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Introduction

An Intentional Region?

I n the summer of 1994, the renowned Brookings Institution economist Anthony Downs delivered what he called an unorthodox speech to members of the Atlanta District Council of the Urban Land Institute. Speaking to a room full of developers, real estate brokers, and politicians, Downs explained that rather than talking about "traditional land-use and real estate issues," he would instead consider "the major challenges facing all large U.S. metropolitan areas." Among the challenges he mentioned were the usual suspects: crime, poverty, racial segregation, failing schools, congestion, and low environmental quality. Though he noted that each was important, Downs posited that governance—namely, a "governmental structure that consists of many small and nearly autonomous local governments"—was the biggest challenge of all. If metropolitan Atlanta's fragmented governing bodies were the culprits for the region's host of problems, how did they become so? In words oddly complimentary yet condemnatory, he let slip that Atlanta's local governments, despite apparent disorder, had succeeded in "carrying out certain growth related policies" that conformed closely to an "unlimited low-density vision" of how "growth ought to occur." But he followed with the suggestion that the region's "unlimited low-density metropolitan growth [had taken] place through an uncoordinated, seemingly almost random set of local public policies and individual private actions carried out by separate governments and private parties." In other words, the issues facing Atlanta at the end of the twentieth century, and by extension other large urban regions, were the consequence of local governments having run amok but in some vaguely coordinated fashion.[1]

Regional planning in the United States has frequently been the target of just this sort of criticism, for being weak and disorganized and, more often than not, "a disappointment."[2] Residential segregation by race and income, sprawling road networks, degraded air quality, overtaxed water and sewer systems, and intergovernmental competition for resources are often cited as seemingly irrefutable evidence of the failure of the federal government and the states to develop and implement a strong system of coordinated, regional planning institutions. But as Downs also suggested, these effects appear to be the result of a vaguely coherent vision, however fragmented it might seem. In many respects, Downs was channeling a sort of received wisdom.

This received wisdom is part of the legacy of a once robust debate about the value of regional planning and its goals, a dispute that dates to the beginning of the twentieth century and occupied the intellectual heart of planning as it coalesced from its beginnings in the nineteenth century into a modern discipline in the 1930s.[3] Yet at the end of World War II this debate was effectively buried and forgotten, and over the second half of the twentieth century the publicly supported regional planning agencies, and the plans they produced, received little attention for their role in the transformation of American metropolitan areas.[4] It is this assumed irrelevance that I challenge, arguing that regional planning remained powerful during the second half of the twentieth century, strengthened by significant, albeit quiet, support from federal and state governments.[5] Indeed, from 1954 until 1981 federal "grants for . . . planning work in metropolitan and regional areas" were a mainstay of support for regional (and local) planning.[6] But because regional planning activities were included in the complex mandates accompanying dispersal of federal funds, they mostly avoided public notice, by the media or others. Lacking the headline-grabbing drama of political grandstanding, racial conflict, or environmental catastrophe, they also evaded much scholarly attention. In part because regional plans are products of intricate institutional relationships and span multiple layers of government, their analysis is difficult, and so is reaching clear conclusions about their impact. Perhaps the most cogent reason postwar regional planning escaped notice is that it tended to be technical, arcane, and unusually boring.[7]

If we can put the boredom of the planning process aside for a moment and instead consider regional plans as devices for structuring decisions about development, as expressions of how regulations should be applied, and as indicators of which organizations and individuals would be allowed to participate, we can begin to recognize the imprint of regional thinking in the ways that local and state governments, along with federal infrastructure policy, together managed the urban development process. We can also begin to see that the process of regional planning, what might be called plan making, as it has been carried out still reveals distinct echoes of debates about regionalism from the earliest years of the twentieth-century.[8] One purpose of this book is to reconsider the influence of regional planning in this light, as both process

and institution, exploring the way it was conceived, structured, and executed, using metropolitan Atlanta as a case.[9]

The externalities of development appear to have fractured modern city regions, but urban decentralization in the second half of the twentieth century was the work of a network of highly coordinated public agencies. Working at different scales, these agencies designed a set of regulatory conditions that favored single-family homes, strip malls, and private automobiles. Once these conditions were in place, households that were able took advantage, moving en masse from central cities, small towns, and farms into outposts along an ever-expanding suburban edge. A second purpose of this book is to explore the connections among these agencies to understand how they influenced the process of regional development.[10]

Researchers who have examined twentieth-century Atlanta have largely set aside the issue of regional planning, and often the geographic region itself, preferring instead to focus on socioeconomic and political forces that conditioned the development of the city, extrapolating that these same forces also shaped the greater metropolitan area.[11] The bulk of this scholarship has used the politics of race and community power as interlocking analytic frameworks. Beginning in the early 1950s, the first studies of Atlanta's power structure concluded that a small set of corporate chieftains effectively governed the city. They commanded an army of middle managers, professionals, and local politicians to carry out their directives, which most conspicuously included sustaining their social and political power while trying to maintain control of the city's growing black electorate.[12] On the basis of this work, scholars subsequently advanced the notion that the delicate politics of race in Atlanta determines how power has been wielded and how the city has developed. Regime theorists updated the power structure argument, explaining how downtown corporate leaders and elected officials learned to cooperate with the city's black leadership to reach a truce that helped the white elites maintain control, even as the black electorate reached majority status.[13] Social and political historians studied the city's racial geography during the twentieth century as a major factor in explaining the shape of the physical and political landscape, from the siting of freeways and transit lines to the location of shopping malls, sports arenas, and office parks to the political affiliation of the suburbs.[14] Geographers and sociologists have seen in Atlanta's physical, economic, and social form an expression of an implicitly racist growth machine, one beholden to the spatial demands of modern capitalism.[15]

The politics of race, complicated by power and political economy, offers a good explanation of the process of development in the city of Atlanta and echoes issues and conflicts documented in other cities.[16] Yet limiting discussion to the city overlooks broader institutions that influenced how the region grew and are not necessarily identical to the ones that operated within the city. Focusing on the city tends to miss issues originating at the state and regional levels. Despite Atlanta being both the

Figure 1.1 "Statue, West Elevation, Georgia State Capitol, Capitol Square, Atlanta, Fulton County, Georgia," 1990, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS GA, 61-ATLA, 3-176

largest city and the state capital, a somewhat uncommon condition, little scholarly literature substantially addresses the influence of state or regional institutions on the urbanization process, which I argue is critical to understanding why Atlanta grew the way it did. While respecting the insights developed in the literature, my purpose is to explore the evolution of metropolitan Atlanta. I do this by taking the urban region as the primary unit of analysis.

This project began with a broad question related to the issues Downs raised in his speech: Is American-style urban sprawl actually unplanned? Discussions of the low-density built form endemic to American metropolitan areas in the postwar period, of which Atlanta is an ideal example, almost inevitably end in a groaning indictment of the unwillingness of local governments to cooperate and usually conclude that "the most important future challenge for metropolitan areas will be to create some kind of effective regional governance for both central cities and their suburbs," to force meaningful cross-jurisdictional conciliation.[17] Sparked by this sentiment, which has become something of a platitude among planners, I sought to investigate Atlanta's alleged unplanned urban sprawl. Might the region's scattered strip malls, office parks, and subdivisions have been the result of a plan? Later, I narrowed the project to three

questions about the influence of regional planning in Atlanta's postwar development. First, what did the public institutions engaged in Atlanta's regional planning process hope to accomplish? Second, how was the relationship among those public institutions constituted, and how did it structure the regional planning process? Third, if Atlanta's regional planning process was coordinated across political scales, why did it lead to such extensive decentralization? All three questions concern how regional policies spanned political boundaries and how ideas about what constitutes good regional planning framed local debates.

I argue that the idea of the urban region, as part of the mesolevel that buffers federal and local governments, played a particularly important role in Atlanta's postwar development. Beginning in 1947, but especially from the late 1960s, decisions about how the region should be developed have been much more highly coordinated and planned than previously recognized. For nearly forty years the close working relationship between the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC)—Atlanta's council of governments and its designated metropolitan planning organization—a cadre of state and local politicians, and a subset of federal agencies created and sustained a regional agenda that appeared haphazard but was in fact quite coherent.[18] At first representing a five-county metropolitan region, by 2002 ARC's footprint had expanded to ten counties, covering 80 percent of Atlanta's urbanized area and 83 percent of the greater metropolitan population.[19] ARC's growth both reflected and directed metropolitan Atlanta's.

To understand how Atlanta's regional planning process functioned, I turn away from simple mechanical indicators and toward the rules that govern the behavior of public agencies (structure) and the language and procedures the agencies use (discourse). Training a sharper lens on organizational issues helps us understand how the structure of the regional planning process, its jurisdiction, sources of funding, and participating stakeholders establish which development issues receive attention and how responses to those issues are crafted. Paying close attention to the discourse that is the heart of the regional planning process, expressed in meetings, hearings, reports, special studies, maps, and media, allows us to see how the process unfolds from the inside. Together, structure and discourse exert significant influence over development decisions, yet they are not easily visible and usually receive little attention.[20]

Most studies of regional planning have focused on the fate of explicit policies, those formally adopted by regional planning agencies that are directed at controlling specific development externalities at the local level. Success or failure is often measured by whether local governments implement those regional policies within a relatively short time frame.[21] More often than not, these kinds of studies deem regional policies failures, a result that tends to downplay the power and effectiveness of regional plans and regional planning agencies while sidestepping the details of the regional planning process itself. Taking a longer view challenges such evaluations.

By looking across several decades and a connected series of planning events, I argue that the agencies, the plans, and most importantly, the process have been a major influence on the shape of Atlanta's growth. Toward this end, this book excavates the regional planning process during a period roughly between 1968 and 2002, years when metro Atlanta experienced its most dramatic growth in population, jobs, and geographic extent. Using a variety of archival resources directly related to the regional planning process, I examine, in order, the creation of ARC (1968–1971); the writing of a regional watershed management plan (1971–1972); the preparation of a regional development plan (1973–1976); the passage of a state law that mandated comprehensive local planning (1987–1989); and a battle over transportation, air quality, and a suburban freeway (1998–2002). The written record of the planning process provides an inside view of how the discourse shared between the professional bureaucracy and public officials helped structure decisions about development. The case of metropolitan Atlanta provides an opportunity to focus on the regional planning process in a single place during a period of significant political, economic, and physical transition.

The importance of the relationship of ARC and the state to this story derives from their position as de facto managers of the regional planning process, a role that allowed a changing cast of politicians and public administrators to exert power over the development of the region and to guide the implementation of federal policy. These two forces, the political and regulatory, consistently shaped and constrained the regional planning process. Until the late 1960s, Atlanta's governing regime was a creature of the city's corporate executives, professional class, and their political allies, a very small group that Floyd Hunter described as "persons of dominance, prestige, and influence" who are "able to enforce their decisions by persuasion, intimidation, coercion, and, if necessary, force."[22] In the late 1960s, this group began to dissipate, a result of the expansion of regional boundaries, changed demographics, and new federal laws. Public administrators, state legislators (including representatives from the rapidly expanding suburban counties), and county commissioners who coalesced around a shared interest in the region's development began to replace them. This emergent governing coalition maintained a surprisingly congenial relationship, which imbued the region with a sense of consensus that persisted for twenty years. At the beginning of the 1990s, however, the regionalist coalition broke down as political control of several county commissions and state legislative districts changed hands. Chaos ensued as a new, more contentious group of stakeholders fought for control of the regional planning process. By the early 2000s, leadership of the state, including the governorship and a majority of the legislature, had shifted from Democratic to Republican, and the population demographics of the region looked very different. The regional planning process, viewed across time, reveals how political changes affected regional development.

The Legacy of Regionalism

The importance of regional planning has been recognized since the birth of city planning itself in the late nineteenth century. Dramatized in documents like Charles Eliot's metropolitan park plan for Boston and Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett's *Plan of Chicago*, the soaring imagery associated with early regional plans paid homage to the idea that the modern city could be designed in a single frame, just as one might design a building or a park. By the interwar period of the twentieth century, however, a decidedly more empirical form of regionalism had mostly replaced the design schemes of the previous generation. The ideas of Ebenezer Howard, Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford, and Howard Odum offered a more process-oriented but also philosophical vision of what regional planning could achieve. Bearing witness to the intense and often ugly industrial urbanization that transformed both the cities and the countrysides of the Anglo-American world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Howard, Geddes, Mumford, and Odum stridently argued that comprehensive regional planning could solve the pathologies of modern life.[23]

Believing that the conditions in central London demanded systematic depopulation, Howard dreamed Garden City as a new kind of urban form, a self-contained city of limited size, cooperatively owned by the residents, and intimately connected to the countryside. With time and careful planning, he argued that a constellation of garden cities could emerge, linked by railroads but permanently separated by productive agricultural land. On paper, Garden City was crisp and clear and has transfixed planners ever since. Geddes too saw the British industrial city as problematic but reacted with the detached eye of a scientist who sought to understand it as much as change it. Rejecting political boundaries as arbitrary, Geddes conceptualized the region as the geographic unit where humans and nature most closely aligned. To gather evidence for his claims, he spent years literally looking out over Edinburgh, fastidiously surveying the physical, social, and economic patterns of the city, building a complex theory about the union of the natural region, economic activity, and folk life. By treating a region as the unit of analysis, Geddes suggested a new lens for viewing and correcting social problems. On the American side of the Atlantic, Mumford and Odum saw themselves as intellectual descendants of Geddes. Mumford combined Howard's normative prescriptions with Geddes's measured empiricism in his belief that the only way to save the United States from itself would be to transform it into an environmentally conscious, decentralized society living in planned urban regions. Odum adopted the Geddesian regional survey as a tool to modernize the American South while avoiding the kind of disruptive, high-intensity urbanization that big American cities in the Northeast and Midwest had experienced. Howard, Geddes, Mumford, and Odum influenced a generation of social scientists, planners, landscape architects, and civil engineers and indeed gave shape to planning's intellectual core over the succeeding decades.[24]

Arguably, the most complete American effort to produce a regional plan that reflected this tradition was the *Plan of New York and Its Environs*, a ten-volume, ten-year project funded by the Russell Sage Foundation that began in 1921 and included many of the most renowned planners and social scientists in the English-speaking world.[25] The New York plan advanced a vision of urban decentralization that borrowed heavily from Howard and Geddes yet also seemed to violate the revolutionary spirit of their ideas.[26] Yet the rigorous empirical approach to understanding and planning the New York region demonstrated by the plan, including defining the region as a unit of analysis, melded social science and policy to provide a depth and intellectual rigor that had never before been so clearly evident in the nascent planning discipline. The subsequent influence of the *Plan of New York and Its Environs* on federal policy during the New Deal and World War II helped provoke federal interest in regional, state, and indeed national planning as a tool for managing the country. Many of the academics and intellectuals working in Franklin Roosevelt's administration supported public sector planning, seeing it as a tool for reining in the excesses of unregulated capitalism. The desire to make some kind of national planning agency a permanent fixture of the executive branch ran high during Roosevelt's four terms, but the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War ended hope that centralized planning would have a permanent place in federal policy.[27]

As World War II drew to an end and the peacetime economy warmed up, gauzy regional plans, amalgams of ideas from a variety of prewar sources, became popular tools for promoting economic growth.[28] These plans were often spearheaded by local chambers of commerce interested in helping their members capture a share of the growing national wealth. Though they usually owed their existence to private organizations, many postwar regional plans were claimed by sponsors to be civic activities.[29] They outlined fanciful civic buildings, multilane freeways, futuristic urban transit systems, and spacious suburban neighborhoods along the urban edge, revealing a lingering belief that American cities were in need of rebuilding.[30] Beyond the publicity the plans hoped to generate, they also accomplished more concrete tasks. In many cases, the infrastructure schemes, parks, and renewal areas in privately financed regional plans later became part of public plans. The first publicly (locally) financed regional planning agencies also emerged in the years just after World War II. Beginning in the early 1950s, a series of new policies expanded and transformed federal support for urban infrastructure and bolstered regional planning in the process.[31] For example, Section 701 of the federal Housing Act of 1954 funded demolition and construction but also provided direct support for activities that would increase regional cooperation around issues of housing and urban development.[32] The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 outlined and paid for the Interstate Highway System but also financed regional planning agencies in their efforts to develop urban highway systems that were at

least nominally coordinated with surrounding land use. The 1950s-era highway and housing acts together ensured that public regional planning agencies would become nearly ubiquitous features of the governing structures of virtually every large and midsized city.

As the highways, bridges, sewers, and airports that framed postwar metropolitan growth took shape, the externalities of urbanization became increasingly visible and difficult to ignore. Waves of regulation addressing the negative effects of the growth of the built environment emerged in response. First came the 1962 Federal Aid Highway Act, which mandated and funded the creation of a national system of regional planning agencies to deal with the human and environmental cost of blasting massive highways through urban neighborhoods.[33] Through these new metropolitan planning organizations, transportation plans were required to engage the public, address civil rights, relocate households displaced by road building, assess the environmental impacts of development, and coordinate land use. After Lyndon Johnson took office in 1963, federal laws governing the built environment and using the region as a primary geographic unit flooded in: air quality legislation in 1963, civil rights in 1964, water pollution and urban renewal in 1965, historic preservation and model cities in 1966, and intergovernmental cooperation in 1968. Richard Nixon inherited and signed broad environmental protection in 1969 shortly after taking office, updated air quality laws in 1970, and oversaw a major expansion of water pollution control in 1972.[34]

Though at times appearing at cross-purposes, expanded federal legislation in the 1960s established new constraints on local control over the built environment while enhancing the power of regional planning agencies. As the condition of the natural environment became part of a complex science of ecology, measurable standards emerged that were linked to planning and infrastructure. Federal transportation policy slowly shifted from expansion to mitigation, a subtle but significant change that required regional agencies to confront the broader impacts of their plans. Legislation to strengthen intergovernmental coordination forced local governments to work closely with regional agencies on planning projects. Requirements for metropolitan-level planning were attached to a wide range of federal domestic programs. Awareness of the negative externalities associated with rapid urban development had finally made its way up to the federal policy-making apparatus and then, in a newly codified form, flowed back down to state, regional, and local planning institutions for implementation.[35] By the early 1970s, these changes reconstituted the regional planning process into a much more complex set of rules and procedures and remade the core activities of regional planning agencies, making the urban region a prominent component of federal policy over the next three decades.[36] Regional agencies finally began to resemble the comprehensive governing bodies their nomenclature suggested.[37]

Post-1970 Sprawl

In the early postwar years (between 1946 and 1970), most suburbs remained relatively compact. People still went downtown to work and shop. Public transit systems made the switch from streetcars to buses but remained relatively well used, and a few federally funded regional rail systems began to appear. In the late 1960s, however, another wave of suburbanization emerged, which roughly coincided with the growing scope of federal control over planning and the built environment. The square footage of the average home began to expand, while the average number of people per household shrank; the percentage of work trips made on mass transit began to decline; and the average distance between work and home grew. As a result, the years after 1970 saw the urban edge flow deeper into the hinterlands. What began as urban decentralization in the 1950s turned into deconcentration in the 1970s. As the baby boomers, a generation raised amid postwar prosperity, began to enter the labor force, they took advantage of the spoils of the system their parents had created to move themselves farther from central cities and into spacious suburban subdivisions on the fringe.[38]

Atlanta demonstrated this process vividly. Up until about 1970, development at urban densities outside the city was largely adjacent to the city limits, the product of city dwellers moving to new suburban neighborhoods.[39] But by the mid-1970s, population growth well beyond the inner suburbs began to accelerate. In 1960 Atlanta contained half the regional population, and Fulton and Dekalb Counties together accounted for 80 percent; by 1970 the city still accounted for one-third of the region's total, Fulton and Dekalb just shy of three-quarters. But by 2000 the city held less than a tenth of the region's population, and the Fulton-Dekalb share had fallen to 36 percent. In 1900 the population density of what could be defined as metro Atlanta was nearly 6,000 persons per square mile. By 1960 this density had dropped by 50 percent. Density continued to decline over the following four decades, falling to just over 1,100 persons per square mile by century's end.[40]

By the late 1980s regulation of the built environment in Georgia was more clearly articulated than ever before.[41] But despite layers of new regulations, better data, and more sophisticated analytic tools, Atlanta's horizontal march across north Georgia seemed more rapid and voracious every year. Noticing the seemingly incessant growth of the fringe, observers consistently concluded that regional planning must be weak and in need of significant reform.[42] Their solutions called for more collaboration and for bigger, more powerful regional agencies to replace ineffective councils of government and metropolitan planning organizations. As Downs suggested in 1994, "Creating regional governance arrangements that can influence key land-use and transportation decisions over all the counties in the Atlanta region is absolutely essential to solving the region's pressing growth-related and social problems."[43]

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Researchers have tended to view the regional planning process in the late twentieth century as focused almost exclusively on ends, yet the complexity of its structure suggests that means may be more important. Viewing ARC and the state of Georgia as an integral part of an ongoing regional planning discourse reframes metropolitan Atlanta's built environment as a by-product of regulated behavior by interpenetrated public agencies and private actors rather than random actions by unrelated entities. Indeed, ARC had been orchestrating the regional planning process in conjunction with the state since its creation, consistently playing an important role in the major development decisions that gave the region its spatial structure. The present shape of metropolitan Atlanta, lacking limiting topography, is largely a manifestation of a highly developed regulatory framework, with ARC and the state sitting at the center. The close relationship between ARC and the state—persisting for decades through water supply plans for the Chattahoochee River, a series of regional development plans, and growth management legislation before finally being upended amid a transportation planning showdown—demonstrates how the planning process worked to structure decisions. The sheer predictability of the outcomes of this relationship belies the image of a disconnected, balkanized collection of independent political fiefdoms, all pursuing their own ends regardless of the consequences.

Ultimately, what Downs and like-minded observers have not enunciated is that each seemingly independent planning decision also worked in conjunction with the ones before it and the ones after, creating a temporal and spatial coherence of surprising extent. Regional development policies and plans for the Chattahoochee River encouraged land conservation, water protection, and neighborhood preservation, but they also accommodated a far-flung, single-family housing stock built around a system of cul-de-sacs, setbacks, and stream buffers. Growth management brought the state power to enforce a set of standards for local comprehensive plans but also purposely ignored how those plans would shape development. Transportation plans focused on strengthening the urban core and reducing congestion by gradually expanding roads and building a commuter-oriented mass transit system, but good roads pushed the urban fringe farther from the central city, and a hub-and-spoke transit system could not accommodate a multinodal commute shed.

Exploring the nature of the relationships that sustained the regional planning process raises several important points about how regional planning has worked in the postwar period, points important to understanding how sprawling metropolitan areas like Atlanta have been created and sustained. First, infrastructure systems, the pillars of the built environment, are the result of a highly structured but also consistently negotiated agreement between public agencies operating at the regional scale. The balance in this negotiation teeters on the ability of regional planning agencies to build and manage alliances between public and private actors. Second, the intellectual legacy of regionalist thought continues to exert a strong influence on the ideology and

practice of contemporary regional planning. While regional planning agencies are creatures of their temporal-spatial context, they owe just as much to the old regionalist tradition. Third, treating regional planning as simply a product of the spillover effects and negative externalities of local development decisions fails to appreciate the connection between regional agencies, states, and the federal government. The way ARC and the state operate reflects the close coordination of policy and ideas between levels of government, whereby the regional agency acts as much as a representative of state and federal interests as it does local interests.

Metro Atlanta Expands

Between 1970 and 2002 Atlanta's low-density sprawl expanded at a rapid pace but largely because it was planned that way. Though the vision of an ideal urban form remained surprisingly consistent, the intervening years witnessed significant changes in the politics and practice of regional planning. As suburbs absorbed people and jobs, turning northern Georgia into a continuous expanse of urbanization, the regional planning process underwent three important disruptions. The first came with the creation of ARC in 1971, when the balance of power in the regional planning process shifted from a small cadre of downtown businessmen to a larger coalition of state and local politicians and public administrators, representing both city and suburbs, who would work together for nearly two decades and settle into a collaborative middle ground from which they would govern. The second came in the early 1980s, when President Ronald Reagan slashed direct federal support of state and regional planning programs. The state of Georgia stepped in, instituting a series of new policies designed to fill the void left by the federal pullback. The third came in the early 1990s as reinvigorated federal urban policy forced significant changes to the regional planning process and changing political alliances displaced several of ARC's longstanding board members and state legislative allies, upending the balance of power on the commission. A new group of politicians, supported by the legions of suburban homeowners who had flocked to metro Atlanta during the 1980s boom, took control of the regional planning process and ushered in a period of turmoil. Openly hostile to regulations that supported coordinated planning, the reconfigured regional coalition turned its attention to protecting the low-density, single-family subdivisions that many believed gave the region much of its appeal. For the next decade, the regional leadership remained at odds with just about any attempt to institute new environmental protections, more aggressive land-use controls, or expansion of the mass transit network. Only when a battle over a new suburban freeway engulfed the region did the impasse break.

The postwar years during which so many regulations controlling land development were created have been well documented, but the effect of those regulations

remains less explored. In the years after 1970, many of the externalities that were supposed to be controlled and mitigated by the expanded regulatory framework got worse, not better. Each new regulation contributed to a transformation of both the regional planning process and the institutions that supported it. Though, with a few exceptions, parcel-level decision-making authority (zoning and building permits) remained embedded in local jurisdictions, the increasing number of regulations requiring regional consideration gave regional agencies significant influence over the broader context in which small-scale decisions could be made.[44] By examining the material record left behind from the regional planning process in Atlanta, this book tells one part of the story of the creation of metropolitan Atlanta. Considering how regional planning was set up and how it actually functioned highlights the intertwined role of politicians and the public bureaucracy in the production of Atlanta's low-density built environment. Regional planning unfolded in the course of meetings, conversations, news reports, conferences, and public hearings, as well as through an array of written materials, reports, plans, and maps. These details of the regional planning process provide insight into the fluid but complicated relationship between levels of government, how a vision for regional development was sustained over time, and how an urban region served as a planning unit. I conclude that in Atlanta the essential story is about the cohesiveness of the region, rather than the city and its suburbs or the conflict between them.

To get back to Downs's assertion that metro Atlanta is indeed a model worth exploring, what kind of model is it? In many respects, Atlanta's regionalist legacy is almost completely at odds with that of a place like Portland or Minneapolis, the two American cities most often identified with good regional planning. While coordination among local governments was made possible by the relationship between ARC's political board and planning staff, the support of state government, and the relative lack of local government fragmentation, the ends to which that coordination was put bore little relation to the natural resource protection imperative in Portland or the attempts at a more equitable redistribution of public funds in Minneapolis.[45] Despite conditions favorable for a progressive regionalism, Atlanta appears to have pursued something else entirely. In many ways, this makes Atlanta a typical case, both regionally and nationally. The processes behind the region's transformation in the postwar period are important to understanding its embrace of regional planning as a growth strategy that was not about shaping or containing growth but increasing the amount of it. Hence we must ask toward what end, and for whom, was Atlanta's regional planning process working? Answering this question demands a careful look at ARC, the state of Georgia, and the planning process they presided over. That is where I begin.