



Meeting 3 Report

Nov. 5, 2009

Engage Gwinnett, the citizens committee on the future of Gwinnett County, held its third meeting on Thursday, Nov. 5, 2009, at the Gwinnett Center in Duluth. The meeting started at 8:00 a.m. and lasted three and a half hours. The Engage Gwinnett committee will make recommendations by the end of March 2010 on county government services and how they should be paid for.

There were two purposes of this meeting. One was to hear presentations about the county's Unified Plan, an important three-year planning effort that envisioned how the county would develop, and about Gwinnett's "peer counties" – the places around the country that Gwinnett most closely resembles. The other was to introduce the four Work Groups to their moderators and key resource people as they continue planning the work of these groups.

The four Work Groups are:

- **Community Services**, which includes libraries, parks and recreation, green space and non-profits services.
- **Development and Infrastructure**, which includes planning and development, transportation, water resources and solid waste services.
- **Fire and Emergency Services**, which includes fire and ambulance services.
- **Law Enforcement and Judiciary**, which includes police, sheriff, correction facility and courts services.

The presentation on the Unified Plan was by Steve Logan, who was director of planning until his retirement from county government. There was also a panel discussion by three citizens who served on the Unified Plan advisory committee. The Unified Plan, Steve said, was called that because it brought together several planning efforts that are often separated – a land-use (often called a "comprehensive") plan, a transportation plan and a federally required housing and urban development plan. Another difference: It began by looking deeply at Gwinnett's underlying economic, demographic and income trends.

And some of what it found was troubling. “The biggest worry the county is facing,” Steve said, is a steady decline in average income. “We’ve gone from a wealthy county . . . and we’re on a slide to an average (income) county.”

The Unified Plan addressed these trends with three scenarios or “plausible futures.” One, which anticipated that growth in the Atlanta region would decline and Gwinnett County would do little to address its challenges and opportunities, was called the “Regional Slowdown Scenario.” Another, called the “Middle of the Pack Scenario,” saw steady growth in the Atlanta region but little action by the county. The third, called the “International Gateway Scenario,” anticipated strong regional growth and vigorous action by Gwinnett County in the areas of economic development, redevelopment of land along key corridors, expanded transit and greater housing choices.

All three scenarios, Steve said, assumed that the county budget would be in a significant deficit by 2030, if nothing significant were done to address expenditures and revenues. But deficits under the first two scenarios were far greater.

The presentation on Gwinnett’s peer counties was given by Dr. Jeffrey Dorfman, a professor of agricultural and applied economics at the University of Georgia. Dr. Dorfman, compared Gwinnett’s population, growth rates, density and size of county government with those of 18 roughly similar counties around the country. His conclusion was that two suburbs of California’s San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose area, Contra Costa and San Mateo counties, were among the three most similar, along with Summit County, Ohio, which includes Akron. Cobb County in the Atlanta region was also similar in many respects to Gwinnett, he said.

The two presentations and videos are available on the Engage Gwinnett web site, www.engagegwinnett.com.

Meeting Process

Bill McCargo and Mike Levengood, Engage Gwinnett’s co-chairs, welcomed the members, the alternate members, citizens and observers, and reminded them of Engage Gwinnett’s mission:

- Look at the major services provided today by Gwinnett County government.
- Make judgments about these services, their levels of service, and how they are delivered.
- Recommend ways of paying for the ones that are truly needed.

Bill gave an overview of today’s meeting and Mike introduced the Work Group moderators and key resource people.

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He then introduced the facilitator for Engage Gwinnett, Jon Abercrombie, who reviewed some of the information requests from Meeting 2, including a list of the county's "mandated services" (services that are mandated by state or federal law or regulation).

Jon reminded Engage Gwinnett members that this would be the last mostly plenary (or large group) meeting before the Work Groups begin meeting in their own breakout sessions. But he said, the meetings ahead would begin with a 30-minute plenary session, before the Work Groups moved to their individual meeting spaces. In that 30-minute session, Engage Gwinnett leaders and facilitators can share important general information, he said. And as the Work Groups made progress, the groups could share updates and critique each others' work.

Finally, Jon said he thought it was important to remind Engage Gwinnett members of the commitments or ground rules they had established at the previous meeting. Among them, he said, was a commitment among individual members not to speak on behalf of Engage Gwinnett. While each member is free to speak his or her own opinions, Jon said, only the co-chairs should speak for Engage Gwinnett itself.

Of the two presentations, the Unified Plan was the one that bears most directly on the work of Engage Gwinnett, since it offers several visions for county action. In presenting it, Steve Logan explained it was a highly collaborative effort that brought together county planners, public officials, citizens and outside consultants to create realistic possibilities for the county.

The first scenario in the Unified Plan, the Regional Slowdown Scenario, Steve said, was considered an "unacceptable outcome." In it, he said, the region's growth slows, and Gwinnett County gains only 30% more people and 27% more jobs by 2030. The county attracts a more transient population, with fewer long-term residents. Average income growth slows, and there's limited neighborhood reinvestment.

The second scenario, the Middle of the Pack Scenario, was considered the "most likely future" – unless the county took bold steps to alter its direction. In this scenario, he said, the Atlanta region continues to prosper, but average income in Gwinnett declines and there's little relief from congestion. Because of the decline in income and other factors, there are no local resources to address redevelopment needs. The county has "fairly low density developments." Gwinnett continues to grow, gaining 47% more people and 53% more jobs by 2030, and becomes a truly diverse community, with no dominant majority. By the end of the period, it is served entirely by public sewer.

The third scenario, the International Gateway Scenario, is by far the most optimistic, Steve said. In it, the national economy remains strong, the Atlanta region has massive job growth, and Gwinnett gains 76% more people and 106% more jobs by 2030. The county sees a major expansion in transit options. The international and multicultural segments of Gwinnett's workforce grow. There are high-rise

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developments at key transportation nodes and mixed-use development along major corridors. There is redevelopment of older areas.

As was said above, under all of these scenarios, the county government would be running a deficit in 2030, as service costs outpaced projected county revenues, but the difference in size among the deficits is significant, Steve said. Under the Regional Slowdown Scenario, the deficit would be \$358 million to \$532 million or 43.7% to 64.9% of revenues. Under the Middle of the Pack Scenario, the deficit would be \$111 million to \$192 million or 12% to 21% of revenues. Under the International Gateway Scenario, the deficit would be \$63 million to \$81 million or 6.5% to 8% of revenues.

The critical choices for the county were identified in the Unified Plan – the areas of decision making that could affect which of the scenarios becomes reality. The five most important, Steve said, were:

- Maintain Gwinnett’s economic development and fiscal health
- Foster redevelopment
- Maintain mobility and accessibility
- Provide more housing choice
- Keep Gwinnett a “preferred place”

After Steve’s presentation and a question and answer session with three of the advisory group members to the Unified Plan, Dr. Dorfman gave his presentation on the peer counties (which is described above) and answered questions about his findings.

Then Jon Abercrombie introduced Otis White, another Engage Gwinnett facilitator, to talk about what the Work Groups would do this morning and in upcoming meetings. Otis said the plan was for members to meet in brief plenary gatherings in future sessions but spend most of their time in Work Groups. In the time that remained today, Otis asked the Work Groups to meet their group moderators and key resource people and talk about how they would like to approach upcoming meetings. Otis’ suggestion was that the next meeting be a “broad overview” of the group’s work area. A good use of this time, then, would be to list those who should make presentations on Nov. 19 and information that would be needed then.

To assist with this, Otis offered each group a poster-size work sheet to use. This form could be used in every Work Group session to help organize for the following meeting, he added.

After the Work Groups met, Jon Abercrombie closed the meeting by reminding participants that, at the meeting on Nov. 19, Engage Gwinnett would meet briefly in a plenary session before going to Work Groups for the majority of the morning.

Discussion Notes

Following the presentations, the Engage Gwinnett committee members and their alternates sat at four tables, according to the Work Groups to which they were assigned. What follows is a transcript of the notes for each work group.

Community Services

- History
- Define community services – which are mandated
- Non-profits – executive summary – who are they? Churches, corps, collaborations, coalitions
- Breakdown of budget
- Partnerships
- What facilities are available to public at what times
- Service needs – how addresses by county vs non-profits

Development and Infrastructure

Information:

- List of services → do and don't provide for – top 10 peer counties
- Carl Vincent Institute → best practices
- Industry drivers – transportation planning → what makes it a success?
- School expansion as it applies to transportation
- How many students stay after graduation → other population have moved in?
- Track record of how many companies didn't come to Atlanta and why (PG)
- Water from Lake Lanier – future planning
- State minimum requirements for 4 departments – do provide vs. minimum – budget per capita, county comparisons
- Info on unified plan – already implemented (government interventions) and on budget – comparisons to other counties
- How are departments working together?
- Overall planning process to better Gwinnett → Accessibility? ADA?
- What are short term problems that apply to long term?
- Revenue and expenses for county and levels

List of Services:

- Overall list of department responsibilities and budgets
- Line out county, city, state, federal responsibilities

- What level of services and cost to be able to fully dig into departments and budgets

Fire and Emergency Services

- Chief of Fire / Firefighters / EMTs
- Site Visit
- Survey results – citizen survey
- Operations Chief, Business Services, Employee Service & Support, Fire Marshall's Office
- Fire / EMS / Community Links → Reps from ER Departments?
- Resources, Processes education
- CPAP Machine
- Public/Private Partners – clinics, private ambulance
- Senior services
- Non-emergency costs
- Safer grants / external resources
- 5-year plan

Law Enforcement and Judiciary

Presentations / General:

- Probate court
- Sheriff
- Chief Walters – Police
- Deputy chief, Sheriff – Mike Boyd

Information:

- Budgets for all departments ('08, '09, '10) – Hard copy
- 45 minutes per department with executive summary – Jann, send in advance
- Engage Gwinnett – Sharepoint – county website
- Executive summary components

Work Group Planning Reports

At the end of the breakout session, the Work Groups were asked to fill out a form with three questions. The notes that follow are the answers each Work Group provided to each of the questions.

Community Services

Major decisions we reached today:

- No Decisions

Presentations or general information we will need for the next session:

- Executive summaries of budgets

Specific services we would like more information about for the next session:

- Partnerships
- What services are mandated, at minimum, and what is being delivered?

Development and Infrastructure

Major decisions we reached today:

- No Decisions

Presentations or general information we will need for the next session:

- Brian Allen
- Planning Director
- Water Planning

Specific services we would like more information about for the next session:

- Need individual departments to present their services and budget to determine services to be looked into

Fire and Emergency Services

Major decisions we reached today:

- Conduct a site visit of fire station

Presentations or general information we will need for the next session:

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- 5-year plan
- Satisfaction Survey Results
- ISO Rating Report
- 2010 Business Plan
- People we need:
 - Fire Chief
 - Assistant Chiefs
 - Operations
 - Business Services
 - Employee Services
 - Fire Marshall
 - Dr. Greenwood (Gwinnett Medical)
 - Dr. Grubbs (Emory/Eastside)

Specific services we would like more information about for the next session:

- Comparable data from other counties most like us – what do their fire services look like?

Law Enforcement and Judiciary

Major decisions we reached today:

- No Decisions

Presentations or general information we will need for the next session:

- Next Meeting (1 hour each):
 - Chief Walters – Police
 - Deputy Chief Boyd – Sheriff
 - Deputy Warden Peek – Corrections
- First Meeting in December:
 - Judiciary System – Different representatives

Specific services we would like more information about for the next session:

- Dangerous gaps and critical service issues - currently and with possible future cuts
- What services are mandated and what is minimum
- What do you offer currently, and what non-mandated are provided
- Employee functions – i.e., certified officers, support staff, etc.
- Organizational chart – city/county interaction in services

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- Budgets 2008, 2009 – 2010 proposals
- Trends: crime, caseload, employees (past 5 years)