

Observations, Considerations and Recommendations

As of Feb. 2, 2010

Community Services

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.”
- 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.

Community Services

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
- 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.

Development and Infrastructure

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.

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

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

Observations

- These cuts have already been made:
 - Human resources from 3 to 1.5
 - Reduction in overall headcount – countered by new hires (need exact figures – we have them, and will find them)
 - Consolidation of warehouse (police warehouse added) – centralized inventory
 - Overall reduction in support personnel
 - Consolidated Fire Marshall, etc., in headquarters
 - Plan review has had cuts in Planning and Development
 - General Operating a/c's have had to cut certain percentages – more cuts than capital with personnel – example, fuel costs
- Gwinnett County has ensured that we have adequate staffing at each site – deliberate cross-training – Fire/EMT
- Interconnection of total system as it relates to service – not just your local station
- Very flexible/dynamic system and process
- Very well trained, professional staff that is well-equipped
- Outsourced some – fire hydrant inspection, EMS billing and collection
- Response time does not meet national standard
- Openness of fire chief and staff – very good attitude
- High morale and team spirit – team-based approach – morale high despite challenges
- Maintain an ongoing process of consistent interpretation of various codes
- Outsourcing was looked at – example: warehousing
- Improvement in relations between fire and hospital system
- Have tried to hire diverse staff – identified current staff and volunteers to promote education

Considerations

- Response time does not meet national standard
- Aging population in Gwinnett
- Impact of road system and congestion (response time), density, development types, redevelopment (CID)
- Halt in new development gives Fire Department time to catch up
- Gwinnett County strives to exceed the national standard
- Water delivery system affects ISO rating
- SPLOST must do what was voted on – result: unmanned stations, which must be staffed
- Georgia Gwinnett College's new dorms
- Cultural/language diversity
- Effectiveness and efficiency of 911 affects Fire/EMS
- First, do no harm – don't make it worse

Preliminary Recommendations

- We don't want to do any harm – don't want to go backwards
- Additional emphasis on citizen education and outreach for purposes of risk reduction – consider volunteers (expand CPR to include choking and other first aid)

- Code adjustments – example, residential sprinklers (consideration) cost must be balanced with return (including maintenance costs) – example: dense single-family dwellings pose a different challenge for fire coordination with cities as well for interpretation
- Outdoor burning – education issue vs regulation issue? Tie in to HOAs, insert in water bills?
- Inspect fire hydrants more frequently

Law Enforcement and Judiciary

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
- 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

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
- 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