

THE BLUEPRINTS PROCESS: A GUIDE



Blueprints for Successful Communities, an education and technical assistance program of the Georgia Conservancy, facilitates community-based planning efforts across the state. These planning initiatives can occur at a variety of scales and locations including the neighborhood, city, and county level, as well as along transportation and watershed corridors and in urban and rural areas throughout the state.

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INTRODUCTION

This document is a guide to the Blueprints for Successful Communities process. The Georgia Conservancy has been conducting community planning and design projects following certain principles and guidelines for the past fifteen years. In the process, the Conservancy has learned a lot about how to do so effectively, reconciling conflicting opinions to arrive at collaborative decisions that are equitable, environmentally sound, and supported by the community at large.

APPLYING BLUEPRINTS PRINCIPLES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

At the Georgia Conservancy, we are fortunate to have a close relationship with the Georgia Institute of Technology's School of City and Regional Planning and School of Architecture, which means that Georgia Tech graduate students—advised by community planning and architecture professors—work with Georgia Conservancy staff to provide technical support to the Blueprints program, devoting an enormous amount of time and expertise to our communities. Maybe your community does not have such a wonderful resource yet, but we still feel there is much about our process worth conveying. Even if conducting design or planning studios (graduate student classes) through a university is not an option, the Blueprints principles and methods of guiding a community through a participatory planning process have proven effective, and we encourage you to adapt them to your own community as we adapt them to each community in which we work.

A TYPICAL BLUEPRINTS PROCESS

The Blueprints process is adjusted to fit the varying needs and circumstances in each community. Blueprints has the advantage of the three part relationship that we have built, in which the community acts as the client and driver of the plan, the Georgia Institute of Technology assists with technical expertise, and the Georgia Conservancy sponsors and guides the process with the aid of its interdisciplinary Blueprints Partners. Most communities will not have the benefit of such a particular set of relationships, but the principles and methods we use to ensure community participation are important and can be applied in any community.

Our process typically evolves in the following way:

- The Georgia Conservancy agrees to work with a community that is experiencing change or is anticipating change;
- Working with the community, we create a broad and inclusive stakeholder group;

- Any upfront educational training that might be needed is conducted, covering topics such as planning policies, terminology, and concepts;
- The Conservancy engages a Georgia Tech School of City and Regional Planning or School of Architecture studio whose masters students conduct analysis and planning work;
- At least four community meetings over a four-month period are held with the stakeholder group and the Georgia Tech studio facilitated by the Conservancy;
- The studio presents a report to the Conservancy. We in turn edit, finalize, and release a Blueprints report, which becomes the community's implementation plan; and,
- The Georgia Conservancy provides follow-up education or technical assistance to support the community's implementation of the plan.

Usually the Georgia Conservancy conducts two Blueprints programs a year – one in the spring and one in the fall. From the initial agreement to the report release, the process can take a full year to complete. Through the outlined process, we achieve stakeholder buy-in and community engagement even before the students get involved. Then, through the series of public workshops, we achieve a dialogue through which the community, with the assistance of the students, can prioritize and outline its goals and the steps to achieving them.

HOW DO WE MEASURE SUCCESS? While a successful planning process means something different in each community, we have some rules of thumb for judging our achievement:

- *stakeholder participation: number and diversity of attendees*
- *community consensus: one community-backed strategy per issue*
- *efficacy of the process: implementation of many of the Blueprints recommendations*

The product of the Blueprints process varies by community, of course. For example, sometimes the outcome is a specific set of zoning recommendations or land use policies; sometimes the outcome is a plan to manage water quality; and sometimes the process results in the creation of some kind of decision-making body that can facilitate consensus and implement planning strategies into the future. Past Blueprints processes have occupied a broad spectrum of focus, ranging from primarily physical planning efforts on one extreme to primarily community consensus-building and facilitation exercises on the other. Most lie somewhere between these extremes; their specific needs determine their specific position within this spectrum.

THE BLUEPRINTS PROGRAM

HISTORY

In 1995, the Georgia Conservancy brought together planners, architects, home builders, transportation engineers, and community advocates to begin a conversation about growth. At the time, many Georgians were concerned about the region's increasing congestion, lack of greenspace, declining air quality, and loss of land, but few were making headway in solving these problems.

At the Georgia Conservancy, we believe that quality growth is vital to our mission of protecting Georgia's natural environment. Protecting environmental resources requires strategies for planning the built environment in a way that allows for economic growth, cultural preservation, and vibrant and equitable communities.

Georgia is home to an abundance of natural and cultural resources. Our development patterns over the last fifty years present a very real threat to these resources and quality of life as a whole. In response, we formed the Blueprints for Successful Communities program to educate, facilitate, and technically assist communities across Georgia in their planning efforts. Since then, we have conducted stakeholder-driven planning programs in neighborhoods, communities, cities and counties all over the state, reaching tens-of-thousands of citizens.

We believe that we can and must thoughtfully plan our communities in order to achieve a balance of economic growth, cultural vibrancy, equitable development, and natural resource protection. We see quality growth as the nexus of all our other conservation interests—clean air and water, energy efficiency, and cultural and environmental preservation. Sustainable planning decisions are those that are economically viable, technically feasible, publicly acceptable, and environmentally compatible, and the Blueprints program consistently works to create planning processes that achieve all of those things.

Since the Blueprints program's inception, we have had the privilege of working in communities all over the state, facing a wide variety of challenges. The Blueprints program has worked in many different types of communities and conditions, including urban neighborhoods, transportation corridors, rural communities, and environmentally, culturally, and historically sensitive areas on Georgia's coast. Blueprints has tackled issues related to:

- growth management and development pressure in particular as it relates to the preservation of community character;
- environmental protection, land conservation, stormwater management, and the protection of water quality;
- traffic congestion, transportation infrastructure, and transit-oriented development;
- providing for an appropriate mix of land uses;

- zoning and historic preservation;
- affordable housing, displacement, and disinvestment; and
- infill development, brownfield redevelopment, and revitalization.

We have worked with the Georgia Institute of Technology's City and Regional Planning program and the Savannah College of Art and Design to engage students in the community planning process. The Blueprints program brings together diverse groups of stakeholders and expertise from across disciplines to help a community develop an action plan that makes the most of their assets and faces their challenges head on. The Blueprints report is the community's implementation plan and their guide to achieving their vision.

BLUEPRINTS PRINCIPLES

We base our work on the belief that successful communities are those that:

- 1) Work together to produce a high quality of life that can be sustained;
- 2) Employ regional strategies for transportation, land use, and economic growth;
- 3) Understand that sustainable community design is based on the recognition that the built environment has both direct and indirect effects on the natural environment;
- 4) Promote efficient use of existing infrastructure, energy supplies, water availability, and land;
- 5) Incorporate compact, integrated land uses which bring people closer to work, to schools and shopping, and safeguard undeveloped lands for agriculture, habitat, and recreation;
- 6) Provide transportation options so that each segment of the community has access to goods, services, and recreation;
- 7) Are designed to be safe, healthy, economically strong, environmentally sound, and inclusive.

Blueprints has been a leader in the growth management arena because of these principles, which are unique in focusing on environmental protection and community participation simultaneously. We emphasize natural resource protection, both by advocating the conservation of environmentally sensitive land and by working towards development practices that are resource efficient, healthy, and capable of accommodating future needs. And, Blueprints is always a community-driven process. We work exclusively in communities where people have invited us to assist them, and throughout the Blueprints process we actively engage community stakeholders and attempt to make workshops and meetings as inclusive as possible.

INTERDISCIPLINARY PARTNERSHIPS: BLUEPRINTS PARTNERS

One of Blueprints' greatest assets is its educational and technical advisory group, the Blueprints Partners. The Blueprints Partners is a group of organizations—professional, governmental, academic, and non-profit—that volunteer to advise the Georgia Conservancy and the Blueprints communities. These diverse organizations have a broad and varied knowledge base, but they share an understanding of the link between land use, economic stability, and healthy air, water, and natural areas.

The active role of each Blueprints Partner is vital to the success of the partnership, and every Blueprints Partner organization takes on certain responsibilities: Each Partner organization provides two representatives to serve on the Blueprints Partners Committee. These representatives attend several meetings a year, participate in Blueprints organizational decisions, and act as technical advisors, either lending their own expertise or connecting us with someone else in their organization. They have contributed to Blueprints processes as technical advisors in many capacities, including:

- reviewing student work;
- participating in and helping to guide community workshops;
- serving as subject-specific technical resources to the Blueprints team;
- educating community stakeholders on planning and policy concepts at pre-Blueprints training workshops; and
- assisting Blueprints communities in implementation of report recommendations.

Our Partners work with us for a number of reasons: Our regular meetings offer them a chance to interact with colleagues and discuss current topics in quality growth; participating in our stakeholder meetings and community workshops allow them to work with communities in meaningful and positive ways; research done at Georgia Tech helps them learn about new and innovative planning strategies; and the Georgia Conservancy recognizes our Blueprints Partners in our publications and on our website.

Currently, our Partners include the following organizations:

- American Council of Engineering Companies of Georgia
- American Institute of Architects, Atlanta Chapter
- American Society of Landscape Architects, Georgia Chapter
- Association County Commissioners of Georgia
- Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership

- Georgia Institute of Technology
- Georgia Municipal Association
- Georgia Planning Association
- Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association
- Institute of Transportation Engineers
- Southface Energy Institute
- Urban Land Institute, Atlanta District Council
- U.S. Green Building Council, Georgia Chapter

RESOURCE PROTECTION

Blueprints emphasizes the protection of natural resources. In an urban area this effort often manifests itself as the identification of parks and open spaces, the creation of trail systems, the introduction of natural stormwater management techniques, and the protection of the tree canopy. In more rural areas it can mean identifying and preserving natural, historic, and cultural resources and then deciding whether and where development should occur. Whether rural or urban, local or regional, planning for resource protection means developing robust physical frameworks that can adapt over time to accommodate a community's changing needs. It is important for the physical design of a community—the arrangement of its lots, blocks, and streets and the relationship between its public and its private spaces—to be a part of the community's discussion.

The Georgia Conservancy does not push specific environmental strategies throughout the Blueprints process. But, we have never had a problem with a community's planning strategies conflicting with our environmental goals. Why not? First, our reputation as an environmental organization probably means that communities who approach us are self-selecting ones, ones that already have an interest in environmental stewardship. Second, although we do not push any agendas during the process, we do make sure that the community's environmental issues at least enter the conversation at the start. As long as they are up for discussion, they will get addressed as the community sees fit.

Depending on the particular community's context, the following are some environmental resources that might warrant consideration in the process:

- **Water:** How is the community utilizing its available water sources? Is the community contaminating water downstream or drawing too much on its available water resources?
- **Scenic views:** How can the community capitalize on the aesthetic and recreational value of its particular landscape and natural corridors?
- **Wildlife habitats:** Are there any wildlife corridors or protected spaces in the community?
- **Tree canopy:** Will the community's longterm plans preserve or enhance its tree canopy, which can improve wildlife habitat, air quality, temperature moderation, and aesthetic quality?
- **Sensitive areas:** Does the community have conditions that require special consideration, such as steep slopes, coastal shoreline, or habitat areas for endangered species?
- **Community design:** Does the community's physical framework—the network of streets, blocks, and lots—allow for land uses and buildings in the community to change incrementally over time as the community's needs evolve? Does it support pedestrian activity? Are the community's public spaces well-designed and well-used?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Blueprints is a community-driven planning process, meaning that the community defines the scope of the work, has direct input throughout the process, and is responsible for the implementation of the final product.

The key to success in any Blueprints community-based planning process is the continuous and vigorous involvement of all local stakeholders. The Conservancy strongly believes that all people with a stake in the community should be involved in the process. We define stakeholders in the broadest terms, and we intentionally include potentially opposing viewpoints. The Blueprints process provides an open environment in which to work towards consensus. Planning efforts that bring together diverse interests and are committed to stakeholder participation in decision-making are the most successful in obtaining the necessary agreement to implement the goals and strategies developed through the planning process. Blueprints brings a diverse array of stakeholders to the table for an inclusive, consensus-based, community-driven planning process.

This participatory process provides the public with an opportunity to explore and understand the impacts of decisions on the immediate area, on the community, and on the region as a whole. For a meaningful and productive process, we believe it is essential that:

- the public has a voice in decisions that affect their lives;
- the involvement of those potentially affected is sought and participants are encouraged to assist in defining how they participate;
- the public is involved as early as possible in the public participation and decision-making process in order to build trust and establish transparency;
- participants are provided with the training and information they need in order to participate in a meaningful way; and
- education and participation are directly combined whenever possible; the needs and concerns of the public are listened to and their input is integrated into the outcome.

There are several different ways of successfully conducting a public participation process; the ideal way will differ with the size of the group, the complexity of the issues, and the community's specific culture. But, the principles remain the same. Appreciate and expect that almost every planning issue has personal content for the participants.

CONNECTING WITH A LOCAL SPONSOR

The Blueprints program only works in communities that have invited us to provide our assistance. Once a community reaches out to the Georgia Conservancy to apply for a Blueprints program, our staff and local community leaders jointly determine whether Blueprints is the right planning tool for the community.

Typically, the local organization that approaches us becomes our local sponsoring organization. This organization or group of organizations can be a municipality, a chamber of commerce, a group of county staff or elected officials, a coalition, etc. Examples of local sponsor organizations that we have worked with include:

- The University Parkway Alliance and the Georgia Passenger Rail Authority (University Parkway Blueprints)
- City of Columbus, City of Phenix City, Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center, The Valley Partnership (Middle Chattahoochee Blueprints)
- NewTown Macon (Macon Blueprints)
- Sandfly Community Betterment Association (Sandfly Blueprints)
- The Center for Community Preservation and Planning (Newton County Blueprints)
- The Lindbergh LaVista Corridor Coalition (Lindbergh LaVista Corridor Blueprints)
- Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association (Pittsburgh Community Blueprints)
- City of Toccoa and the Georgia Forestry Commission (Toccoa Blueprints)
- Neighborhood Planning Unit G leadership (NPU-G Blueprints)

We usually spend a significant amount of time with the local sponsors explaining the Blueprints process and setting preliminary goals with them. It is important that stakeholders understand that the Blueprints process is being driven by the local sponsor. Throughout the process, a local sponsor will introduce meetings and set out meeting goals to maintain this relationship clearly.

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

The local sponsor will work with Blueprints staff to identify community stakeholders. Then, at our first meeting, we will ask those present to identify others whose interests are at play.

The strength of the Blueprints process is that it is stakeholder-driven. The idea is not to come into a community to collect data and then leave to make a plan; on the contrary, the idea is to help the community create its own plan. And the key to achieving that is a broad, diverse stakeholder group that can talk through ideas, interests, and disagreements to reach consensus.

Examples of local stakeholders identified by the Blueprints staff and local sponsor include:

- Residents of a community
- Elected officials and city/county planning and/or engineering staff
- Representatives from the Department of Community Affairs' Regional Advisory Council and/or the appropriate Regional Planning Commission (metropolitan planning organization)
- Representatives from environmental groups and other "special interest" groups active in the areas, including preservation organizations
- Representatives from neighborhood groups within the area and other neighborhood activist types
- Church/faith leaders within the area
- Department of Transportation representatives
- Georgia Power or other large utility representatives
- Representatives from any nearby state or national park, wildlife refuge, military base, etc.
- Chamber of commerce representatives
- Representatives from local banks, industries, and businesses
- School board/system representatives
- Local developers
- Mobility advocates
- Housing departments and authorities
- Local law enforcement officials

Not everyone in the stakeholder group will become an active participant. In the past, 70-80% of the invited stakeholders attend meetings throughout the process. Around 50% will remain committed stakeholders, and probably 25-30 % will remain heavily involved throughout the process. It is acceptable and expected that not all of those invited will attend workshops or continue to be involved.

The significant point is that meetings or workshops are well advertised to the public at large and that there is a concerted effort to specifically invite identified stakeholders. In the past, we have advertised meetings in many ways: email, of course, is one option, although many communities, especially those that are in financial need, often have many members without regular or any internet access; flyers, direct mailings, and phone calls can be effective, as well; however, usually the most effective way to ensure attendance is to disseminate the invitation through the local sponsoring organization, a community center, a school, a church, or some other entity that already has a way of communicating with many members of the community.

It is also important to hold meetings at times when most working people can attend and in a location easily accessible to the majority of the community. We have held meetings in local churches, schools, and recreation centers on Saturdays and weekday evenings to accommodate the work schedules of stakeholders.

We always strive for a diverse group of stakeholders. We make sure to include people with diverging opinions and varying, if not conflicting, interests. Although negotiating between them can be difficult or uncomfortable, having a strong relationship with the local sponsor or sponsors makes things easier. Even though everyone will not agree on every topic, the stakeholders generally agree that collaboration among a wide base of interests leads to a more credible result.

PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

The public workshop format is the meat of the Blueprints process. We usually hold four of these workshops over the course of a Blueprints process, preceded by one introductory community meeting. At the pre-workshop meeting, we finalize the stakeholder list, explain the Blueprints process in detail, and develop an initial, broad picture of the community's issues. At the first workshop the stakeholder group identifies the assets and challenges of their community. This process not only gets the community sharing their concerns and hopes for their community but also helps direct the work of the Blueprints team. The second workshop is typically a discussion about existing conditions and a visioning exercise. The third workshop is a design charrette at which strategies and recommendations are put forth for vetting by the stakeholder group. At a final community meeting, the final Blueprints report presentation is made to the community and final comments are gathered from the stakeholder group. This part of the planning process usually takes approximately four months.

Depending on the issues your community faces, you may have fewer or more workshops. For example, a more complex set of issues or greater community conflicts may take more time to discuss, while a less contentious, more focused set of issues may take fewer meetings.

You might adjust the format of your meetings, as well. In some cases, for instance, especially when there are a number of technically difficult issues to work through, we have found it effective to break up into smaller groups, each of which addresses a specific problem. These groups should not be exclusionary or political. Rather, they should be transparent; their function is to allow a group of stakeholders—either because of their interest, their expertise, their available time, or their dedication—to devote time to working through a problem more thoroughly than might be possible in a stakeholder-wide setting. The small groups then informally present their work back to all the attendees for further discussion.

TIPS

Public workshops can be tricky. If you're working through a planning process in an open, inclusive, honest way, the chances of having a room full of stakeholders who are all in agreement with each other are slim to none. Conflicting perspectives are nothing to be afraid of; on the contrary, in working through them we achieve strong solutions to problems that are often more robust and always more equitable than what any one group or individual would have proposed alone. Compromise and collaborative discussions are essential to reaching consensus.

At every step on an agenda there are certain techniques that a meeting moderator or facilitator can use to make sure that any conflicts are brought to light and dealt with in a way that moves discussions along productively. Following, in the description of each meeting and workshop are the techniques that have worked for us over the years.

THE PRE-WORKSHOP COMMUNITY MEETING: INTRODUCING THE PROCESS

At this meeting, members of the Georgia Conservancy, a studio professor, and representatives of the sponsoring organization meet with an initial group of stakeholders. At this meeting, Georgia Conservancy staff gives an overview of the Blueprints process, the local sponsoring group explains why they invited us to work with them, and the Blueprints team reviews the definition of the study area. If time permits, we might discuss visions and goals as well. Later, in the first community workshop, we will work on refining and expanding these lists, as needed.

SUGGESTED AGENDA ITEMS

- Opening remarks (member of local sponsoring organization)
- Introductions around the room
- Introduction to Blueprints program (Blueprints staff and studio professor)
- Introduction to the community and its issues (Member of local sponsoring organization)
- Listing potential stakeholders

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

- Sign-in sheet
- Paper for note taking
- Markers

This initial meeting is critical as it is the community's introduction to Blueprints, and it will set the stage for our future interactions with them. It is also important because there are almost always some sensitive issues that need to be understood before the process starts, and this meeting is the appropriate time for such issues to be raised and discussed openly. The facilitators of the process should be on the lookout for any indications or mentions of people who have interests in the study site but are absent at the table. It is crucial to make sure they are included in the conversation, and this is the right time to reach out to stakeholders you might have missed during the initial development of the stakeholder list.

AT EACH MEETING: The facilitator should be supported throughout the process by someone who helps by taking notes on the discussion, and a sign-in sheet should be used at each meeting to collect stakeholder and contact information you may not have and to document the level of public participation.

THE FIRST PUBLIC WORKSHOP: DEFINING ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

This workshop is the first one the studio members (the participating students) attend. Usually a handful of new community participants will have joined the process, as well, both because you have reached out to additional stakeholders and because news of the planning process has spread through the community.

First, we introduce everyone in the room. Now, a lot of people will have specific, pressing issues that have brought them to the room in the first place. Sometimes, it is very effective to ask people to both introduce themselves and who they represent and explain (briefly!) what issue they want to see on the table. Doing so makes sure that everyone gets heard, and it can be an easy way to diffuse any initial tension if necessary.

At this workshop, we define a community's assets, liabilities, goals, and the challenges the community will face in reaching these goals. One way to accomplish this is to break into small groups—usually three or four, depending how many people are in attendance—which help keep discussions manageable. A facilitator for each group—either a student or a member of Georgia Conservancy staff—can lead the discussion, list items on a white board or a flipchart as they come up, and ask questions to draw out issues. We either break out twice—once to discuss assets and challenges and once to discuss visions and goals—or we break out once to discuss them all together. Sometimes, potential strategies will begin to emerge in these discussions. Although the facilitator should be flexible, it can help if he or she begins from a set of issues that the studio and the sponsoring group already know are important for the community.

After breaking into small groups, the most effective way to discuss assets, challenges, visions, and goals with the group at large is to ask a stakeholder from each small breakout group to report back to the entire room. Doing so makes sure that the stakeholders, not the facilitators, own the process.

***VOTING or PRIORITIZATION EXERCISE:** Give every meeting attendee a limited number of small sticker dots. Hang up the list of issues that the stakeholders identified earlier in the meeting, and allow a bit of time for people to place stickers on the issues that are the most important to them. They can place all their stickers on one issue or divide them up among several issues. Tallying up stickers can help see what the community as a whole is prioritizing.*

SUGGESTED AGENDA ITEMS

- Opening remarks (member of local sponsoring organization)
- Introductions around the room
- Introduction to Blueprints program (Blueprints staff and studio professor)
- Assets and challenges discussion (in break-out groups)
- Visioning and goals discussion (in break-out groups)
- Prioritization exercise (sticker voting)
- Set next meeting & closing remarks

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

- Sign-in sheet
- Nametags
- Comment sheets
- Flipchart for note taking
- Dot stickers for voting
- Maps and trace paper for people to draw on
- Markers

THE SECOND PUBLIC WORKSHOP: EXISTING CONDITIONS AND STRATEGIES

By this meeting, the students have taken in what they learned at the last meeting. They have researched, documented, and analyzed the assets and challenges, and they have begun to create strategies with which to address the community's goals. Now, they can present their initial findings to the community.

This meeting will often vary the most between communities, because the process of developing strategies can unfold in many different ways. Planning this meeting thus requires discretion and flexibility. But, usually at this meeting, someone (often the studio members) will give a summary of what has happened at the previous meeting, such as listing assets and challenges and reviewing any goals or visions that the stakeholders developed. Then, the students present their analyses of these assets, challenges, and goals. This may be a lengthy presentation, because it might be necessary to cite best practices or other reasoning behind each approach. At this point, the students have usually begun to assess which strategies are feasible and to develop some ways to evaluate and ultimately select particular approaches. Depending on the community and the studio, their approaches to these strategies might be at various stages. The questions and answers following their presentation will usually be quite long as well, as the stakeholders will have both questions about the studio's approach and suggestions about ways to improve it.

At this point in the planning process, it is very important for the studio to communicate clearly with stakeholders. Their analyses and recommendations will still be incipient, so stakeholder input can be very instructive. Does the studio's analysis support the impressions of the community? Are the students placing their efforts in the right areas? Are they developing ideas in a way that is clear and communicable?

Following the presentation, the workshop attendees are again asked to vote on their preferred approaches or strategies, or the ones they find most important, using the sticker voting or prioritization exercise used in the first workshop.

SUGGESTED AGENDA ITEMS

- Preview maps prior to meeting start
- Opening remarks & introductions (member of local sponsoring organization)
- Blueprints overview and update (Blueprints staff and studio professor)
- Existing conditions and strategy presentation with Q+A (studio members)
- Quick break
- Voting exercise overview & instructions (studio members)
- Voting exercise
- Set next meeting & closing remarks

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

- Sign-in sheet
- Nametags
- Comment sheets
- Flipchart for note taking
- Dot stickers for voting

THE THIRD PUBLIC WORKSHOP: EVALUATING AND REVISING STRATEGIES

This is the most hands on of all the public workshops. It is also the longest. It usually takes 6-8 hours, so we either hold it all day on a Saturday or we split it between two evenings or Saturdays, depending on the community's preference.

At this workshop, the students present the work they have done refining the strategies that have been laid out through the earlier public workshops as well as any new strategies they and the community have developed. At this point, the strategies should be feasible, reasonably financially achievable, and reflective of consensus support. The studio presents their refined strategies, and then we typically split the attendees up into groups at tables. Often, the easiest way to tackle the work is to split up into tables by issue. Community members can deal with one aspect of the plan at a time, and by rotating through tables everyone has a chance to work with every issue.

While dividing issues—water quality, economic development, and transportation, for instance—between tables can be effective, it is important that everyone rotate through each. Doing so keeps everyone informed on the big picture, and it prevents developing solutions that are in conflict with each other.

At each table, the group can look at the strategies on large scale maps the studio has produced and draw revisions, ideas, or comments on top of them.

MAP EXERCISE: Getting people to actually draw on a map and make a plan is an excellent way to facilitate product interactions. It is important, though, that if a professional planner, designer, or engineer is guiding the process that he or she allows it unfold rather than driving the stakeholders towards a particular, physical outcome. Engaging physically with the map of the community can both help people stay more active and involved and help them understand the real physical implications of the strategies they are working towards.

SUGGESTED AGENDA ITEMS

- Opening remarks & introductions (member of local sponsoring organization)
- Blueprints overview and update (Blueprints staff and studio professor)
- Studio presentation with Q+A
- First issue table
- Break
- Second issue table
- Third issue table
- Report back
- Set next meeting & closing remarks

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

- Sign-in sheet
- Nametags
- Comment sheets
- Large maps, plans, and/or street sections to draw on
- Trace paper
- Flipchart for note taking
- Markers or pens

THE FINAL PUBLIC MEETING: PRESENTING RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this meeting is to present the studio's final findings and recommendations to the community. As such, it is less participatory than the other meetings, but it still gives the community an opportunity to make corrections, call for changes, or ask for additional information. Students generally make any of these changes within a week or so after this final public meeting.

At this meeting, the studio will typically display recommendations on boards or tables so that stakeholders can preview them before a formal presentation. A student manning each board or table can answer questions before the presentation begins. Then, the studio will present their final recommendations to the stakeholders. Someone should take notes on comments that are made during this presentation.

Following this meeting and any last tweaks to the recommendations or strategies, the Georgia Conservancy staff begins writing the Blueprints report.

SUGGESTED AGENDA ITEMS

- Preview student work
- Opening remarks & introductions (member of local sponsoring organization)
- Blueprints overview and update (Blueprints staff and studio professor)
- Student presentation with stakeholder input
- Break for interaction with students & presentation materials
- Gather to report back & discuss next steps in the process

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

- Nametags
- Comment sheets
- Boards, handouts, powerpoint, or other media to present studio results
- Flip chart for notetaking
- Markers

THE BLUEPRINTS REPORT

The Blueprints process concludes with the release of the Blueprints report—both in hardcopy and available for download on a publicly available website—to the community. Typically, this handoff occurs about three months after the last public meeting. During this three month period, the Georgia Conservancy staff writes the Blueprints report, taking the academic studio report that the Georgia Tech students produced and converting it into a more user-friendly step-by-step guide to implementation. The report documents the planning process, starting with the assets, liabilities, and challenges of the community and then laying out the community's goals, from a long term vision to immediate priorities. Depending on the community and its specific challenges, the final Blueprints report will include a wide variety of things, but some of the components that it often includes are:

- An overview of the public involvement process
- Economic initiatives
- Parks strategies
- Land conservation initiatives
- A stormwater management plan
- Agricultural or industrial plans
- Zoning changes or other policy recommendations
- A transportation plan
- Street design guidelines
- Implementation measures, such as an administrative body
- An integrated master plan
- Prioritized recommendations with resource contacts

The community should be able to use the report as a jumping off point, taking its clear, succinct description of the process and its results and translating it into the necessary actions.

For all the past completed Blueprints reports, visit the [Blueprints communities website](#).

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER BLUEPRINTS?

After the Blueprints process is complete and we have finished writing the Blueprints report, the community is responsible for implementing their plan. Usually, the sponsoring organization will take the lead in following through on the next steps outlined in the report. Ideally, they will manage, support, and follow up on the implementation efforts as a whole, while other individuals or organizations within the community will take ownership of individual pieces within the plan that they are interested in and equipped to monitor through implementation.

This sense of ownership does not just come about at the end of the process. The facilitators of the process should be conscious of encouraging its development from the beginning of the public workshops, and by the end of the process it is usually fairly clear who is going to take responsibility for which recommendations.

While the Georgia Conservancy will remain a resource to the community after the Blueprints planning process, it is important for the community to take over the task of implementation, both because we are not financed or responsible for constructing public infrastructure projects, establishing public or private programs, or implementing government policy or regulation changes, and because the people that ultimately have to live with the consequences of changes in their community should be the ones to shape their development.

It is critical that the local and regional governing bodies, if they were not the sponsoring organization, be active in the Blueprints process so that they might formally adopt the Blueprints report and/or its recommendations and so that applicable government planning, policy, and budgets can be aligned to implement Blueprints recommendations. Some past Blueprints communities have formally adopted Blueprints reports and developed cost estimates and specific design plans for implementing recommendations.

Perhaps the most measurable success of the Blueprints process is in educating and empowering stakeholders to demand sustainable growth policies in their communities. Stakeholders must hold their governments and other responsible agencies accountable for implementing the community-supported Blueprints recommendations.

BLUEPRINTS COMMUNITIES

Below, find a list of all our past Blueprints workshops with a synopsis of each. In managing a community-based planning initiative, we are in the position of being a completely neutral entity without an agenda other than to take the community through the Blueprints process and encourage the use of quality growth concepts and policies. As such, each Blueprints is tailor-made to meet the needs of its particular community. Our goal is to provide possible solutions to address specific challenges and to accentuate the assets of each community. Consequently, our successes vary as greatly as the communities with whom we work. Some highlights are provided below:

Blueprints communities:

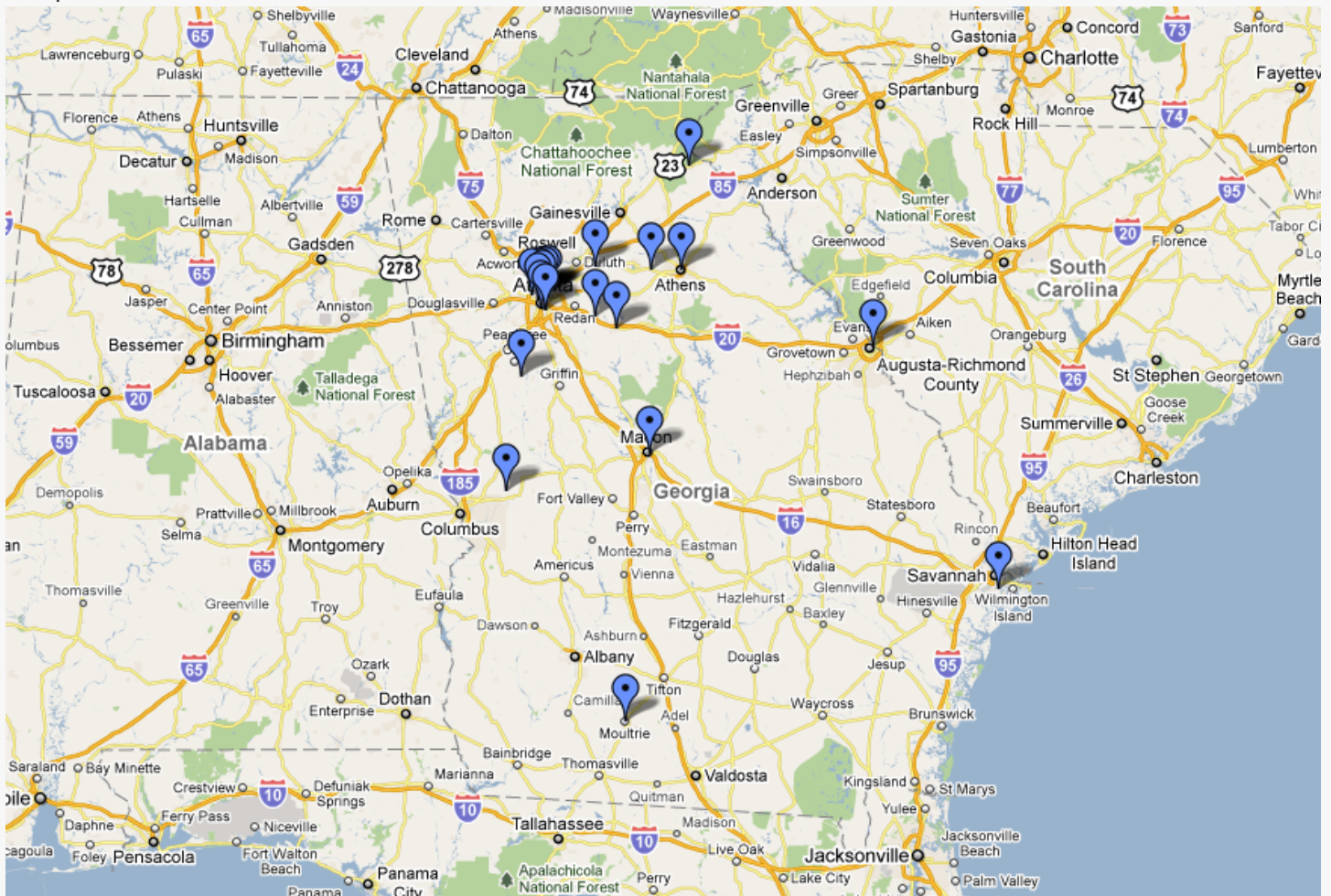
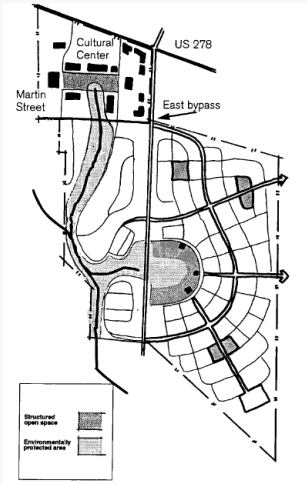


image source: google maps, 2011

Click map above to access a live map of Blueprints communities, and click the name of each community to access the full Blueprints report.

COVINGTON, NEWTON COUNTY, FALL 1997



Our first Blueprints community planning workshop was held in 1997 in the city of Covington in Newton County. The City and County were trying to accommodate growth while maintaining their small-town, rural quality of life. One of the recommendations coming out of the Blueprints report was to establish a nonprofit community organization to oversee future development in Covington. The outgrowth of this recommendation is the Center for Community Preservation and Planning, which has risen to be one of the leading champions of quality growth in Georgia. The most successful aspect of The Center is that it makes planning visible and understandable to the citizens of Covington and Newton County. Some of the projects that can be directly attributed to The Center's efforts are: The Covington & Newton County Trails Master Plan, The Clarke's Grove EarthCraft Community Pilot Project, and The Square Market, Covington's public market.

SENOIA, COWETA COUNTY, SPRING 1998

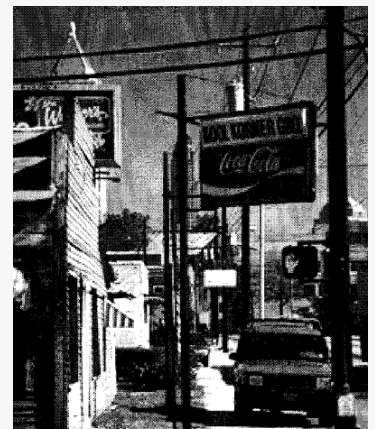
This Blueprints evaluated the impact of rapid population growth and a proposed commuter rail station in this historic railroad town. We recommended ways Senoia could manage growth to preserve its small-town character and enhance quality of life.

LAKEWOOD HEIGHTS, CITY OF ATLANTA, SPRING 1998

With a focus on economic development, this studio proposed a plan for revitalizing the inner-city neighborhood, improving its appearance, and fostering neighborhood pride.

HOME PARK, CITY OF ATLANTA, FALL 1998

This studio worked with the Home Park neighborhood to create a master plan that would protect the community's assets and solidify a neighborhood organizational structure. In 1999, Home Park, a neighborhood in Midtown Atlanta, was being squeezed on one side by an expanding Georgia Tech campus and on the other by the redeveloping brownfield called Atlantic Station. Blueprints recommendations included actions to protect the historic single-family core of the neighborhood, define the neighborhood edges, ensure the continued diversity of housing and income groups, and helped establish what has been an ongoing dialogue with both of its neighboring communities. In addition, Home Park leveraged the work done in the Blueprints program into funding for a Master Plan.



ATHENS, CLARKE COUNTY, SPRING 1999

This studio tested components of the Athens-Clarke County proposed Concept Plan and Future Land Use Plan on three areas of the city, presenting options for urban design and future development configurations.

UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, BARROW / OCONEE COUNTIES, SPRING 2001



This Blueprints examined the sections of the proposed Atlanta/Athens rail corridor within Barrow and Oconee counties, studying how these largely rural areas could incorporate rail stations within them and prepare for projected growth while preserving their character.

UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, GWINNETT COUNTY, SPRING 2001

This Blueprints examined the Gwinnett County piece of the proposed Atlanta/Athens rail corridor, studying how the urban and suburban communities of Dacula, Lawrenceville, and Lilburn could incorporate rail stations within them and capitalize on their economic development potential.

CITY OF CONYERS, ROCKDALE COUNTY, SPRING 2003

Addressing greenfield and greyfield site options, this Blueprints identified a framework for redevelopment in the larger surrounding commercial area of the Highway 20/138 corridor.

SANDFLY COMMUNITY, CHATHAM COUNTY, 2004

This Blueprints worked with the small coastal community of Sandfly, one of the oldest African-American settlements in Georgia, in an effort to maintain the community's unique character in the face of commercial development. Sandfly was rapidly losing its heritage and identity as it became increasingly squeezed by commercial development and a new interstate interchange. Blueprints helped organize the community and gave them a voice and the tools with which to talk with developers. Over the years, Sandfly has managed to stay involved in conversations with developers and the county and is now planning for a new bike and pedestrian trail to link their community with schools, parks, and neighboring communities.



OCMULGEE RIVER CORRIDOR, MACON/BIBB COUNTIES, FALL 2004

This Blueprints proposed the Ocmulgee National Heritage Corridor as a way to promote education, understanding, and appreciation of the Ocmulgee River's natural and cultural heritage and as a strategy for protecting these resources and promoting economic development.

PIEDMONT HEIGHTS, CITY OF ATLANTA, SPRING 2007

With a focus on maintaining workforce housing and increasing connectivity, this Blueprints identified methods for protecting the single-family neighborhood core of Piedmont Heights while planning for compact, pedestrian-friendly development on its fringes.

TOCCOA, STEPHENS COUNTY, SPRING 2007

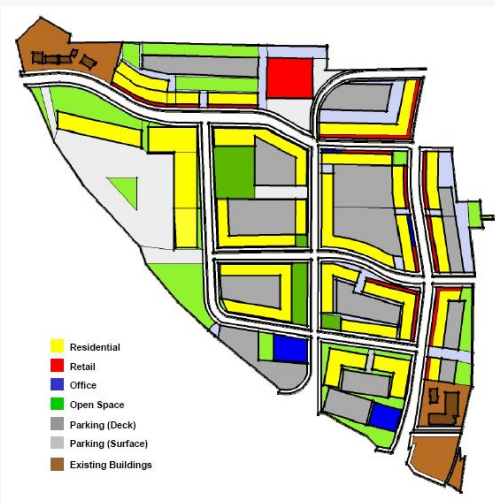
In this Blueprints, we worked with stakeholders to look at alternative zoning approaches to housing, economic development, transportation, and protection of cultural and natural resources. We developed a land use plan for Toccoa to guide future growth, outlining zoning strategies for a number of character areas including greenway corridors, agricultural areas, rural residential areas, urban service delivery areas, and historic/cultural areas.



WESTSIDE ATLANTA, CITY OF ATLANTA, FALL 2007

Building from Beltline planning, this Blueprints reframed the transportation and transit discussion, developed templates for corridor redevelopment, addressed greenspace connectivity, and looked at infill redevelopment opportunities around transit and brownfields in an area spanning 37 neighborhoods.

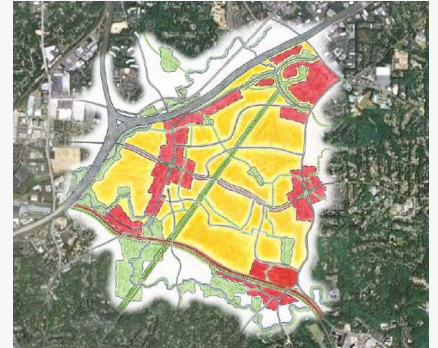
COLLIER VILLAGE, CITY OF ATLANTA, SPRING 2008



One of the smallest study areas to date, this Blueprints project focused on a four-block area at the intersection of two congested roadways. "Collier Village" is an aspirational name for an underutilized commercial area on the brink of major redevelopment. The studio addressed pedestrian safety, connectivity, environmental concerns, zoning, land use and urban design. In a classic Community Benefits Agreement, Collier Village took one of the recommendations from their Blueprints report – fix signal timing and add a traffic light – and worked with a developer who had a Development of Regional Impact (a large-scale development likely to have effects beyond its jurisdiction) in the approval process and negotiated to have the developer pay for both the signal timing and the traffic light.

LINDBERGH-LAVISTA CORRIDOR COALITION, CITY OF ATLANTA AND DEKALB COUNTY, FALL 2008

This Blueprints worked with the Lindbergh-LaVista community to develop a strategy of development nodes, multi-modal transportation corridors, and green infrastructure to improve the community, preserving existing single-family neighborhoods, improving pedestrian and vehicular circulation, and enhancing neighborhood identity. LaVista Road, a corridor in DeKalb County, brought a series of neighborhoods together to plan their main transportation corridor. The transportation recommendations from the Blueprints report were adopted into DeKalb County's Comprehensive Development Plan.



NEWTON COUNTY, SPRING 2009

This Blueprints process produced a land conservation plan for the county. The plan looks to the year 2050, envisioning a build-out scenario where the county could preserve its rural character while accommodating additional population growth. This was achieved by designating up to 50% of the county's land for compact communities and 50% for "green" land uses including conservation and recreation land, agricultural land, and very low density, low impact development.

PIN POINT, FALL 2009

This Blueprints assisted the coastal community in establishing a vision for the future that embraced preservation of the community's heritage as part of the Congressionally-designated Gullah-Geechee National Heritage Corridor while addressing the immediate needs of property development and infrastructure improvement.



NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING UNIT G, ATLANTA, FALL 2010

This Blueprints studio worked with residents of Atlanta's Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) G to develop solutions that take advantage of the NPU's assets—an industrial park, the Chattahoochee river, proximity to downtown Atlanta, new developments, and other environmental and cultural resources--to address the challenges facing NPU G: low employment, lack of retail and services, decaying housing stock, and poor public transportation options.

CONCLUSION

We have found the Blueprints process to be very effective in facilitating community-wide decisions and initiatives. Many times, it has established a framework within which a community can make decisions—both immediate and long-term—about its planning goals and efforts. We hope that, even if your community does not share our resources, you will use our process as a model by which your community can implement changes sustainably, with equity and efficacy.