



Georgia Planning Officials Newsletter

July 2007

Building Smart Growth

(Part 1 of 3)

Local governments in Georgia have grown more interested and sophisticated in dealing with issues related to development and growth. “Quality growth” is a buzz phrase used in many circles when discussing the sustainability of a development and its impact on the quality of life in our communities. These discussions tend to focus on green space, river protection, mixed-use and other planning related topics. The results have been remarkable. Many new developments are incorporating ideas that create a greater sense of place and community.

However, the preservation of green space usually means higher density developments and mixed-use buildings with a variety of tenants. These tenants, from restaurants to families, are all living in and sharing the same space. This density and mix of occupancies is very different than what the builders and inspectors in our communities were working with five to ten years ago.

Effective enforcement of the building codes protects our communities and ensures that growth is sustainable from the first homebuyer to the next. This series of articles will discuss the problems that can be created due to poor code compliance efforts, why a problem with building inspections does exist in Georgia and some basic steps to improve the effectiveness of a community’s inspection efforts.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Usually it is somewhat easy to see the impact of our governmental services. Citizens associate a good police department with less crime, a good recreation department with better activities, and so on. Judging building code compliance efforts is more difficult, but the quality of construction impacts the aesthetics, safety and value of our communities.

Aesthetics: Higher quality looks better, whether you are talking about clothing, furniture or houses. We all want prospective residents to notice protected green spaces rather than construction defects of buildings. Poor quality work may not be noticeable immediately after construction. However, poor quality can soon take the form of warped rooflines, structural sags or distortions, siding that is wavy or pulling away, cracked foundations or fascia, and other eye-catching problems.

Safety: Shoddy workmanship, due to unskilled labor or time pressures, can result in an increased risk of electrical or mechanical fires and framing that is compromised. Dense and mixed-use developments add another layer of risk and regulation, especially in relation to fire-rated systems.

Value: Better quality doesn’t just look better; it maintains its value longer. Buildings that comply with building codes are less likely to develop costly problems that lower property values. Organizations such as *Homeowners Against Deficient Dwellings* (www.badd.com) list many examples of the cost of poor construction. Many of these problems may not show up for two or three years, usually after the subdivision is built and the development LLC has disbanded. The problems, however, can leave communities with lingering issues related to blighted neighborhoods and homes that cannot sell.

The next article in this series will focus on the reasons that construction defects are a growing issue for communities. Jon Walker is the Director of Operations for SAFEbuilt Georgia. He can be contacted through www.SafeBuiltGeorgia.com.

Construction & Building Codes News

Stronger Design Requirements Now Effective For High Wind Areas. Construction in Georgia’s regions that have basic wind speeds of 100 miles per hour or greater *must now meet the stronger design requirements* of Section R301.2.1.1, Design criteria, of the 2006 International Residential Code (IRC).

Although the 2006 IRC became effective in Georgia on January 1, 2007, the implementation of Section R301.2.1.1 was delayed for six months to provide needed transition time for impacted parties. On July 1, 2007, the postponement period (for that code section) ended and the new requirements became effective.

For more information, please contact Ted Miltiades, DCA’s Director - Office of Construction Codes and Industrialized Buildings at: tmiltiad@dca.state.ga.us or (404) 679-3106.

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 or 404.463.3105