



Meeting 7 Report

Jan. 6, 2010

Engage Gwinnett, the citizens committee on the future of Gwinnett County, held its seventh meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2010, 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, the benefits citizens receive from those services, and how they should be paid for.

The first 30 minutes was held in plenary session (with all members present), so members could hear reports from spokespersons for the four Work Groups that make up Engage Gwinnett and receive an overview of the day's activities from Jon Abercrombie, the Engage Gwinnett facilitator. Members then went to their Work Group meeting rooms, spending the next three hours in Work Group sessions.

Meeting Process

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

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

Bill said that some of the Work Groups are ready to begin framing their recommendations, and he urged others to move as expeditiously as possible from gathering information to deliberating about recommendations. He added that because one group, the Fire and Emergency Services Work Group, was a little ahead of the others in its work, this Work Group would be asked to look at a set of "internal services" the county provides – services such as human resources and finance that serve county agencies rather than citizens – and make recommendations in that area as well.

In his remarks, Mike also urged members to move as quickly as possible to tentative recommendations on county services – and to be bold. A natural concern, Mike said, would be that despite the six long

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sessions they've held, the Work Groups might fear they do not know enough about the workings of county departments to make good recommendations. They shouldn't worry about that because the tentative recommendations will be reviewed by staff, and if there are unintended consequences, agency heads will point them out. Another concern, he said, might be that the public won't support the recommendations. Engage Gwinnett is planning four public engagement sessions in February, at which time the recommendations will be discussed. If the tentative recommendations are not supported by the citizens, Engage Gwinnett members will know it, Mike said.

"My guess is that neither of these will be big problems," he added. "You probably know a lot more than you think about how these agencies work. And you certainly have the judgment to propose recommendations that the public will support."

The spokespersons for the four Work Groups talked about what their groups had learned and where they were focusing their attention.

Charlotte Nash of the Fire and Emergency Services group said that her group had identified the major services in its area but wanted another information session with Fire Chief Bill Myers before framing its recommendations. She mentioned that one issue her group felt needed addressing was county pensions and health care. "These are overarching issues that will have an impact on the budget from now on," she said.

Jose Perez of the Development and Infrastructure group said his Work Group had moved from information gathering to deliberations and had divided the services in its area into three groups: water resources, planning and transportation. The group felt that, because water services are paid for entirely by "enterprise funds" (that is, through user fees and not taxes), there was no need for the group to study it further. In planning, the deliberation is focusing on the department's outsourcing plans. In transportation, there was considerable discussion of the need for new or expanded routes between North Fulton and Gwinnett County – which Jose said his group felt was critical for Gwinnett's economic future.

Norwood Davis from the Community Services group said that his Work Group had focused in recent weeks on the county's library system and parks and recreations department, and would spend time today on health and human services. He said he thought the Work Group would also review some emerging ideas about library staffing and possible fees and outsourcing for parks in this meeting.

Chuck Warbington of the Law Enforcement and Judiciary group said his group was continuing to look at its work area as a system, in which changes in one area have an impact in another. But the information gathering sessions are now complete, and the group is now ready to begin brainstorming about recommendations, he said.

Work Group Presentations and Discussions

The four Work Groups received presentations, held discussions and brainstormed possible recommendations in their work areas. The following is a brief summary of some of the presentations and discussions that were held.

Community Services

There were two parts to the Community Services Work Group meeting. In the first part, the Work Group heard from Ellen Gerstein, executive director of the Gwinnett Coalition for Health and Human Services. The Coalition is a non-profit organization that helps government, non-profit organizations, religious institutions, philanthropic organizations and others collaborate in addressing human service needs in Gwinnett.

The county provides subsidies for some non-profits but does so directly – not through the Coalition, Ms. Gerstein said. This caused some in the Work Group to question whether the subsidies shouldn't be made to the Coalition instead, with the Coalition deciding who should receive them. One member of the group said he thought the county should not be providing any subsidies for human services group; churches and non-profits should provide them. But others disagreed, arguing that providing human services saves the county money in the long term on things like drug rehabilitation and court and jail costs.

In the second part of the meeting, the Work Group began framing recommendations for the library system and parks and recreation. For the libraries, the group discussed several possible recommendations, including:

- The library system should take a new look at its staffing model, which seemed to treat all branches alike. Some branches might be opened at different hours and serve different functions, the group suggested.
- Construction of new libraries should be stopped. Renovations or expansions of existing branches should be undertaken with an eye toward lowering operating expenses at these facilities.
- The system should “fully consider” the likely impact of electronic access by patrons to library resources and how that should affect branch staffing and hours.

For parks and recreation, the Work Group also discussed possible recommendations, including:

- SPLOST funds should be used to reduce operating expenses at parks by investing in more natural landscaping and less expensive lighting.
- Parks should institute parking fees through the use of “honor boxes.”

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- Fees charged to athletic associations should be reviewed and possibly increased, so they cover actual costs. Similarly, fees for the recreation centers and the Gwinnett Environmental and Heritage Center should be reviewed and possibly increased.

Development and Infrastructure

The Development and Infrastructure Work Group continued its discussions on what has been learned so far and began drafting lists of observations, considerations and recommendations that should be considered for the final report. The Work Group also accepted an invitation from the Departments of Transportation and Water Resources to tour their facilities on January 15.

For Water Resources, the Work Group discussed possible recommendations:

- The Work Group discussed the issue of the county feeding water back to Lake Lanier. In the ongoing negotiations between Georgia, Alabama and Florida, Gwinnett County is not given credit for returning water back to the lake.
- There was a concern in the Work Group that stormwater fees do not cover the costs of providing adequate service necessary to prevent flooding. The stormwater fund is a separate enterprise fund from water and sewer, paid for through a separate line item on property tax bills.

For Planning and Development, the Work Group discussed possible recommendations:

- The Work Group discussed the possibility of combining licensing and review. Currently, these tasks are mostly separate, so combining these two functions would require staff to be cross-trained. Some members of the Work Group were concerned what this would mean for the quality of the work done in Planning and Development. Others pointed out that some cross-training is already under way.
- There was also discussion about conflicting policies and goals in Planning and Development. On the one hand, the mission of the department should be about generating revenue. But, on the other hand, there was concern that the department's policies are anti-business to the extent that the policies tend to favor residential development.

The Work Group decided to discuss recommendations for the Department of Transportation at the next meeting.

Fire and Emergency Services

The Fire and Emergency Services Work Group held a question and answer session with the Fire Chief and heard a presentation from the Fire Marshall. The Work Group also discussed a few issues relating to EMT training.

The Work Group discussed the new state requirements for EMT training and whether Gwinnett should reach out to nearby counties that could not afford training on their own. The Work Group acknowledged that there would have to be enough revenue to offset the additional cost of providing training services.

The Work Group discussed the county's fire safety training efforts. Gwinnett has and will continue to form business and school partnerships to reach out to most citizens. The county currently inspects only assisted living facilities housing up to six patients – larger facilities are inspected by state. The county also maintains fire and life safety programs, a junior fire setter prevention program, and CPR and first aid classes.

Work Group members asked several questions relating to the fire academy and some of the concerns relating to offering training services to other counties. There was also some discussion relating to specific changes in fire codes that would help either save money or reduce the demand for services.

The Work Group also discussed the number of applicants to become Gwinnett County EMTs. While there are currently 300 applicants on the eligibility roster, only so many can be hired. Close to 100 EMTs on the payroll will likely retire in the next five years. With a smaller human resources staff available, the county estimates that the time to process applications will double.

Law Enforcement and Judiciary

The Law Enforcement and Judiciary Work Group continued its discussions on what has been learned so far and began drafting lists of observations, considerations and recommendations that should be considered for the final report. The Work Group developed a list that included the following discussion items:

- Supporting an increase in court fees with the state legislature
- Conversion to a paperless judicial system
- Reviewing indigent defense system
- Moving forward with CJIS implementation
- Online fee and ticket payment process
- Creation of an Innovation Chief

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- Partnership with NCR to put kiosks in the Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center on a trial basis
 - These kiosks would allow citizens to pay fines and process other transactions without human interface
- Review the Unified Plan's recommendation of 1.3 officers per 1,000 residents
 - Would Gwinnett meet this ratio if municipal officers and sheriff's deputies were included?
 - Is this ratio still recognized as a national standard?
- Review the need for full building security at the Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center
 - Is there potential to outsource security?
- Review reducing animal control officers for more officers on the street
- Review option to outsource animal control
- Review ordinance to limit number of animals people can have
- Better cross-department planning
- Better community awareness
- Independent review to encourage cooperation and efficiencies

Work Group Information Requests

During their discussions, the four Work Groups listed what information they would need to move forward. The following is a transcript of the requests for information.

Community Services – Requests for the county

- Detail consequences of running the library with only local funds (no state funding)
- Donations of books – why don't accept them
 - What would they accept?
 - How do they make the decisions of what to accept?
 - Could Friends of the Library receive the books and sell them?
- Who are the non-profits that provide support to the library, parks and recreation, senior services and health and human services, and what support do they provide?
- Parks and Recreation – lighting costs – what are the costs and how much of the cost is offset by the athletic fees?
- Who determines the usage of school fields (Could parks & recreation leverage the resources for the community?), and how is this determined? What are the implications (liability)?
- Need more information on county golf course – costs, revenue
- What is the county policy for (Phil) supporting and addressing health and human services?
- Need more information about mandates for government subsidies
- Savings based on going to regional system for libraries

Development and Infrastructure – Requests for the county

- Water and sewer – does county pay rent on fire hydrants to generate revenue bonds?
- Do we compare ourselves to other metro counties – Planning and Development service levels and permitting requirements
- Would all of the fees raised by Planning and Development flow to the outsource vendors, if it is outsourced?
- Need information about other counties who have outsourced Planning and Development
- Want Matthew’s efficiency study of Planning and Development, and Transportation
- Did the tax collection matrix include allowance for an \$18 million shortfall?

Fire and Emergency Services – Requests for the county

- Post employment cost questions (OPEB) – please redirect to Finance
- Disparity info – example: 2 CA counties – one report says unincorporated, and 1 says Fire District – please reconcile terms
- Please add Gwinnett to Alfie’s chart
- Residential sprinkler requirements – does Cobb have a density requirement for this? Does this affect ISO rating? What is the impact on insurance premiums?
- What is the success rate for the Jr. Firesetter program?
- What are your priority code changes?
- Ban on outdoor burning – what other jurisdictions has this worked in?
- Fire Academy – training smaller jurisdictions – can we do it? What net income could it generate? At what expense?
- Can we see weighted values of ISO rating?
- Chief or designee available by phone
- Written response is fine

Fire and Emergency Services – Requests for Ga. Gwinnett College

- What are the average/common ratios and standards?
- What are our current staffing ratios? Pre- vs. post-cuts (beginning 2009 vs. end 2009), and what are the overtime trends in support services, also pre- vs. post-cuts.
- Comparison to our peer and aspirational counties – all internal services, shared services, IT, HR, finance, support, in-house legal (ICMA and GMOA may have this information)
- Number of additional positions included in budget approved yesterday? (particularly fire and police)

Law Enforcement and Judiciary – Requests for the county

- Proposed legislation on service and court fees
- Cost of SWAT personnel and equipment for police and sheriff departments

- Cost of independent review and analysis of each area of the Justice System

Miscellaneous Notes

The following notes were also captured in each of the Work Group discussions.

Community Services

Thoughts – Health and Human Services

- Subsidy process broken
 - Can't not provide health and human services funding
 - Revise process – Gwinnett Coalition for HHS (or another central agency) be a re-granting agency to address specific needs and leverage capacity
 - Can ill afford to reduce funding
 - Basis of funding shouldn't be "because we always have"
 - May not be addressing biggest needs today
- How do you prioritize?
 - Create fees for some services
 - Out of sight, out of mind concern
- What group should be involved in planning senior services? (study)
 - Coalition sub-committee
 - Friends of Gwinnett County Senior Services
 - Planning Department
 - ARC
 - Non-biased
- County is mandated to provide Senior Services
- Why are Public Health dollars based on 1970s population?
- What would be the possible consequences of the coalition being charged as the re-granting agency?

Benefits – Health and Human Services

- Safety net for those at risk and most vulnerable
- Information, education, awareness
- Early intervention before a situation gets worse (or before government services are needed)

Facts and Trends – Health and Human Services

- Losing ground on positive indicators Gwinnett County has seen in the past – looking more like urban centers
- Privatized in a sense – no personnel costs
- Leverage is very important – coalition and coordination
- Research and data are being used to prioritize and focus on needs in community
 - Also used for grants from outside of county

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- Coalition has created strategic plan
- Big difference between subsidies: Hospital, DFCS, MH, BOH; vs. Ch Shelter, BF Gw, Coalition, etc.
- Senior population growing greatly
- Haven't done adequate planning for senior growth – not just community services, but also transportation, planning, etc. – we're just playing catch-up now
- Senior services funding is based on census (change in funding will come in approximately 2012) – mainly work with seniors ages 80+; very few services are available for 60 to 80 year-olds.
- More needs than funds

Potential Recommendations – Health and Human Services

- Advocate state funding for public health based on current census
- Revised process for results-based strategic (accountability, process, needs assessment, strategic plan) subsidies funding for coalition to take on this responsibility – Commissioners would set the dollar amount annually
- Level of funding not be cut any further

Potential Recommendations – Library

- Level of expertise/education – does there really need to be the three required, degreed personnel at the library at all times?
- Alternative personnel/staffing patterns at library
- Different services at different times
- More centralized responsibilities for some things
- Better leveraging of volunteers (community service, seniors, youth, etc.)
- Each library facility should be viewed as a branch of a central library system
- Revisit regional/tiered system – cost savings
- Inappropriate to assume “one size fits all”
- Defer/suspend new sites (renovations okay)
- Reconsider replacement facilities
- Consider implications of online access: hours of operation, staffing, cost (impending technological changes)

Potential Recommendations – Parks and Recreation

- Use SPLOST money to renovate parks that will result in future costs savings (in lieu of additional/new parks) (i.e., artificial turf, diff lighting, natural landscaping, etc.)
- Honor system parking fees
- Fees raised to cover real costs of athletic activities (staffing, lighting, use of facilities, etc.)
- Active recreational facilities – recoup more of their costs, evaluate potential for this (including EHC)
- Potential for privatization of some/all(?) facilities, i.e. courthouse
- More natural landscaping requires less upkeep

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- Analyze coordination with GCPS – comm. Schools, use of ball fields, pools, etc., could Parks and Recreation leverage school fields more/better?
- Sell golf course – needs more discussion
- Online process to reserve fields, park, etc.

Arts – not funded. Should it be? Could we do better?

Development and Infrastructure

Observations – Water and Sewer

- Goal is to pay as you go and reduce debt
- No more bonds
- Pays for itself through user fees
- Costs more to treat sewer than water (60% more)
- Water and sewer enterprise is on water bill
- Storm water is on property tax bill – funding is approximately 50% of what's needed

Observations – Planning and Development

- Can permits and inspection be combined with license and review (consideration)
- County is perceived to be more pro-residential and anti-business development
- Conflicting policies in planning and development
- State responsibility of all roles of planning and development, Board of Commissioners and planning commission
- Planning and development department is and should be about generating revenue
- Planning and development is tasked with the future of Gwinnett County
- No near-term demand for outsourcing

Considerations – Water and Sewer

- How do we address the storm water infrastructure failing? (cost)
- Shortfall in revenue from fees

Considerations – Planning and Development

- Consider opportunities to combine departments (cross-train)
- Policy and procedures should be business friendly because businesses generate revenue. Our tax base is too heavily weighted to residential vs commercial.
- Review of services being provided that have nothing to do with permitting and planning (Matthew's efficiency report of Planning and Development)

Recommendations – Water and Sewer

- Re-state current policy

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Recommendations – Planning and Development

- Board of Commissioners to maintain current permitting, processing and plan review service levels – keep us competitive when growth returns
- Department evaluate policies and procedures to ensure that they align with a pro-business environment
- Do not outsource any matters that have an effect on the future of Gwinnett County
- Fast track renaming the Planning and Development department to Planning and Economic Development
- Do not outsource any essential Planning and Development functions

Fire and Emergency Services

Chief – Follow-up Answers

- Volunteers – supportive roles with fire academy, etc.
- Fire hydrant info posted on website
 - Current MOU says 72 months; ideal is 6 months
 - Will lose ISO points – how many points are applied to this category?
 - Contract says?
- Medic 28 is one of the medic units – numbered to fire stations, not number of ambulances
- Post employment costs (this question will be directed to finance)
 - Yes – pay as you go added in (41.65%) – lump sum payment
 - 16% rolled into GSI
- Are there points for training specialists for ISO? No ISO points for fire prevention?
- Updated EMT – question – potential for revenue?
 - Yes, but could require another instructor so revenue would have to offset costs
 - Paramedic program – a great opportunity for revenue
- Disparity in info (from Alfie’s info and from Fire Department) – 2 counties in CA – 1 says unincorporated, one says district – please reconcile different terms
- DeKalb now charges for vehicle extractions \$250 -\$750k (True extractions: 230 in 2008, 128 in 2009)
- Not enough extractions in Gwinnett to begin to charge for this service – Jaws of Life costs \$15-20k
- Slippery slope: if we charge for extractions, won’t we begin having to charge for others?

Assistant Fire Marshall – Presentation

- Fire Marshall’s office is now part of Community Risk Reduction Unit – done at no cost
- No specific law on time frame for inspecting existing buildings – state will assist if we ask, but Gwinnett County maintains jurisdiction – state is a resource, only
- When a business burns, they usually don’t rebuild and not in that jurisdiction
- High risk occupancy

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- Personal care, all schools, daycare, annual inspection
- Apartments – 2010 priority
- Night inspections – 2 nights per week – doing county, will do city
- Need to bring Gwinnett County Fire Ordinance (not code) up-to-date – last done 10 years ago – priority
- Why does Gwinnett have its own ordinance instead of relying on existing state, etc.?
 - Gwinnett County formally adopts those laws, but can make Gwinnett County only modifications with community input
 - Also, after shell is approved to make sure it's safe for people
- Are our ordinances more rigorous than neighbor counties? Yes/no – Cobb is very rigorous (example: residential sprinkler required) – does Cobb have a density requirement for this?
- How many team members in your division? 25, including 16 inspectors, 5 investigators, 2 educators
- How are conflicts with plan review resolved – meeting until hashed out
- Success rate for Jr. Firesetter program? How do you address diversity? All docs have been translated and working to address it.
- Death rate – multifamily vs single family dwelling: 80% of fires occur in home – out of that, 84% occur in single family or duplex – South has highest death rate
- Board/care – up to 6 – they inspect that, but do not inspect nursing homes or assisted living, which are inspected by the state
- Currently going through upgrades – Accella? – also work with ADA requirements
- Fire investigations is law enforcement
- Staffing ratios pre- and post-reduction: 3 have moved to plan review, but still paid by fire (captain, training assistant manager, admin) – impact too great, will reassign others to cover this loss
- Priority code changes?
 - Sprinklers in residential board/care
 - Maybe sprinklers in single-family residential as far as economics allow – yes, costs more, but saves lives – so need to have the conversation
 - Outdoor burning – see the challenge, but would like to do away with it
 - What jurisdiction has this worked in? Please send priorities
- High risk in multifamily and board/care due to occupancy, not necessarily building issues, but due to their ability to get out quickly
- Revenue side of having sprinklers – can encourage people to do it right by including it in first fee but paying penalty fees for subsequent visits
- Target date for ordinance completion? First quarter 2010 in office, then submit for review
- Fire academy – classes per year for recruits? 2-3
 - No downtime for when entire academy not used, but there is in-between time during recruit sessions
 - Can this time be used for smaller jurisdiction to be paid to teach them? Yes, possible – have let others use facility for their own burn training on a reciprocal basis – threat: most send to state because Gwinnett County is a competitor but the state is not

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- What income could it generate? At the state, they pay for meals and the room and board is free. So what would others pay? Will look at it
- Currently, 300 people are on the eligibility roster – 30-32 already EMTs
 - 120 job offers to hire 66 – 2 academy classes
 - 100 or better can retire in the next 5 years
 - Like to keep 150 on eligibility roster
- January 14 2010 – next meeting – good for site visit – 9:00 a.m. Fire Headquarters
- Education program
 - Students or staff? Both
 - How often CPR – every 2 years, CPR sat – large class
 - Hours of CPR – 6 hour class
 - Also offered by others, but they charge
 - Under review to make bigger impact
- Retention rates – excellent, only a few firings
- Can we see weighted values of ISO rating?
- Is there a consultant group that does pre-ISO? Confident they can do it but will provide information on groups if we want

Law Enforcement and Judiciary

Considerations

- Explore partnership with NCR to automate court, fee and filing processes
- Consolidate all facility maintenance
- Expense of whole GJAC security
- Goal: create a world class justice system that is cost-effective, innovative across all platforms

Recommendations

- Ask county to reevaluate state mandated fees/price for service and court fees; advocate legislative action
- Privatization of collection of remaining unpaid fees/fines at end of probation period; recommend legislative action
- Explore indigent defense funding, fee per case vs. hourly defense
- Expedite “paperless” system for courts, filing fees, permits
- Use innovation to streamline all processes/implement technological advance to increase efficiency
- Explore outsourcing for / consolidation:
 - Corrections (privatizing)
 - Courthouse security
 - Building maintenance
 - Animal control
 - Process servers

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- Re-examine basis for 2030 unified plan recommendation of 1.3 police officers per thousand population – use composite numbers of county and city police and population to determine current ratio and current ratio with sheriff’s department
- Examine staffing of animal control and number of animals per household
- Recommend independent review of each judicial system department and the inter-connectivity/cause and effect/interaction of their budgeting, staffing and processes (possible task force of consultant/staff/citizen members)
- Education/community building to prevent code enforcement calls
- Solicitor’s office explore level of charges not requiring jury trial (less than 6 months jail)
- “Summit meeting” of municipalities and county courts on fines and binding costs
- Explore state reimbursements for county services