

## **Downtown Development Authorities**

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Downtown development authorities are used in cities throughout the state as a mechanism to revitalize and redevelop municipal central business districts. City officials should understand how DDAs are created, what DDAs are empowered to do and the roles and responsibilities of DDA members.

### **How are DDAs created and activated?**

Downtown development authorities have been created by the General Assembly in every city in the state of Georgia. However, downtown development authorities cannot transact any business or exercise any powers until activated by adopting and filing an ordinance or resolution. The resolution must declare the need for the authority, specify the boundaries of the downtown development area that constitutes the central business district and appoint the initial directors.

### **How many DDAs are there in Georgia?**

While there has been a DDA created in each municipal corporation in the state, only a portion of the cities in the state have activated their DDAs. According to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) 2010 Directory of Registered Local Government Authorities, there are 148 DDAs registered in Georgia. Prior to 1996, there was no official record of how many authorities were operating in the State of Georgia. During the 1995 legislative session, the Georgia General Assembly passed the Local Government Authorities Registration Act. This act requires local government authorities to register annually with DCA beginning January 1, 1996. Authorities, including DDAs, are also required to submit an annual report of revenues, expenditures, assets, and debts to DCA. The DCA site allows users to look up authorities by type and city name, and includes detailed information about how each authority was created along with contact information for each registered authority.

### **What powers does a DDA have?**

OCGA 36-42-8 lists the general powers of downtown development authorities. As with other types of authorities in Georgia, downtown development authorities may accept grants and apply for loans. They can also own, acquire and improve property, and they are empowered to enter into contracts and intergovernmental agreements. DDAs also have the authority to issue revenue bonds.

### **How many members serve on a DDA board?**

A DDA consists of a board of seven directors who are appointed by the municipal governing authority to serve staggered four-year terms. Directors are appointed by the governing body and must be taxpayers who live in the city or they must own or operate a business located within the downtown development area. They must also be taxpayers who live in the county in which the city is located. One of the directors can be a member of the municipal governing authority. Board members do not receive any compensation for serving on the DDA, except for reimbursement for actual expenses incurred in

performing their duties.

**What are the training requirements for DDA board members?**

With the exception of a member who also serves on the city council, all DDA board members must take at least eight hours of training on downtown development and redevelopment programs within the first 12 months of their appointment to the DDA.

**One of our DDA members previously served on the DDA board, went off the board for several years, and was recently reappointed. Does he have to take training again?**

Yes. Even though a member received training during his or her previous service on the DDA board, it is important that he or she take the training again to get the most recent information about legal requirements and recommended practices for DDAs.

**What's the difference between a downtown development authority and the Main Street/Better Hometown Program?**

The Main Street/Better Hometown programs provide resources for cities across Georgia that are seeking to develop their downtown areas. Cities are not required to participate in the Main Street/Better Hometown programs, but they may choose to do so in order to take advantage of the technical assistance and other resources available through these programs.

In the late 1970s, the Main Street program was initiated in three Midwestern cities by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as a pilot project to show that downtown development and historic preservation could go hand in hand. In 1980, after the pilot effort proved to be a success, states were encouraged to apply to participate in an expanded National Main Street program and Georgia was one of six states selected. The state agency administering the program in each state chose five cities to work with. In Georgia, DCA selected Athens, Canton, LaGrange, Swainsboro and Waycross to be the first Main Street Cities. In the mid-1990s, DCA created the Better Hometown program, essentially a Main Street program for towns under 5,000 population. Today, there are 103 Main Street and Better Hometown cities across the state. The Georgia Main Street program is administered by DCA while the national program is administered by the National Main Street Center.

**What is the difference between “Main Street” and “Better Hometown” cities?**

Classic “Main Street” cities are those cities with populations between 5,000 and 50,000 that follow the Main Street approach to downtown development. “Better Hometown” cities are smaller cities with a population of 500-5,000 that have received full designation as Main Street cities. In addition, DCA also administers a separate program available to larger cities (with populations over 50,000) called the Urban Georgia Network, which is designed to deal with the unique challenges and issues that come with being a larger city.

**What are some additional resources for information about downtown development in general?**

A wealth of information on downtown development in Georgia is available through a

variety of state agencies and other organizations. The [DCA website](#) has extensive information about downtown development and redevelopment that may be helpful for city officials who are working to revitalize and protect downtown areas. The [Downtown Development Resource and Program Guide](#) (Adobe Acrobat) contains information about the resources and programs DCA provides to cities and DDAs across the state, including information about some of the state-administered grants and loans available for downtown projects. The [Georgia Main Street](#) website has information about how cities can participate in the Main Street/Better Hometown programs. For information about preserving downtown resources, including obtaining design assistance for downtown projects, check out the [Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation](#) website. The [Georgia Historic Preservation](#) website has information about historic preservation tax credits and other resources offered through the state's Department of Natural Resources. Finally, the [Georgia Cities Foundation](#) (GCF), a non-profit subsidiary of GMA, administers a low-interest loan program for projects in downtown areas.

### **What is the Georgia Downtown Association?**

The Georgia Downtown Association (GDA) is a non-profit association that promotes the economic redevelopment of Georgia's traditional downtowns. Through advocacy, education and marketing, GDA works to focus the public's attention on the value of downtown. GDA is an independent association that supports both public and private sector efforts targeted at enhancing Georgia's downtowns.

GDA offers several programs that are designed to increase the opportunities for and build on the talents of its members. Membership in the Georgia Downtown Association is open to cities, downtown development authorities, businesses, professionals and other individuals interested in downtown. The Georgia Downtown Association also annually sponsors the Georgia Downtown Conference in partnership with DCA.

### **Our city's DDA has been defunct for many years but has recently been reactivated and the new members would like to obtain information on how to proceed. Where can I learn more about how to get started and find out about DDA training?**

For more information about DDAs in Georgia, including detailed information about how to obtain DDA training, contact Alan Dickerson, GMA community development manager, by phone at 678-686-6213 or by email at [adickerson@gmanet.com](mailto:adickerson@gmanet.com).