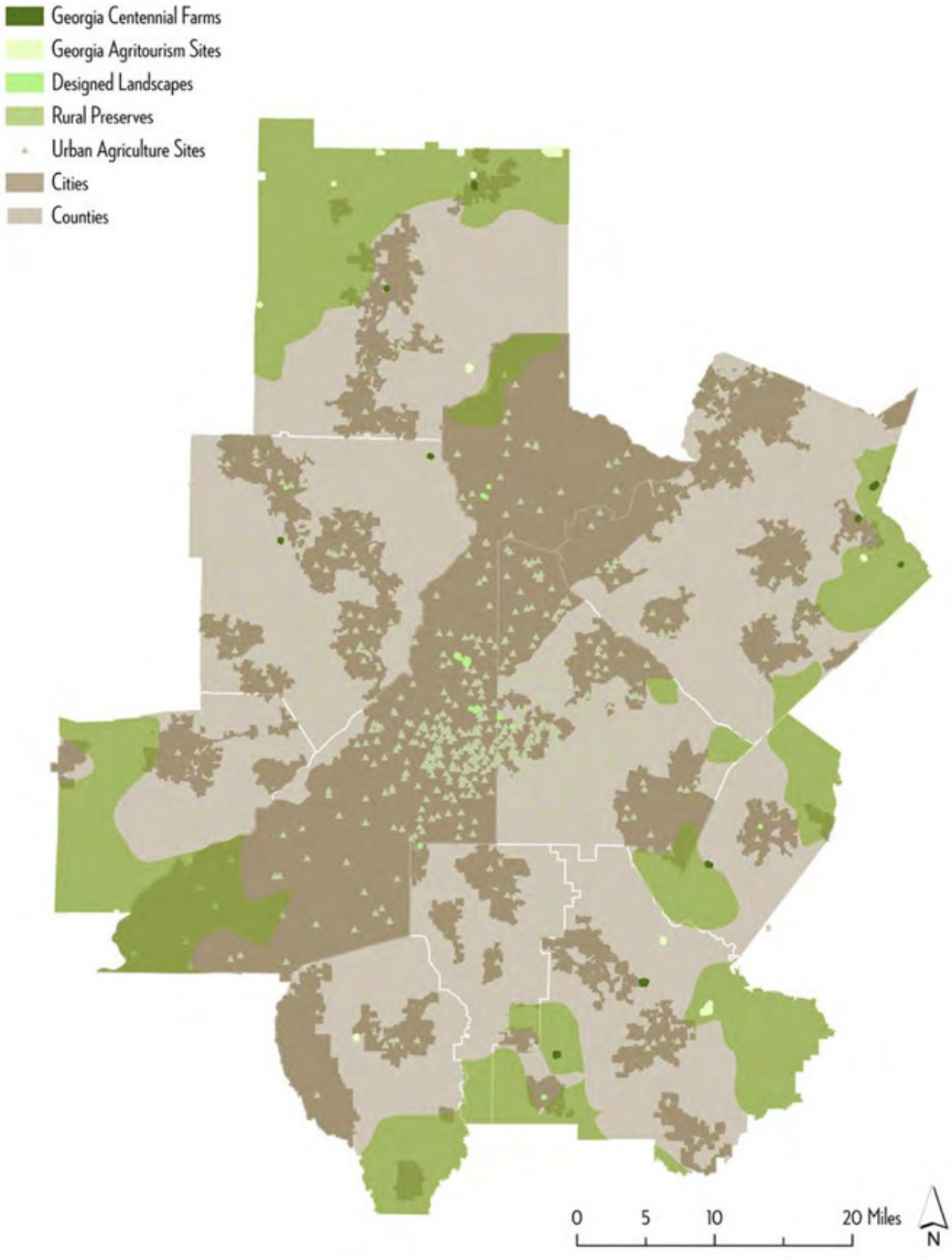
POLICY CONNECTION

Any trees, whether growing individually along a street, in a park, or under forest conditions, make up the region's urban forest. Trees provide numerous environmental and social benefits, and are consistently threatened by development in metropolitan areas. As the region's communities face ever-growing effects of climate change, trees play important roles in removing carbon dioxide from the air and producing oxygen, and helping to manage stormwater runoff by reducing the amount of water falling directly onto impervious surfaces. Additionally, trees help to curb the urban heat island effect, which often causes cities to be several degrees warmer than the surrounding areas due to the number of buildings and paved surfaces, by providing shading. This evens out temperatures and lowers energy demand. The ability of trees to reduce both pollution and the urban heat island effect offers health benefits ranging from the reduction of respiratory illnesses to heat induced illnesses. Trees have also been shown to improve the livability of neighborhoods, offering desirable aesthetics and psychological benefits. Especially in the "city in a forest," as Atlanta is often called, it is important to preserve existing and increase tree canopy wherever possible.

Policy Connections reflect areas of evolving focus in the agency work program. ARC anticipates a greater focus on the urban forest and its role in planning for resiliency in the region. [Policy Connections are not considered to be Regionally Important Resources or Green Infrastructure Network for the purposes of this plan.]



SCENIC & AGRICULTURAL
REGIONALLY IMPORTANT & GREEN INFASTRUCTURE NETWORK RESOURCES



Regional Resource Plan 67

Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices Matrix

Areas of Agricultural and/or Scenic Value



General Policies and Protection Measures Matrix

Areas of Agricultural and/or Scenic Value

