



Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council Public Involvement Plan

Public involvement is a primary element in the work of the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council. This document describes the public involvement activities to be undertaken by the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council. The Council, assisted by its regional planning contractor, will follow this Public Involvement Plan to provide opportunities for meaningful input from key stakeholders, representatives of local governments, and the general public. In general, it is at the discretion of the Chair of the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council to permit additional public comment or to adjust or adapt to specific meeting timelines and constraints, so long as the intent and expectations described below are followed.

Guiding principles

The Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council recognizes the benefit and importance of providing opportunities for diverse input throughout the regional water planning process. The principles of the public input process are:

- Stakeholders and Council members will treat each other with respect and dignity;
- All participants will have an open mind and participate openly and honestly;
- The regional water planning process will continue with concurrent public comment throughout;
- Georgia EPD will provide public notice and take public comment on draft regional water plans after they are submitted;
- Stakeholder comments will be pertinent to the topic of the meeting at which they are expressed; and
- Input from the public, key stakeholders, and local government representatives will be considered and incorporated in Council work products.

Key stakeholders

The key stakeholders for the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Region are identified below. All members of the public will have opportunities for input, even if not specifically identified in this section.

- Local Governments -- within the water planning region
- Neighboring regional water planning councils – water planning councils that share borders and/or water resources
- Regional Commissions – agencies supporting local and regional comprehensive planning
- Agriculture – includes water permit holders for agricultural applications
- Businesses – includes local businesses (this audience may be sub-divided into more specific categories)
- Industries – includes industrial water permit holders and municipally-supplied industrial facilities
- Forestry – includes owners of managed forest lands and the forest products industry
- Institutions/educational/schools – includes public and private schools as well as institutions
- Tourism – includes public and private organizations related to local travel and tourism
- Recreation – includes citizens and industry related to recreational water uses
- Environment – includes citizens, agencies, and groups focused on environmental protection
- Public – any citizen interested in the regional water planning process

Procedural criteria

Time will be provided at every Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council meeting for input from stakeholders and the public. The procedural criteria are intended to ensure the public respects the Council's schedule constraints and the Council respects the public's opportunity to present relevant and different opinions. To facilitate a fair and efficient process, the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council has adopted the following procedures for public comment.

- All Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council meetings will be open meetings
- Stakeholders will be provided an opportunity to provide comments pertinent to the topic of the meeting in which they are expressed
- Time for public comments will be provided at all Council meetings
- Provisions for written comments will be made at all Council meetings

The Chair of the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council will use discretion to manage public comment under different circumstances in ways that enable the Council to progress with its work and respect those who want to comment.

Meeting announcements

All Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council meetings will be open meetings, including at least a 24-hour notice of any meetings. The following provisions will be made for all Council meetings to inform the public of upcoming meetings.

- Posted on the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council website (<http://www.flintochlockonee.org>) with a meeting agenda or summary of topics to be covered, meeting time, and meeting address
- Announced in a press release
- Posted at the meeting location with a meeting agenda or summary of topics to be covered, meeting time, and meeting address
- Meeting summaries will be posted on the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council website (<http://www.flintochlockonee.org>)

Stakeholder and public comment opportunities

Specific opportunities during the regional water planning process for stakeholder and public input include but are not limited to the following.

- Meetings of the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council
- Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council website: <http://www.flintochlockonee.org> (documents will be posted periodically with timeframes for comment and mechanisms for comment clearly stated)
- Letters may be mailed to Georgia EPD (Address: Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Division, 2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Suite 1152, East Tower, Atlanta, GA 30334)

- Emails to the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council and/or Georgia EPD
- Georgia EPD public notice period for the resource assessments
- Georgia EPD public notice period on the draft regional water plans

The Council, at the discretion of the Chair, may permit additional stakeholder and public comment opportunities, as deemed appropriate. In the event that public input seems insufficient, the Council, with the assistance of the regional planning contractor, may make additional efforts to solicit input.

Local governments

Much of the implementation of the regional water plans is the responsibility of local governments; therefore input will be sought from local government officials and staff on the following specific topics.

- Regional population, economic and employment forecasts
- Fiscal implications of water management practices
- Draft regional water plan

The Council and local government representatives should identify proper communication pathways. The following actions are intended to coordinate activities of the local governments with the Council.

- Local government officials and staff will be provided an opportunity at the Council meetings to comment on the regional water planning process and items on the meeting agenda
- Local government officials and staff may provide written comments to the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council, as needed.

Other regional water planning councils

In order to plan and coordinate the use and protection of shared water resources, the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council will coordinate with adjacent and hydrologically-connected councils throughout the regional water planning process. Georgia EPD will convene some meetings to discuss shared water resources, such as on the current resource assessments. The Council will use the following communication pathways to coordinate with adjacent regional water planning councils.

- Members of the Council will attend shared resource meetings and other joint meetings
- At the discretion of the Chair, an opportunity may be provided at Council meetings for announcements or progress reports from adjacent regional water planning councils

At the discretion of the Chair, the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council may provide for additional coordination with adjacent regional water planning councils, as deemed appropriate.

Review and consideration of public input

The objective of this process is to gather relevant and diverse input to improve the quality of the recommended regional water plan. Once public comments are received from the public and key stakeholders the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council, with the assistance of the regional planning contractor, will consider and address these comments. Written comments and web comments will be summarized and provided to Council members. Verbal comments will be summarized and included in meeting summaries.

Adopted November 17, 2009