

Bainbridge Tomorrow



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Acknowledgments

The Bainbridge Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan could not have been prepared without the dedicated participation of many key residents of the city. The Bainbridge Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan was created by:

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We greatly appreciate the contributions of the many citizens and other interested persons that attended the public meetings and public hearings and visited the www.bainbridgetomorrow.com website as part of the Bainbridge Comprehensive Plan process.



July 1, 2025

Southwest Georgia Regional Commission
181 East Broad Street
Camilla, Georgia 31730

RE: Comprehensive Plan Update Submittal

The City of Bainbridge, Georgia has completed an update of its comprehensive plan and is submitting it with this letter for review by the Southwest Georgia Regional Commission and the Department of Community Affairs.

I certify that we have held the required public hearings and have involved the public in development of the plan in a manner appropriate to our community's dynamics and resources. The first public hearing was June 18, 2024, and a steering committee including city council and other stakeholders was created to meet several times to assist in the preparation of the draft plan. Public meetings of the Steering Committee were held on August 29, October 24, and November 25, 2024, and January 9, 2025, including a planning charrette at the October 2024 meeting. A public hearing presenting the final draft plan to the City Council was held on April 15, 2025. Evidence of this has been attached.

I certify that appropriate staff and decision-makers have reviewed the Regional Water Plan covering our area and the Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria (O.C.G.A. 12-2-8) and taken them into consideration in formulating our plan.

If you have any questions concerning our submittal, please contact our Director of Community Development Steve O'Neil, steveo@bainbridgecity.com, (229) 248-2000 or our planning consultant, Robert and Company [Project Manager: John Ford, j.ford@robertco.com, (404)577-4000, extension 2014].

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "ER", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Edward Reynolds, Mayor

Enclosures: Draft City of Bainbridge 2025 Comprehensive Plan

RESOLUTION

A RESOLUTION BY THE CITY OF BAINBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL TO FORWARD THE 2025-2050 CITY OF BAINBRIDGE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE TO THE SOUTHWEST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

WHEREAS, the City of Bainbridge, Georgia, in cooperation with the Bainbridge-Decatur County Planning Commission, has undertaken the preparation of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan in accordance with the standards and procedures established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the applicable rules of the Regional Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Bainbridge-Decatur County Planning Commission reviewed and approved the proposed Comprehensive Plan and passed a resolution recommending its adoption on April 8, 2025; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and City Council of the City of Bainbridge considered the recommendation of the Planning Commission and adopted the Comprehensive Plan by resolution at its regular meeting held on April 15, 2025; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with the rules and requirements set forth by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Regional Commission, local governments are required to transmit their adopted Comprehensive Plan for review and approval by the Regional Commission and the DCA.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and City Council of the City of Bainbridge, Georgia, that the 2025 Comprehensive Plan be hereby forwarded to the Regional Commission for review and processing in accordance with applicable rules and procedures.


BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Mayor, City Manager, or their designee is authorized to take all necessary actions and execute all necessary documents to facilitate the transmittal of the Comprehensive Plan.

ADOPTED this 15th day of April, 2025.

CITY OF BAINBRIDGE, GEORGIA

By: 
Edward Reynolds, Mayor

ATTEST:


Randee Eubanks, City Clerk







Introduction

The Comprehensive Plan is a long-range statement of a community's vision, plans, and proposals for development intended to guide decision-makers and other community leaders as they consider potential opportunities, resource allocation, and practical plans to accomplish their goals for economic development, enhanced livability, and an affordable future.

Why Bainbridge Tomorrow?

A Comprehensive Plan provides a strategic framework for sustainable growth and development. Given southwest Georgia's demographic shifts, economic changes, and environmental considerations, comprehensive plans serve as roadmaps to guide land use, transportation, housing, infrastructure, and community services. Regular updates ensure alignment with evolving needs and priorities, typically occurring every five to ten years. These frequent revisions help cities adapt to changing circumstances, including emerging challenges such as housing issues, economic development, environmental sustainability, and social equity.

Bainbridge Tomorrow preserves Bainbridge's unique historical, cultural, and environmental characteristics by setting guidelines for development that respect and enhance the city's identity, protect historic sites, promote local heritage, and maintain the unique aesthetic qualities of different neighborhoods. Developing this comprehensive plan involves significant input from residents, business owners, and other stakeholders to build a shared vision for Bainbridge's future.

Looking to the future, Bainbridge Tomorrow creates a vision for growth and development. Strategic goals include enhancing economic development, improving infrastructure, and fostering a vibrant, sustainable community. Major projects and priorities will shape the city's development, ensuring Bainbridge remains a dynamic and thriving place to live, work, and visit.



Planning Principles

Why do we plan?

Comprehensive plans position a city for long-term success by providing a clear framework for development and growth. Planning preserves the city's unique historical, cultural, and environmental characteristics by setting clear guidelines that respect and enhance these elements. Land is one of a city's most valuable resources. Planning helps manage land use, encouraging a harmonious blend of residential, commercial, industrial, and public spaces. Planning also encourages environmental sustainability and emergency preparedness practices to protect natural habitats, reduce pollution, and improve risk management for governments, institutions, businesses, and individuals. By involving community input and incorporating diverse feedback points, these plans foster a shared vision for the future.

Who do we plan for?

We plan for the city's current and future residents, businesses, and stakeholders. Planning aims to meet the needs of families, workers, and entrepreneurs by creating a livable, vibrant, and sustainable environment. It ensures that infrastructure, public services, and amenities are in place to support the well-being and economic prosperity of the community. Additionally, planning considers the needs of future generations, aiming to preserve natural resources and maintain the city's unique character and heritage. By engaging a broad spectrum of the community in the planning process, communities can ensure that diverse perspectives are considered, fostering an inclusive environment that benefits everyone.

What outcome are we looking for?

As residents and business owners of the City of Bainbridge, this plan is yours. The plan should reflect the needs, values, and aspirations of the people who live, work, and play in Bainbridge. The plan should also be flexible to accommodate unexpected changes or impacts, whether internal or external, as well as projected future conditions to assist the community in adapting and thriving amidst future uncertainty.

What do we do with the Plan?

A comprehensive plan should be iterative; each plan should build and expand on past plans and existing development. Plan preparation should build on multiple rounds of community input through stakeholders and public engagement to identify and refine the community vision and preferred recommendations. After stakeholder review, the draft plan will be presented to the Bainbridge Planning Commission for recommendation and to the Bainbridge City Council for official approval and preliminary adoption after a Public Hearing. The approved draft is then forwarded to the

Regional Commission for review, and the Regional Commission sends the draft to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) for compliance review and comment. The regional and state reviews will provide a report within 40 days that may identify that the Minimum Standards and Procedures are “in compliance” or that revisions or clarifications are needed.

Once the plan is determined to be “in compliance,” the City Council should officially adopt the plan in alignment with the State requirements, publicly announce the availability of the plan, and identify where a complete copy may be reviewed. Georgia DCA will usually post a completed copy of the plan on the State’s Comprehensive planning website. After adoption, the plan will serve as a guide for the anticipated future development of Bainbridge. The “implementation section” will be particularly important in putting the plan into action and bringing community visioning to reality.

How can we collaborate?

Residents play a crucial role in shaping the development and character of their communities, ensuring that planning efforts reflect collective needs and aspirations. Public meetings hosted by city councils, planning commissions, and neighborhood associations provide platforms for residents to stay informed and engage in discussions about Bainbridge’s future. These forums, including workshops for Bainbridge Tomorrow, offer opportunities to voice concerns and provide suggestions directly related to specific study elements defined by the DCA.

The Bainbridge Tomorrow website serves as an additional resource, allowing residents to access planning materials, participate in surveys, and join community visioning sessions. Public comment periods further empower residents to share input on plans and recommendations. For those seeking more direct involvement, joining community advisory boards or local neighborhood associations offers an avenue to collaborate closely with local government on planning initiatives.

Community events such as town halls, block parties, or neighborhood clean-ups also provide informal spaces to discuss planning issues and foster consensus. Volunteering for local initiatives strengthens community ties and offers valuable insights into local needs and priorities.

Collaboration with local nonprofits and advocacy groups can amplify efforts on key issues such as affordable housing, environmental conservation, and transportation. Staying informed through newsletters, local media, and community bulletins ensures residents remain connected to ongoing planning efforts. Additionally, participatory budgeting allows residents to have a direct hand in deciding how public funds are allocated, influencing planning and development projects. It is essential that we all advocate for inclusive planning practices, ensuring that underrepresented voices are heard in the decision-making process.

Approach

The Georgia legislature adopted planning rules in 1988, and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) was charged with overseeing the preparation, review, and adoption of a local government comprehensive plan (see Chapter 110-12-1 Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning).



Required Planning Elements

DCA identifies nine planning elements defined in Chapter 110-12-1-.03. The nine required and optional plan elements are:

- The Bainbridge Comprehensive Plan includes all nine of the specified planning elements defined in Chapter 110-12-1-.03, although the order of elements was changed to present the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Bainbridge.
- The Capital Improvements and Community Work Program are incorporated as separate Chapter 12 - Community Work Program and Chapter 12 - Capital Improvement Plan.

Community Goals	Required for all local governments.	
Needs and Opportunities	Required for all local governments.	
Broadband Services	Required for all local governments.	
Economic Development	Required for all local governments in Georgia Job Tax Credit Tier 1.	Recommended for communities seeking improved economic opportunities for local citizens.
Land Use	Required for all local governments with zoning or land development laws subject to Georgia Zoning Procedures Law.	Recommended for communities considering new land development regulations, identifying target areas, or protecting specific parts of the community.
Transportation	Required for all local governments within a Metropolitan Planning Organization.	Recommended for communities with automobile congestion or parking issues in selected areas, or interested in alternative transportation modes
Housing	Required for all HUD CDBG communities.	Recommended for areas with concentrations of low-quality or dilapidated housing, high housing/income disparities, or a jobs/housing imbalance.
Community Work Program	Required for all local governments.	
Capital Improvements	Required for all local governments that charge impact fees	

Table 0.01: DCA Required Planning Elements

Optional Planning Element Options

DCA also encourages local communities to add optional elements to their comprehensive plan to address specific local needs. DCA's supplemental planning recommendations include public infrastructure, community facilities, natural resources, cultural resources, human resources, education, recreation, green space, sustainability, resilience, public safety, target areas, intergovernmental cooperation, target areas, or other specific elements as needed.

The recommended plan for the Bainbridge Comprehensive Plan is to include optional elements for existing infrastructure as Chapter 1 – Bainbridge Today – Background, Resources, and History. Chapter 10 – Health Services is a proposed new element that focuses on community healthcare and aging facilities. Chapter 11 – Implementation Toolbox and Approach provides resources for decision-making in developing recommended plans and the community work program. These optional elements also provide a link to the Quality Community Objectives below:

Community Quality Objectives

Georgia DCA also provides supplemental recommendations to assist planners, stakeholders, decision-makers, and the community in preparing the comprehensive plan. These ten Community Quality Objectives overlap and reinforce one another, ensuring the plan supports a more successful future for the community.

- Economic Prosperity
- Resource Management
- Efficient Land Use
- Local Preparedness
- Sense of Place
- Regional Cooperation
- Housing Options
- Transportation Options
- Educational Opportunities
- Community Health

The planning process incorporates the planning elements and tries to integrate and address the quality community objectives for planning through the guidance of meetings with staff, stakeholders, and community input. The adopted comprehensive plan should provide documentation of the planning process, the goals, the public engagement, and the community's recommended agenda for the 2025 to 2050 planning period.

Bainbridge Tomorrow is a Living Plan

The Bainbridge Tomorrow 2025-2050 Comprehensive Plan is a living document intended to provide documentation of where the city is and what the city wants to be in the future. Adopting the plan marks a milestone in the continuing discussion of Bainbridge's evolution and its role in the region, the State of Georgia, and the nation.

Much of the Comprehensive Plan documents from 2020, 2015, and 2010 is carried forward with the addition of new information and a hearty series of public meetings to address current and future concerns. The plan update process has added elements regarding the extension of Broadband, access to housing and health care, and a basic capital improvements program to prepare the city for future challenges and responsible decisions.

The city's comprehensive plan provides public policy guidance for the city regarding economic development, land use, transportation, and access to jobs, health care, housing, and quality of life. The plan directly establishes priorities for public actions and direction for private-sector investors and decisionmakers that work within the city. The plan also provides residents, homeowners, and business owners with a guide to the city's priorities. The plan also calls attention to the need for transparency and better information in making public decisions that may need deeper investigation regarding potential impacts on the community's culture and livability.

The plan includes illustrations, maps, and images to help city officials, residents, community groups, investors, and other stakeholders understand key concepts and the potential impacts, both intended and unintended, of city and developer actions. Above all, the plan provides ideas and options for placemaking to ensure that the city achieves desirable results through public actions and decisions.

Chapters 1 through 4 provide an overview of the current conditions regarding where Bainbridge is today and the community engagement process to determine community vision, goals, needs and opportunities. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of Broadband access.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss economic development and land use including programs to energize job creation and residential livability. Chapter 8 has traditionally been a discussion regarding streets, automobile parking, and other modes of access. However, attention to mobility for pedestrians, bicyclists, and wayfinding have received added importance. Chapters 9 and 10 expand the discussion of access to housing and health care (including recreation and cultural resources).

Chapter 11 provides a toolbox of implementation resources such as tactical planning and the framework of sustainable urban design, as well as permitting and zoning updates that meet 21st Century regulatory models. This chapter also introduces the potential adoption of a form-based code that incorporates smart growth and new urbanism principles, unifies development regulations across all scales of design, and integrates environmental techniques informed by established development patterns. The toolbox is intended to support Bainbridge's successful transition from rural to urban development, reflecting the city's growing importance within Decatur County and Southwest Georgia.

The Community Work Program in Chapter 12 details the Report of Accomplishments from the 2020 Comprehensive Plan and outlines a list of potential projects for planning, development, and implementation between 2025 and 2030. Some additional desirable projects may be identified as aspirational objectives of the plan, albeit not within the current estimated resources of the city. A sample Capital Improvements Plan is also presented to assist the city on making decisions regarding impact fees or a special purpose local option sales tax proposal.

Appendices include a review of plan and community engagement resources, documented community involvement, and a glossary of planning terms.

The Bainbridge Tomorrow 2025-2030 Comprehensive Plan attempts to integrate goals and recommendations from the community engagement process. It also acknowledges the many other plans and decisions made by local, regional, state and national public entities, private investors, non-profits, and non-government organizations that may affect residents, businesses, visitors, and the physical and economic structure of the city. The Comprehensive Plan is not a perfect instrument but is intended to serve as a basis for comparison and require interactions to plans provided by others. The plan is meant to be interpreted by City Council, and legal counsel, with advice as needed from Community Development, other departments, and outside agencies or consultants as needed to determine city policy.