

Infill Development Program

What is it?

Infill development is new construction on scattered vacant or underutilized lots in the established neighborhoods and business districts of your community. These infill sites are typically located closer to the center of your community and are already served by public infrastructure, such as roads, water and sewer lines. Infill development has many benefits (see navigation bar at left for Benefits of Infill Development), but it may not happen on its own, without some intervention by your local government.

By instituting an infill development program, your local government can encourage more infill development while, at the same time, guiding this development so that it enhances the quality of life in established neighborhoods of your community. An effective infill development program will include the following elements:

- Identification of areas of the community where infill development is desired
- Guidelines for the types of infill development that are appropriate for each of these areas. These guidelines will typically regulate the density, size, and architectural design of new infill development
- Incentives to developers for building new infill projects
- Improvements to public facilities and services to support infill development
- Changes in existing regulations to support infill development (for an example of a local infill development program refer to the Model ordinances or other implementation instruments section of GQGP quality growth tool: Infill Development Program)

How to do it

1. **Involve stakeholders.** Identify stakeholders and form a task group or steering committee that is capable of representing the various points of view in the community and working together toward a common agenda. The stakeholders may include:
 - local government representatives
 - neighborhood organizations
 - property owners
 - realtors
 - home builders and commercial developers
 - bankers

Educate these stakeholders about the benefits of infill development for your community. Invite them to raise their concerns about infill development. This

may help establish what types of infill development are acceptable, and suggest guidelines for different situations.

2. **Identify infill priority areas.** Involve the stakeholder group in identifying priority areas for infill development in your community. Do these areas have access to adequate infrastructure and services? Consult with realtors and developers to assess the real estate market for new infill development in these areas. What types of development would be feasible and what would be the most appropriate density and selling prices?
3. **Carry out an infill parcel inventory in priority areas.** Create an inventory of the vacant and underutilized property in the priority infill areas identified above. Perform a windshield survey of these areas, looking for:
 - vacant lots and land areas (even if not currently accessible by paved streets)
 - underutilized properties, identified by comparing the current use with surrounding properties and what could be supported by infrastructure and location
 - poorly maintained properties that might be redeveloped
 - condition of public facilities, including street, sidewalk, and drainage problems that may need to be addressed in order to promote infill development in the area
 - existing neighborhood patterns of landscaping, tree canopy, and architectural features that may be factored into guidelines for compatibility of new infill development

Research possible development limitations for each infill parcel and add this to your inventory. These may include: current zoning, soils, floodplain, wetlands, topography, and accessibility (roads). Also research the age, condition, and residual capacity of public facilities serving each parcel, including schools, water, sewer, parks, sidewalks, public transportation, streets, and stormwater drainage.

You may choose to prioritize the infill parcels according to developability and their importance for achieving your community objectives. Evaluation measures might include:

- size of parcel
- configuration of parcel
- size, condition, quality, and value of existing structures
- character of the neighborhood
- dynamics of real estate market
- capacity and condition of infrastructure
- surrounding amenities and support services

4. **Identify potential barriers to infill development.** Involve stakeholders in evaluating factors that may work against encouraging infill development in the areas identified above. Typical barriers to infill development include:

- *Lack of developer interest.* Developers in your area may be used to developing only on "greenfield" sites at the urban periphery, unaware of the market potential for infill development.
- *Cost of development.* Infill parcels typically cost more than land in greenfield sites. It is also more expensive to develop on lots surrounded by existing development.
- *Neighborhood resistance to higher density* (necessary to recoup higher development costs). This resistance can significantly delay a project, and therefore push up development costs, as the neighbors fight each successive development approval required for the project.
- *Regulatory barriers.* Zoning, land development regulations, and fire and building codes may present problems for developing on infill sites. These regulations are typically written to deal with development on suburban greenfield sites. For example, these codes frequently require more frontage, lot area, setbacks or buffers than will fit on the typical infill lot. Requiring developers to obtain multiple variances from your existing codes will discourage them from pursuing infill projects.
- *Administrative delays.* Examples of infill development activities that could add delays to the development process include:
 - fee waivers, tax abatements and sale of publicly foreclosed property - require action by several boards and filing processes that may be scheduled for only certain times of the year
 - detailed design standards that require multiple reviews or public meetings
 - public acquisition of infill sites to facilitate redevelopment - the acquisition and redevelopment process will require a redevelopment plan to meet state requirements, property appraisals, and a variety of legal actions.
 - financial assistance to developers from public sources - grants and loans from state and federal sources may take months to process, require significant paperwork to assure eligibility and accountability, and often come in the form of reimbursements instead of covering "up front" costs
- *Inadequate public facilities.* Poor water or sewer service and inadequate road or school capacity are examples of factors that could discourage a developer from undertaking infill development in a particular area.
- *Accessibility.* Lack of paved street access to a vacant site will render it undevelopable.

5. **Design your strategy for encouraging infill development.** The barriers to infill development identified above will point toward elements that need to be included in your infill development program. Work with your stakeholders to select and refine these elements to fit the local situation.

Possible Elements of an Infill Development Strategy

Stimulating Developer Interest

- Training programs or seminars
- Publicity campaign
- Publicize infill parcel inventory and make information available to developers
- Provide examples of successful infill development projects
- Demonstration projects involving public-private partnership or local development corporation

Reducing Infill Costs

- Public land assembly and land price write-downs
- Make productive interim use of vacant land by installing parking, gardens, playgrounds, etc.
- Below-market financing through mortgage revenue bonds or DCA Housing Programs <http://www.dca.state.ga.us/housing/index.html>
- Density bonuses; permitting variances from side-yards or setbacks to allow greater coverage
- Loan guarantees
- Fee waivers, including impact fee (refer to GQGP quality growth tool: Development Impact Fee) waivers
- Tax abatement

Reducing Neighborhood Resistance

- Design standards for ensuring compatibility of new infill development
- Require developers to meet with residents of the surrounding area to solicit their input on project design before finalizing their development plans
- Correcting Regulatory Barriers
- Revise zoning for particular sites
- Special overlay districts (refer to GQGP quality growth tool: Overlay Districts)
- Eliminate inappropriate development regulations (refer to GQGP quality growth tool: Smart Growth Audit)

Reducing Administrative Delays (refer to GQGP quality growth tool: Streamlined Development Permitting)

- Revise staff review procedures
- Eliminate unnecessary review steps or hearings
- Designate an ombudsman or review expeditor

Improving Public Facilities

- Public funding of off-site capital improvements (streets and utility extension or upgrading)
- Impact fees (refer to GQGP quality growth tool: Development Impact Fees)
- Tax allocation district
- Community Improvement district

Improving Accessibility

- Provide public streets (consider extending streets in a manner that improves overall connectivity of the street network).

6. **Adopt the program.** Develop an ordinance that reflects stakeholder input for your infill development program. The model ordinance (refer to the Model ordinances or other implementation instruments section of GQGP tool: Infill Development Program) included herein may be adapted to your specific requirements. Present the ordinance to local elected officials for official adoption. Abide by all applicable notice and public meeting requirements.
7. **Spread the word** to builders, real estate professionals, and lenders and encourage them to take advantage of your new infill development program. Provide information through your planning, zoning and permitting offices, and distribute materials explaining the new program to builders associations and boards of realtors. Lenders are often skeptical of financing new projects that they cannot evaluate in familiar ways. Minimize lender opposition by providing information on successful infill development projects in Georgia.
8. **Track progress and revise the program as needed.** Periodically re-evaluate your infill development program to determine if it is encouraging infill development of the types and locations desired by the community. If not, adjust the program accordingly.

Things to consider before using this tool

- Residents of neighborhoods experiencing infill development may oppose new infill projects because of concerns about: increased density; impact on property values; increased cut-through traffic; loss of trees; drainage problems, or bringing a mix of incomes, races, or age groups into the neighborhood. To minimize this opposition, ask developers to meet with residents of the surrounding area to solicit their input on project design before finalizing their development plans.
- Establishing and implementing an infill development program will involve the following administrative costs:
 - Program Design*
 1. organizing public involvement
 2. inventorying vacant land
 3. reviewing codes and streamlining permitting
 4. developing design guidelines and other regulations
 - Ongoing administration*
 5. staff time reviewing projects and administering program guidelines
 6. site acquisition and infrastructure improvements
 7. providing incentives for infill development

- One financial benefit of infill development for local governments is that it reduces the need to provide public infrastructure to support new development. But this benefit depends on how well the existing public infrastructure in infill neighborhoods was originally constructed and how well it has been maintained. Sometimes the original infrastructure in older neighborhoods is aging and under-maintained. Older streets, sidewalks, schools, water pressure, sewer lines, and stormwater management facilities may be incapable of carrying additional loads. In such cases, your local government may be required to make improvements to this infrastructure, which will substantially reduce the financial benefit of infill development.

Additional Information on Encouraging Infill Development

Background

- Are you concerned that development is pushing the borders of your community too far out?
- Are there vacant lots or property that could be built on scattered within developed areas in your community?
- Are you looking for ways to persuade developers to invest in some of the overlooked parts of your community?
- In those established neighborhoods where new development is occurring, are residents concerned about:
 - houses that don't fit the neighborhood's character?
 - loss of mature trees and open space?
 - Increased traffic, crowded schools, and drainage problems?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, a strategy for encouraging infill development may be right for your community. Infill development is new construction on vacant lots in established neighborhoods and business districts that are largely developed. Infill development can occur in a variety of forms and intensities. While the most prevalent form of infill development is small-scale residential or commercial development, projects may occupy parcels over 100 acres as a virtual new town with a full complement of urban land uses.

The perception that there is a boundless supply of inexpensive land for development has caused some of our communities to spread too far across the landscape. This pattern of growth has led to low density development and inefficient land use that drains the public infrastructure and services of many Georgia communities. Increased infill development can be an effective antidote to sprawl and offers needed alternatives in both housing and lifestyle. Through infill, redevelopment and reuse of vacant and under-utilized parcels can be an economical way to decrease traffic, and promote walking by reducing walking distances and supporting transit use. Large-scale infill development can take even more advantage of transit and other measures to reduce travel demand through mixed-use development. In three cities studied by the Real Estate Research Corporation, commuters from infill residential sites would save an average of \$3,000 to \$4,000 each in annual transportation costs compared to the average commuter living on the suburban fringe.

Types of Infill Development

Alternative forms of infill development include:

- Developing one or more new residences on an undeveloped or underutilized site within an existing, established neighborhood

- Redeveloping an existing neighborhood
- Subdividing an existing lot into two or more building lots and adding houses on the newly created lots
- Demolishing an existing home on a lot and building a larger home incorporating an additional residential unit ("tear downs")

Benefits of Infill Development

The principal benefits of infill development include:

- making better use of urban land supplies while reducing consumption of forest and agricultural land
- increasing access of people to jobs, and jobs to labor force
- reducing the time, money, energy, and air pollution associated with commuting and other use of single occupant automobiles
- strengthening real estate markets and property values, and renewing older neighborhoods and housing stock
- making better use of existing infrastructure and lowering costs of public services such as: transit, sidewalks, water and sewer, school, and public safety (police, fire, ambulance)
- replacing brownfields and abandoned industrial areas with functioning assets
- adding to socioeconomic diversity
- supporting unique cultural, arts, educational and civic functions, such as museums, opera, sports, and universities

Relationship to the Comprehensive Plan

Your community's Comprehensive Plan should provide the goals, objectives, policies, and implementation strategies that guide future development. It should also contain data, maps, and lists of community development projects and programs that will influence the future character and shape of the community. The following table illustrates how each Comprehensive Plan element can play a role in framing a successful infill development strategy. If your Comprehensive Plan does not encourage infill development, you could make these changes part of the next scheduled update of the Comprehensive Plan and Short Term Work Program.

Comprehensive Plan Element	Examples of Useful Information	Examples of Supportive Policies
Population Element	Number of future residents by age, income, family size	Support the diversity of incomes, ages, cultures and lifestyles in our community.
Economic Element	Number of new jobs created in the community in each employment classification	Encourage the retention and appropriate expansion of population-serving business opportunities in the central business district.
Natural and Historic Resources Element	Location of fragile areas of natural resources, steep slopes, floodplains that make vacant land unsuitable for further development	Protect sensitive areas, prime forests and other natural resources from unsuitable development.
Community Facilities	Location and capacity of schools, parks, libraries, streets, public transportation, water, and sewer service that would support infill development	Provide for the maintenance and improvement of public facilities in older areas, especially those capable of supporting infill development.
Housing	Age and condition of existing housing stock. Number of new housing units needed to meet projected population growth	Provide incentives for mixed-income housing to be located closer to major employment concentrations.
Land Use	Location and acreage of current supply of vacant and undeveloped land. Amount and location of future development and	Promote the preservation of older neighborhoods through appropriate infill and redevelopment where adequate public

	redevelopment	facilities exists.
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