



Meeting 2 Report

Oct. 22, 2009

Engage Gwinnett, the citizens committee on the future of Gwinnett County, held its second meeting on Thursday, Oct. 22, 2009, at the Gwinnett Center in Duluth. The forum started promptly at 8:00 a.m. and lasted three and a half hours. The Engage Gwinnett committee will make recommendations in the next six months on county government services and how they should be paid for.

There were three purposes of this meeting: to hear two key presentations about how the county government and its finances work, to discuss and adopt some rules for Engage Gwinnett's process, and to divide into the four Work Groups that will be the focus of the committee's work for the next several months.

The four Work Groups are:

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

The presentations were by Glenn Stephens, county administrator, and Aaron Bovos, financial services director and Gwinnett County's chief financial officer. Glenn gave an overview of the county history and government structure. Aaron spoke about the county's financial structure, its revenue sources, how those revenue sources had changed in recent years and the current situation.

Glenn reviewed the Board of Commissioners' roles and those of county administrator. He talked about the roles of other elected officials (sheriff, district attorney, judges, tax commissioner, etc.) and the school board and how Gwinnett is connected through agencies and boards to regional, state and national decision-making. A key point Glenn raised was that Gwinnett is an urban county. While there are 15

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municipalities in Gwinnett County, more than 80% of residents live in unincorporated Gwinnett. For these residents and businesses, Gwinnett supplies police, fire, emergency response, water, water reclamation, parks and recreation and other urban-style services.

Aaron's presentation focused on how Gwinnett's finances worked. He discussed the two budgets (annual operating and capital budgets) and five fund types (tax supported funds, internal services funds, special use funds, enterprise funds, and capital project funds). Many of the funds collected by Gwinnett County are restricted by law in their use, he said.

Aaron spent much of his presentation on the property tax, which funds both the school district and the county government. The current millage rate is 31.52 mills, of which 20.55 is levied by the school district and 10.97 by the county. Since 1994, the school district's millage has remained essentially flat, while the county's millage has decreased by 27% or 3.98 mills.

In part that's because of changes in state law that require localities to reduce their millage rates when the tax digest increases in value or, if they maintain the same rates, advertise them as "tax increases." Since 1997, this "100 percent rollback requirement" has amounted to a cumulative revenue loss of nearly \$840 million compared to what the county would have collected had the millage rate remained the same, Aaron said. Another state law limits property taxes assessed on Gwinnett homeowners through an a "value exemption" that rises with increases in tax assessments. The law applies only to the county's portion of the property tax (not to the school district's portion). Since 2001 this law has cost the county treasury more than \$148 million, Aaron said, compared to what it would have been had the law not been passed.

Both Glenn and Aaron talked about "service levels" as an important concept in understanding how Gwinnett County's budget is set. These service levels – for instance, the amount of time it takes the fire department to respond to a call, on average – determines how much money is allocated for each service and each department. If you set a different service level – increasing or decreasing the average amount of time for fire responses – it would increase or decrease the amount that's budgeted. Both urged Engage Gwinnett members to pay close attention to service levels as they examined the county's services.

Glenn's and Aaron's PowerPoint presentations and videos are available on the Engage Gwinnett web site, www.engagegwinnett.com.

Meeting Process

Bill McCargo and Mike Levensgood, 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.

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- 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.

Mike reviewed the comments received from the Oct. 8 meeting and introduced the four Work Groups that committee members and alternates would work in for the weeks ahead, as they learned about services and service levels.

He then introduced the facilitator for Engage Gwinnett, Jon Abercrombie, who presented the members with three process questions to discuss and resolve:

- When would alternate members be asked to step in for regular members?
- How would Engage Gwinnett members prefer to make decisions?
- What should be their “commitments” to each other (i.e., the ground rules)?

Jon distributed a ballot that allowed members to indicate the number of meetings they felt a regular member should miss before he or she were replaced by an alternate, and opened a discussion of the question. The results from the ballot indicated that both regular members and alternates felt three meetings was the most that should be missed before his or her alternate was elevated to voting member. (There is more detail on the alternates discussion below.)

In a second ballot Jon suggested several ideas for making decisions, among them:

- Look first for common ground. If needed, hold a vote and let the majority decide.
- Report strongly held minority opinions along with the majority view.

There was a discussion about whether dissents by a single person should be recorded. (It was decided they should be part of the record, perhaps in an appendix.) Members and alternates indicated on their ballots that they agreed with these decision-making ideas. (Details on the voting and comments about decision making are listed below.)

Finally, Jon introduced the idea of “commitments” that members should make to each other, that would govern their actions in Engage Gwinnett meetings and when talking about Engage Gwinnett in other settings. These commitments were suggested by members at the first Engage Gwinnett meeting on Oct. 8. They included:

- Speak openly and honestly and listen seriously.
- Do not make disparaging personal remarks.
- Even if you do not agree with all the decisions of Engage Gwinnett, do not undermine the process.
- Show up for all the meetings or catch up if you miss one.

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The exact commitments are recorded below. There were no suggestions for additional commitments or changes to these.

During a break, members were asked to fill out ballots with their first, second and third preferences for Work Group assignments. Staff sorted the ballots and gave as many first-preference assignments as possible. In order that each group have at least eight voting members, some second-choice and one third-choice assignment were made. (The Work Groups' membership is below.)

After the break, Glenn Stephens and Aaron Bovos gave their presentations and answered questions. When Glenn and Aaron were finished, Jon asked members, alternates and observers to discuss what additional information they might need to know, based on what they had heard so far, and record those thoughts on flip charts. (The notes from the flip charts are below.)

Then co-facilitator Otis White explained what Engage Gwinnett members would be doing for the rest of this year (through December). Basically, he said, they would work in one of four Work Groups, focused on groups of county services. The aim, Otis said, was to create a set of alternatives with consequences and tradeoffs. To save money, for instance, a Work Group might suggest lowering a service level as an alternative. In framing the alternative, the Work Group should describe not only the financial consequences but its likely effects on residents and businesses as well (the consequences and tradeoffs).

The goal, Otis said, was to create a set of clear alternatives and consequences to take to the citizens in January in meetings across the county. At those meetings, citizens would be asked to indicate the alternatives they would prefer. These preferences would be reported back to Engage Gwinnett members before they make tentative decisions on the alternatives they would recommend.

In the second phase of Engage Gwinnett, Otis went on, the group would turn from services to revenues – basically, how to pay for the services (and service levels) its members were recommending. By starting with the services, Engage Gwinnett would know the budget amount it should aim for in its revenue discussions.

The Work Groups then met for the first time. Jon asked them to introduce themselves and brainstorm on this question: What do you most hope will result from your work together on this service area?

Jon Abercrombie closed the meeting by saying that, at the next meeting on Nov. 5, Engage Gwinnett will hear two more presentations, about the county's Unified Plan, a recent and important planning process, and about "peer counties" – counties that are similar to Gwinnett County and may serve as important comparisons. At that meeting, members and alternates would meet in their Work Groups and plan the speakers and information they will need in order to get started.

Discussion Notes

The 42 Engage Gwinnett committee members were seated at five tables. There were two tables of alternate members, who will serve on the committee if there are vacancies. And there were citizens and observers in the audience. The alternates and observers were invited to discuss and write down their questions in response to the presentations on Gwinnett County Government operations and budgeting. The notes that follow are the questions that were captured on the flip charts, with the five committee tables first, then the alternates and observers.

Committee Table 1

Based on what you heard in Glenn and Aaron's presentations today, what additional information will you need for your Work Group?

- Explain/clarify relationship between Board of Commissioners and School Board – i.e., explosive growth, but lag in school infrastructure
- Budget breakdown by departments and constitutional offices
- Comparison of Gwinnett to surrounding as well as comparable counties in country
- Authority of appointed boards – i.e., Parks & Recreation vs Planning Commission vs Library Board

Committee Table 2

Based on what you heard in Glenn and Aaron's presentations today, what additional information will you need for your Work Group?

- Mandated vs. discretionary services
- How revenues to be reviewed
- Benchmarking against peer counties
- Consistency in department presentations

Committee Table 3

Based on what you heard in Glenn and Aaron's presentations today, what additional information will you need for your Work Group?

- Municipalities
- Status of service delivery dispute
- What do municipalities provide?
- What should municipalities provide?

Committee Table 4

Based on what you heard in Glenn and Aaron's presentations today, what additional information will you need for your Work Group?

- Establish base line of required services to be provided by county
- What does the county consider to be a "core service" above the required and why

Committee Table 5

Based on what you heard in Glenn and Aaron's presentations today, what additional information will you need for your Work Group?

- Define "core" services
- What services are mandated? (statutorily) Is there a minimum level and if so, what is that level? What are the associated costs?
- Request presentations by department heads, constitutional officers, leaders of various workgroups
- Request projected revenues for next 3-5 years

Alternate Table 1

Based on what you heard in Glenn and Aaron's presentations today, what additional information will you need for your Work Group?

- Development/infrastructure: How does a developer get to choose/is assigned locations to target for building?
- What exactly is the role of alternates in these meetings?
- Which appointed boards have final authority and which are advisory only?

Alternate Table 2

Based on what you heard in Glenn and Aaron's presentations today, what additional information will you need for your Work Group?

- How much do commissioners get paid and what is perks amount and who determines these amounts?
- Describe in detail distinction between funded and unfunded mandates and who determines the amounts and how level of service is determined.
- What are the consequences for not abiding by mandated?

Observers

Based on what you heard in Glenn and Aaron's presentations today, what additional information would you like to know?

- Which organizations have discretion about how much money is spent?
- Which have only advisory capacity?
- Which services by law county has to provide?
- What funding has to mandated requirements about certain funding is spent – capital vs operations
- Other creative funding ideas
- What thought process was in making cuts they made
- Why service between cities and county
- Updating and integrating systems/IT services – city, county, state
- Underground economy

Process Decisions

There were three process decisions made at this meeting. They were:

- When would alternate members be asked to step in for regular members – and how would they participate in Engage Gwinnett Work Groups?
- How would Engage Gwinnett members prefer to make decisions?
- What should be their “commitments” to each other (i.e., the ground rules)?

Jon offered some “starting points” for these decisions, with opportunity for members and alternates to make choices and comment.

When do alternates join the group?

Here were Jon's suggestions:

- When the EG member misses _____ meetings, the alternate becomes the voting member.
- When the EG member is going to miss a meeting, the alternate can participate, then update the voting member when they return.

On average, committee members suggested that alternates should become voting members after the committee members miss 3.04 meetings. The average number suggested by alternates was 2.96.

Committee members made the following suggestions:

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- In the case of stakeholder representatives, let that group decide if replacement is necessary.
- I believe the threshold at missed meetings should be reasonable given the number of meetings. The alternate should not be involved until the voting member has been removed or resigned.
- Circulate list of alternate members, with contact information.
- The EG committee member is the individual who's made the commitment to attend meetings. Three misses will hamper progress.
- If the alternate has not been attending the previous meetings, they should not be qualified to vote for at least two meetings.

Alternates made the following suggestions:

- As an alternate, I think that any alternate that substitutes for a delegate must have been present and involved before they can step in for a delegate. Delegates may have an extreme circumstance where they could have more than three absences. However, they may have done "homework" and still be updated.
- How do alternates work into work groups? Do they follow the main member, float, go where they best fit?
- member informs alternate of small group meeting schedule.
- Wouldn't make sense if the alternate has been to less meetings than the EG member.
- EG member should communicate with their alternate to ensure minimal disruption in the process. Note: the final bullet on the EG commitments, "We will show up and catch up if we are behind."
- How would we know if person missed meetings? When time to vote? Strange process.
- So long as one is present, there is no problem.
- Determine and establish a method for alternates to fill in advance when an absence is expected, therefore creating an option for an excused absence that does not go against the count of three.
- Alternates should be present at meetings in order to vote at all. Should alternates be called upon to vote for anyone who is out if they have no alternate present.

How will we make decisions?

Here were Jon's suggestions:

- First we will look for common ground. If needed we vote and a majority carries the vote.
- A strongly held minority opinion is clearly reported with the decision that is made.

On a scale of 1-5 committee members ranked their level of agreement as 4.26. Alternates ranked their level of agreement as 4.32.

Committee members made the following suggestions:

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- For individual opinion let there be a separate section for those inputs. But have a majority minority opinion and then a list of other opinions.
- It needs to be more than one person's opinion. If one person's opinion is not shared by any other member of a committee as diverse as this, with 40+ members, how much value does that opinion need to be given in our report? I agree with Chuck Warbington's suggestion for minority opinions to be included in an appendix to the main report.
- Strongly held opinions by even one or two individuals may be submitted in letter form by those individuals and included within appendix to primary report.
- I don't think one voice in the minority should be clearly reported, but should be documented or made note of. One voice shouldn't hold up the flow of our process.
- Minority opinion must have a minimum number of votes (perhaps 5) to justify reporting.
- Only significant minority, not individual dissenting opinions to be reported.
- There should be a formal way for groups dissenting with recommendations to be heard.
- To make the six month commitment we must quickly decide that majority means consensus and dissenting opinions can be recorded, but not lingered on.
- In appendix minority documentation.
- Apply an appendix for minority views.
- Chuck's appendix idea is a good one for minority views.
- Minority opinions in the appendix.
- Minority comments be placed in back of report.
- Appendix.
- We need to provoke non-traditional ideas, but we need to coalesce around ideas that can be broadly supported.
- Report should include only a strongly held opinion/position. A single or not strongly held opinion could be included as appendix for posterity purposes.
- A minority view should reflect a significant number of individuals. The idea of one being a minority that would carry the same weight as the majority opinion could distort the final product and its conclusions.
- Strongly held minority opinion of one should also have a voice that is not lost by a vote. Opposing/dissenting opinions should be recorded and reported so the public and the commission is aware.
- The strongly held minority opinions are put in an addendum to the report.
- Include an appendix of minority opinions with narrative and list of people who dissent from majority view.
- There's not enough room in this process for the opinion of a minority of one. The individual can communicate directly with the commissioners. Those opinions could also be accumulated and included in the overall report as an annex.
- If a minority opinion results and the individual wants to write a dissent, that should be reported to ensure that the process is credible and reflects diversity and addresses the cynicism and skepticism that exists in the community about this committee and process.
- Any individual or group of individuals can have their minority opinion included in the report as an appendix to the report if the individual or group writes their opinion.

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- All minority opinions should be recorded in a clear and visible location with respect to the subject matter, not in an index where it would be difficult to find and connect to the subject matter.
- The idea of an appendix for minority views. We cannot get bogged down in too small details.
- Regarding one person having a minority position all their own, if they are willing to author an “appendix” as Chuck suggested, that is how they should get their unique views out there.
- For individual opinions, add an appendix per topic of minority/individual opinions.
- Important to record minority opinions, but do so in appendix.
- Any member should be able to include an appendix to the final report on any topic about which he holds a strong minority opinion. Also, the website that I suggested may provide the outlet for minority opinions.
- An appendix with all minority comments to be included for reference.
- One person’s opinion out of a group of 42 is not a strongly held opinion.
- Prepare majority report with appendix of minority views. Would support minority view consisting of 3 or more participants.

Alternates made the following suggestions:

- I am unsure if “every” minority opinion is worthy of validation; however, similar to the Supreme Court, I think that strong dissenting opinions must be recorded. There may be innovative thoughts that might inspire future good decision making. The intellectual thought and efforts should remain intact.
- Chuck Warbington’s idea of placing minority opinion in an appendix is a good one. It would be helpful if the strength of the minority opinion was also recorded.
- If there are enough options to call for a vote, why can you not report the other choices that were voted upon? This will document both the majority vote as well as other opinions held.
- Minority views held should be captured for the record.
- I think the group is diverse enough in opinion that this will work. However, the control of discussion by the facilitator/process may stifle some of the minority opinions, etc.
- Indicate/determine specifically what “strongly held” means. Either by percentage of total or as a specific number of people supporting the issue (ie, at least 3 people, or 2% of total).
- As long as this person is open and does not have a personal agenda or strong opinion on the subject.
- I believe a group should be able to ascertain majority and strong minority opinions. I do not believe one person in the group with an “agenda,” an “axe to grind,” etc., should be allowed to force the group to advocate their opinion if that opinion is not widely agreed upon by others. That person is free to appeal to the Board of Commissioners on their own and should do so as that is the proper avenue for personal opinions. This is a group and should be viewed as such by all involved.

Group Commitments

On another handout, Jon Abercrombie offered the following set of commitments for committee members and alternates to make, based on the feedback from the previous session. committee members and alternates were then invited to offer further suggestions on their ballots. The following is a list of the commitments that were offered, followed by the suggestions made by committee members and alternates.

Here were Jon's suggested commitments:

- Speak openly and honestly and listen seriously.
 - We want to make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak and to listen respectfully, even when we disagree. Stand the name tents on their end if we want to speak.
 - Make sure that we are honest and candid, but without malice.
- Do not make disparaging personal remarks.
- Remember that all the members are engaged as citizens who are considering the needs of the whole community, not just those with whom they live, work, and serve. We are trying to represent the needs of the entire community.
- Our meetings are public, but we will not attribute quotes of other members outside of the group. We want to be able to speak for ourselves and to have a free-flowing conversation.
- We may not agree with all the decisions of Engage Gwinnett, but we will not undermine the process. We will make sure positions not held by the entire group will be openly reported. Support for the process does not mean support for all of the decisions.
- We will show up and catch up if we are behind.

Committee members made the following suggestions:

- None others
- Agree
- Good
- Good to go
- Agreed
- Works!
- Agree
- Agree
- Important to show "united front!" Using the privilege to dissent and take advantage of personal agenda publicly that counters the direction (decisions) of majority should not be acceptable.
- Great summary of ground rules. Fully support.

Alternates made the following suggestion:

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- We will educate ourselves outside of the meeting on topics to be discussed in meetings.

Work Group Notes

The Engage Gwinnett committee members were divided into four Work Groups:

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

Here are the committee members assigned to each group:

Law Enforcement and Judiciary:

Jim Pack
Randy Meacham
Jeff Mahaffey
George Hutchinson
Kip Stokes
Chuck Warbington
Keith Shewbert
Renee Byrd-Lewis
Charles Swain
Herman Pennamon

Fire and Emergency Services:

Charlotte Nash
Kelly Kelkenberg
Rick Cost
David McClesky
Julianne Thompson
Scott LeCraw
Demetrius Jordan
Kook ja Lee

Development and Infrastructure:

Millicent Crawford
Jack Mason
Lan Nguyen
Glen Williams
Mark Tibbetts
Bill Atkinson
Jose Perez
Julie Post
Keith Roche
Laurie McClain
Michael Sullivan
Paula Krone

Community services:

Norwood Davis
David McMullen
Dick Goodman
Carol Hassell
Dan King
Kevin Kovalchik
Paula Hastings
Bob Griggs
Asif Jessani
Erik Richards

The alternates also joined the Work Groups, with their respective committee members. The Work Groups each discussed the information they will need in order to make good decisions. Two work groups turned in their notes with this information. The notes that follow are those that were captured.

Community Services

- Mandate services: What are they, what level?
- Underserved areas
- Utilization levels
- Municipality provision of services, support of services
- SPLOST report: status, plans, county and municipalities
- Relevant boards and authorities: what groups and organizations have responsibilities for services in the areas covered by our topics
- County and municipal budget for items covered

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- HHS: meals, services provided, services supported
- Arts: needs, services provided, services supported
- Ditto for other areas covered by topic

Law Enforcement and Judiciary

- Required mandates
- Consequences of change in service
- What non-mandated services provided
- Who are the leaders – let's hear from them
- Employee functions
- Organization
- Budget
- Trends (5-year): crime, case load, budget (expenditures, revenues), employees
- Are there dangerous gaps, critical service issues?