

7

Intergovernmental Coordination

The Intergovernmental Coordination Element provides the following:

- an inventory of existing intergovernmental coordination mechanisms and processes,
- an assessment of the adequacy and suitability of existing coordination mechanisms to serve the current and future needs of the community, and
- goals and strategies for effective implementation of community policies and objectives that may involve multiple governmental entities and independent organizations.

What is intergovernmental coordination?

Intergovernmental coordination involves how the local governments of Gilmer County, Ellijay, and East Ellijay work with each other, with adjacent local governments, and with other quasi-public entities such as the school board and the water and sewer authority. Adequate coordination is needed to plan for orderly growth in the community because plans and decisions made by a local government will have an impact upon other public agencies and independent organizations and vice versa.

Element Outline:

7.1. Inventory

7.1.1. Coordination with Governmental and Other Public Entities

- Gilmer County and the Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay
- Surrounding Counties
- Gilmer County School Board
- Constitutional Officers
- Independent Special Districts and Development Authorities
- Utility Companies
- Other Joint Planning Efforts

7.1.2. Coordination with State Programs and Activities

- Service Delivery Strategy
- Governor's Greenspace Program
- Appalachian Regional Commission Program
- Regional Water Supply/ Water Protection Plans

7.2. Assessment of Current and Future Needs

7.3. Community Goals and Implementation Program

7.1. Inventory

7.1.1. Coordination with Governmental and Other Public Entities

7.1.1.1. Gilmer County and the Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay

Comprehensive Planning. In 1994, Gilmer County and the Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay prepared and adopted a joint comprehensive plan entitled *Gilmer 2015: A Shared Vision*. The County and Cities have continued this tradition of cooperative planning by completing this comprehensive plan.

Annexation. Gilmer County and the Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay adopted a land use dispute resolution agreement in 1998. This agreement contains the process for resolving disputes over annexation. Following is a summary of the dispute resolution process:

1. The City notifies the County government and affected property owners about the proposed annexation.
2. The County forwards a statement of (a) no objection or (b) bona fide objection.
3. If there is no objection, the City proceeds with the annexation.
4. If there is an objection, the City may respond in one of four ways: (a) agreeing to implement the County's stipulations, thereby resolving the County's objections, (b) agreeing with the County and stopping action on the proposed annexation, (c) initiating a mediation process, or (d) seeking a declaratory judgement in court.

Service Delivery. Gilmer County and the City of Ellijay adopted a Service Delivery Strategy (SDS) in 1999. At that time, the City of East Ellijay had a population of less than 500 and therefore was not required to have an SDS. The Service Delivery Strategy documents the coordination and delivery of services in Gilmer County and is being updated as part of the comprehensive plan update process.

Following is a summary of the services included in the SDS:

- **Economic Development.** The Economic Development Authority and the Gilmer County Chamber of Commerce encourage and coordinate county-wide economic development. The City of Ellijay provides additional economic development services within its incorporated boundary.
- **Property Tax Assessment and Collection.** Gilmer County provides tax assessment services and collects County property taxes for both unincorporated and incorporated areas. The City of Ellijay provides municipal tax collection services for its residents. The City of East Ellijay does not assess a property tax.
- **Courts.** Gilmer County provides Superior Court, Magistrate Court, Probate Court, and Juvenile Court Services for both unincorporated and incorporated areas of the County. The Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay provide municipal court services.
- **Library.** The Sequoyah Regional Library System serves the library located in Gilmer County. The library receives financial support from all local governments.
- **Airport.** The Gilmer County Airport Authority is the administrative/advisory body to the Gilmer County Board of Commissioners for airport operations.
- **Health and Human Services.** The Gilmer County Health Department, Senior Center, and Day Care Center provide services to residents of both unincorporated and incorporated areas of the county.
- **Zoning.** The Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay both provide zoning within their incorporated boundaries. Gilmer County is in the process of adopting a zoning ordinance, called the "Gilmer County Land Use Ordinance."
- **Planning.** Gilmer County provides planning services to the unincorporated portions of the county while the Cities provide planning services in their respective municipalities.
- **Construction and Code Enforcement.** Gilmer County provides construction and code enforcement services to the unincorporated portions of the county while the Cities provide construction and code enforcement services in their respective municipalities.

- **Housing Authority.** The Ellijay Housing Authority provides public housing in the City of Ellijay to low income residents who qualify for government subsidized housing.
- **Animal Control.** Gilmer County provides animal control services to the County. The City of Ellijay assists with animal control within its city limits.
- **Emergency Management.** Gilmer County provides emergency management to all areas of the county via the Emergency Management Agency. The county also provides fire protection services to all unincorporated areas as well as the City of East Ellijay. The City of Ellijay operates its own fire department. EMS and E-911 services are provided to residents in both the unincorporated and incorporated areas of the county.
- **Road and Bridge Construction and Maintenance.** Gilmer County provides maintenance to all county roads and bridges. The Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay have their own road maintenance departments.
- **Parks and Recreation.** Gilmer County operates a Parks and Recreation Department which provides a variety of services to residents of both unincorporated and incorporated areas of the county.
- **Law Enforcement.** The Gilmer County Sheriff's Department is available to both unincorporated and incorporated areas of the county. The Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay operate their own police departments.
- **Jails.** Gilmer County provides jail services to both unincorporated and incorporated areas of the county.
- **Water and Waste Water Supply, Treatment, and Distribution.** The Ellijay/Gilmer County Water and Sewer Authority provides treated water and waste water treatment to portions of the unincorporated areas of Gilmer County and the Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay.

7.1.1.2. Surrounding Counties

Developments of Regional Impact. Development in counties which are adjacent to Gilmer County or developments of regional impact (DRI) which occur in a nearby county have the potential to impact Gilmer County and the Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay. Surrounding and nearby counties include the following:

- Fannin
- Lumpkin
- Pickens
- Murray
- Union
- Dawson
- Gordon

Developments of regional impact are

“large-scale developments that are likely to have effects outside of the local government jurisdiction in which they are located. The Georgia Planning Act of 1989 authorized the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to establish procedures for intergovernmental review of these large-scale projects. These are designed to improve communication between affected governments and to provide a means of revealing and assessing potential impacts of large-scale developments before conflicts relating to them arise. At the same time, local government autonomy is preserved since the host government maintains the authority to make the final decision on whether a proposed development will or will not go forward.”

(source: www.dca.state.ga.us/planning/regionalimpact.html)

All developments of regional impact are reviewed by their respective Regional Development Centers (RDCs). The RDC evaluates the potential impacts of the proposed development and determines whether it is consistent with the regional plan and the plans of affected local governments. The RDC's evaluation is advisory in nature and is designed to help a local government anticipate possible impacts of a proposed development. The local government is encouraged to take this information into account in deciding whether to approve, deny, or require modifications to the development in order to mitigate any undesirable impacts which were uncovered during the RDC's evaluation.

Other coordination mechanisms which exist or are planned between the surrounding counties and the governments of Gilmer County, Ellijay, and East Ellijay include the following:

- mutual aid agreements for law enforcement and fire protection (existing) and
- a tri-county emergency children's shelter (planned).

7.1.1.3. Gilmer County School Board

Informal coordination occurs between the School Board, the local governments, and various other agencies in the community, but there is not a formal process for coordinating such activities.

One example of successful coordination is the sharing of recreation facilities between the School Board and the Gilmer County Recreation Department. The School Board is also working with the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Authority, the Water and Sewerage Authority, and the Recreation Department on plans for its new campus on Clear Creek Road.

7.1.1.4 Constitutional Officers

Sheriff and Police Chiefs. The Sheriff's Department submits monthly financial reports to the County Commission, but does not make regular reports regarding law enforcement activities. The Police Chiefs for the Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay make regular reports to their respective City Councils regarding law enforcement activities.

Tax Assessor. There is no formal process for coordination between the County Commission and the Tax Assessor although regular, informal communication occurs between these entities. The Ellijay City Clerk coordinates informally with the Ellijay City Council and Mayor. The City of East Ellijay does not assess a property tax.

Courts. Gilmer County is part of the Appalachian Judicial Circuit which also includes Fannin and Pickens Counties. A District Attorney and several Assistant DAs serve the Appalachian Circuit. Gilmer County also has a Probate Court, a Juvenile Court, and a Magistrate Court. Ellijay and East Ellijay have their own municipal courts. Gilmer County is considering establishing a Public Defender's Office to handle growing number of indigent cases.

No formal coordination exists between the local governments and the court system.

7.1.1.5. Independent Special Districts and Development Authorities

Ellijay-Gilmer County Water and Sewerage Authority (WSA). The WSA board is comprised of members appointed by the County Commission and the City Councils. The board members report regularly to their respective governments.

Economic Development Authority (EDA). The EDA board is comprised of members appointed by the County Commission. The EDA coordinates informally with the County Commission. It is presently coordinating with the County School Board on the development of a business and technology park on the property recently purchased by the School Board.

Ellijay Housing Authority. The Housing Authority board is appointed by the City of Ellijay. The Authority coordinates informally with the Mayor and City Council.

7.1.1.6. Utilities

Electricity is provided by Amicalola Electric Membership Corporation, Georgia Power Company, and Atlanta Gas and Light. Although informal coordination occurs between the local governments and utilities, no formal coordination mechanisms have been established.

7.1.1.7. Other Joint Planning Efforts

Gilmer Family Connection Commission/Collaborative. Gilmer County Family Connection was established in 1998 and consists of a Commission and a Collaborative that ensure progress on 24 programs and activities designed to help Gilmer families and children. Its current 3-year plan includes the following goals:

- All Gilmer children and youth will be successful in school, will be drug free, and will have opportunities to become productive citizens.
- All Gilmer families will be strong and stable.

The following agencies and organizations work in partnership to accomplish the goals of the Commission:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| ▪ Dept. of Family and Children Services | ▪ Gilmer County Parks & Recreation |
| ▪ Gilmer County Schools | ▪ Fraternal Order of Police |
| ▪ Community Mental Health | ▪ Gilmer County Chamber of Commerce |
| ▪ Gilmer County Health Department | ▪ Department of Juvenile Justice |
| ▪ Gilmer County Head Start | ▪ Juvenile Court |
| ▪ Gilmer County Pre-K | ▪ Gilmer County Youth Council |
| ▪ Georgia Dept. of Labor/Vocational Rehab. | ▪ Hispanic Task Force |
| ▪ Gilmer Adult Education | ▪ Faith Community |
| ▪ Ellijay Housing Authority | ▪ Civic Groups (e.g. Lions Club) |

Representatives from each of the local governments serve on the board of the Commission.

Chamber of Commerce. Gilmer County and the City of East Ellijay contract with the Chamber of Commerce for tourist-related advertising. Regular, informal coordination occurs between the Chamber and the City of East Ellijay and Gilmer County. The Chamber also works closely with the Economic Development Authority on a variety of projects.

Downtown Ellijay Merchants and Associates (DEMA). DEMA makes regular reports on its activities to the Ellijay City Council.

7.1.2. Coordination with State Programs and Activities

7.1.2.1. Service Delivery Strategy

As discussed in Section 7.1.1.1, Gilmer County and the City of Ellijay adopted a Service Delivery Strategy in 1999. The Strategy is being updated as part of the comprehensive planning process.

7.1.2.2. Governor's Greenspace Program

Gilmer County and the City of Ellijay jointly participate in the Governor's Greenspace program. Together, they propose to protect 5,495 acres of land. This is in addition to the 54,718 acres of the Chattahoochee National Forest which are presently owned by the federal government. The land type, estimated acreage, and tools for protection which are proposed in the community's Greenspace Program are shown below.

TABLE 7-A. Governor's Greenspace Program Proposal

Land Type	Estimated Acreage	Tools for Protection	
		Permanent	Temporary
Floodplain	4,950	conservation easements restrictive covenants	Part V Minimum Environmental Standards
Archaeological Sites	50	fee simple acquisition conservation easements	archaeological/conservation overlay zones, agricultural zoning
Steep Slopes	495	conservation easements	Part V Minimum Environmental Standards

The Greenspace Program Vision Map is included in Section 4.1.16.

7.1.2.3. Appalachian Regional Commission Program

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is a federal-state partnership that awards program grants for projects which address the ARC's five goal areas:

1. education and workforce training,
2. physical infrastructure,
3. civic capacity and leadership,
4. business development, and
5. health care.

Gilmer County is eligible to participate in ARC programs. The County's liaison with the ARC is the North Georgia Regional Development Center.

7.1.2.4. Regional Water Supply/Water Quality Protection Plans

Every year the State of Georgia is required to make a list of lakes, rivers, and streams which do not meet Federal and State water quality standards. This list is based on results of annual water quality testing done by the State's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and the US Geological Survey. In Gilmer County, all of the lakes, rivers, and streams meet the standards for most pollutants except for fecal coliform bacteria. The Coosawattee River, Cartecay River, Ellijay River, Mountaintown Creek, Flat Creek, and Tails Creek all have segments

exceeding Federal and State standards for fecal coliform bacteria pollution. Fecal coliform bacteria, which comes from animal or human waste, is an indicator of the presence of potential bacteriological pathogens.

Over the past two years, the North Georgia Regional Development Center (NGRDC) has been working with local governments and other agencies in Gilmer County, as well as with a citizen advisory committee, to determine how to address the fecal coliform bacteria pollution. Initially, efforts were made to determine the potential source of the pollution. Since fecal coliform bacteria comes from animal and human waste, a study was made to determine how many cattle and poultry operations existed in the Coosawattee River watershed and where they were located relative to the many streams in the area. It was determined that there are over 190 poultry and cattle farming operations in the Coosawattee River watershed. Many of the cattle operations allow cattle to enter streams for watering purposes and have heavy feeding operations where animal waste accumulates and runs off into adjoining streams. Many of the poultry operations spread poultry manure on fields in the area. This manure often runs off into adjacent streams during heavy rains. These kinds of conditions contribute to the high fecal coliform bacteria pollution.

Most of Gilmer County's residential development is served by a septic tank and drainfield system. Sometimes these systems fail and can cause surface water pollution. Decades ago, many people did not even use septic systems and used a drain pipe that dumped waste directly into a nearby stream. These kind of conditions also contribute to the high fecal coliform counts that are found in many streams in the Coosawattee River watershed.

Recognizing that these problems existed, local governments and agencies supported the NGRDC's efforts to secure a grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency under the Federal Water Quality Control Act. NGRDC was awarded \$150,000. The funded project, which began in January 2003, was designed to address four objectives which are described below.

Objective 1: To determine if there is interest in forming a Coosawattee River group, which would consist of an on-going organization of local officials, citizens, State agencies, and others who are interested in preserving water quality.

Status of Objective 1: The NGRDC staff has led several meetings of stakeholders interested in protection of the waters of the Coosawattee River. The stakeholders, who are primarily local, state, and federal employees working in the water protection field, are urging the public to become more involved in the protection and clean-up of the Coosawattee River. It is anticipated that a "Coosawattee River Alliance" will be a by-product of an open meeting planned for the summer of 2004 to discuss the water-related issues in this important river basin.

Objective 2: To educate local citizens, farmers, and government officials about water quality in the watershed and what can be done to improve it. This will be accomplished through workshops, press releases, and demonstration projects.

Status of Objective 2: An on-site agricultural best management practices (BMP) workshop was held in May 2004 at a farm on Boardtown Road. The workshop was a forum for farmers to see first-hand some of the projects which were funded by the EPA grant. The farm is participating in the cost share program set up by the NGRDC through EPA grant funding. The workshop was conducted by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service with participation from NGRDC, EPA, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Georgia Water and Soil Conservation Commission. The NGRDC also plans a poultry BMP workshop in the near future.

Objective 3: To provide funding for agricultural best management projects, which will serve as a demonstration to cattle and poultry farmers in the area on how to minimize animal waste from entering streams. The NGRDC will provide a small grant covering 60% of the cost of a poultry waste stack house, fencing along streams, off-stream watering facilities, or construction of heavy use feeding areas to those farmers whose current operations may be contributing to the fecal coliform bacteria in a nearby stream. The NGRDC has grants to fund approximately seven of these type projects.

Status of Objective 3: Three projects have already been completed and a fourth is in development. These projects were selected through the assistance of the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Objective 4: To fund septic system repairs, which may be contributing to the fecal coliform pollution. The NGRDC will provide a small grant (up to 60% of a project cost, but not to exceed \$1,500) to property owners who have failing septic systems.

Status of Objective 4: Three projects have been completed and a fourth is in development. All four projects consisted of homes that did not have a septic system. These projects were selected through the assistance of the Gilmer County Environmental Health Office. The NGRDC has grants to fund approximately twelve septic repair projects.

7.2. Assessment of Current and Future Needs

The following assessment involves an analysis of the data provided in Section 7.1. to determine if existing coordination mechanisms and agreements are adequate to serve the community's current and future needs and if there are any issues or problems which can be addressed by the local governments.

This assessment can be completed by answering the following questions which were derived from Section 110-12-1-.0 4(12)(g)2.(ii) of Georgia's Minimum Local Planning Standards.

- What issues are arising or have arisen from growth and development proposed in comprehensive plans of nearby local governments or other governmental entities that indicate a need for additional planning coordination between local governments?
- What specific problems and needs in the community would benefit from improved or additional intergovernmental coordination and how could this coordination be achieved?
- Are existing coordination mechanisms or agreements adequate in achieving predictable positive results for ensuring efficient and effective delivery of local services, coordinated land use and growth management, and protection or conservation of natural resources?

These questions are in Sections 7.2.1. through 7.2.3.

7.2.1. What issues are arising or have arisen from growth and development proposed in comprehensive plans of nearby local governments or other governmental entities that indicate a need for additional planning coordination between local governments?

No conflicts have been identified with any adjacent counties or other governmental entities.

7.2.2. What specific problems and needs in the community would benefit from improved or additional intergovernmental coordination and how could this coordination be achieved?

The level of communication between the various governments, utilities, and public agencies is not at the level needed for effectively dealing with community-wide issues. Consequently, the community would benefit from quarterly, biannual, or biannual coordination meetings involving the local governments, local authorities, the County School Board, and other agencies.

Gilmer County Family Connection is proposing to construct a Family Resource Center which would provide a user-friendly, one-stop facility housing a variety of service providers, while saving taxpayer dollars. Having providers housed in one location would allow for better communication and interaction between agencies and prevent duplication of services. The following agencies would potentially be housed in the facility.

Family Crisis Services

- Department of Family and Children Services
- Gilmer County Sexual Assault Center
- Prevent Child Abuse Gilmer
- Foster Parents Association
- Dept. of Juvenile Justice

Emergency Family Services

- Family Connection
- Food Pantry
- Clothes Closet
- Community Action
- Habitat for Humanity

Education and Youth Services

- Department of Labor
- Family Connection (including Low Income Housing Program, Targeted Case Management Services, Hispanic Services Bureau, and Youth Leadership Development Center)

The Gilmer County Health Department has expressed a desire to co-locate with these agencies; however, this would nearly double the amount of square footage required for the Family Resource Center. It would be extremely advantageous to have the Health Department included in the Resource Center, but because funding for the facility may be limited, it may not be financially possible.

7.2.3. Are existing coordination mechanisms or agreements adequate in achieving predictable positive results for ensuring efficient and effective delivery of local services, coordinated land use, growth management, and the protection or conservation of natural resources?

The Service Delivery Strategy that was adopted by Gilmer County and the City of Ellijay is in the process of being updated to include the City of East Ellijay. This strategy documents the coordination and delivery of services in Gilmer County and should be updated as needed.

The community would benefit from improved coordination between the local governments, the School Board, the Water and Sewer Authority, and other public agencies and community organizations. Mechanisms for improving coordination could include quarterly “state of the community” meetings in which representatives from the various governments, agencies, and organizations would meet informally to discuss projects of importance in the community.

Gilmer County and the Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay adopted a land use dispute resolution agreement in 1998. This agreement contains the process for resolving disputes over annexation.

Through the joint comprehensive planning process, a future land use plan and map will be adopted. The result will be future land use plans for the Cities and County that are coordinated and use the same land use definitions. This joint planning effort will reduce land use conflicts at jurisdictional borders.

Additionally, the Land Use Element contains policies and action items related directly to coordinated land use, growth management, and the protection of natural resources. The Community Facilities and Services Element contains policies and action items related directly to the need for coordination between the provision of public infrastructure and land use.

7.3. Community Goals and Implementation Program

As part of the comprehensive planning process outlined by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Gilmer County, Ellijay, and East Ellijay are required to develop community goals and an associated implementation program that sets forth a plan for intergovernmental coordination to include joint processes for collaborative planning and decision-making.

The implementation program must support the Community Vision and include actions which should be undertaken to achieve the Community Vision.

7.3.1. Community Vision

In the year 2024, Gilmer County, Ellijay, and East Ellijay will be known as vibrant, safe, healthy, and attractive places to live, work, and play. The excellent quality of life experienced by all of our residents and visitors is a result of the following:

Livability. We have healthy residential neighborhoods, thriving commercial areas and activity centers, strong agricultural establishments, and outstanding public facilities and services. Opportunities for quality education, employment, and recreation are varied and plentiful.

Community Character. We recognize that our community's abundant natural resources and rich history contribute greatly to our quality of life and to our economic prosperity. We seek measures to protect these resources while promoting and facilitating well-planned growth and development.

Shared Direction. The public and private sectors work together as partners to proactively plan for growth in the community. The local governments provide excellent leadership and residents are well-informed about the projects and activities which are planned for and occurring in the community.

7.3.2. Goal, Policies, and Action Items

To support and achieve the Joint Vision Statement above, Gilmer County and the Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay have developed the following intergovernmental coordination goal and associated objectives and action items:

<p>Goal: Positive, cooperative, and effective relationships between Gilmer County, the City of Ellijay, the City of East Ellijay, and other public agencies and organizations.</p>	
<p>Policy 1: Local Coordination. Promote effective coordination between the County and City governments and the County School Board, the Water and Sewer Authority, and Economic Development Authority.</p>	<p>Action Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Consider quarterly, biannual, or annual joint planning meetings of the local governments, authorities, boards, and agencies to improve communication and coordination. b. Seek funding for a full-time, paid staff position of “Economic Development Director” through a cities/county partnership. c. Update the Service Delivery Strategy as needed.
<p>Policy 2: Joint Planning. Continue the joint comprehensive planning approach to ensure collaborative planning and decision-making.</p>	<p>Action Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop, adopt, and maintain a Joint Comprehensive Plan and associated implementation programs which are acceptable to all governments. b. Update, adopt, and maintain the Joint Solid Waste Management Plan.
<p>Policy 3: Consistency with the Future Land Use Plan. Use the adopted Joint Comprehensive Plan as a guide for decision-making.</p>	<p>Action Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Require that rezoning actions be consistent with the Future Land Use Maps in the Comprehensive Plan. b. Discourage making capital investments in rural areas that are not slated for urban/suburban intensity growth in the Future Land Use Plan.
<p>Policy 4: State Coordination. Pursue effective relationships with key State agencies and departments.</p>	<p>Action Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Work with state level economic development agencies to attract new businesses to the area. b. Jointly approach the Department of Transportation regarding needed road improvements.
<p>Policy 5: Cooperative Planning. Promote cooperative planning efforts throughout the community.</p>	<p>Action Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support efforts to improve water quality in the community. b. Support Gilmer County Family Connection efforts to construct a Gilmer County Family Resource Center as well as an emergency children’s shelter.