



November 23, 2009

Dear Engage Gwinnett Committee members:

As you know, the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners is now holding public hearings on a 2009 millage rate increase proposed by Commissioner Kevin Kenerly. There have been attempts to draw the Engage Gwinnett committee into taking a position with regard to that question. One person, who is not a member of the Engage Gwinnett committee, has invited us to respond in writing to his contention that our committee is a “fake citizen panel [that] will likely wind up with most of the blame for [passage of Commissioner Kenerly’s motion].” We plan to reply in writing regarding our bona fides and to invite this person to attend our meetings so that he may better understand what we are doing, and we will invite him to meet with Jann Moore so that we might better understand his point of view.

One member of our committee, who approached us as Co-Chairs with a request that Engage Gwinnett take a position on the current question, was apparently not satisfied with our response that we would not ask you to do so and so has reached out to each of you directly by email last Friday. As Co-Chairs we declined to ask you to take a position for two simple reasons: Engage Gwinnett was not asked to do so and the Engage Gwinnett Committee was not ready to vote before it had really begun to learn about what it was asked to do. That same member offered to host a site where members of the Engage Gwinnett committee could post comments regarding their thoughts. We accepted that offer in the spirit it was made, as a well-intended opportunity to create a public exchange for sharing ideas; however, we believe that the televised meetings of our Committee and of our work group discussions will provide a similar level of transparency about the process for our fellow citizens. Although we have always been open to receiving and have worked to act on process suggestions, we chose not to accept his invitation for another simple reason: We plan to present a written report to the Board of Commissioners after deliberations by the full Engage Gwinnett Committee and we believe that the best way to achieve agreement on constructive recommendations regarding difficult issues is to do as one body after study of the issues and face to face deliberations.

To remedy any confusion about the mission of the Engage Gwinnett Committee we remind each of you that our mission has a different focus than the question the Board of Commissioners is currently considering. As we have previously stated to you, the mission of the Engage Gwinnett Committee is to look at the next five year budget cycle and to make informed recommendations to the Board of Commissioners in April of 2010 regarding maintaining or changing current service levels and how to pay for them. What the Board of Commissioners does or does not do regarding the 2009 millage rate does not change our primary mission, and any action the Board takes will be considered as we develop our advisory report.

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We have only met in work groups for one full session and we believe you will agree with us from your experience with this process that we have much more work to do to educate ourselves about what services are currently provided by Gwinnett County and what consequences exist in maintaining, reducing or increasing current service levels. When we conduct our public meetings in February 2010, we need to be ready to listen to our fellow citizens regarding their desired service levels and their ideas about how to pay for them. Your work during December and January should be focused on conducting an inventory of county service levels and how we currently pay for them. Once we digest what we have learned from our key resource people and from our fellow citizens, we will be better prepared to focus on the costs of maintaining, reducing or increasing county service levels which will be the focus of our work in March.

We appreciate the patience you have demonstrated during the past two months. We hope that we have used our time together wisely to provide you with basic information about our county economy, our county government structure, our county budget, the Unified Plan for 2030 and possible similar counties with which we might compare best practices.

We have approached our work with the Engage Gwinnett Committee with an open mind, we know that economic times are very challenging and we have learned that the imbalance in the county tax base between residential and commercial property owners must be addressed. We ask that each of you work together with us to measure the success of our work by how well we identify the greater good for the citizens of Gwinnett County and make recommendations about service levels and how to pay for them that help the Board of Commissioners to act on them. We do not expect there to be unanimous agreement on all possible recommendations. However, we do plan to protect the process from being derailed from within or without. The work we have been asked to do is too important and your time is too valuable to do otherwise.

Should you decide to attend the public hearings on the 2009 millage rate increase, please remember that you are doing so as a citizen of Gwinnett County not as a spokesperson for the Engage Gwinnett Committee.

Please contact either of us if you have any questions or concerns about what we have shared with you in this letter. Thank you again for your willingness to study the long term budget issues and to listen to each other and to our fellow citizens as together we develop recommendations to the Board of Commissioners that will affect the future of Gwinnett County.

Sincerely,



Mike Levensgood, Co-Chair
Engage Gwinnett



Bill McCargo, Co-Chair
Engage Gwinnett

cc: Jann Moore