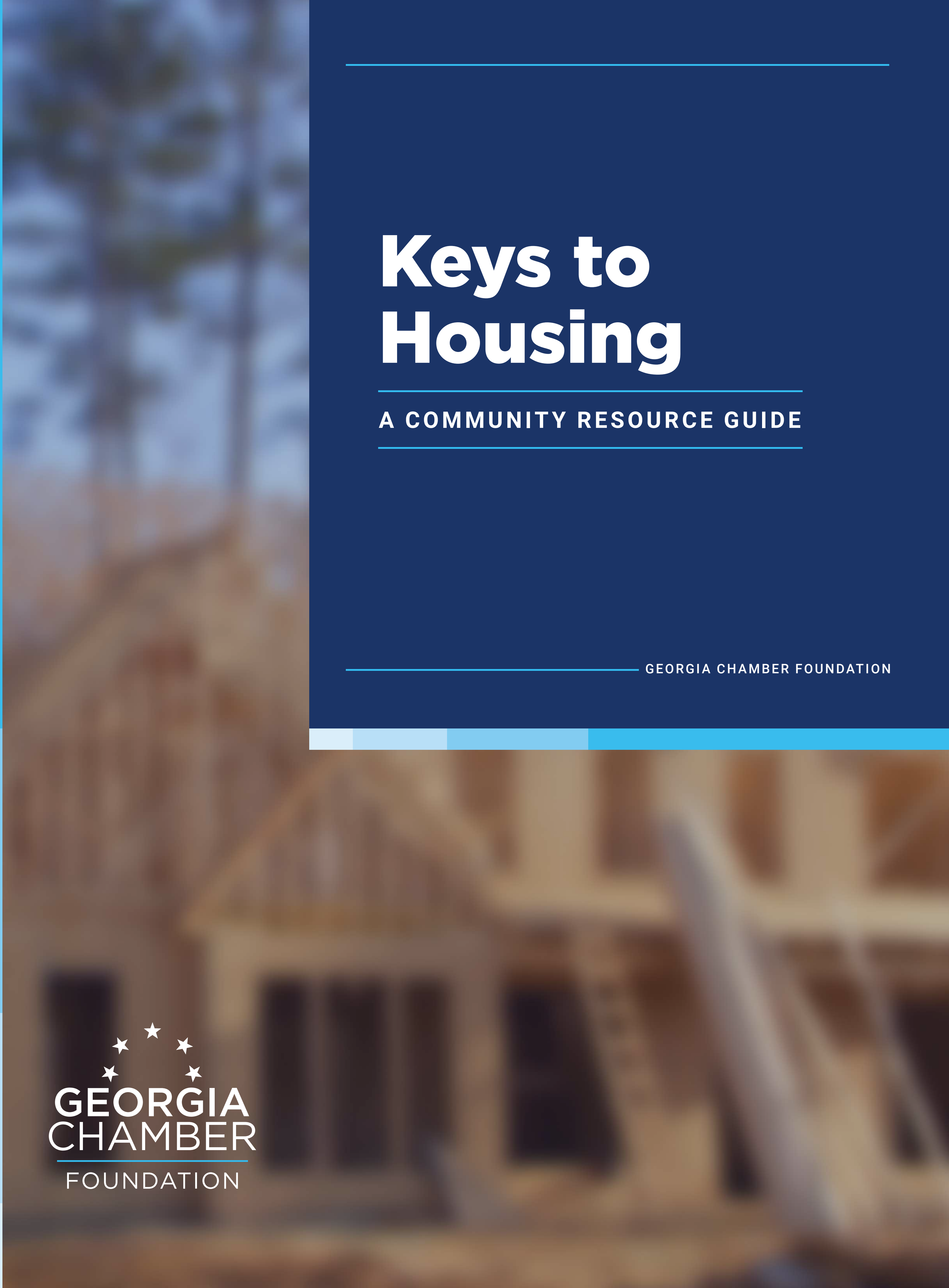

Keys to Housing

A COMMUNITY RESOURCE GUIDE

GEORGIA CHAMBER FOUNDATION

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2026 Keys to Housing

Housing continues to be one of the state's most pressing challenges, impacting communities of all sizes. Although the issue has evolved significantly in recent years, it has remained pervasive as Georgia's homeownership rate declined to 64% from its peak of 72% in 2002.

Detailed in this *Keys to Housing* Guide is data explaining the challenge as well as historical and current trends impacting the state housing stock. The report also summarizes the work of the Housing Access and Affordability Task Force. But most importantly, this piece serves as a resource to enable local leaders to effectively convene partners and stakeholders in their cities and counties to deliver increased housing options for Georgians. By collaborating with our partners (Georgia Association of REALTORS, Georgia Homebuilders Association of Georgia, Georgia Municipal Association, and Association of County Commissioners of Georgia), our team has leveraged our diverse expertise to simplify the process and equip local leaders with the knowledge they need.

This resource outlines a blueprint for coalition building, provides existing proven programs, funding tools, and policy solutions that have the support of all the above listed groups. Housing solutions differ across our state, but the need to increase housing stock remains present in urban, hub, and rural communities. The *Keys to Housing* guide removes ambiguities and creates a clear path forward to tackle tailored housing needs.

Georgia's brightest and most prosperous days are before us. It is our hope that this serves as the start of meaningful, productive conversations regarding housing, growth, and opportunity in your community. Our team serves ready to be a continued resource as you begin or evolve your strategy.

Daniela Perry

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
GEORGIA CHAMBER FOUNDATION

The Challenge: Data and Long-term Trends

Georgia has been named the best state in which to do business for a 12th year in a row.

In the last year, the state has experienced 423 facility expansions and new locations, which represent more than $26.3 billion in investment and 23,200 jobs in the coming years.

This incredible success means communities across the state of Georgia are facing unique challenges that must be met with innovative solutions to capitalize on the economic opportunity fully. Many Georgians are not able to work in the community they call home, and consistently, Georgia businesses report that the lack of attainable housing is impacting their talent pipeline. For three consecutive years, Georgia CEOs ranked access to housing as one of the top two issues affecting their ability to recruit, develop, and retain employees. Furthermore, the state's homeownership rate peaked in 2002 and has declined 7% since then.

The state's housing crisis has developed out of multiple factors interacting over a long period of time. First, Georgia has grown substantially in recent years. Since 1980, the state has added more than one million new residents per decade, meaning the population has nearly doubled. Simultaneously, housing development has not kept pace. The number of building permits issued in Georgia, according to Census Bureau data, crashed during the Great Recession and has yet to fully recover despite sustained, rapid population growth.

For example, more building permits were issued during the last five years of the 1990s than during the entire decade from 2010 to 2019. The combination of these trends has led to a shortage of inventory.

Limited inventory is due in part to the slowdown in development. However, rising interest rates have also led many families to stay in their current home rather than move to a new one that might better meet their needs. This reduced churn further decreases the available homes, which is significantly impacting first-time homebuyers and middle-income earners.

> **As of mid-2024, the share of first-time homebuyers shrank to a historic low of 24%, representing an 8% decline year over year.**

first-time homebuyers

↓ 8%

At the same time, the median age of first-time homebuyers reached a record high of 40 years old. In 2021, 34% of U.S. home buyers were first-time and the median age was 33.

> **Furthermore, the median listing price for a Georgia home was $389,500 as of November 2025, an 8% increase from November 2021.**

median listing price

8% ↑

The culmination of these factors over time has led to a decrease in homeownership. Georgia's home ownership rate has been declining since a peak of 72% ownership in 2002. Despite upward trends in 2016, the current rate of home ownership has fallen to about 64%.

The Opportunity

National trends, including high inflation, rising mortgage rates, and workforce shortages, are certainly impacting the ability of Georgians to afford housing. While these are not within the purview of state and local leaders, there are a number of factors that can be altered at the state level, which would make a dramatic difference for consumers.

To continue Georgia's steady, strong economic growth, adequate housing stock is needed for Georgia workers and their families. At present, current needs are not being met and will not support our future growth trends. By 2050, Georgia is projected to increase its population by 26% and increase its jobs by 46%. To capitalize on the opportunity to further prosperity for more Georgians, an innovative, multi-faceted strategy to create increased housing inventory in communities across our state is required to address our housing crisis. Increasing the supply of housing is vital, especially for first-time homebuyers and middle-income Georgians, because they are currently most disproportionately impacted.

Housing Access and Affordability Task Force

In 2023, the **Housing Access and Affordability Task Force** convened to bring stakeholders together to cultivate lasting relationships and develop thoughtful solutions to address Georgia's critical housing shortage. Current and future Georgians deserve to live in the same community in which they work, and that starts with finding an affordable home that meets their needs.

The stakeholders that engaged in this effort were the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, the Georgia Association of REALTORS®, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia Municipal Association, the Home Builders Association of Georgia, and Habitat for Humanity of Georgia. The Task Force met throughout the year, through designated representatives of each association to:

- Determine the challenges each stakeholder faces in housing supply versus demand.
- Increase conversations between stakeholders in the planning of economic development projects and their respective workforce and housing needs.
- Develop potential community, local and state level solutions to address Georgia's critical housing shortage that is affecting local communities across the state.
- Build relationships between local elected officials, the private sector, representing housing creation and job creators to cultivate information sharing and increase trust.
- Establish common ground between the stakeholder groups to improve the quality of life in their local communities.

Why This Guide Was Created

Through the work of the Task Force, a number of solutions were identified. However, the most significant takeaways centered around the need for cross-sector engagement in a community to effectively address housing needs and challenges.

Too often, accurate data is not available to correctly assess initial action steps or develop a long-term strategy regarding housing needs in a community. The private sector and public sector are not always collaborating, creating opportunities for misunderstandings and minimizing success in increasing the housing stock.

Local chambers of commerce are constant conveners, bringing together elected officials, community leaders, and business leaders to solve challenges and position communities for future economic growth.

This guide, produced by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and Georgia Chamber Foundation in partnership with Housing Access and Affordability Task Force members, aims to equip local chamber leaders to host productive discussions and actionable strategies with their stakeholders in their community. **The goal is to share solutions with broad support from a variety of parties and proven models of success in other communities.** In this way, communities will be empowered to develop effective plans that address the unique needs of their community and increase housing stock.

The following framework outlines a practical step-by-step process communities can use to begin addressing housing challenges locally.

Developing an Actionable Community Housing Strategy

Determining an actionable strategy to address your community's housing needs begins with establishing a working group that represents a broad range of stakeholders from across multiple sectors. Ensuring diverse perspectives are engaged from the beginning helps produce solutions that are both effective and well-rounded. This systems approach also recognizes that the factors impacting housing supply are interconnected, and no decision occurs in a vacuum.

Key Stakeholders to Include

Your working group should draw from the following:

- Local chamber of commerce
- Chamber of Commerce board chair
- Development Authority/Economic Develop-ment Department
- County Commissioners
- City Council members
- Mayor
- Planning Department staff
- REALTORS and real estate professionals
- Homebuilders and housing developers (single-family, multi-family, senior, workforce housing)
- Local Housing Authority (if applicable)
- Land Bank (if applicable)
- Habitat for Humanity
- School superintendents and board of education representatives
- Financial institutions (local banks, credit unions, CDFIs)
- Major employers and Human Resource leaders
- Healthcare leaders and hospital systems
- Nonprofit service providers (United Way, com-munity action agencies, housing nonprofits)
- Faith-based organizations
- Regional planning commissions/councils of governments
- State and federal agency representatives (Georgia DCA, USDA Rural Development, HUD regional offices)
- Community members, including renters, first-time homebuyers, and underserved popula-tions

Sourced from Lightcast Software, Occupation Table, STEM Occupations (SOC 2021)
*An employment concentration greater than 1.0 indicates a greater concentration of workers in the respective occupation in Georgia compared to the national average.

Where to Start

Determining an actionable strategy to address your community's housing needs begins with establishing a working group that represents a broad range of stakeholders from across multiple sectors. Ensuring diverse perspectives are engaged from the beginning helps produce solutions that are both effective and well-rounded. This systems approach also recognizes that the factors impacting housing supply are interconnected, and no decision occurs in a vacuum.

1 Build a Steering Committee

- Begin by developing a list of invitees that align with the stakeholder groups above and ask them to commit to long-term engagement.
- Prior to hosting the first meeting, gather important data to guide the conversation. This could include:
  - median income
  - current population
  - population projections
  - job growth projections
  - available housing stock
  - median home price
  - vacancy rates
  - rental affordability
- Much of this data can be found in the Georgia Chamber Foundation's **Economic Competitiveness Redbook**. The **Georgia Department of Community Affairs' Housing Needs Assessment Report** is also an effective resource outlining data, economic trends, and presenting frameworks for evaluating local housing needs.

2 Set Vision and Goals

- Work with the steering committee to establish a shared vision statement (e.g., "Every resident in our community has access to safe, affordable, and quality housing").
- Agree on guiding principles such as equity, sustainability, workforce readiness, and long-term community growth.
- Agree on housing definitions to reduce misunderstanding. The following are suggested:
  - **Affordable Housing**: housing where the monthly housing costs (mortgage or rent, insurance, property taxes, and utilities) to own or rent is no more than 30% of the monthly income that falls below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI)

    - **Workforce Housing**: housing where the monthly costs (mortgage or rent, insurance, property taxes, and utilities) to own or rent is no more than 80% of the monthly income that falls below 120% of the Area Median Income (AMI)
    - **Multi-family**: Any residential structure with three units or greater in the same building.
    - **Build-to-Rent**: Single-family or multi-family development with more than five units in the same location, where all properties have common ownership and management.
- Identify short, medium, and long-term housing goals that can serve as benchmarks. Measure success and clearly communicate these milestones.
- Identify other communities in the state that have achieved housing development success, speak with, or travel to them for advisement.

3 Convene Stakeholders

- Host facilitated sessions to increase communication among parties, identify challenges and opportunities, and agree on actionable next steps.
- Address communication gaps that often lead to misunderstandings of housing challenges. Breaking down silos aids in building consensus around strategies and potential projects.

4 Explore Funding & Policy Tools

- Develop a funding matrix to map potential programs and resources to specific housing priorities.
- Evaluate state, federal, and private resources to support housing needs. Examples are included below.

State/Federal Resources

Examples of these sources include the Georgia Housing Trust Fund, Georgia DCA programs, HUD HOME and CDBG funds, and USDA Rural Development.

While this list is not exhaustive, it represents some of the most often utilized financial resources. All of these might not be a fit for your community, but understanding how you and coalition stakeholders can take advantage of these to move forward with your community's strategy will stretch local dollars further.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING TOOLS:

Rural Workforce Housing Fund: The Rural Workforce Housing Initiative is helping to spur the development of critically needed workforce housing in communities across the state. Local governments, as well as local, regional, and state authorities, generally in partnership with a housing developer, are eligible to apply. The OneGeorgia Authority will also consider offering loans to private developers, including not-for-profits and community housing development organizations. **Click here** to learn more.

Tools for Home Buyers: As the average cost of a home has increased and the age of the first-time home buyer has also increased, generating awareness about existing programs is an important part of a local community's housing strategy. REALTORS are extremely familiar with these products and how best to utilize them, in addition to community banks. Engaging these partners will aid in increasing homeownership locally.

- **Georgia Dream:** The Georgia Dream Loan Program provides assistance and funding for eligible first-time homebuyers. Individuals must:
  - have a household income up to the maximum
  - have liquid assets of no more than $20,000 or 20% of the sales price immediately after closing (whichever is greater).
- **VA Home Loans:** VA Home Loans provide assistance to veterans looking to purchase a home. There are a variety of tools backed by the VA. Click here to learn which is the most effective tool in your community.

Private & Philanthropic Resources

Specific funding tools enable the utilization of public and private dollars to fund projects to completion. A mix of resources allows for public dollars to go further and private entities to develop housing options needed in the community. Some of these options include:

- **Community Foundations**: A community foundation is a local, independent nonprofit that pools donations from individuals, families, and businesses to address community issues. They act as a central hub for local philanthropy. Many community foundations will have a specific focus or dedicated funds related to housing. This will vary by community.
- **Affordable Housing Bonds**: These are debt securities, often tax-exempt municipal bonds, issued by state/local agencies (HFAs) or non-profits to finance low-cost rental housing or below-market-rate homeownership for low-to-moderate-income individuals, lowering interest costs for developers and buyers through tax advantages and federal programs. This helps to leverage the private and public resources to get projects across the finish line. Examples include mortgage revenue bonds and the Low Income Housing Tax Credit.
- **Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)**: The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program is the federal government's main policy tool for encouraging the development and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing. The program awards developers federal tax credits to offset construction costs in exchange for agreeing to reserve a certain fraction of units that are rent-restricted for lower-income households. The credits are claimed over a 10-year period.

Public-Private Resources

There are other ways to innovatively leverage public and private dollars through mechanisms that are targeted in specific neighborhoods or specific needs that spur development. Some of these include:

- **Land Bank:** A land bank is a public entity with unique powers to put vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties back to productive use according to community goals. A land bank's primary purpose is to acquire properties that some call "blighted" and temporarily hold and take care of them until they can be transferred to new, responsible owners.
- **Tax Allocation Districts:** Georgia's Redevelopment Powers Law was adopted by the general assembly in 1985 and gives local governments the authority to sell bonds to finance infrastructure and other redevelopment costs within a specially defined area, known as a tax allocation district or TAD. The bonds are secured by a "tax allocation increment" which is the increase in the property tax revenues resulting from redevelopment activities occurring. As public improvements and private investment take place within a TAD, the taxable value of property increases. The local government collects those revenues, putting the increase due to the new investment into a special fund to pay off bonds or loans that financed the public improvements in the district.
- **Land Donations:** Public entities can work with private entities to secure land at very low or no cost in exchange for improved development in a local community. This allows costs to be managed while development grows.

5 Address Land & Infrastructure Readiness

Inventory available land suitable for development, assess infrastructure capacity, and identify potential infrastructure barriers to new development (water, sewer, transportation, and broadband).

- **Inventory existing infrastructure:** Document all current infrastructure, including water, sewer, electricity, broadband, transportation (roads, public transit), and emergency services.
- **Evaluate capacity:** Determine the current capacity of each infrastructure system and identify areas where they are already strained or underutilized.

6 Perform Community Planning Analysis & Regulatory Reform Options

- Analyzing existing housing stock, including current gaps, and as well as regulatory barriers are important steps to take in order to assess the needs and barriers to increasing local housing stock that is not tied to physical limitations.
- Conduct local and regional housing studies to determine what price point and type of housing is needed in the community. The need could be quantified according to Area Median Income (AMI).
- Assess existing housing stock for potential opportunities and current gaps.
- Recommend periodic reviews of the zoning and planning regulations to prevent them from becoming outdated
- Utilize regular comprehensive plan updates to assess needs, opportunities, and alignment with long-term vision and goals for future growth in a community.
- Build planned development designation into comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances to avoid burdensome hearings that inhibit development, such as Planned Development Housing Overlay districts.
- Adhere to certain zoning standards, and you are able to build by-right.

Local Government Recommendations

Encourage local governments upon update of their comprehensive plans, to consider the following provisions:

- Creation of a local option "affordable housing community" or "workforce housing zone" designation, either of which is used to set goals for attaining workforce housing (% based, or unit # based).
- Inclusion of Planned Developments or Planned Unit Development designation into comprehensive plans to avoid onerous hearings; Planned Development Housing Overlay districts.
- Could limit it to certain local governments based on population or recent growth.
- Establish housing inventory growth goals on an annual or periodic review scheduled, based on current and projected housing demand.
- List actions and a schedule the city or county will take to meet housing demand.
- Strategies can include financial, regulatory, or other incentives by local governments.
- Encourage local governments to authorize Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and other multi-generational options that allow the full spectrum of homeownership.
- Encourage local governments to refrain from requiring a developer to create an HOA/POA in order for a project to move forward in the development process.
- Align land use planning with housing goals to ensure growth is sustainable and equitable.

Minor Changes to Developement Plans

Consider enabling local government staff to approve minor changes (to be defined) to development projects that speed up the development process. An example of this policy in practice is the existing Planned Development ordinance in Athens-Clarke. Minor change examples include:

- Changes to home placement on lots that do not substantially change the project or the overall number of units.
- Changes to home positioning due to new land surveyance data.
- Minor modifications to the location of buildings, provided all setbacks established for the development are met.
- Minor changes to the location and configuration of streets and rights of way.
- Minor changes to the location, configuration, and size of approved open space or common areas due to circumstances not foreseen at the time that plans were approved.
- Changes in project phasing and development.

- Consider conducting periodic regulatory fee and impact fee studies to determine if the levels are appropriate.
- Encourage local governments to relax zoning restrictions in areas where density makes sense in their local community.
- Provide templates and roadmaps from other cities and counties that have succeeded in amending their zoning code to encourage smaller lot sizes, lower square footage minimums, and allow a variety of building materials. A targeted combination of these changes will serve to reduce the overall cost of construction of the home, which reduces the price to sell the home.
- Encourage local governments to lower the minimum square footage of housing units.
- Encourage local governments to allow 1-to-4-unit residential buildings to follow the International Residential Code rather than the International Building Code.
- Cities and counties may create a designation for "infill lots," which are lots that are already platted in established neighborhoods with existing infrastructure in place but are not currently developed. For such infill lots, the city or county should be authorized to waive or reduce impact fees, permit fees, and infrastructure tap fees to encourage development of these existing lots.

7 Enact Community Housing Plan

- Implement an action plan with clear assignments of responsibility. Begin with projects that are feasible and visible to build momentum and public goodwill
- Recognize that building housing stock will not happen overnight. Adopt a multi-year strategy that balances short and long-term housing needs.

8 Communicate & Engage the Community

- Create a public engagement plan that includes town halls, surveys, and transparent updates.
- Build community support by highlighting benefits such as workforce stability, economic development, and improved quality of life.
- Address concerns proactively to reduce resistance and encourage buy-in.
- Foster a healthy dialogue between the steering committee and community organizations with housing interests in line with the committee's vision and goals.
- Support partnerships among local governments and their local businesses to help explain why changes are needed to housing stock to the broader community in order to support job growth and a high quality of living for residents.

9 Evaluate, Refine, & Sustain

- Continually evaluate the success of projects to determine if goals are being met and to address new needs as they arise.
- Conduct housing studies at regular intervals to update data and identify ongoing gaps.
- Ensure stakeholders remain committed over time by establishing formal structures (e.g., annual reports, progress dashboards, or standing committees).
- Celebrate successes publicly to reinforce momentum and encourage long-term sustainability.
- Apply to become a GICH community
    - List of current communities can be found **here**
    - **GICH Success Stories**

Conclusion and Next Steps

Increasing a community's housing stock requires significant coordination, thoughtful planning, and a long-term commitment. The challenges facing cities, counties, and Georgians today are the result of decades of underdevelopment combined with rising costs, growing NIMBYism, and evolving housing needs. While solutions will take time, we must act now to ensure Georgians are able to pursue homeownership, live in the communities they work, and support economic prosperity in the Peach State.

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For more tailored insights and data please visit

gachamber.com/research

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