

August 1, 2016

RE: Resolution 2016-06-77 Seeking Proposed Changes to Section 105-19 of the Code Related to the Use of Wood in the Construction of Buildings Taller than Three Stories or Larger than 100,000 Square Feet

Mayor Paul and City Council Members:

The Georgia Forestry Association is Georgia's primary advocate for forest landowners, forest-based businesses and forest product manufacturers. Since 1907, GFA has worked to promote open access to markets for Georgia's 22 million acres of private, commercially available timberland. Markets for working forests are critical to the economy and ecology of Georgia - providing more than 10,000 jobs in metro Atlanta and over 133,000 direct and indirect jobs across Georgia. Forests also serve urban communities by generating clean air and clean water.

We write on behalf of Georgia's landowners and forest product manufacturers - with the support of the signees designated at the end of this letter - to express our concern about Resolution 2016-06-77 which would require metal or masonry framing on any new buildings taller than three stories or more than 100,000 square feet. We understand that the City of Sandy Springs wishes to promote durable and safe development within the city limits. However, the approval of this resolution would create undue collateral damage on Georgia's forest industry by stifling the free market for construction materials and creating an unwarranted precedent for banning Georgia grown wood.

Wood is a safe, high performance construction material.

Building codes by the International Code Council - the model from which the Georgia State codes are based - reflect the global consensus regarding building safety and fire. These codes comprehensively address life safety for all building occupancy types. In terms of fire protection, building codes require all buildings to perform to the same level of safety regardless of materials. Wood buildings can be designed to meet rigorous standards for performance, which is why the codes allow the use of wood in a wide range of building types - including structures that are taller and have more area.

The well-established, safe performance of buildings built under the construction type provisions of the International Codes, and therefore the state codes, for many years, speaks for itself. For a local jurisdiction to depart from the statewide code on such basic matters as building size, materials, combustibility and fire resistance, would be a major problem for the design and construction industry and would be a set-back for the cause of standardized uniform codes which are so important to both industry and the public. The need for deviation from the consensus model codes and the state codes should be substantiated technically, rather than with broad assumptions about materials and types of construction. Sandy Springs does not represent unique climatic, geologic, topographic, or public safety conditions as required by state law for such a restriction beyond the state code.

Wood is good for Georgia and Sandy Springs.

Forestry in Georgia generates \$29 billion annually to the state's economy. According to the Georgia Tech Enterprise Innovation Institute, in the 10 core counties that comprise metro Atlanta as defined by the Atlanta Regional Commission, forestland owners and forestry-related industries provide \$3.7 billion in total economic output and \$667 million in wages and salaries.

Forests and the products they produce are excellent carbon storage sinks. In fact, according to a study by the Consortium for Research on Renewable Industrial Materials, wood products used in construction store more carbon and use less fossil fuels than other materials, like steel and concrete. Wood framing in a home produces 26 percent less net CO2 emissions than steel and 31 percent less than concrete.

Markets for Wood are critical to the sustainability of Georgia's forests.

Of the 24.3 million acres of forest in Georgia, 91 percent are privately owned – more than any other state in the nation. Urban and rural based forestland owners – large and small – invest in managing healthy forests that benefit every Georgian. These are called “working forests” because they increase the economic vitality of the state and provide environmental benefits to every citizen.

Georgia is covered with more trees today than 75 years ago, thanks to markets for trees. Working forests are planted, harvested and replanted to produce the raw materials for common consumer products we use every day, including ordinary wood products for building construction. As long as the landowners can harvest trees and replant them, we can look forward to the economic and environmental benefits they provide.

A healthy and vital forest industry is essential to Georgia and the City of Sandy Springs. We should expect local governments to support an industry that helps our economy and our ecosystem. Promoting the use of wood in construction is a great way that Sandy Springs can help, not hinder, growth and prosperity in our state, region and country.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andres Villegas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andres Villegas
President and CEO
Georgia Forestry Association