



# Georgia Planning Officials Newsletter

August 2007

## Building Smart Growth

(Part 2 of 3)

The problems associated with poor building code compliance can have serious consequences for a community. It can increase the risk of fires or structural collapse and lower property values. Most builders and building inspectors across the state are trying to ensure quality construction. However, building a good product and complying with codes require training and time on the part of both builders and inspectors. These have been more difficult to come by in recent times.

### WHY IS THERE A PROBLEM?

**Population and Housing Boom:** Georgia has grown, and the housing market has been pacing or exceeding that growth. According to statistics from the Atlanta Regional Commission, Metro Atlanta has led the nation in housing production over the past decade. This trend has continued into the early part of this century as Atlanta leads the nation in population growth. Recent statistics show that the number of housing units in Atlanta increased 20.7% from 2000 to 2006. This trend is not limited to Metro Atlanta alone. From 1990 to 2000, Census numbers show the State of Georgia experienced a 24% increase in housing units, adding over 643,000 units to our state.

The number of skilled trades people has not grown as quickly. There is a shortage of skilled framers, plumbers and electricians. A 2004 study of housing in Central Florida found that 95% of homes were built with serious construction defects and suggests that these serious issues might be the result of “pressure [to build too fast] passed along to local subs, staffed largely by an unskilled, largely immigrant labor force who are unable to maintain pace without sacrificing quality” (Source: Defining a National Housing Research Agenda: Construction Management and Production – February 2004 National Science Foundation workshop).

**Productivity vs. Quality Control:** A 2004 *Consumer Reports* article reports that builders are completing homes within 90 to 120 days – compared to a range of 120 to 200 days that was the norm a decade ago. Additionally, production supervisors usually oversee 8 – 12 homes at a time.

**More Complicated Systems:** Most builders now utilize pre-engineered systems such as floor and roof trusses. Also, building standards are more complicated due to regulations that require everything from specific building materials for aesthetics to national regulations on energy conservation. These products and building techniques do not always complement one another. Builders and inspectors require training on these new systems and techniques now more than ever, but they are crunched for time to take that training due to demands for production.

The combination of these pressures for new housing stock, faster production times, and new building systems - combined with a need to increasingly rely upon unskilled labor - has created a “perfect storm” for construction defects.

*The next article in this series will focus on how we can better protect our communities during periods of intense construction.*

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## Construction & Building Codes News

**GICH Is Looking For Your Community's Application.** The Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) is currently accepting applications for community participation through **September 10, 2007.**

GICH offers communities a three-year program of collaboration and technical assistance to help communities create and launch locally based plans to meet their housing needs. Participating communities will create a community housing team to develop new ideas about meeting local housing needs, learn about approaches and available resources to meet housing needs, and produce and implement their community housing plan. GICH partners with Georgia Municipal Association, DCA and the University of Georgia Housing and Demographics Research Center.

Applications for participation in GICH are at UGA's Housing and Demographics Research Center website <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/hacc/hdrc/gich/about.html>. For more information, please contact GICH Program Coordinator Karen Tinsley at (706) 542-4949.

We want to hear from you! Please send us your thoughts, experiences and advice on being a Planning Official. E-mail or fax your submissions to Robbie Hayes at [rhayes@atlantaregional.com](mailto:rhayes@atlantaregional.com) or 404.463.3105