



## Meeting 4 Report

Nov. 19, 2009

Engage Gwinnett, the citizens committee on the future of Gwinnett County, held its fourth meeting on Thursday, Nov. 19, 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.

Only the first 30 minutes and final 15 minutes was held in plenary session (with all members present). The rest of the time was spent by the four workgroups in breakout sessions, during which they heard presentations about their work areas. Notes about the major presentations are below. PowerPoint slides from the presentations and videos are available on the Engage Gwinnett web site, [www.engagegwinnett.com](http://www.engagegwinnett.com).

### Meeting Process

Mike Levengood, Engage Gwinnett's co-chair, 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.

Mike suggested that, as they hear overview presentations about their work area, Work Group members might ask two questions:

- What budget reductions have already been made in the last two years?
- How do these budget reductions affect the progress the county is making toward the vision set out in the Unified Plan?

The Unified Plan is a plan for growth that the county adopted earlier this year after three years of planning and research, and it includes a vision for the county's development. Engage Gwinnett members

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heard a presentation about the Unified Plan at the third session, on Nov. 5. That presentation is available on the Engage Gwinnett web site, [www.engagegwinnett.com](http://www.engagegwinnett.com).

Mike introduced the facilitator, Jon Abercrombie. Jon reminded Engage Gwinnett members of one of the commitments (or group guidelines) they adopted at the session on Oct. 22, which was for individual members not to speak on behalf of Engage Gwinnett. This is properly done only by the Engage Gwinnett co-chairs, Jon reminded them. So while individual members could voice their own opinions, they should not claim to speak on behalf of Engage Gwinnett.

Jon asked the groups to select “Work Group spokespersons” at this session. The spokesperson’s jobs, he said, would be to:

- Give brief presentations at future sessions about the Work Groups’ progress.
- Meet with the co-chairs and facilitators after future sessions to talk about process problems.
- Help staff understand group information requests, as needed.

With those instructions, the Work Groups went to their own sessions to begin the overview presentations. At the end, the groups met again briefly to report the names of the spokespersons. Here are the work groups and their spokespersons:

Community Services	Norwood Davis
Development and Infrastructure	Jose Perez*
Fire and Emergency Services	Charlotte Nash
Law Enforcement and Judiciary	Charles Swain

\* Julie Post will give the presentation for Development and Infrastructure at the Dec. 3 session, since Jose will not be present then.

## Work Group Presentations

The four Work Groups received overview presentations from the directors of Gwinnett County departments in their work areas. The following is a brief summary of some of the information that was presented.

### Community Services

The Community Services Work Group received two overview presentations. One was from the Department of Community Services. Among the information the group received:

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- The Community Services Department includes six divisions, of which Parks and Recreation, Health and Human Services, Voter Registration and Elections and the Cooperative Extension Services are the largest.
- Parks and Recreation is the largest single area, with an FY09 budget of \$31.6 million, of which \$5.5 million were provided by fees and registration. A major part of Parks and Recreation's budget comes from a property tax levy approved by the voters in 1986. The levy was for 1 mill then, but it has been reduced over the years to 0.79 mill.
- Health and Human Services includes an array of services, from Senior Services (senior centers, meals, transportation and home services) to the Centerville Community Center. Much of Senior Services' funding comes from state and federal sources.
- The Voter Registration and Elections' budget varies widely from year to year, depending on the elections calendar. In FY09, the budget was \$1.1 million. In 2008 (a presidential election year), the budget was \$6 million.
- The Community Services Department has reduced its full-time employees from 270 at the end of 2008 to 241 this summer and anticipates further employee reductions, to 229 in 2010.

The Work Group also heard from the Gwinnett County Public Library, which is separate from the Department of Community Services. Among the information the group received:

- There are 14 public libraries in Gwinnett County, with a 15<sup>th</sup> (Hamilton Mill) about to open.
- There has been a significant increase in demand at the libraries, with a 6% increase in circulation and 9% increase in patrons so far this year, compared with the same period last year.
- At the same time, due to budget constraints, the system has reduced its hours by 38%.
- The system is contemplating significant budget cuts in FY10, including a 9% overall budget reduction and 8% personnel budget cut, even as it opens its 15<sup>th</sup> library.

### **Development and Infrastructure**

The Development and Infrastructure Work Group received three overview presentations. One was from the Department of Transportation. Among the information the group received:

- The DOT provides services such as road and bridge construction and maintenance, airport and transit operations, and traffic engineering and planning.
- Over the past year, the department reduced authorized positions from 181 to 152, a 16% reduction.
- Out of the department's FY09 \$31.9 million operating budget, \$19.2 million comes from the general fund. The rest comes from special funds like special assessments, transit fares and airport fees. The capital budget for 2009 was \$217 million.

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- The FY10 budget foresees operating expenses of \$31.5 million, a reduction of \$400,000 from the FY09 budget.

The Work Group also heard from the Department of Planning and Development. Among the information the group received:

- The Department of Planning and Development provides services such as plan review, permits and inspection, current and long range planning, license and review, and economic development.
- Over the past year, the department has reduced the number of full-time employees from 177 to 71, a 59.9% reduction.
- Out of the department's FY09 \$8.8 million operating budget, \$5.4 million comes from the general fund. The rest comes from fees for service and other direct revenue.
- The FY10 budget foresees operating expenses of \$7.9 million, a reduction of \$900,000 from the FY09 budget.

The Work Group also heard from the Department of Water Resources. Among the information the group received:

- The Department of Water Resources provides water, sewer and storm water services.
- The department is funded by monthly water bills and an annual storm water utility fee, not by general property taxes.
- In 2008, the department faced a "perfect storm" of revenue reductions and expense increases, as water consumption declined 20% (and is expected to remain flat in 2009) and development activity (which funds capital improvements) declined sharply, even as costs increased. The department responded with a hiring freeze, a reduction in overtime, negotiated costs savings and a number of other cost-savings measures, which should add up in FY10 to expense savings of \$1.9 million.
- Positions have been eliminated at the department and further reductions are ahead. The department had 623 authorized employees in FY 08; it is authorized for 612 now and plans to have 599 in FY10.
- The department has scaled back capital improvement plans for water and sewer by more than half and sees its capital budget as shifting increasingly to paying for maintenance rather than new construction.

### **Fire and Emergency Services**

The Fire and Emergency Services Work Group received an overview presentation from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. Among the information the group received:

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- The department has 28 stations, and had an authorized strength of 830 employees prior to September 19, 2009. On that date, the authorized strength was reduced to 783. The department anticipates making nearly 63,000 emergency responses this year, a 4% increase from last year.
- The Fire and EMS budget for 2009 is \$76.4 million on March 3, 2009, of which \$11.3 million comes from service charges (overwhelmingly charges for EMS transport). The budget was reduced to \$70.3 million for the remainder of the year and 2010.
- There are national standards to define what fire and emergency responses should be. One, set by the National Fire Protection Service, is for the first responder to answer calls within six minutes 90% of the time. Gwinnett County's Fire Department meets that standard 50% of the time. Another, set by the American Heart Association, is for patients with chest pain to reach hospital emergency rooms within 30 minutes' time. The current average time in Gwinnett County is 33 minutes.

### **Law Enforcement and Judiciary**

The Law Enforcement and Judiciary Work Group received two overview presentations. One was from the Police Department. Among the information it received:

- The FY09 budget for the Police Department is \$91.1 million, of which \$13.2 million comes from service charges (primarily the charge on telephone bills for 911 services). The budget has been reduced 8.3% since FY08.
- The reductions can be seen in the personnel cuts. The authorized sworn officers have been cut from 729 in 2008 to 696 this year and authorized civilian personnel from 319 to 288.
- This represents a significant departure from the Unified Plan's vision of 1.3 officers per 1,000 population. Even in FY08 the department was below those levels, at 1.07 per 1,000 population. This year it is at 1.00 per 1,000 and in FY10 (without additional officer reductions) it will be at 0.98, due to an increase in population.
- The department plans to reduce or eliminate a number of services, including quality of life policing services, park patrols, DUI units and crime prevention services.

The Work Group also heard from the Sheriff's Department. Among the information it received:

- The Sheriff's Department has a wide range of duties, many of them mandated by state law. Among them: Operating the county jail, providing legal service of court papers and arrest warrants, providing court security and managing the sex offenders registry.
- The FY09 budget is \$69 million, of which \$4.7 million is provided by services and reimbursements.
- The Sheriff's Department anticipates significant cost increases in years ahead, not least by the anticipated closing of the county Correctional Complex in 2011, which will result in the transfer

of 300-400 county inmates from the Complex to the county jail, which the sheriff manages. The average daily population at the jail this year is 2,700.

- The Sheriff's Department also anticipates increases in legal papers and arrest warrants that it has to serve.

### Work Group Information Requests

At the end of the breakout session 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

- Senior Services: Number of meals needed vs actual number delivered
- Subject matter experts (non-county) Ellen Gersten, Carolyn McGarrity
- Finish recreation funding presentation
- Community schools – what's going to happen to them?
- Budget reductions and implications
- What are the actual needs? i.e., seniors, income levels, demographics
- How else are needs met?
- Homelessness needs/issues
- Focus on services actually provided by county and percent to which needs are being met
- Phil finish
- Library questions addressed
- Ellen Gerstein → needs in Gwinnett (Gwinnett Coalition)
- Recreation master plans
- Analysis of fees charged for P/R
- Don't just benchmark vs other counties, keep other entities in mind too

#### Community Services: Library

- Long-range plan – summary
- Budget breakdown – what types of materials buy and how much of each, number of subscriptions
- Number of line items and mandates (funded and unfunded)
- Internet access – county (People capacity to access)
- Standards and how to compare them
- Define interrelationships
- Categories: essential, full, operable – implications of each
- Budget percent – state (restrictions – direct and indirect services)
- Comparison of what would happen if don't have state money

- Levels of staffing

### **Development and Infrastructure**

- Would like Brian & Brian (speakers) to return, and Lynn to attend in case of questions.
- Transportation: need info on sidewalks and future plans on crosswalks (access for disabled).
- What is left to cut out?
- Need more in-depth information on services provided and how they are provided.
- Much confusion on what we can do to help.
- Not enough detail on the budget – too macro.
- Need a benchmark to look to.
- What is the plan to increase revenue to the county? Current/future.
- How does the municipalities zoning impact county revenue (annexation)?

### **Fire and Emergency Services**

- 3 peers – comparison data
- List of positions that were eliminated
- Report on retention rates
- EMS Cost recovery – 11 M vs 70 M
- ISO effect on millage increase vs insurance premium
- Info on Cobb County structure
- Org chart – fire department
- GEMA/homeland security rep
- Backup for radio system info
- Site visit – Headquarters for emergency operations
- Comm partner info

### **Law Enforcement and Judiciary**

- Police: Breakdown of crime activities/level per precinct and staff allocated to each precinct.
- Breakdown of traffic accidents on private property.
- Basis of 1.3 recommendation in unified plan.
- Number of sworn personnel and civilian: population, square foot area, call for services, crime stats, per capita crime ratio.
- Police and sheriff: Building and maintenance budgets.

### **Miscellaneous Notes**

The following notes were captured on the flip charts in each of the Work Group discussions.

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The **Law Enforcement and Judiciary** Work Group recorded the following notes during the presentations to the group:

- Spokesperson: Charles Swain
- Chief Walters: Invitation to Comstat meeting December 3rd. Expressed interest: Jim Pack.
- Police recommendation: 1.3 ratio within 2-3 years outlined in unified plan
- Presentations: GPD, Charles Walters, Chief; Sheriff, Mike Boyd, Chief Deputy
- December 3 presentations include: Corrections, David Peek, Warden; Tom Davis, Judge; Rosanna Szabo, Solicitor; and Tom Lawler, Clerk of the Court

The **Infrastructure and Development** Work Group recorded the questions they asked through the course of the presentations that were made. The following questions were asked during the presentation on transportation:

- Cost to maintain infrastructure in municipalities?
- What does dust control do?
- Where is this information made available to the public? How do you get the information out?
- What long-term effect do you see from stopping preventative maintenance?
- Is there a connection between you and public services to ensure safety on light outages? Are there people in your department to direct traffic?
- What is the circular road? Will that be like 285? Is it a highway or street?
- How else was 85/316 funded beyond local dollars?
- What drives ridership changes on transit over the year?

The following questions were asked during the presentation on planning and development:

- Outsourcing – will the positions be local?
- Will you be shifting any employees to the out-sourcing companies (re-badging)?
- What is your transition plan?
- Explain pass-through fees.
- How many permits were for houses that were actually built?
- Will the new software upgrades help maintain service levels?
- Our budget is about 1% of the general fund.
- Will need approximately \$220,000 per year to move the unified plan forward.
- What will the outsourcing cover?
- Why are you looking to outsource? (general group opinion is this is a bad thing.)
- What other counties outsource?

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- Will it mirror existing process?
- How will you control the outsourcing companies?
- How does this save the county money?
- Will the vendors be in a county building?
- Will vendors use same systems as county?
- Do you have any potential companies in mind?
- Do you anticipate many residential permits in the next few years?

The following questions were asked during the presentation on water resources:

- Employees are county, but our funding is from our fees – salaries come out of this fund.
- Stormwater fee is on property tax bill.
- Bonds are backed by county.
- When do you anticipate having bond debt paid off?
- What interest rate do you have on the bonds?
- Do you ever over-run your budget? What do you do with extra money? Any overage goes into reserve?
- Are there federal opportunities for growth – loans, grants?
- What does the county do for those that can't pay bills?
- How much outstanding bad debt?
- Do you have list of federal money and the projects it financed or will finance?
- Description of benefits for projects that are chosen? Exact cost savings associated with them?
- Is there still opportunity for further federal funding for projects?
- Will some of the flood damage project be reimbursed by FEMA?
- Effect on county if you lose and can't make budget?
- Where does the money you have saved go to?
- How should we deal with Lake Lanier?
- Enterprise funding – is there legal mandate protecting the water funding from other county debts?
- Due to pipe replacement needs is the budget \$20 million short?

An observer at the **Community Services** Work Group made the following observations:

- Very discouraged about the lack of financial detail – this group cannot meet their goals without this info.
- Please put copies of all handouts online (including contents of folder provided by library)